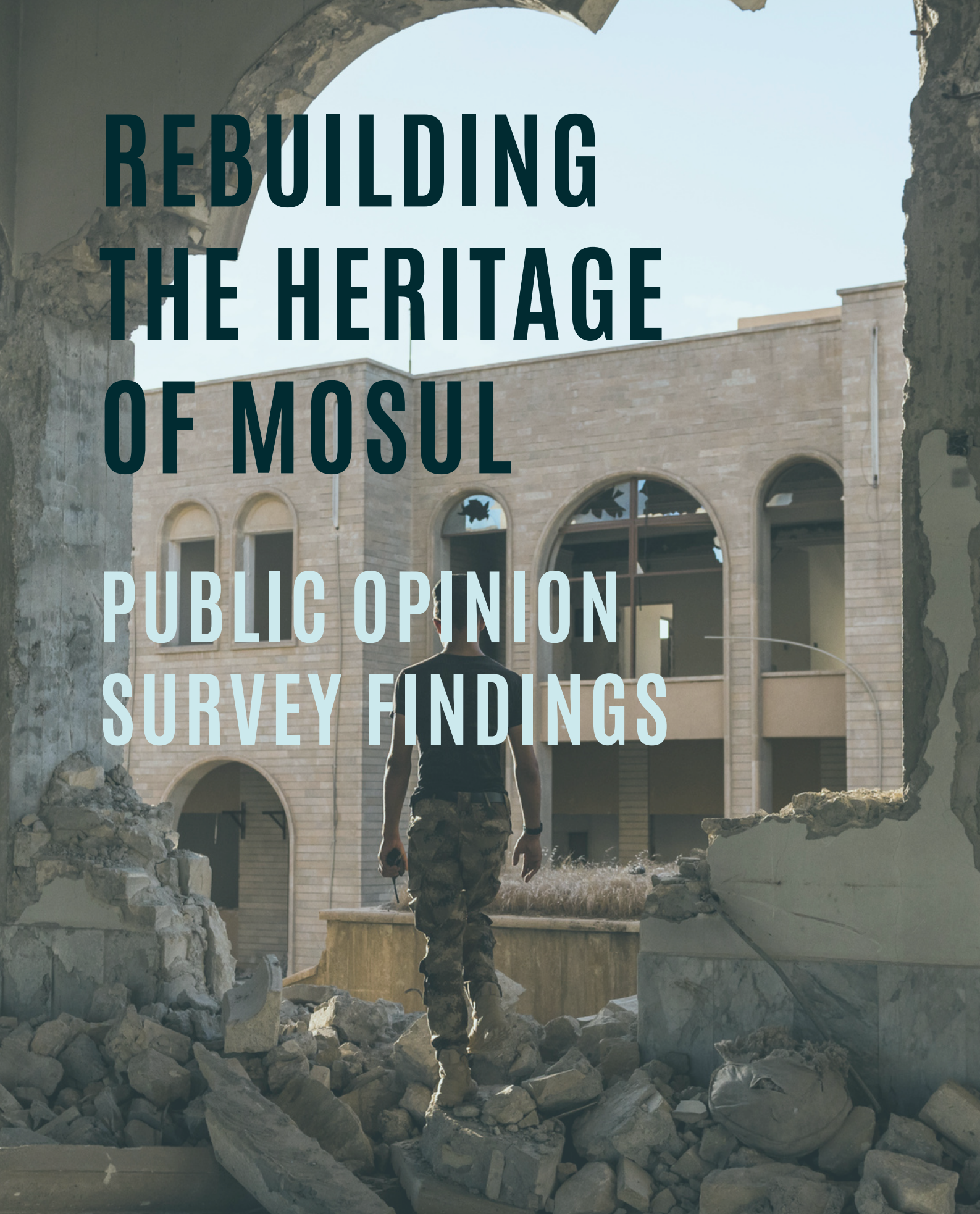


REBUILDING THE HERITAGE OF MOSUL

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY FINDINGS



This project was funded by the Australian Research Council (DP200101468).

This project was conducted by researchers from the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University and the College of Arts and Sciences, the University of Pennsylvania in partnership with the Arab Barometer, Princeton University and the Iraq-based Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies.

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Front and Back Covers: A man walking through the rubble of a heavily damaged Syriac Orthodox Church in Mosul (Joel Carillet/iStock, May 2017).

CONTACT

Prof. Benjamin Isakhan benjamin.isakhan@deakin.edu.au

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the Islamic State's devastation of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, various initiatives were introduced to reconstruct the city's heritage sites. However, these projects are mostly designed and implemented by foreign organisations, many of which have limited information on local views towards heritage sites and their destruction.

A number of international heritage reconstruction efforts have begun in Mosul under the assumption that they will be supported by the local population.

This report summarises the survey responses of 1600 Mosul residents who were asked about their attitudes towards heritage.

The results indicate that the overwhelming majority of Maslawis reported immense pride in the rich cultural heritage of Iraq, felt aggrieved by the destruction of heritage sites during the recent conflict, and wanted to see their heritage reconstructed.

However, the survey also suggests four key recommendations for current and future heritage reconstruction projects in Mosul.

1) HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION IS NOT THE MAIN PRIORITY

Heritage reconstruction should not take precedence over other urgent priorities like humanitarian aid, security, development, unemployment, health, education, and peacebuilding.

2) DON'T DISMISS LOCAL AND/OR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE SITES

The reconstruction of local religious sites may be just as important as the reconstruction of iconic heritage buildings or archaeological sites that are less frequently visited and hold less personal significance for locals.

3) LESS 'AUTHENTICITY' AND MORE MODERN FACILITIES

Renovations to damaged sites should transform them into new and more useful community structures and centres.

4) GRANT IRAQIS AGENCY OVER THE FUTURE OF THEIR HERITAGE

Foreign actors must ensure local agency and control over the future of their heritage, including in all major reconstruction works.

BACKGROUND

In June 2014, the Islamic State (IS) captured the northern Iraqi city of Mosul and declared the creation of a new caliphate.

As they had done throughout Iraq and Syria, the IS unleashed a wave of devastating human suffering in Mosul that included the mass killings, enslavement, torture, and forced displacement of thousands of civilians. These events created an ongoing humanitarian and security crisis and led to interventions by foreign militaries.

In addition to the atrocities perpetrated against innocent Iraqis, the IS also deliberately targeted countless cultural heritage sites across Mosul. For example, the IS made international headlines when it publicised footage of militants destroying artefacts and statues held at the Mosul Museum.



Ruins of the Nabi Yunus Shrine in Mosul, also known as the Tomb of the Prophet Jonah, destroyed by the IS (Leena Ha/Shutterstock)

The IS also triggered global outrage when it detonated explosives at archaeological sites, including the Assyrian city of Nimrud, causing irreparable damage.

Alongside these well-known attacks was an intense, violent campaign targeting sites with great significance to different religious groups such as Christian churches, Sunni and Shia mosques, and Yezidi temples. The IS also actively destroyed scores of historic souqs, public libraries, schools, and universities, as well as cemeteries and tombs.

In response to the unprecedented scope and scale of heritage destruction perpetrated by the IS, numerous foreign states, multilateral institutions, and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have invested time and resources into ambitious heritage preservation and reconstruction efforts across Mosul.

One of the largest initiatives to date is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) flagship project entitled 'Revive the Spirit of Mosul.'

This 5-year undertaking, which began in February 2018, has overseen the implementation of various UNESCO-led heritage reconstruction efforts both inside Mosul and throughout the city's surrounding areas (UNESCO, 2018).

Currently, over 100 million United States Dollars (USD) has been provided in funding for the project, including from prominent multilateral institutions like the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as well as state governments ranging from the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, and the regional government of Flanders (Belgium).



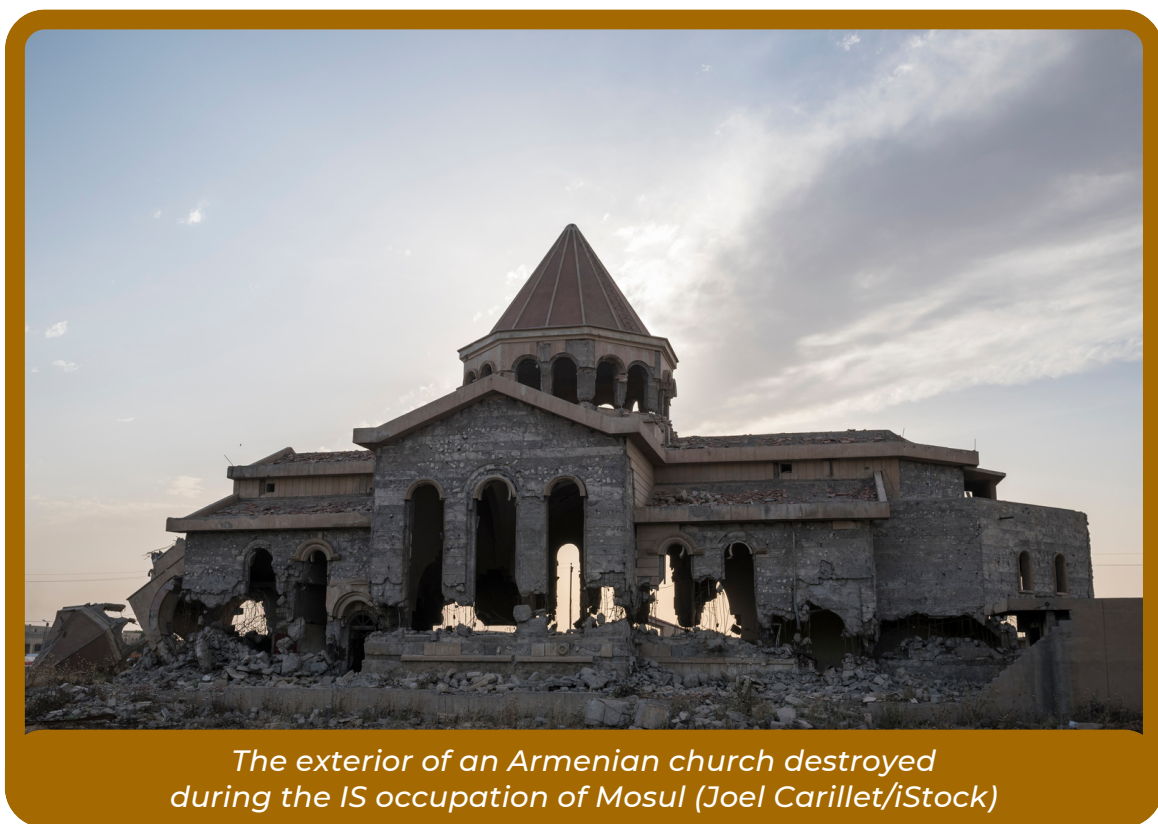
The central dome of Mosul's Great Mosque of al-Nuri following an explosion by the IS in 2017 (Chris Pook/Shutterstock, November 2018)

Other notable foreign-led efforts include:

- the 'Mosul Mosaic' project, designed to restore the city's churches and mosques and funded by the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH) in partnership with France and Italy (ALIPH, n.d.);
- a 5-year endeavour under the auspices of the Smithsonian, the Musée du Louvre, ALIPH, and the World Monuments Fund (WMF) entitled 'Rehabilitation of the Mosul Museum' (Kurin, 2021);
- several projects funded by the United Kingdom's (UK) Cultural Protection Fund, including a 4-year training course for Iraqi citizens on documenting, stabilising, and reconstructing heritage sites that had been destroyed by the IS (British Museum, n.d.);
- United States (US) State Department projects, including a partnership with the Smithsonian on the 'Nimrud Rescue Project' (Johnson et al., 2020).

Each of these heritage restoration initiatives has the potential to contribute to the advancement of post-IS peace and stability in Mosul.

However, in light of the high levels of foreign involvement and the diversity of international stakeholders contributing to heritage projects, their efficacy and legitimacy must be openly assessed.



This project therefore sought to measure the extent to which local public opinion on heritage aligns with the significant projects undertaken by various foreign actors to restore and rebuild the heritage of Mosul.

PROJECT SUMMARY

This project examined local public opinion on heritage, its destruction and its reconstruction in the Iraqi city of Mosul, and the extent to which this converged with or diverged from the actions of foreign states, INGOs, and multilateral institutions rebuilding the cultural sites of the city.

By surveying Mosul residents, the project intended to determine: how individuals value and engage with their heritage, the ways in which they experience its destruction, their views on reconstruction projects, and the extent to which they support foreign-led restoration works.

The authors designed the survey in collaboration with scholars from the Arab Barometer. The survey was conducted in Arabic and administered face-to-face by the Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies based in Iraq.

The survey took place in 2021, beginning on the 25th of March and concluding on the 4th of April, with a total of 1600 respondents.

It was designed to capture a cross-section of Mosul's adult population, including all citizens over 18 years of age who were living in the city at the time that the survey was being conducted.

To respect the privacy and protect the safety of participants, they remain anonymous and non-identifiable. The survey was conducted and administered in accordance with the ethical standards of the Deakin University Research Ethics Committee, Australia.

Although the survey was designed to obtain responses from a large number of diverse participants hailing from Mosul, the authors do not claim that the data collected equates to a generalisable or singular 'public opinion' that can be attributed to the entire cross-section of Mosul's demographics.

METHODOLOGY

The survey entailed 60 different questions across six interrelated themes:

PART I: HERITAGE ENGAGEMENT (10 QUESTIONS)

Examining how respondents engage with their heritage, including how often they visited sites and how highly they valued different kinds of sites across varying locations.

PART II: HERITAGE DESTRUCTION (10 QUESTIONS)

Examining how respondents reacted to the destruction of heritage sites, including how their reactions to destruction varied across different kinds of sites.

PART III: HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION (10 QUESTIONS)

Examining how respondents view the various heritage reconstruction projects across Mosul, including how such efforts are perceived in the context of broader humanitarian needs and how initiatives align with the type of reconstruction preferred by locals.

PART IV: STATE ACTORS (5 QUESTIONS)

Assessing how respondents perceive the role played by the Iraqi government in heritage protection and reconstruction, including whether they would like to see the Iraqi government responsible for managing the ongoing rehabilitation of heritage sites in Mosul.

PART V: INTERNATIONAL ACTORS (7 QUESTIONS)

Assessing how respondents perceive the role played by international actors in heritage protection and reconstruction, including who they would most like to see responsible for managing the ongoing rehabilitation of heritage sites in Mosul.

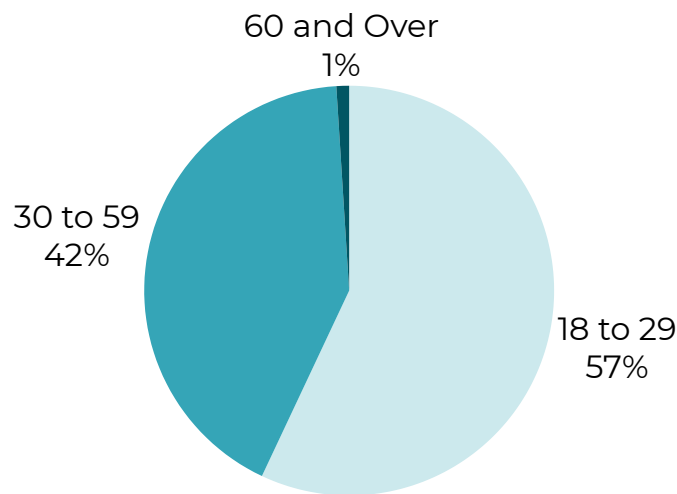
PART VI: DEMOGRAPHICS (16 QUESTIONS)

Obtaining key demographic data about the respondents.

KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The responses to Part VI revealed the key demographics of 1600 Mosul residents surveyed. [1]

AGE



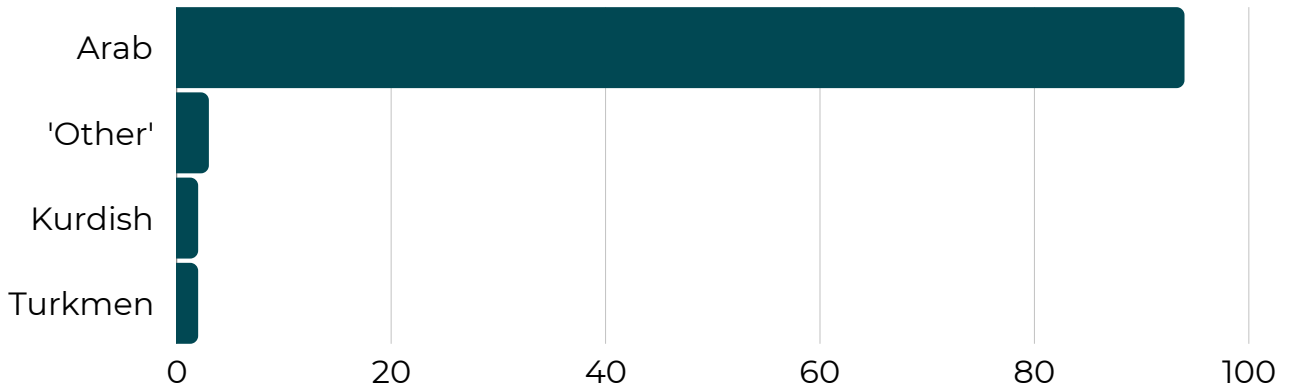
MARITAL STATUS



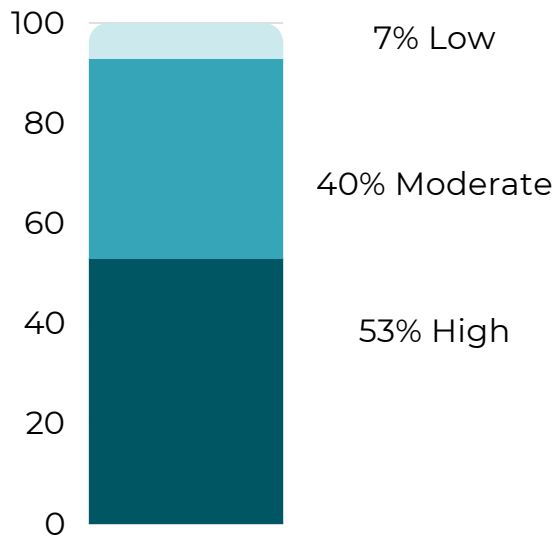
GENDER



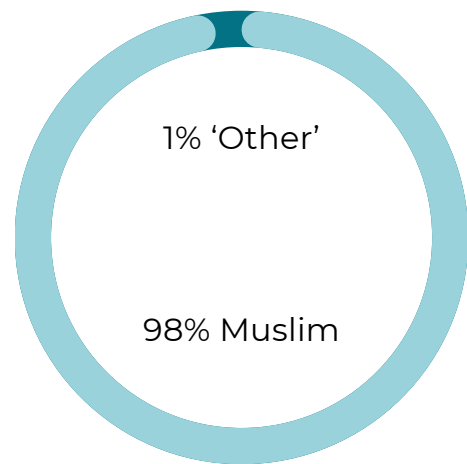
ETHNIC IDENTITY



LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT



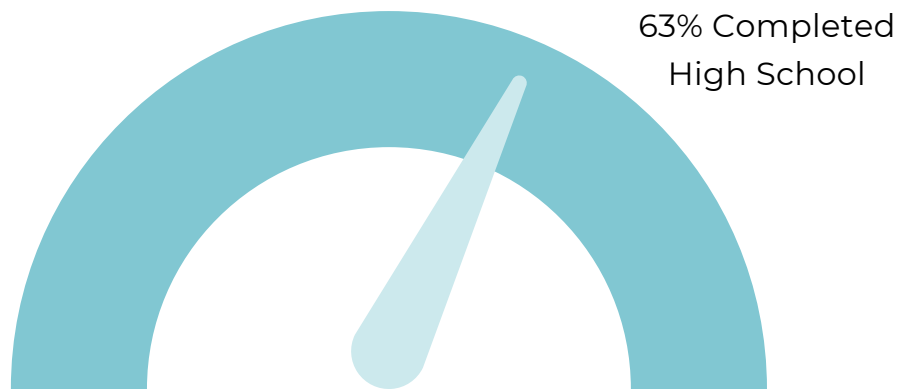
RELIGIOUS IDENTITY



LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS ADHERENCE

96% Close Adherence to Religious Practices and/or Principles

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION



EMPLOYMENT STATUS

75% Unemployed
[2]

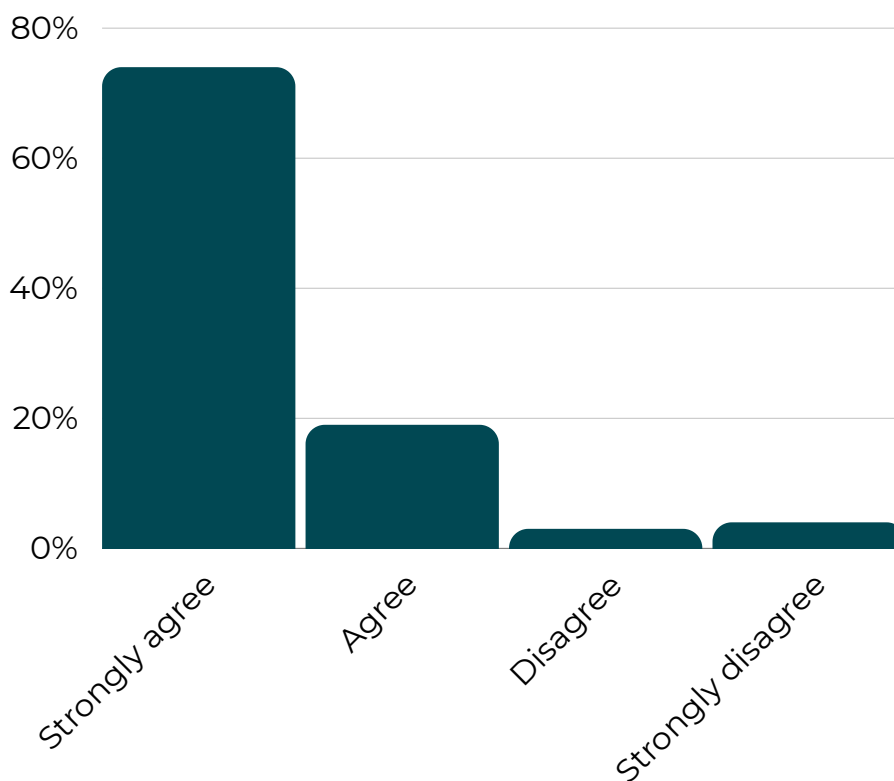


SURVEY FINDINGS

PART I: HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF MOSUL VALUE AND ENGAGE WITH THEIR HERITAGE?

When asked to respond to the statement: *I am very proud of the rich cultural heritage of this country*, an overwhelming number of participants either strongly agreed (74%) or agreed (19%), compared to a small number who disagreed (7%). See Figure 1. [3]

Figure 1. Do you agree with the following statement: 'I am very proud of the rich cultural heritage of this country?'



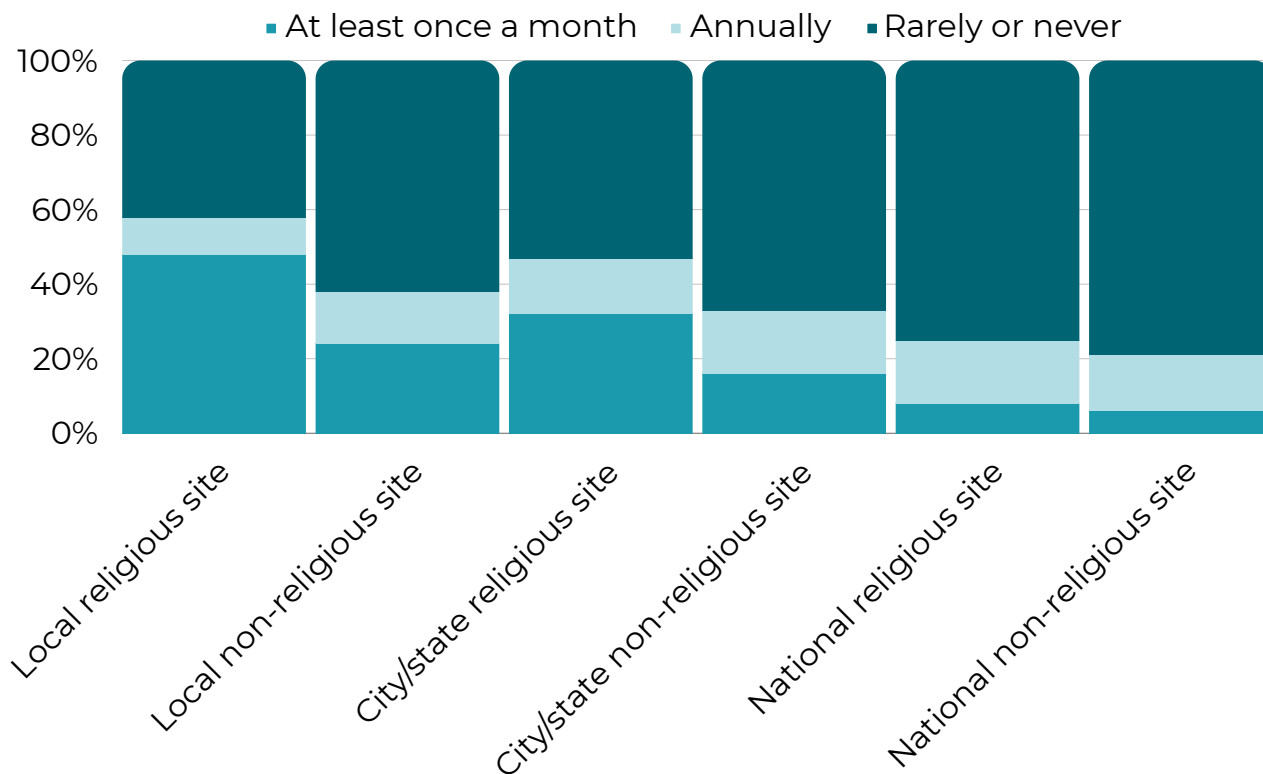
These results indicate that most Maslawis surveyed hold a great sense of pride in Iraq's rich cultural heritage.

Participants were then asked to respond to the question: *How often do you visit the following heritage sites?* They were provided with six options covering two types of sites and three locations of sites:

- Religious Sites: *A mosque, church, shrine or other religious site.*
- Non-Religious Sites: *A museum, historical building, or pre-Islamic archaeological site.*
- Local Sites: *Nearest or most accessible site.*
- City/State Sites: *Sites across Mosul and the Nineveh governorate.*
- National Sites: *Heritage outside their governorate.*

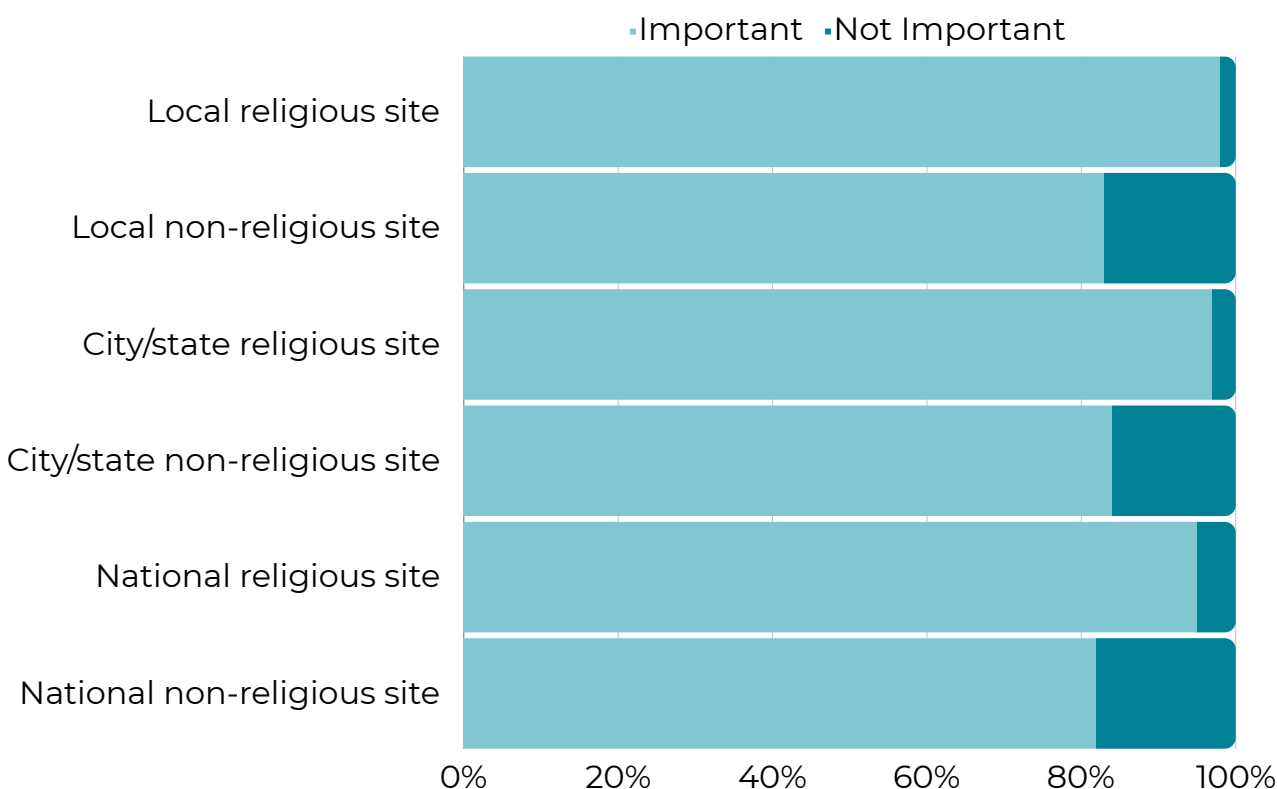
A majority of participants affirmed that ‘local religious sites’ were visited most frequently (48%) and that ‘national non-religious sites’ were ‘rarely or never’ visited (79%). See Figure 2.

Figure 2. How often do you visit the following heritage sites?



Similarly, when asked to respond to the follow-up question: *Despite how often you visit, how important are the following heritage sites to you personally?* and provided with the same six options, locals consistently ranked 'local religious sites' as the most important (98%) and 'national non-religious sites' as the least important (82%). See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Despite how often you visit, how important are the following heritage sites to you personally?

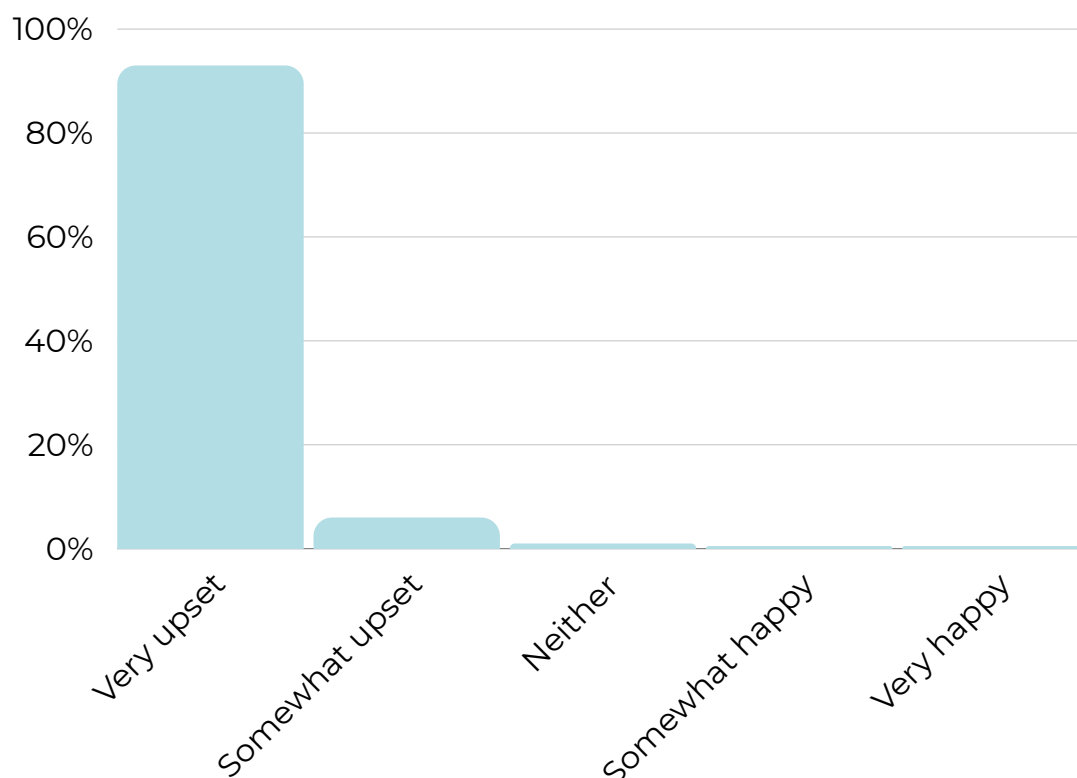


Overall, religious sites were visited more frequently and more greatly valued than non-religious sites by Mosul residents. While respondents were more likely to visit local sites than those located further afield, the proximity of sites did not influence their importance, with religious sites consistently ranking higher than non-religious sites.

PART II: HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF MOSUL INTERPRET THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR HERITAGE?

Respondents were also asked: *Overall, how would you describe your feelings when heritage sites were destroyed during the recent conflicts?* Nearly all respondents (99%) indicated a negative reaction that did not support the deliberate or conflict-related damage to sites by the IS and other actors. See Figure 4.

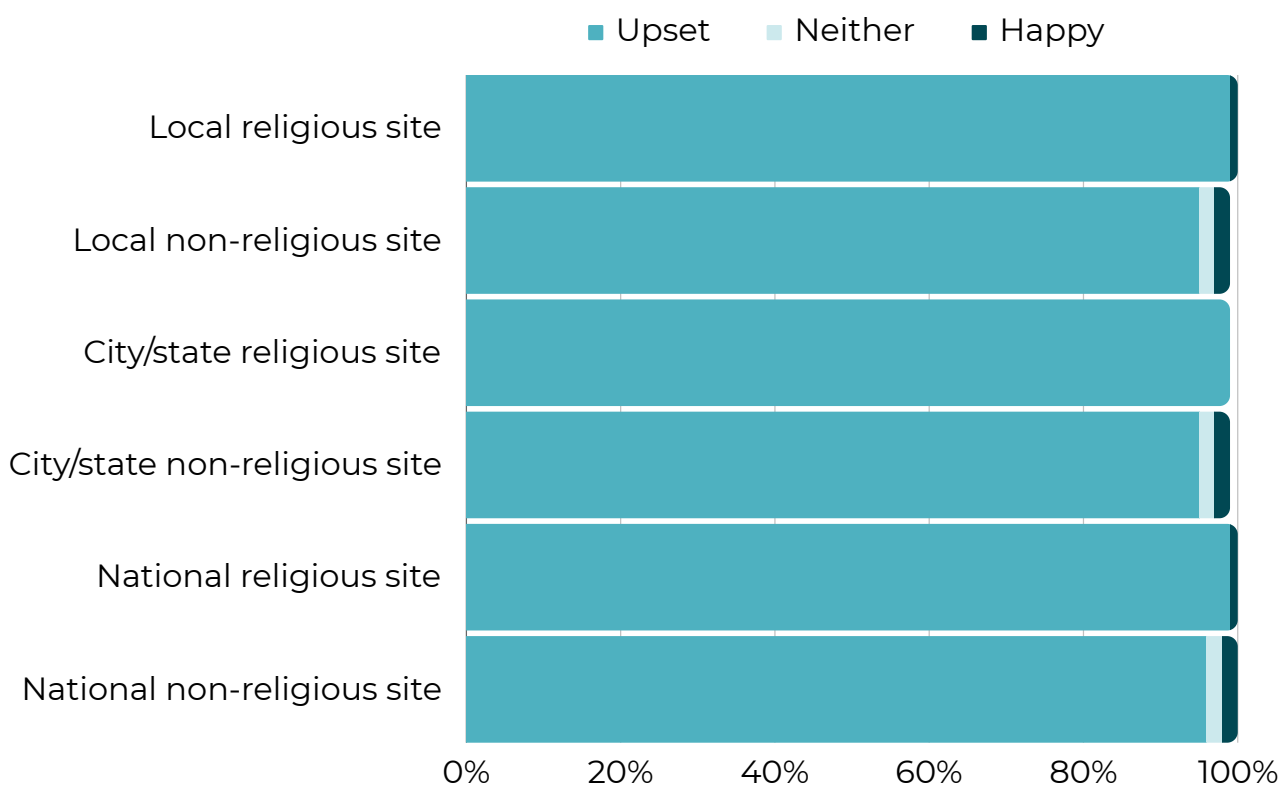
Figure 4. Overall, how would you describe your feelings when heritage sites were destroyed during the recent conflicts?



We also sought to understand how participants reacted to destruction and whether this was influenced by variations in the type and location of sites.

We therefore asked: *How did you react to the damage and destruction at the following heritage sites?* and identified the same six options for sites. The results indicated that respondents were marginally more upset at the destruction of religious sites than non-religious sites regardless of vicinity. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. How did you react to the damage and destruction at the following heritage sites?



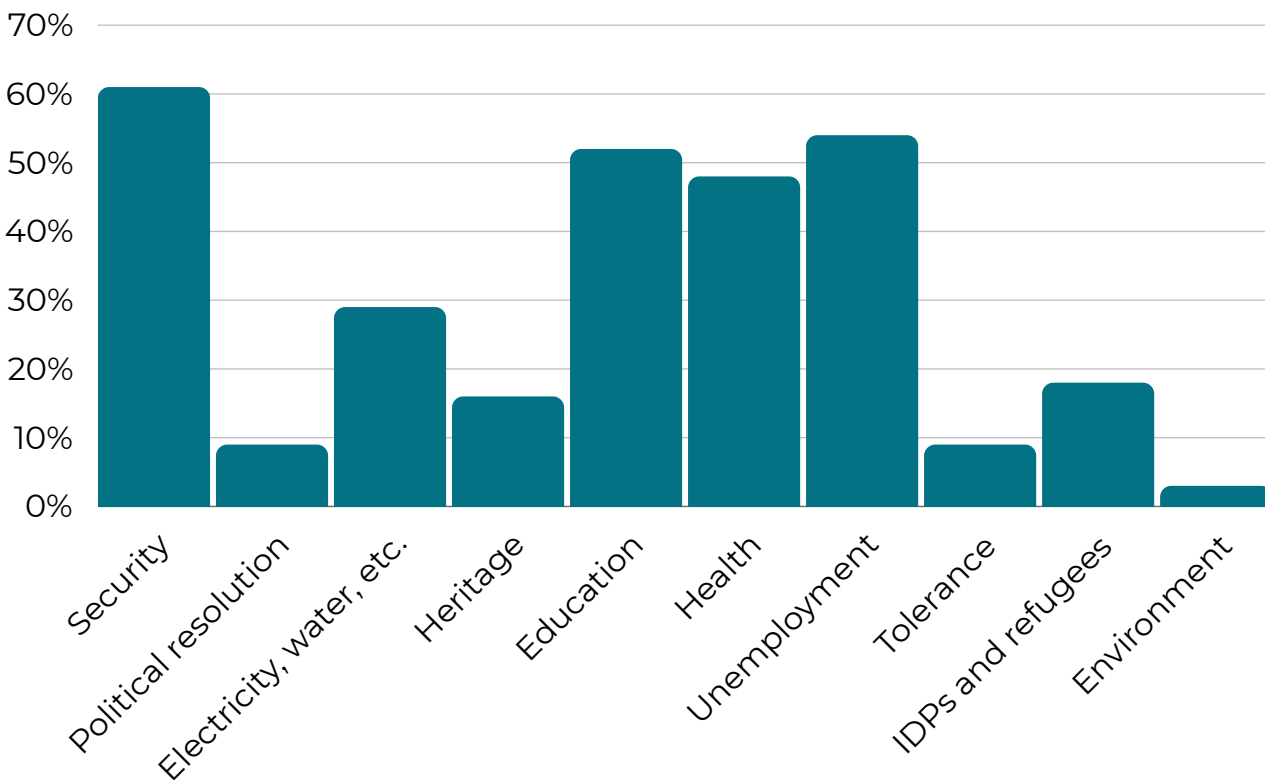
PART III: HOW DO THE PEOPLE OF MOSUL VIEW THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THEIR HERITAGE?

To determine the level of priority assigned to heritage reconstruction, we asked participants: *If you had to choose just three, which of the following do you think are the most urgent priorities for the future of Iraq?*

We then presented them with a list of 10 options broadly reflecting a spectrum of pressing needs facing Mosul’s post-IS population.

The results indicate that the highest number wanted to prioritise ‘safety and security’ (61%), followed by ‘unemployment and poverty’ (54%), ‘education and schools’ (52%), and ‘hospitals, health and sanitation’ (48%). ‘Heritage protection and reconstruction’ had far lower support (16%). See Figure 6.

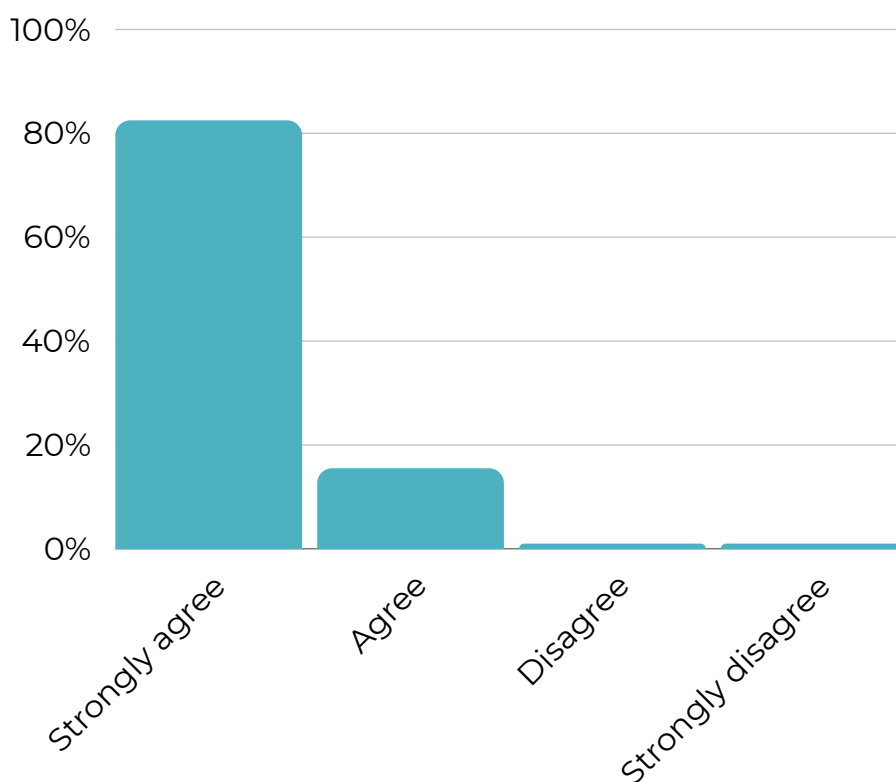
Figure 6. If you had to choose just three, which of the following do you think are the most urgent priorities for the future of Iraq?



These results call into question the privileging of heritage reconstruction projects across Mosul by various multilateral institutions, INGOs, and foreign governments.

Despite this, when asked to respond to the statement: *Heritage sites that were damaged or destroyed during recent conflicts should be restored or reconstructed*, almost all Maslawis surveyed ‘agreed’ (98%) with only a small number who ‘disagreed’ (2%). See Figure 7.

Figure 7. Do you agree with the following statement: ‘Heritage sites that were damaged or destroyed during recent conflicts should be restored or reconstructed?’



Finally, we asked respondents the multiple-choice question: *What would you prefer to see happen to the heritage sites that have been damaged or destroyed during the recent conflicts?*

The most frequent reply was that sites should be restored and reconstructed 'into a new and more modern structure' (48%), followed by the way they were 'when they were first built' (22%) or to 'their pre-war condition' (21%) and at least partially repaired 'so as to be useful again' (5%). See Figure 8.

Figure 8. What would you prefer to see happen to the heritage sites that have been damaged or destroyed during the recent conflicts?

Response	%
<i>Not Reconstructed</i>	
That the sites are not restored and reconstructed but left damaged and in ruins	<0.5%
That the sites are not restored and reconstructed but developed into entirely new facilities	4%
<i>Reconstructed</i>	
That the sites are partially restored and reconstructed so as to be useful again	5%
That the sites are restored and reconstructed to their pre-war condition	21%
That the sites are restored and reconstructed to the way they were when they were first built	22%
That the sites are restored and reconstructed into a new and more modern structure	48%

Although not placed among Maslawis' most urgent priorities in the wake of the IS and the ongoing crises affecting Iraq since mid-2014, nearly all participants were in favour of rebuilding sites overall.

Specifically, there were high levels of support for projects that would transform heritage sites into more modern and useful spaces that can be accessed well into the future.

PART IV AND PART V: WHAT ROLE DO THE PEOPLE OF MOSUL SEE FOR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS?

We also asked respondents a set of questions designed to gauge their level of support for both domestic and international heritage projects in Mosul.

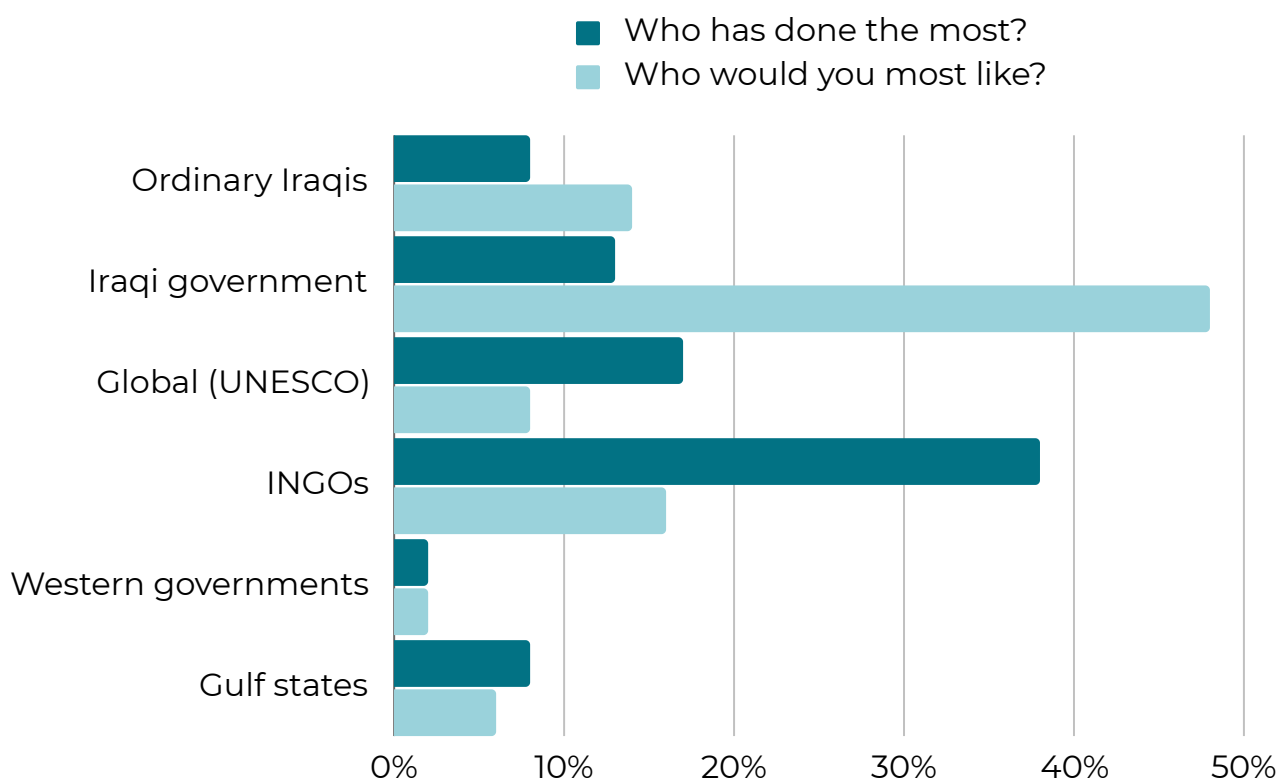
We therefore asked: *Which actor do you think has done the most to restore or reconstruct heritage sites across Iraq?* and provided respondents with 14 different options ranging from 'ordinary Iraqis' to foreign actors.

Participants most prominently recognised the roles played by INGOs such as ALIPH and the WMF (38%), followed by key global agencies like UNESCO (17%), and the Gulf states (8%). Western governments (including the UK and the US) were least mentioned (2%) and thus seen to have played a smaller role than either the Iraqi government (13%) or ordinary Iraqis (8%). See Figure 9.

We then asked them to respond to the follow-up question: *If you had to choose just one, who would you most like to see being entrusted with any restoration or reconstruction work at heritage sites?*

Here a higher number of participants selected the Iraqi government (48%) or ordinary Iraqis (14%) over INGOs (16%), global agencies (8%), and Gulf states (6%) - with the lowest level of support for Western governments (2%). See Figure 9.

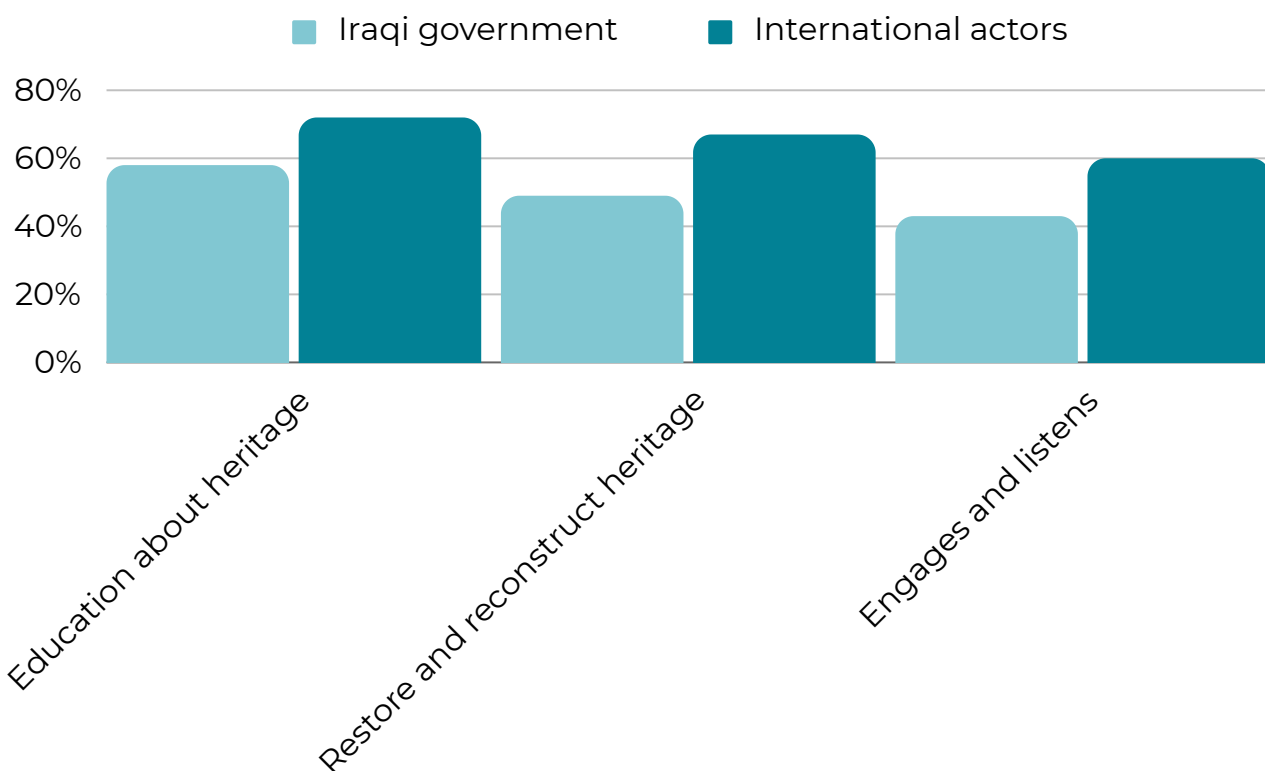
Figure 9. Which actor do you think has done the most to restore or reconstruct heritage sites across Iraq? If you had to choose just one, who would you most like to see being entrusted with any restoration or reconstruction work at heritage sites?



The survey also sought to illuminate the opinions of Mosul residents on the track records of the ‘Iraqi government’ and ‘International actors’ and whether each was doing enough to: *Promote heritage and educate people about the rich heritage of this country; Restore and reconstruct heritage sites after conflict; and Engage with and listen to the Iraqi people when it comes to their ideas on heritage.*

Here, international actors were consistently viewed as performing better (72%, 67%, and 60%, respectively) than the Iraqi government (58%, 49%, and 43% respectively). See Figure 10.

Figure 10. The Iraqi Government/International actors are doing enough to: promote heritage and educate people about the rich heritage of this country; restore and reconstruct heritage sites after conflict; engage with and listen to the Iraqi people when it comes to their ideas on heritage, its destruction and reconstruction.



Together, Parts IV and V revealed that despite the fact that foreign-led heritage programs were considered generally better than the Iraqi government at heritage education and reconstruction as well as listening to the Iraqi people, most respondents would still prefer to see such projects entrusted to the Iraqi government and ordinary Iraqis into the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) HERITAGE RECONSTRUCTION IS NOT THE MAIN PRIORITY

In light of the decades of poverty, violence, and oppression suffered by the people of Mosul, it is not surprising that respondents did not view heritage as the main priority. Understandably, most respondents were more concerned with securing improvements in security, education, employment, and health.



UNESCO has maintained that its ‘Revive the Spirit of Mosul’ project will contribute “to community reconciliation and peacebuilding through the recovery of the living environment and rehabilitation of the city’s heritage sites” (UNESCO: n.d.).

UNESCO and other foreign actors could address this issue by ensuring they partner with humanitarian agencies to help guarantee that such efforts are conducted in keeping with the broader conflict humanitarian, security, and infrastructure needs facing the people of Mosul.

They must also ensure that local communities are directly involved in the design and implementation of heritage reconstruction initiatives. Given the complexity of challenges being dealt with by Mosul residents, these measures are essential in preventing the sidelining of other development agendas in favour of investing solely in heritage.

They are also important if meaningful and lasting progress is to be made in overcoming local tensions, rather than simply relying on the symbolic value of rebuilding heritage sites as a gesture of peace.

2) DON'T DISMISS LOCAL AND/OR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE SITES

The survey also recorded that the population of Mosul were more likely to visit and value local and religious sites than sites further away or with no religious significance.



The interior of an Armenian church destroyed during the IS occupation of Mosul (Joel Carillet/iStock)

A majority of participants indicated that the destruction of local religious sites was a deeply negative experience and, accordingly, that they wanted to see these sites rebuilt.

This suggests that the people of Mosul have divergent priorities from the various foreign-led heritage projects taking place across the city and its surrounds.

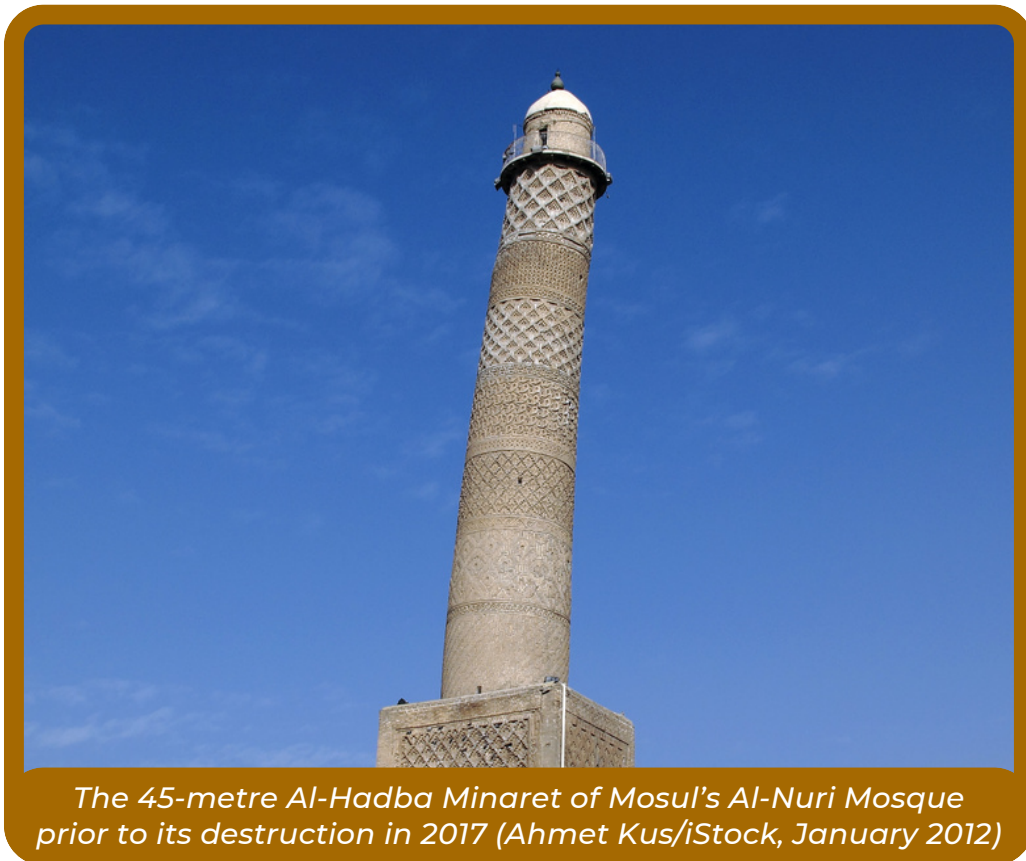
These tend to emphasise revered iconic sites that are difficult to access (like the Great Mosque of al-Nuri) or non-religious sites (like the Mosul Museum). The focus on these kinds of sites, which are reportedly rarely visited by Maslawis and hold less importance in their day-to-day lives, raises questions about the efficacy of resource allocation in heritage management.

Substantial investment in projects that are misaligned with the priority of rehabilitating localised and religious sites vocalised by respondents has meant that more cost-effective initiatives that hold greater positive potential have been passed over.

Key state governments, multilateral institutions, and INGOs would benefit from consulting with communities affected by heritage destruction, including the people of Mosul, to gain an insight into the local and/or religious sites that were more frequently visited and highly valued thanks to their personal, communal, and spiritual significance.

3) LESS 'AUTHENTICITY' AND MORE MODERN FACILITIES

This survey also revealed that Maslawis hold a clear preference for transforming damaged sites and structures into new spaces that can be used and enjoyed by community members as opposed to repairing buildings to align with their pre-war or historic condition.



This contrasts against many heritage projects currently underway in Mosul that have sought to restore the historical and archaeological 'authenticity' of the site.

Foreign actors engaged in heritage reconstruction in Mosul must therefore strive to get the balance right between upholding the historical integrity of the site and delivering urban spaces that are both practical and meaningful to a society with little public infrastructure.

4) GRANT IRAQIS AGENCY OVER THE FUTURE OF THEIR HERITAGE

Despite the substantial funding provided by foreign actors and the many noteworthy success stories, high levels of international involvement in determining the direction of heritage reconstruction can be problematic.

While study participants acknowledged the important roles played by INGOs (such as ALIPH or the WMF) and global agencies (like UNESCO), they also expressed a desire for domestic control over future heritage projects.

More specifically, in addition to wanting a reduced role for external actors, Maslawis were the least supportive of the bilateral engagement from states in the West, followed by the Gulf.

Given that these governments have made significant commitments to reconstructing sites across the city, this lack of endorsement highlights just how important local partnerships and community engagement are to the ways in which heritage projects are received by domestic populations.



Foreign actors operating in Mosul ought to recognise that citizens wish for both the Iraqi state and ordinary Iraqis to hold ultimate responsibility for protecting and rebuilding their heritage following the damage and destruction unleashed by the IS and others.

CONCLUSION

This report has documented the results of an original public opinion survey of post-IS Mosul. Specifically, the survey documented respondents' views of heritage destruction by the IS and other actors, and the many foreign-led projects to reconstruct key historic sites across the city.

The survey has highlighted the tendency for foreign actors to rely on assumptions about how Maslawis value and engage with their heritage, perceive heritage destruction, and view heritage reconstruction.



More to the point, the idea that Iraqis implicitly support the interventions of external experts and organisations in designing and implementing reconstruction was thoroughly interrogated.

The survey data illustrated that Mosul residents: take great pride in the rich and varied cultural heritage of their country; were aggrieved by the destruction of their heritage sites; and greatly supported heritage reconstruction.

Further, the project uncovered four crucial areas that are relevant to current and future heritage projects spearheaded by international actors. Rebuilding heritage sites was generally supported by respondents, especially when projects are conducted in partnership with the Iraqi government and actively involve Iraqis.

However, failure to engage with public opinion on heritage issues in post-conflict Mosul has meant that reconstruction projects frequently face significant problems.

Heritage projects may risk repeating past mistakes unless corrective actions are taken to re-centre the observations, concerns, and desires of Mosul's local population.

- **Firstly**, the findings indicated that most Maslawis do not wish for heritage preservation and/or reconstruction efforts to be prioritised over pressing development and peacebuilding initiatives or at the expense of urgent humanitarian needs.
- **Secondly**, respondents hope to see the rebuilding of their local religious sites rather than only globally-recognised sites seen to hold broader significance thanks to their historical, archaeological, or architectural value.
- **Thirdly**, a majority of Maslawis conveyed that their vision for the future involved the transformations of sites into more modern, practical spaces to be enjoyed by the community in the long term.
- **Finally**, Maslawis overwhelmingly called for greater agency, involvement, and control to be afforded to the Iraqi state and Iraqi citizens as opposed to external bodies and governments determining the future of their heritage.



Ruins of the Nabi Yunus Shrine in Mosul, also known as the Tomb of the Prophet Jonah, destroyed by the IS (Joel Carillet/iStock, May 2017)

International actors would do well to take heed of these findings and ensure that their ongoing work in Mosul and elsewhere more meaningfully engages with and listens to the local population whose heritage they seek to protect and reconstruct.

Historically, when local concerns have been neglected in heritage conservation and management practices, both human communities and their heritage sites have become more vulnerable to further suffering, inequality, and intentional harm, impeding wider progress towards peace and stability.

It is hoped that the contents of this report will help to spread awareness on the importance of Mosul's rich cultural heritage and the need for future initiatives seeking to protect and preserve the city's array of unique and diverse sites to be cognisant of, and sensitive to, the expectations and agency of those Maslawis whose heritage they endeavour to reconstruct.

ENDNOTES

[1] The authors note that the data presented in the various charts and tables contained in this report do not always add up to exactly 100%. This is either because participants sometimes answered 'don't know,' some respondents refused to provide answers to a specific question, or because percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

[2] The authors note that this included students as well as individuals not formally employed but who engaged in domestic labour such as caring for children and/or the elderly and/or being responsible for numerous household duties.

[3] The authors note that some responses have been grouped together for ease of presentation (e.g. 'rarely' and 'never' may become 'rarely or never').

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Further information can be found at the 'After Islamic State' project website: <https://web.sas.upenn.edu/afterislamicstate/>

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which Deakin University campuses are located: the Wadawurrung people, the Boon Wurrung people, the Wurundjeri people, and the Gunditjmara people.

