THE THEORY OF LEGAL CYNICISM AND SUNNI INSURGENT VIOLENCE IN POST-INVASION IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

We elaborate a cultural framing theory of legal cynicism - previously used to account for neighborhood variation in Chicago homicides - to explain Arab Sunni victimization and insurgent attacks during the U.S. post-invasion occupation of Iraq. Legal cynicism theory has an unrecognized power to explain collective and interpersonal violence in international as well as American settings. We expand on how “double and linked” roles of state and non-state actors can be used in this theory to analyze violence against Arab Sunni civilians. Arab Sunnis responded to their reports of unnecessary violent attacks by U.S./Coalition soldiers with a legally cynical framing of the U.S./Coalition-led invasion and occupation, the new Shia-dominated Iraq state, and its military and police. A post-invasion frame amplification of beliefs about state-based illegitimacy, unresponsiveness, and insecurity made it not only possible but predictable that Arab Sunni insurgent attacks would continue against U.S./Coalition forces and transfer to Shia-dominated Iraq government forces. Violence in Iraq persisted despite Surge efforts to end the Arab Sunni insurgency.