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## Mind Your Youth: Youth Unemployment and Islamic Radicalization

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**Mind Your Youth:  
Youth Unemployment and Islamic Radicalization**

by  
Caleb K. Ray

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Croft Institute for International Studies at The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the potential existence of a correlation between youth unemployment and Islamic Radicalization in the MENA using data from the World Bank, the Global Terrorism Database, and the Arab Barometer. It aims to add to the current body of research regarding socioeconomic drivers for radicalization and terrorism.

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**Table of Contents:**

I. Introduction ..... 5-7

II. Framework..... 8-11

III. Background & Methodology ..... 12-16

IV. Micro Analysis ..... 17-23

V. Macro Analysis ..... 24-31

VI. Conclusion ..... 32-34

VII. Bibliography ..... 35-36

## Introduction

The ongoing “War on Terror” is not the first of its kind. The first campaign against terrorism began in the 1970s and persisted for 15 years. In 1973 the U.S. ambassador to Sudan was murdered by Palestinians, and the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon was killed in 1976. The American ambassador to Afghanistan was kidnapped and murdered in Kabul in 1979, the same year as the Iranian Hostage Crisis. Four years later Trans World Airlines flight 843 was hijacked, and a handicapped American vacationer was killed after he was pushed into the Mediterranean sea in his wheelchair by terrorists who hijacked the *Achille Lauro* cruise ship. Also in 1983, a car bomb struck the U.S. embassy in Beirut, claiming 46 lives. Only six months later, terrorists drove an explosive laden van onto the United States Marine Corps barracks compound at the Beirut airport, and killed 241 U.S. Marines.

In 1985 President Reagan ordered airstrikes on Libyan installments on Muammar Qaddafi’s personal compound in response to the bombing of a Berlin discotheque that was linked to the Libyan Prime Minister. Qaddafi’s life was spared but one of his daughters was killed. After the American airstrikes in Libya, the threat of terrorism waned significantly and was thought to be all but completely diminished. It was not. In 1989, a bomb detonated aboard Pan Am Flight 103 in Scotland and left zero survivors. All 259 people aboard the plane died, as did 11 others on the ground when the fuselage fell to earth and struck a small neighborhood. The attack had been planned by a cabal of Middle Eastern state supporters of terrorism, including Muammar Qaddafi. The terrorism that confronted the West 40 years ago was much different from what we see today. The terrorists in this first war were motivated primarily by political issues.<sup>1</sup> It largely lacked the religious element that makes fighting terrorism such a more difficult task today. The current

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<sup>1</sup> Chanda, Nayan, Paul Kennedy, and Strobe Talbott. *The Age of Terror: America and the World After Sept 11*. New York: Basic Books, 2001, 85.

struggle against terrorism still has much in common with what happened in the 70s and 80s, seen most vividly in how Qaddafi and his peers struck back with the Pan Am 103 bombing. Retaliation only generates another round of terrorism; eradication is the only way to get rid of the threat.<sup>2</sup> Since the United States launched its more recent, full scale campaign against radicalism spawning in the Middle East, the frequency of Islamic extremist terrorist attacks has increased sharply. In 2001, there were fewer than 100 terror attacks carried out by radical Muslim perpetrators. In 2015, the number was over 2,700.<sup>3</sup>

Alongside the U.S. led physical battle against terrorism that has droned on since 9/11, researchers at universities, government agencies, and NGOs have continuously built upon an ever-growing body of research concerning what causes Islamic extremist radicalization in the first place. Ideally, if one were to identify a specific societal phenomenon that pushes people toward Islamic extremism, then governments could enact the appropriate political or economic measures to stop that phenomenon. If this could be achieved, then it would be possible to stop terrorism before it ever happens by eliminating the societal factors that make Islamic extremism seem like the best direction for some people to take their lives in. It would make it possible to fight terrorism without having to put boots on the ground, costing the lives of coalition forces and, as statistics have shown, only making the problem worse. But this goal, so far, appears to be little more than a far-fetched and idealistic dream. Throughout all of this extensive research the indication is seldom that some driver for radicalization seems plausible; instead the pool of factors that are found *not* to be drivers for radicalization becomes larger. That does not mean that it is impossible, or that we should give up on trying to figure it out. Each time research shows that something does not

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<sup>2</sup> Chanda, Nayan, Paul Kennedy, and Strobe Talbott. *The Age of Terror: America and the World After Sept 11*. New York: Basic Books, 2001., 87.

<sup>3</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. Global Terrorism Database University of Maryland, 2016.

correlate with Islamic radicalization, it narrows the possibilities of what that missing driver, or likely what combination of drivers, for radicalization could be. If it exists, someone will find it eventually. Finding what is not a driver toward radicalization precipitates greater understanding of modern terrorism, the majority of which has roots in the Middle East North Africa region by means of ideology or perpetrator origins.

The MENA is second only to sub-Saharan Africa in (proportionally) large youth population size, and many of its countries also have abnormally high youth unemployment rates. Jordan is currently at the top of that list. According to data from the International Labor Organization, youth unemployment rose between 2009 to 2018 in Jordan.<sup>4</sup> This reached an apex in 2014, the same year that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of the Islamic State's worldwide Caliphate. He urged Muslims across the world to immigrate to the Islamic State with the goal of one day conquering Rome and Spain in the name of an extreme interpretation Salafist Sunni Islam. The newly minted organization lauded the importance of physical Jihadism in returning to what supporters believe to be true Sunni Islam. Recruits from countries across the world indeed began traveling to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State, as did radical Salafi adherents from the Middle East and North Africa.

Jordan shares borders with both Iraq and Syria and saw increases in relative youth unemployment rates throughout the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). I argue that the Hashemite Kingdom is a strong medium through which to examine drivers for increases in rates of radicalization in the MENA region. Bearing this in mind, **does youth unemployment in Jordan correlate with higher propensity to Islamic radicalization?**

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<sup>4</sup> International Labor Organization. "Youth Unemployment (as a % of total labor force aged 15-24)." Accessed October 28 2019.



## Framework

The academic discourse on the determinants and drivers of terrorism and Islamic radicalization is extensive, but research on youth unemployment as a specific determinant for terrorism in the MENA (Middle East, North Africa) region is relatively limited.<sup>5</sup> Bagchi and Paul indicate that prior research does, however, more often examine the impacts of youth bulge, unemployment (in general), and inequality more extensively in relation to terrorism.

Henrik Urdal hypothesizes that a country with an abnormally large youth bulge is more vulnerable to violence, including terrorism.<sup>6</sup> Urdal uses the following reasons for this hypothesis: A country's failure to absorb the disproportionately high youth population into the labor market creates a sense of resentment among the youth. This abandonment makes it easier for terrorist organizations of all types to recruit these individuals, as the opportunity cost for an unemployed young man is significantly lower than that of one who is employed. Many researchers also see unemployment as a likely determinant of terrorism. For instance, James Piazza asserts, "the average national unemployment rate for each country would be expected to bear a significant positive relationship with terrorism, as unemployment precipitates the stress of idle workers who might suffer from unmet economic expectations and therefore turn to political violence."<sup>7</sup> Additionally, Bagchi notes inequality as another possible determinant for terrorism studied more extensively than youth unemployment. The discrepancy between individuals' expected and actual

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<sup>5</sup> Bagchi, Aniruddha and Jomon A. Paul. "Youth Unemployment and Terrorism in the MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) Region." *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 64, (2018): 9.

<sup>6</sup> Urdal, H. "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (2006): 609.

<sup>7</sup> Piazza, JA. "Rooted in Poverty: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18 (2006): 160.

well-being as a result of inadequate employment opportunities generates “collective discontent, and ultimately terrorism.”<sup>8</sup>

Surprisingly, political economist Martin Gassebner saw little success in finding that youth bulge, unemployment, or inequality had any impacts on terrorism or radicalization. Bagchi postulates that the question of whether the three of these factors together can cause terrorism will yield more positive results, and states that youth unemployment can be used as an amalgamation of the three as it is related to each of them.<sup>9</sup> Most governments throughout the Middle East and North Africa pay for free secondary education, but this system is now strained because of the youth bulge throughout the region. The World Bank states that the MENA region “has not capitalized fully on past investments in education. [...] The education systems did not produce what the markets needed, and the markets were not sufficiently developed to absorb the educated labor force into the most sufficient uses.”<sup>10</sup> This issue is only getting worse, as government expenditures on education as a percentage of total government expenditures in Jordan, for example, rose from 12% in 2017 to 28.5% in 2018.<sup>11</sup> Dalacoura also posits that Islamist terrorists are often a “mix of educated middle-class leaders and working class dropouts.”<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, if there is high unemployment amongst a group of people, even members of the group who are employed will become resentful. “Social identity theory,” which considers the consequences of personal and social identities for individual perceptions and group behavior, states that widespread unemployment will motivate even employed persons to lash out because they will

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<sup>8</sup> Bagchi, Aniruddha and Jomon A. Paul. "Youth Unemployment and Terrorism in the MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) Region." *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 64, (2018): 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank. *The Road Not Traveled: Education Reform in the Middle East and North Africa* (2008).

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. “Government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditure).” Accessed October 22, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Dalacoura, Katerina. “Terrorism, Democracy and Islamist Terrorism.” *Islamist Terrorism and Democracy in the Middle East* 13 (August 11, 2006): 21–39.

interpret unemployment within their social group as a personal grievance as well.<sup>13</sup> Hence, youth unemployment impacts terrorism in two ways. First, on the “demand side,” because extensive youth unemployment creates resentment and breeds demand for terrorism. Second, on the “supply side,” because unemployed young people are easy targets for terrorist recruitment.<sup>14</sup>

This paper utilizes the impacts of youth unemployment on terrorism based on Bagchi’s rationale that youth unemployment is an effective metric when examining socioeconomic drivers for terrorism in the MENA region. The United Nations defines youth unemployment as the situation of young people who are looking for but cannot find a job, who are between 15-24 years old.<sup>15</sup>

A recent examination of the links between ISIS recruitment found that economic conditions do not increase ISIS membership, but that the number of foreign fighters in ISIS is positively correlated to GDP per capita and Human Development Index (HDI).<sup>16</sup> It is important to note; however, that this study focused more exclusively on foreign membership from Western countries such as France and Germany. I intend to contrast the findings of Efraim Benmelech and Esteban Klor with those of Mohamed Abdel Jelil et al. to highlight the differences in drivers of radicalization in the MENA itself versus more distant western countries. Jelil contends that unemployment is indeed a driver for Islamic radicalization.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Benmelech and Klor claim that unemployment, income inequality and low GDP per capita cannot be seen as

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<sup>13</sup> Bagchi, Aniruddha and Jomon A. Paul. "Youth Unemployment and Terrorism in the MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) Region." *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 64, (2018): 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> "UN World Youth Report 2012." *The UN Focal Point for Youth*, (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Klor, Esteban and Efraim Benmelech. *What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?:* National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Jelil, Mohamed Abdel, Kartika Bhatia, Anne Brockmeyer, Quy-Toan Do, and Clément Joubert. "Unemployment and Violent Extremism: Evidence from Daesh Foreign Recruits." *Policy Research Working Paper Series*, March 2018.

realistic drivers for terrorism because countries that do not struggle in these areas still see relatively high rates of radicalization when compared to countries in the Middle East.

Among those who agree on the significance of lack of opportunity, several researchers interpret the effects of these socioeconomic issues on radicalism differently. For example, Bagchi and Paul argue that youth unemployment increases domestic terrorism in the MENA region, but they also claim that youth unemployment does not have significant effects on transnational terrorism, or instances of terrorism in a country concerns victims of perpetrators from another.<sup>18</sup> However, much of the data used in the aforementioned study was collected earlier than 2012, well before the rise of the Islamic State. I argue that Bagchi's research can be updated to indicate a correlation between unemployment and radicalization during and after the rise of ISIS.

In their article *Unemployment and Violent Extremism: Evidence from Daesh Foreign Recruits*, Jelil, Bhatia, Brockmeyer, Do, and Joubert confidently argue that lack of economic opportunities directly explains foreign enrollment in ISIS (a transnational Islamic terrorist organization). My own research will align most closely with this 2018 study, though I will go further by indicating correlations between youth unemployment problems in the MENA region and Islamic terror as a whole, rather than ISIS alone.

The analysis chapter will examine both quantitative and qualitative findings on Jordanians' opinions on the problem of unemployment in the country. Previous studies have focused almost exclusively on statistics detached from the personal experiences of citizens in the MENA region, but it is also important to gain a better understanding of authentic opinions in order to fully understand, and perhaps to act upon, how lack of opportunity drives radicalization.

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<sup>18</sup> Bagchi, Aniruddha and Jomon A. Paul. "Youth Unemployment and Terrorism in the MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) Region." *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 64, (2018): 19.

## Background & Methods

Radicalist violence, though seen at lower levels in The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan than in most other Arab nations in the MENA, remains a relevant factor in analysis of the state.<sup>19</sup> In August 2018 Jordanian gendarmerie conducted a raid in Al Salt, just 18 miles northwest of Amman, on a house that was suspected to be the hideout of a group of extremist Muslims who had previously conducted a bomb attack. When the Jordanian security forces entered the residence the radical militants detonated explosives throughout the house, killing four Jordanian servicemen and injuring 16 civilians. Five Jordanian nationals claiming allegiance to the Islamic State were found responsible for the bombing. The suspects had buried an extensive quantity of explosives near the house; intended for later terror attacks on civilians and security forces. The incident in Al Salt destroyed the nebulous sense of calm that was present in Jordan even during the Islamic State's height. Researchers at the Soufan Center see attacks like this as a sign of things to come as members of the beleaguered Islamic State make their way out of Syria.<sup>20</sup> Over 3,000 Jordanians have traveled to Syria or Iraq in recent years to fight for ISIS. This makes Jordan the third largest source of foreign fighters to the Islamic state behind Russia and Saudi Arabia. Presumably, many ex-ISIS fighters will return to their home countries following ISIS's loss of its last territory in Eastern Syria in March 2019.<sup>21</sup> "It seems probable that the influence and involvement of returnees [in terrorist activity in their home countries] will grow as their numbers increase."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> 9 attacks in 2016

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. Global Terrorism Database University of Maryland, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> The Soufan Center (TSC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving as a resource and forum for research, analysis, and strategic dialogue related to global security issues and emergent threats.

<sup>21</sup> Barrett, Richard. *Beyond The Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*. The Soufan Center, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

The fact alone that 3,000 Jordanians entered Syria to fight for Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's Islamic state shows that the Kingdom of Jordan is particularly susceptible to Islamic radicalization when compared to other nations in the MENA. According to the International Labor Organization, Jordan also has a relatively high percentage of youth unemployment when compared to the rest of the region. Youth unemployment in Jordan rose from 28% in 2014 to 35% in 2016, while the average rate of youth unemployment across the MENA was only 22% in 2016.<sup>23</sup> As stated in the theoretical framework, youth unemployment is an effective metric to examine because it serves as an amalgamation of other important factors such as youth bulge, unemployment, and income inequality. Each of these metrics have been studied independently in relation to radicalism and extremist violence, but research using youth unemployment remains limited.

Given that Jordan has had a high rate of radicalization and high youth unemployment rates, the country is an ideal subject to use for a micro-level analysis of the relationship between youth unemployment and radicalization.

***Figure 1:***

**Jordanians who have “little to no trust in their own government”**

Survey Group	% 2013	% 2018
Unemployed Youth Pop.	41%	51%
Total Unemployed Pop.	41%	58%
Youth Pop.	33%	54%
Total Pop.	38%	59%

<sup>23</sup> International Labor Organization. “Youth Unemployment (as a % of total labor force aged 15-24).” Accessed October 28 2019.

Data from the Arab Barometer survey waves in 2013 and 2018 shows a high and increasing level of distrust in the Jordanian government. Well over half of the entire Jordanian population responded “little trust” or “no trust” when asked how much trust they had in their own government. Jordanians’ growing frustration and lack of faith in their own government should also indicate a higher propensity toward radicalization in the Kingdom, as citizens’ disillusionment and skepticism over a government’s capability and devotion to its people can sometimes act as a catalyst for terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

The World Development Indicators from the World Bank database, the Global Terrorism Database, and results from the Arab Barometer surveys provide the statistics necessary for examining this relationship. The World Development Indicators database compiles data collected by a plethora of research and outreach organizations such as the International Labor Organization, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and of course the World Bank itself. It includes extensive data on all forms of unemployment, including youth unemployment, for the past 20 years for almost every country in the Middle East and North Africa. It even includes unemployment data for countries like Libya and Syria that are weathering periods of turmoil and civil war. The World Development Indicators database can be particularly fruitful when used in conjunction with other databases, such as the Global Terrorism Database.

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) was built by and is maintained by the START National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland. It contains data on every single terrorist attack, relating to religion and otherwise, successful or unsuccessful, since 1970. The database includes details such as the perpetrators’

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<sup>24</sup> Bagchi, Aniruddha and Jomon A. Paul. “Youth Unemployment and Terrorism in the MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) Region” *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 64, (2018): 10.

nationalities, the targets' nationalities, the method of the attack, the reasoning for and/or group behind the attack, and much more. This means researchers can filter the data to determine very specific types of attacks. For example, when investigating youth unemployment and radicalization in Jordan, one can query the database to populate results about Islamic extremist attacks during a certain period of time in Jordan, or by Jordanian aggressors.

Data from the World Development Indicators and the GTD are useful when comparing larger sets of data that are not found in the same database. However, the Arab Barometer has an important advantage in that its surveys can provide insights at the individual level. The Arab Barometer aims to obtain online survey results from at least 1,200 citizens in each country across the MENA during each wave of surveys (which typically occur once every two to three years), and often they acquire many more results than this. Between the last three waves, the Arab Barometer has taken in around 50,000 individual surveys. The 2013 and 2018 survey waves obtained the most robust results, with respondents from 12 countries across the region including Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Palestine, Sudan, and Yemen. The 2016 survey wave only reached 7 countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia. In each sweeping survey, after asking for general demographic information, the survey asks respondents questions relating to everything from religion, to social welfare, to sentiments about their government and international relations, to their own family structure. Arab Barometer data is unique because it permits users to see what people of a certain age, nationality, economic, or marital status (or all of these) answer when asked specific sets of questions.

This research compares responses to survey questions from different social groups by presenting the amount of respondents who answered a certain way as a percentage of that whole

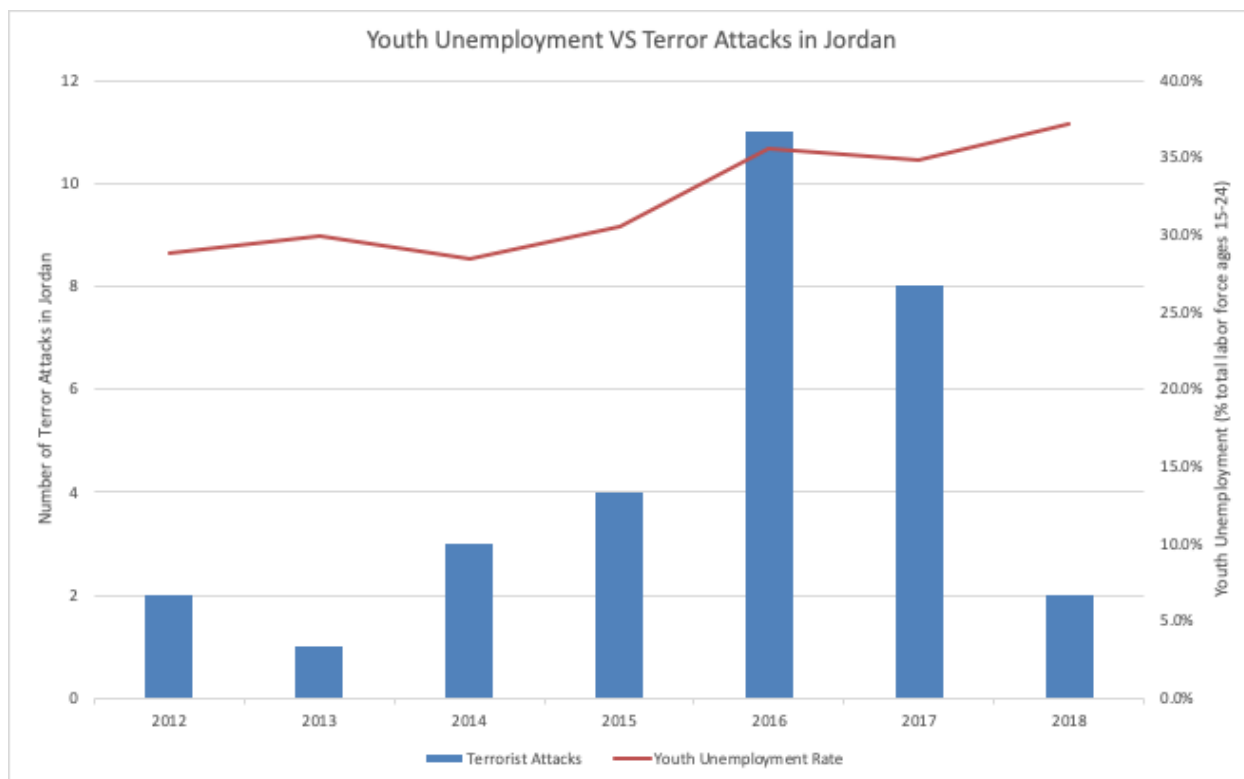


social group. This makes it possible to directly compare the sentiments of the unemployed youth population with those of the general population despite the fact that the general population, of course, will have many more survey results.

Examining responses to the Arab Barometer's questions most closely related to violence against the west does raise concern over how reliable responses are. Social desirability bias likely lead some survey respondents to withhold the complete truth when completing survey questions regarding such contentious subjects. Despite the fact that Arab Barometer survey takers are explicitly informed that their identities will be kept anonymous, the desire to present themselves in a more socially acceptable way could still persist in some instances. In the case of the questions analyzed here, respondents may have had a lower likelihood of admitting to sympathizing with violence against the West. However, I argue that this tendency does not compromise the value of this research. All survey respondents would have been exposed to a similar amount of pressure to as a result of social desirability bias. While percentages of respondents supporting violence might be marginally lower across the board, the comparison of these percentages between countries, age groups, and employment statuses still bear value.

## Micro Analysis

**Figure 2:**



Jordanian youth unemployment data from the World Bank and data on the number of terrorist attacks in Jordan from the Global Terrorism Database show a simultaneous spike in both variables in 2016. Youth unemployment rose above 35%, and there were 11 terror attacks. Terror attack frequency was low in 2013 and 2014, as was the youth unemployment rate. A correlation is visible here; however, this could be coincidental, moreover it fails to provide information on radicalization as a whole. Instead, it accounts for those who decided to act upon radicalism by going through with terror attacks. The Arab Barometer surveys administered in 2013, 2016, and 2018 do, however, include several questions that can be linked to propensity toward radicalization. The same questions are not asked in each survey, which means that we cannot necessarily compare data over time in relation to changes in youth unemployment over time. Instead we can filter the

survey results to respondents who are under the age of 25 (the minimum age to respond to the Arab Barometer is 17), and analyze how these respondents answered questions related to radicalization. Most prior studies have simply compared separate data on radicalization and unemployment, such as Bagchi's 2017 study which compared terror attack frequency with metrics like military expenditure. Using the Arab Barometer makes it possible to analyze responses related to radicalism from people who are known to be both young and unemployed.

In 2013 the Arab Barometer asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "The United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the U.S. everywhere." The 2018 questionnaire similarly asked whether survey takers agreed or disagreed that "Violence against the United States is a logical consequence of their interference in the Arab region." The UK government defines Islamic radicalism as "any form of Islam that opposes democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs." Therefore, positive answers to these questions should indicate a correlation with radicalization, and perhaps a stronger propensity toward radicalization. If one supports violence against western nations and decides to take action, then he or she would presumably take the most formalized route. In the Middle East this would lead people to join radical Islamic groups like the Islamic State and al Qaeda.

**Figure 3:**

**Jordanians agreeing that “The United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the U.S. everywhere”**

Survey Group	% in agreement 2013	% in agreement 2018
Unemployed Youth Pop.	46%	65%
Total Unemployed Pop.	46%	59%
Youth Pop.	43%	62%
Total Pop.	41%	62.4%

In an analysis of Jordanians who agreed with the statement, 3% more of the unemployed Jordanian youth population agreed with the statement than the total Jordanian youth population in both 2013 and 2018. 6% more of the unemployed youth population supported the statement than did the total unemployed population. This gap between the responses of employed and unemployed young people remained constant over the 5 year gap. The rate of 46% of the unemployed youth population in agreement seen in 2013 was 5% higher than the general Jordanian population in the same year, but this gap closed to 2.6% in the 2018 wave of surveys. The rate of positive responses to the statement by unemployed youth did not increase at a significantly higher rate than other groups in 2018 when unemployment reached its highest point, save for the total unemployed population. However, positive responses by unemployed young people do remain higher in general between 2013 and 2018.

As youth unemployment rose by 7.3% from 2013 to 2018, understandably the number of Jordanian Arab Barometer survey respondents who were young and unemployed increased from

83 to 100 individuals between 2013 and 2018. The total Jordanian youth population polled remained at exactly 402. Rather than seeing more radicalist tendencies only among the young unemployed population over time, these tendencies increased at a near exactly uniform rate of 20% among each of the three groups as the unemployed youth population grew. Here it is important to reiterate that the hypothesis does not say that young unemployed people are more likely to radicalize. Instead it says that as the unemployed youth population increases, so too will overall propensity toward radicalization.

Applying the Social Identity Theory assists in understanding the relationship between this sizeable overall increase in anti-western sentiment and increased youth unemployment, which rose from 30% in 2013 to 37% in 2018. Social Identity Theory deals with the idea that the “self is reflexive and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classification.”<sup>25</sup> It means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group’s perspective. Bagchi notes that the theory states that widespread unemployment will motivate even employed persons to lash out because they will interpret unemployment within their social group as a personal grievance as well.<sup>26</sup> This would not indicate that the unemployed youth population shows any significantly stronger proclivity toward radicalization than the general population, but it could point to youth unemployment’s correlation to the entire population’s proclivity to radicalize.

In order to measure overall resentment among the Jordanian population versus simply resentment against the United States, we can examine Jordanians’ responses when asked how

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<sup>25</sup> Stets, Jan E. and Peter J. Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2000): 224-237.

<sup>26</sup> Bagchi, Aniruddha and Jomon A. Paul. “Youth Unemployment and Terrorism in the MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) Region” *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences* 64, (2018): 9-20

much they trust their own government (see figure 1). The unemployed population's level of trust is not significantly lower than that of the rest of the population over time. However, the amount of distrust among all Jordanians for their own government increased at a remarkably similar rate to the responses regarding support for violence against the United States. The percentage of citizens in support of violence against the United States increased by 21% between 2013 and 2018, and the percentage of citizens who had little to no trust in the government increased by 23% in the same period of time. This clear similarity adds substance to the observation that frustration among the Jordanian population increased at a significant rate between 2013 and 2018. Still, close examination of a link between youth unemployment and radicalization demands the analysis of questions more directly related to radicalism.

**Figure 4:**

**Jordanians in support of Daesh's use of violence:**

Survey Group	% in support 2016
Unemployed Youth Pop.	3.2%
Total Unemployed Pop.	1.4%
Youth Pop.	1.6%
Total Pop.	0.7%

In the 2016 survey wave only, the Arab Barometer asked respondents whether or not they supported the Islamic State's (or Daesh's) use of violence in its extremist operations. While an examination of how responses to this question changed over time as youth unemployment in Jordan spiked could provide more powerful information, comparing the responses for one year

alone still contributes value. *Figure 4* shows the percentage of the youth unemployed population, the total unemployed population, the total youth population, and the total population who support ISIS's use of violence, and shows that 3.2%, 1.4%, 1.6%, and 0.7%, respectively, were in support. Though these percentages are small, they show nonetheless that the Jordanian unemployed youth population is 80% more likely to approve of ISIS's use of violence than is the general population, 50% more likely to do so than the total youth population, and over twice as likely as the total unemployed population. Furthermore, this higher sympathy with radicalism among the unemployed youth population was measured at the same time that other metrics that are often tied to radicalization were on the rise.

In summary, Youth unemployment in Jordan rose by 7.3% from 2013 to 2018, according to the World Bank. The percentage of unemployed youth who distrusted the Jordanian government rose by 10%, and the percentage of unemployed youth who supported violent action against the United States increased by 19% during those 5 years. In 2016, unemployed young people were 80% more likely than the general population to agree with the Islamic State's violent tactics. Lastly, the Global Terrorism Database shows that the number of Islamic extremist attacks in Jordan in 2018 was double that of 2013.

Thus far the hypothesis that youth unemployment correlates with Islamic radicalization in Jordan appears plausible. However, a macro-level analysis comparing the results of each of the metrics used in this chapter across the entire Middle East and North Africa to the results from Jordan alone can further solidify, or disprove, the validity of the hypothesis. The youth unemployment rate in Jordan increased more abruptly and reached a higher rate in general than almost any other nation in the Middle East and North Africa (only Libya reached a higher rate of unemployment). Therefore, if the hypothesis is true, the signs for youth unemployment as an

indicator for propensity toward radicalization should be stronger for Jordan than for the entire MENA region as a whole.



## Macro-Analysis

The developing world is currently experiencing its largest youth cohort to date, and the Arab world is the most affected by the inflation of the youth population.<sup>27</sup> The Middle East and North Africa region is the youngest in the world. Today's global youth are more likely to be pursuing an education than any previous generation, but this desire for educational attainment may cause unexpected negative outcomes in the MENA region. Countless political officials and researchers alike subscribe to the belief that a lack of education leads to a higher propensity for radicalization. However, the discovery of evidence to the contrary has come closer to outweighing the prevalence of the aforementioned "opportunity cost" theory. The verifiable evidence investigators have collected so far does not clearly support the idea that education level reduces a person's desire to join a violent extremist organization. Rather, Berrebi notes, "if anything, the findings suggest that those with higher educational attainment and higher living standards are *more* likely to participate in terrorist activity."<sup>28</sup>

That is not to say that unemployment has nothing to do with radicalization. Jordan as well as the rest of the MENA provides an impressive level of educational opportunity (currently Jordan maintains over 95% secondary school enrollment). When the students graduate from these generally state-sponsored schools, finding work proves exceedingly difficult. We see a phenomenon in which the government fosters a sense of false hope by successfully providing free secondary education and then promptly lets graduates down by failing to provide work opportunities. Bearing this in mind, "educated individuals would be particularly frustrated by the

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<sup>27</sup> Chaaban, Jad. "Youth and Development in the Arab Countries: The Need for a Different Approach." *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (2009): 33.

<sup>28</sup> Berrebi, Claude. "Evidence about the Link between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians." *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 4.

loss of economic opportunities and alternative economic cost of their risking arrest or worse would be lower.”<sup>29</sup> If this theory holds true then Jordanian citizens should exhibit a higher propensity toward radicalization than other countries in the region because Jordan has a strong education system while youth unemployment currently rests at over 36%.

The micro analysis chapter already highlighted a correlation between youth unemployment and drivers for radicalization within Jordan alone. A more concrete analysis necessitates a comparison with the rest of the region. Like those in the previous chapter, this chapter’s charts include information on four distinct population groups in the total MENA Jordanian populations: the total population, the total unemployed population, the youth population (from ages 17 to 25), and the unemployed youth population. *Figure 5* compares the percentage of Jordanians with the percentage of citizens across the Middle East and North Africa who agree that United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the US everywhere. If the percentages taken from the Jordanians’ responses to the Arab Barometer are higher, then the presence of a correlation between youth unemployment and radicalization could be likely.

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<sup>29</sup> Berrebi, Claude. "Evidence about the Link between Education, Poverty and Terrorism among Palestinians." *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 8-9.

**Figure 5:**

**Arab Barometer survey takers agreeing that “The United States interference in the region justifies armed operations against the U.S. everywhere”**

Survey Group	% in agreement 2013	% in agreement 2018
MENA Unemployed Youth Pop.	46%	60%
Jordanian Unemployed Youth Pop.	46%	65%
MENA Total Unemployed Pop.	45%	59%
Jordanian Total Unemployed Pop.	46%	59%
MENA Youth Pop.	46%	62%
Jordanian Youth Pop.	43%	62%
Total MENA Pop.	45%	59%
Total Jordanian Pop.	41%	62%

In 2013, exactly equal percentages of the unemployed youth population in Jordan and in the entire Arab world agreed that violence against the United States was justified. By 2018, as youth unemployment in Jordan continued to spike, the percentage of young unemployed Jordanians who supported violence against Americans increased by a full 19% to a total of 65%. In the Middle East and North Africa as a whole, the number reached only 60% by 2018. The changes were similar for the total youth populations. By 2018 62% of Jordanians and 62% of

citizens throughout the region between ages 17 and 25 said they supported violent action against the United States. However, this number rose from 46% of young citizens of the MENA in 2013 and from only 43% of young Jordanians, meaning the percentage of young Jordanians that endorsed violence against the U.S. increased at a faster rate. The difference in the rate of increase in support for anti-Western sentiment between the MENA's total unemployed population and Jordan's total unemployed population was insignificant; each group increased its support by approximately 14% over the 5 year span.

Interestingly, the disparity between changing opinions in Jordan versus the whole region is the most visible in the general population's responses to this question, rather than in responses from young, unemployed, or young unemployed people. Amongst the total Jordanian population that the Arab Barometer surveys reached, the percentage that supporting violence against America rose by 21% between 2013 and 2018, from 41% to 62%. The total surveyed population of the MENA saw an increase of only 14%, rising from 45% to 59%, the smallest increase in percentage seen in any of the survey groups in Figure 5.

Comparing Jordanians' responses with responses collected region-wide shows that in Jordan, all but one of these population groups' disdain for the West increased more rapidly and reached a higher percentage of the population than did the same groups in the rest of the MENA. Increasing anti-United States sentiments increased 4% more rapidly among young unemployed Jordanians versus the rest of the region, and 6% more rapidly among the general Jordanian population between 2013 and 2018. During that same period of time, the youth unemployment rate calculated from Arab Barometer survey data alone (rather than larger scale data sources such as the World Bank) showed an overall decrease in the MENA's youth unemployment rate, falling from 23% to 21%. In Jordan, Arab Barometer results show an increase of 5%, from 20% to 25%

in the youth unemployment rate (see *figure 6*). Consequently, the relative change in youth unemployment and responses to the survey question concerning violence against Americans was nearly identical in Jordan.

***Figure 6:***

**Youth unemployment rate calculated from Arab Barometer data alone:**

Survey Location	2013	2018
MENA	23%	21%
Jordan	20%	25%

The comparison presented in figure 5 also indicates a correlation between youth unemployment and radicalization. Jordan underwent a higher and more rapid spike in youth unemployment than anywhere else in the region between 2013 and 2018, and during that time violent sentiment for the West also increased significantly more among Jordanians. Still, the question of whether respondents did or did not support violence against the United States is not a telltale indicator for propensity for involvement in Islamic extremism. The question from wave IV of the Arab Barometer wave (2016) that asked respondents whether they agreed with the Islamic State's use of violence, however, is as close as one can hope to get while still expecting respondents to provide truthful answers.

**Figure 7:****1. Total Arab Barometer survey takers in support of Daesh's use of violence:**

Survey Group	% in support 2016
MENA Unemployed Youth Pop.	3.1%
Jordanian Unemployed Youth Pop.	1.9%
MENA Total Unemployed Pop.	2.3%
Jordanian Total Unemployed Pop.	1.4%
MENA Youth Pop.	1.9%
Jordanian Youth Pop.	1.4%
Total MENA Pop.	1.7%
Total Jordanian Pop.	0.7%

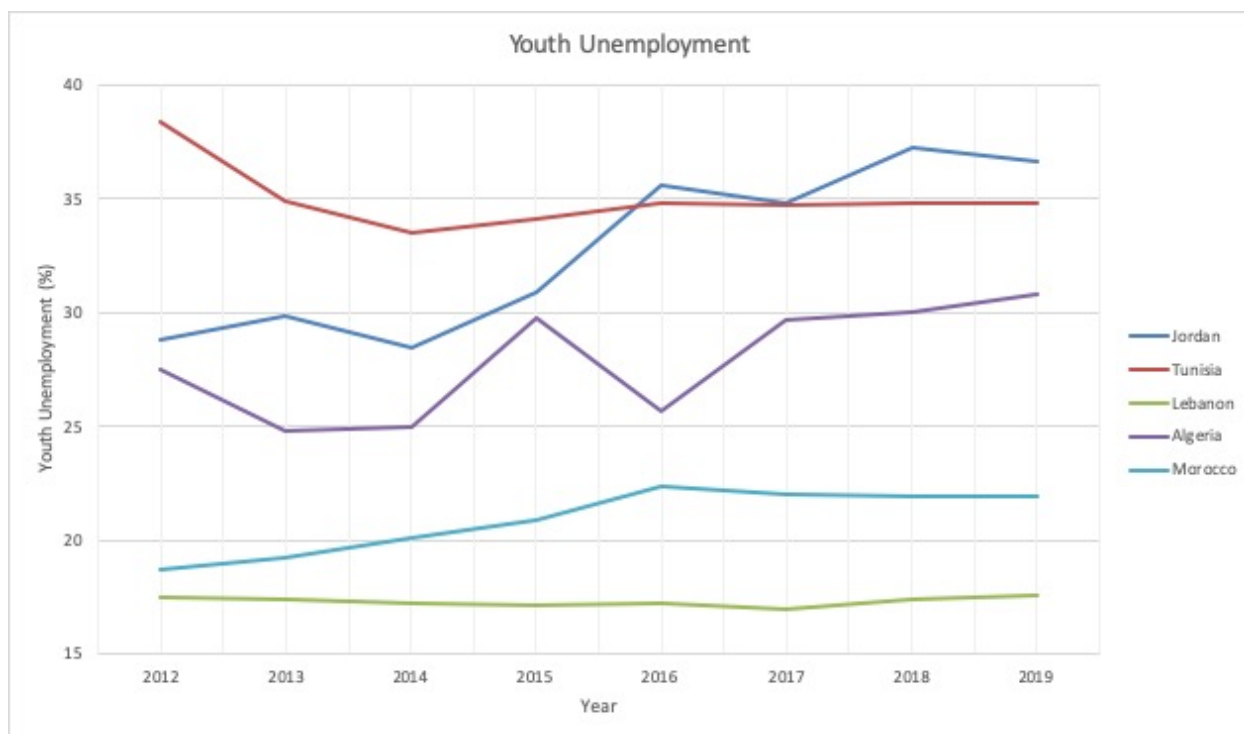
While the data in figure 7 still show that the youth unemployed population as well as the youth population exhibit a higher propensity to radicalization both within Jordan and beyond its borders in the rest of the MENA, the chart yields a different result than the previous one. In each population group examined, a higher percentage of citizens throughout the entire Middle East supported ISIS's use of violence than did Jordanians alone. Oddly, the gap between the opinions of the youth unemployed populations in Jordan versus MENA-wide is the largest of the three population groups.

Overall, figure 7 indicates that youth unemployment does not correlate with propensity to radicalize. The question now becomes, why do responses seen in figure 5 (relating to support for violence against America) seem to support the hypothesis, while the responses presented in figure 7 do not? The problem could lie in the fact that the question concerning the Islamic State was only asked in the year 2016, and therefore did not allow for a complete analysis of how responses evolved over time. Jordan's youth unemployment rate is currently climbing higher than the rest of the nations in the MENA today. Its continuous upsurge in the past five to ten years could mean that responses to questions used to explore its potential correlation to other factors must also be observable over a certain period of time, rather than in just one instance, in order to yield more fruitful results.

For example, in 2016 unemployment in Jordan rose rapidly, but Tunisia was still riding out the effects of the Arab Spring in 2011 and youth unemployment was still on its way down from 2011's remarkably high rate of 42%. The two countries' unemployment rates matched one another in that year, despite the fact that one was declining and the other was rising. Jordan's youth unemployment rate had not yet had enough time to pull away from the rest of the region in 2016, and therefore it is understandable that its potential effects would not have had as much of a visible impact as data collected more recently and continuously. While the use of data collected in a single year may or may not give rise to problems, this should not mean that figure 7 is useless. Instead it may indeed show that youth unemployment does not correlate with propensity to radicalization after all.

The charts in this macro-analysis chapter compare Jordan with the other countries that were polled by the Arab Barometer in 2016. This means that, in essence, the conglomerated MENA data should be seen as having its own youth unemployment rate when considering its significance

versus Jordan's data. So although Jordan's youth unemployment rate intersected with Tunisia's in that year, the "overall MENA" unemployment rate that the Jordanian data it is being compared to saw an overall decline (see figure 6). Thus, the fact that each of the population groups in Jordan harbored less support for ISIS's use of violence than the MENA-wide survey groups means that data in figure 7 contradicts the hypothesis.





## **Conclusion**

This research has examined the potential relationships between Islamic radicalization and youth unemployment in the case of Jordan, drawing on statistics from the Arab Barometer surveys conducted in 2013, 2016, and 2018. Utilizing survey responses from the Arab Barometer made it possible to examine direct responses from people who are known to be young and unemployed, rather than to simply compare a detached unemployment statistic alongside the frequency of terror attacks.

Inside Jordan alone, the young unemployed population showed a higher propensity to extremist radicalization than did the rest of the population. This held true after investigating results concerning the support for violence against the United States as well as the support for the Islamic State's use of violence. Jordan's youth unemployment rate spiked in 2016 and again in 2018, and as hypothesized, a higher percentage of the unemployed youth population in Jordan supported violence against the United States in 2018 than in 2013. Furthermore, general support for violence against the West grew at a uniform rate of 20% for each population group examined. Similarly, when Jordanians were asked whether they supported Daesh's use of violence, the unemployed youth population held more support than other population groups. Thus, the micro-analysis research upholds the hypothesis that youth unemployment correlates with propensity to radicalization in Jordan.

Jordan currently has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the MENA region, and it has grown alarmingly quickly. If likelihood of radicalization indeed correlates with youth unemployment, then Jordan should have higher per-capita support for violence against the West as well as more support for ISIS's use of violence. In the macro-analysis section, a comparison of Jordanians' support for violence against the U.S. proved to be higher than per capita support for

violence against the U.S. across the Arab World. The comparison of responses regarding support for ISIS's violence yielded different results. In 2016, Jordan displayed a lower level of support than its neighbors did for the Islamic State's tactics. Therefore the macro-analysis yielded slightly conflicting results. However, results to questions asked on the 2016 Arab Barometer survey may be a poor metric to use with respect to correlation with increased youth unemployment in Jordan. The Jordanian youth unemployment rate reached its apex in 2016, and it is possible that the effects of the spike may not have taken effect by the time of the administration of the 2016 survey.

In conclusion, using Arab Barometer data to investigate youth unemployment's relationship with propensity to radicalization in Jordan shows that while a positive relationship between the two is highly plausible, it does not completely prove the hypothesis. The survey questions used are not an ideal way to measure a population group's likelihood of radicalization. They may measure how much youth unemployment correlates with sympathy toward radicalization, but not one's willingness to act on borderline-radicalist beliefs. Data even more directly related to radicalization would be necessary to get closer to a definitive answer. Unfortunately, the accessibility of this data may be a near insurmountable challenge unless the researcher worked for a government agency with access to more information than what the average citizen may view. Prison and arrest records from Middle Eastern and North African countries would be a promising start.

The ultimate goal of this research was to come closer to putting a finger on whether youth unemployment should be seen as a potential driver for radicalization, or whether it should be added to the pool of socioeconomic factors that certainly are not. Based on the results from comparing Arab Barometer survey data, youth unemployment should not yet be placed in the latter category. More research on the relationship between radicalization and terrorism and youth unemployment,

or perhaps simply with high youth populations alone, should be conducted in order to come to a completely decisive answer. Even still, given radicalization's ambiguous nature as it occurs on a completely individual level, the likelihood of ever finding a single key socioeconomic driver for Islamic extremist radicalization is slim.

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