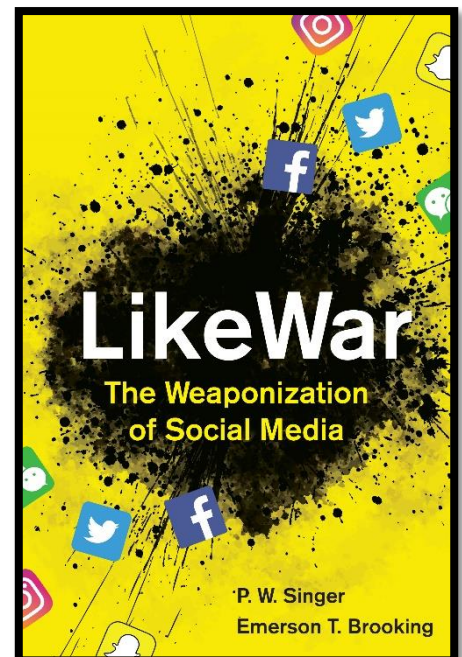




## Social Reasons for the Success of ISIS

- ISIS uses social media (Twitter, Facebook) to recruit thousands of new fighters, and presents war like a computer game. Their strategy has inspired thousands of men from all over the world to fight with them.
- Groups like ISIS wait until there are people within the general population who are unhappy or tired of the problems within their governments and then appear to create solutions based on current social problems.
- Creating propaganda films which glorify the war they are waging which attracts young Muslims across the middle East. Often these young people feel angry with the social situation and the history of the Middle East and voiceless. Fighting with ISIS they feel gives them **power** and a **voice**.
- Al-Qaeda (a different extremist group) has cut ties with ISIS because they deem it too extreme: to some this makes ISIS the most powerful and attractive option.
- ISIS rules the territory they have captured with fear: anyone speaking out against them, even Sunni Muslims (those most aligned with ISIS), are killed. These executions are often filmed and put on social media sites, making others scared of fighting against them, while gaining attention from power seekers.
- ISIS has been taking women in particular as slaves and selling them. Some ISIS fighters think it is okay to use people who are unbelievers as sex slaves. This causes more divides in social issues.
- ISIS, as a group, is extremely rich, with a net worth of about \$2 billion dollars (compared to al-Qaeda which is about \$30 million). They've raised this money by smuggling, extortion, kidnapping and selling slaves, but also by raising taxes from the population and selling oil and electricity (from places they stole) back to the Syrian government. There is also a large amount of donations from private individuals who agree with them.
- Many Muslims from all over the world were outraged by the USAs military action in Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular its use of remote controlled drone strikes. Some estimates count the civilian death toll to be as high as 500,000 in Iraq. Some of these angry people feel that they are without a voice, and the world won't listen to them. By fighting with ISIS, the world is paying attention and they are changing history.



## Cultural Reasons for the Success of ISIS

- ISIS has started its own schools, and has begun recruiting young boys to indoctrinate them and get new fighters. In this sense they are creating their own new culture from a young age when young minds will blindly believe.
- Islam is split into two main groups: Shiites (80%) and Sunnis (20%). Sunnis are the minority in the world and so ISIS wants to create a Sunni country. To some Sunni Muslims this is culturally and socially attractive, especially considering how hostile Shia and Sunni Muslims have been to each other in the past.



- ISIS is more than just a terrorist group. It has set up courts, schools and other services, flying its black jihadi flag everywhere. In Raqqa, the capitol of Syria, it even started a consumer protection authority for food standards. This has made its progress culturally sustainable as they are not only involved in violence. ISIS functions as a whole government, and is part of every aspect of some people's lives.
- ISIS members follow and promote an extreme interpretation of Islamic (Sharia) law. It has established a reputation for extreme brutality, carrying out crucifixions, beheadings and amputations of hands for those who steal. This creates a culture of fear so people are unwilling to speak out against them.
- Extremists groups are using peoples culture against them, teaching them that if they do not follow their interpretation of Islam that they are bad people who want to hurt God. Due to this cultural instability they begin to believe ISIS's words.



- ISIS is creating a whole new culture which aims to have a religious leader (Caliph) as the head of state. This idea of a God-centered culture is appealing to many Muslims who feel disillusioned with materialist and Western ideas of culture.

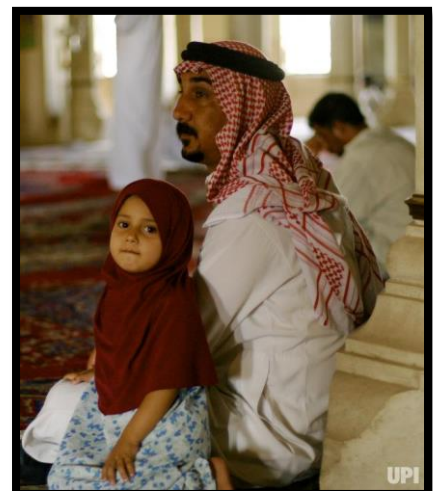
## Religious Reasons for the Success of ISIS

- Wahabi Islam, a particularly conservative and extreme form of Islam, is what ISIS practices and enforces. This includes women having to cover up, hand amputation as a punishment for theft, and the death penalty for anyone who challenges them. Only 3.5% of the world's Muslims follow Wahabi Islam but they come from many of the world's richest Arab nations; Qatar (46% of the population), United Arab Emirates (44% of the population) and Saudi Arabia (22% of the population). Many large donations from individuals in these countries have made ISIS the best funded 'Jihadi' group in history, and they have given these donations partly because of religious motivation.

- Belief is strong amongst many ISIS fighters that they are doing the will of Allah (God) by creating an Islamic Caliphate. Videos of ISIS online, of which there are a huge number, often have members saying "Allah hu Akbar" meaning 'God is Great'. This idea of a God centered society appeals to some Muslims who disagree with Western, materialist values.



- ISIS fighters believe they are fighting in a Jihad: a holy struggle against evil which Allah approves of. If they die, they believe they will go to paradise. This makes them very determined, and difficult to convince of another opinion. Their religious belief is fundamentalist and very closed to other interpretations of the Islamic faith, so much that they are willing to remove anyone who speaks out against them or their faith.
- Some fighters have been 'brainwashed' by religious propaganda to the extent that it is extremely difficult to have a reasoned conversation with them. They strongly believe that they are doing the right thing: to them the violence ISIS commits is God's will as it is creating a society ruled by what they consider to be God's law.



## Historical Reasons for the Success of ISIS

- The USA has been giving weapons to groups linked to Al-Qaeda in Syria to fight Asad, the dictator who has used chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Some of these weapons have fallen into the hands of ISIS, who are fighting alongside rebels against Asad. This means ISIS has some state-of-the-art weapons that have been 'donated' to them.
- Many of ISIS's weapons come from weapons given to Iraq Security Forces by the USA during the war (in 2003) and then captured, including anti-aircraft weapons, artillery, armoured vehicles and light and medium firearms. These weapons in a way, are being used against the people who originally gave them away.
- 3 years of Civil War in Syria, and the removal of Saddam Hussein, has left a power vacuum in the region that ISIS is filling. When you have no leader, someone or something will step up to power. In this case, ISIS was that something.
- When ISIS started moving through Iraq, 10s of thousands of Iraqi soldiers dropped weapons and ran due to fear, poor training and poor organization. They also left their weapons behind for ISIS to use and use against them.
- The oil in Iraq and Syria has mostly been sold by British Petroleum (BP) and ISIS believes that the oil money from Iraq should go into the hands of Iraqis (and ISIS themselves). Many Arabs agree with this idea (although not with ISIS's methods) and are actively seeking ways to return the money to their own lands.
- ISIS has robbed banks (Mosul central bank, 2014) and taken charge of oil fields and power stations. Now governments are paying them for the resources they had stolen! Government wants to reduce the conflict and not cause any more harm, but this sets a precedent that allows ISIS to continue these actions.
- ISIS has also broken into prisons to free people arrested as terrorists in the past, which add to the number of fighters with them.

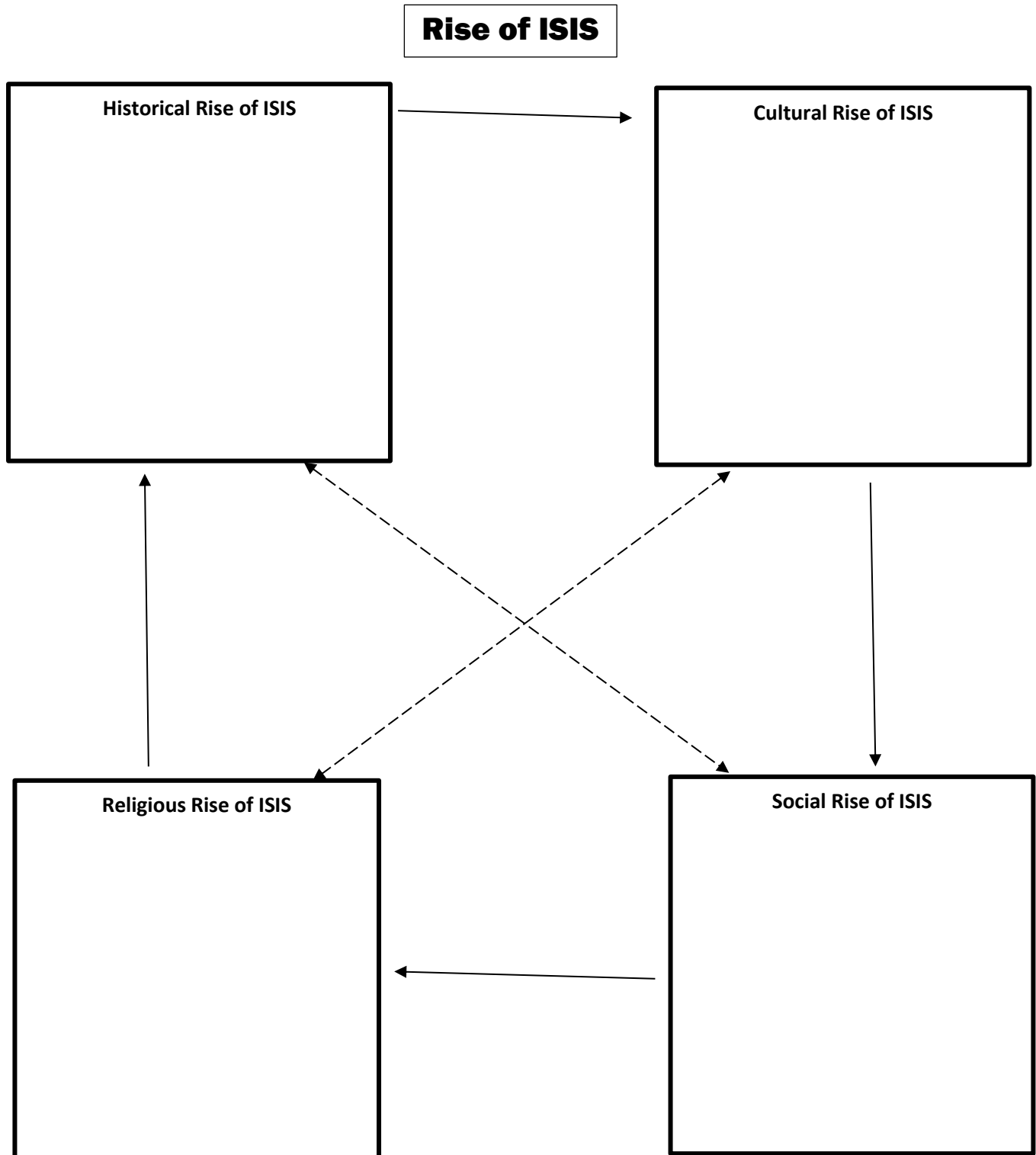


**US Weapons recovered from an ISIS  
Attack in Iran, April 2016**



### Extremists: Rise of ISIS

**Directions:** Read each set of station notes and fill in the missing information below. You will have to summarize the information in each box and then create a connection along each line between the different topics. You must fill in all boxes and lines.



1. Why are people turning to extremist groups like ISIS?
2. What do you think is the biggest factor (Historical, Social, Religious, Cultural) in ISIS control?
3. How does economics drive extremist groups?