

**Online Appendix to “Mainstreaming and Outlier: The Quest to
Corroborate the Second Lancet Survey of Mortality in Iraq”**

By

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Appendix A. Bloomberg and L2 Researchers often make Corroboration Claims for L2 Similar to those made in “Answers to Questions about Iraq Mortality Surveys”

In this appendix I show that the incorrect claims analyzed in this paper, and similar claims, appear widely: not only in a posting that was withdrawn from the Bloomberg website.

1. Claimed Corroboration from the ILCS, BBC poll and the ORB poll

An official statement from the Bloomberg School released in November of 2007 asserts:

"The findings of independent surveys of Iraqis conducted by the United Nations in March 2005, by the BBC in March 2007, and by the British polling firm ORB in September 2007 support the conclusions of the Hopkins mortality studies." [Munro and Cannon \(2008\)](#).

L2 co-authors Gilbert Burnham and Les Roberts write in the *Baltimore Sun*:

"Finally, last month, the respected British polling firm ORB released the results of a poll estimating that 22 percent of households had lost a member to violence during the occupation of Iraq, equating to 1.2 million deaths. This finding roughly verifies a less precisely worded BBC poll last February that reported 17 percent of Iraqis had a household member who was a victim of violence." [Burnham and Roberts \(2007\)](#).

In an article in PR watch journalist Diane Farsetta writes:

"While Les Roberts cautioned that he does not have the information needed to evaluate the ORB poll, he noted its similarity to other estimates. 'There was a BBC poll that was done at the end of four years of occupation,' he told me. 'In that poll, 17 percent of households said someone in their household had been killed or injured from the violence of the war.' The ORB poll covered an additional six months and found that 20 percent of Iraqi households reported at least one death. Since 'every data set ... suggests more people have been killed in this war than injured,' Roberts feels that the BBC and ORB polls are 'quite consistent.' He added that attempts to update the 2006 *Lancet* data, which are not scientific and make major assumptions, have calculated that there may have been 'a million [total Iraqi] deaths by August of 2007.'" [Farsetta \(2008\)](#).

Note in the PR watch article "physical harm" in the BBC poll is presented narrowly as killings plus injuries whereas physical harm would not exclude such other crimes as rapes, kidnappings, robberies. In a radio interview Les Roberts went further, misrepresenting "physical harm" as just violent deaths:

"... poll that was done by ABC and the BBC at the fourth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, and it, it's available, the summary of the results are still available on the BBC website, and the first thing they say in there is that 17% of households say that they lost a household member to violence.... and our study last summer [L2] was saying 1 in 7. And so for the BBC to do a poll that says 17% of households have lost someone to violence is quite consistent with our findings." [The People Speak Radio \(2007\)](#), around minute 42.

Indeed, L2 and the BBC poll would be roughly in agreement on the number of violent deaths in Iraq if the BBC had found 17% of families having a family member suffering violent death rather than physical harm, but this is not the case. Even if it were the case,

L2 and the BBC poll would still diverge considerably on the geographical pattern of violence in Iraq.

A statement still posted on the Bloomberg website, [Bloomberg \(2007\)](#), claims corroboration for L2 from the ORB poll in “the geographic spread of violence” despite the fact that ORB data suggest quite the contrary, that Baghdad is roughly 5.5 times as violent as the rest of Iraq while L2 data suggest that Baghdad is no more violent than the rest of Iraq. Bloomberg also claims that “the same escalating trends in Iraqi mortality are being captured in both of the surveys [ORB and L2].” Yet, the ORB poll gives no information at all on time trends, escalating or otherwise. ORB only gives an estimate for the total number of deaths from the beginning of the war until August of 2007. Curiously, Bloomberg states that the ORB poll “found a higher fraction of deaths among women” than L2 did, although ORB has not released, and apparently did not collect, any information on the gender breakdown of victims, or, for that matter, any other demographic information on victims.

The following email from Les Roberts is posted on the medialens website:

“Overall they [L2 and the ORB poll] seem very much to align. (e.g. both conclude that: most commonly violent deaths are from gunshot wounds [in contradiction to IBC and the MOH*], most deaths are outside of Baghdad [in contradiction to the other passive monitoring sources which tallied ~3/4th of deaths in the first 4 years in Baghdad and have only recently attributed even 1/2 as being elsewhere], Diyala worse than Anbar....).” Email from Les Roberts to the medialens website, [medialens 2007](#).

In the IBC database roughly 60% of the deaths in the ORB time-frame are due to gunfire.¹ Thus, this ORB finding on the prevalence of gunfire as the leading cause of violent death is consistent with, not contradictory to, the IBC database. I was unable to find an Iraqi Ministry of Health (MoH) claim on whether or not gunshot wounds are the most common form of violent death in Iraq according to MoH data.

As discussed in section 3 of this paper, roughly 3/5 of violent deaths are in Baghdad according to the ORB data compared to roughly 1/4 for L2. IBC places just under 60% of deaths during the first 4 years in Baghdad, not 3/4 as claimed by Roberts. And the ORB poll does not, and could not, confirm an L2 claim that “Diyala is worse than Anbar” because the ORB poll did not do any interviews in Anbar.

Thus, there have been multiple incorrect claims of corroboration for L2 from the ILCS, the BBC poll and the ORB poll made by the Bloomberg School of Public Health as well as incorrect claims of corroboration for L2 from the BBC and ORB polls by Gilbert Burnham and Les Roberts.

2. Claimed Corroboration from the IFHS

An interview of Les Roberts with the Chicago Tribune contains the following exchange:

¹ This is my own calculation working from the IBC database.

“Q: The Iraqi government's study [the IFHS] of violence-related mortality was published in January by the New England Journal of Medicine. How does that study compare with the 2006 Lancet study?

A: This new study is very similar in general conclusion to the Lancet study. They found mortality doubled in the three years after the invasion. We found that mortality went up 2.4-fold after the invasion. They estimated a before-and-after death rate very close to that reported in our study.

But they differed in estimating the fraction of those excess deaths that were from violence...”
[Weinstein \(2008\)](#).

Yet L2 estimated that post-invasion violence exceeded pre-invasion violence by a factor of 72 while the IFHS data suggests that violence increased by a factor of 11. L2 found that the increase in non-violent deaths, post-invasion versus pre-invasion, was statistically insignificant whereas the IFHS data suggests a statistically significant and large increase in non-violent deaths. Thus, if one distinguishes between violent deaths and non-violent deaths then the two surveys diverge dramatically. Moreover, there is a big difference between a doubling of mortality (actually a factor of 1.9 in the IFHS raw figures) and mortality increasing by a factor of 2.4. Finally, the IFHS and L2 differ strongly on the geographical patterns and time trends of violence in Iraq. Another interview of Les Roberts on the National Public Radio (NPR) show “Talk of the Nation” contains the following exchange.

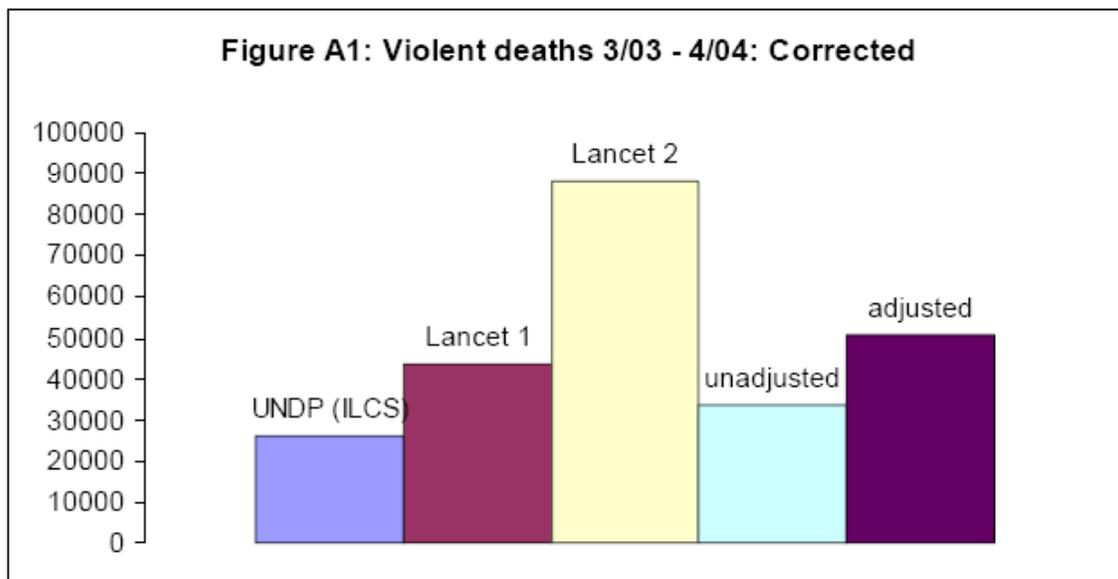
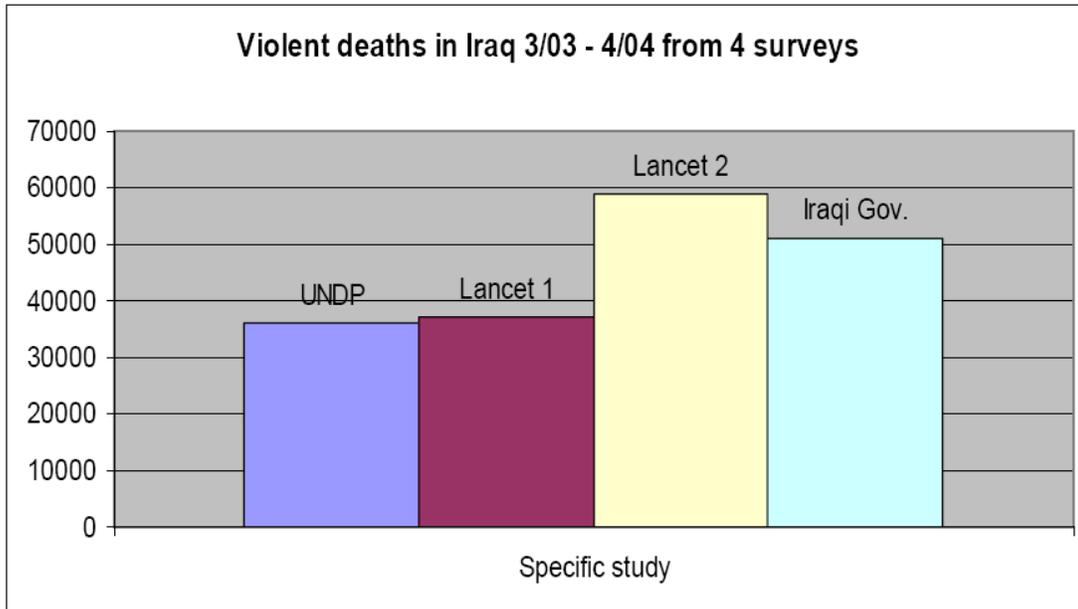
Q “And your estimate came in considerably higher than the WHO estimate [the IFHS]. Over 600,000. Why the discrepancy do you think?”

Les Roberts. “Well, you know, this is fascinating. I’ve had about a dozen interviews in the last day and I can’t ever remember two studies having such similar results and having it being painted as so controversial.” [NPR \(2008\)](#).

However, in a separate NPR story posted on the same web page Les Roberts states, more accurately, that L2 and the IFHS are incompatible with one another:

“There are two possibilities. Our estimate has too many. Theirs has too few.” [Wilson \(2008\)](#)

Roberts (2008) claims that the ILCS (UNDP), L1, L2 and the IFHS (Iraqi Gov.) “paint a very consistent picture” over the first 13 months of the war, offering the picture below. This figure raises the ILCS estimate from 26,000 to 36,000, lowers the L1 estimate slightly, lowers the L2 estimate considerably (see section 2) and makes an inappropriate comparison with the IFHS, presenting unadjusted figures for the first three surveys with IFHS figures that have been adjusted upwards for presumed undercounting. I give the corrected figure below the one that was presented to German MPs.



3. Claimed Corroboration from the Pentagon, the Baghdad morgue, the Najaf Graveyard, other Burial Data and IBC

A statement released by Les Roberts asserts:

"They [the IFHS] roughly found a steady rate of violence from 2003 to 2006. Baghdad morgue data, Najaf burial data, Pentagon attack data, and our data all show a dramatic increase over 2005 and 2006. ...",

"Finally, their data suggests one-sixth of deaths over the occupation through June 2006 were from violence. Our data suggests a majority of deaths were from violence. The morgue and graveyard data I have seen is more in keeping with our results." [Institute for Public Accuracy \(2008\)](#).

Similarly, in a radio interview Les Roberts states:

"In the – in the reports of violent deaths to them, they [the IFHS] found no difference in 2006 from late 2003 and 2004, and that's just not in keeping with data from the Baghdad morgue, data of burials in the city of Najaf where the Shia traditionally try to take bodies for burial, and our data. In the data the Pentagon keeps, not on deaths, but on attacks per day there was a dramatic increase right through 2006, and that is another reason why I strongly suspect that there was gross under-reporting of violent deaths to these government interviewers." [Anti War Radio \(2008\)](#).

Most of these claims are incorrect. First, Baghdad morgue data are consistent with IBC data but not with L2 data. Second, there does not appear to be an actual dataset for burials in the Najaf graveyard, certainly not a time-series dataset useable to assess time trends in violent death rates for all of Iraq. Third, there do not seem to exist other graveyard data usable to estimate the percentages of violent and non-violent deaths among all deaths in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.

Section 5 of this paper refutes one claim that Bloomberg has made about the Pentagon attacks data: that it backs up the L2 data suggesting that Diala is more violent than Anbar. Here Roberts claims corroboration for L2 from the Pentagon attacks data on time trends, rather than the geographical pattern, of violent deaths. Again, it is conceded that the Pentagon mortality data do not corroborate the L2 mortality data. It turns out, however, that the Pentagon attacks data also do not corroborate the L2 time trends either. In fact, the trends in the Pentagon attacks data are much closer to IBC trends than to L2 trends.

Figure A1 plots the weekly number of attacks for all the periods given in [US Department of Defense \(2006c\)](#), beginning in April of 2004 and ending in August of 2006. Figure A1 also plots the total number of deaths recorded by IBC for the exact same periods, stopping slightly after the end of the L2 coverage period. The trends are similar, although the IBC curve rises slightly faster than the Pentagon curve does in mid 2006.

Figure A2: Pentagon Attacks versus IBC Deaths

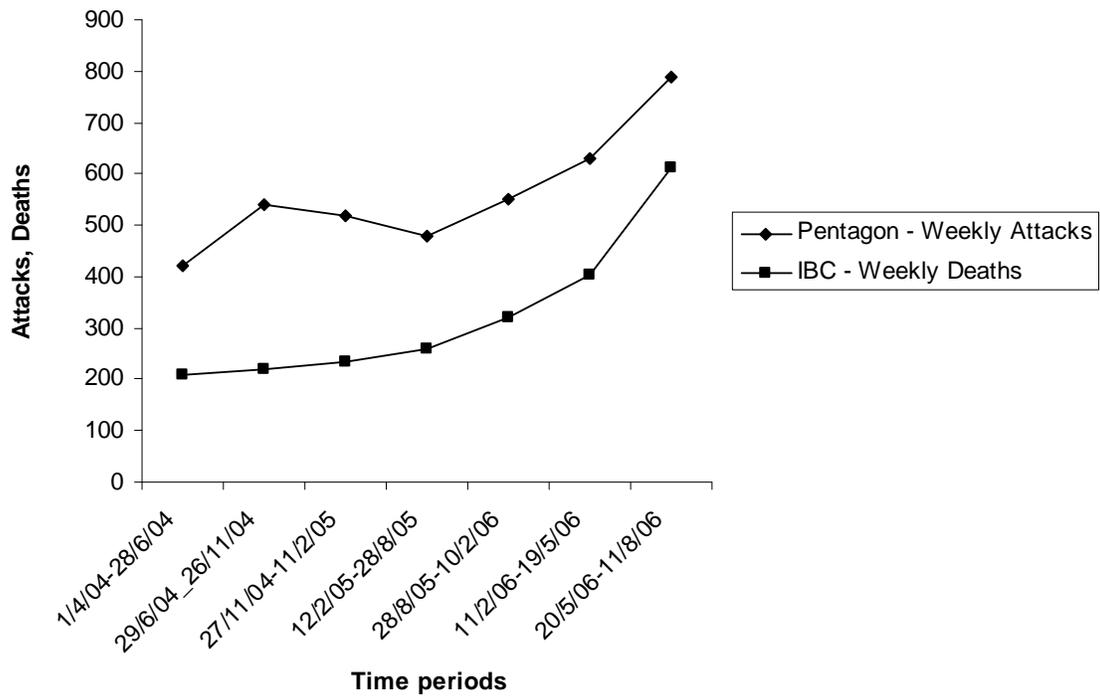


Figure A3: Pentagon Attacks versus L2 Deaths

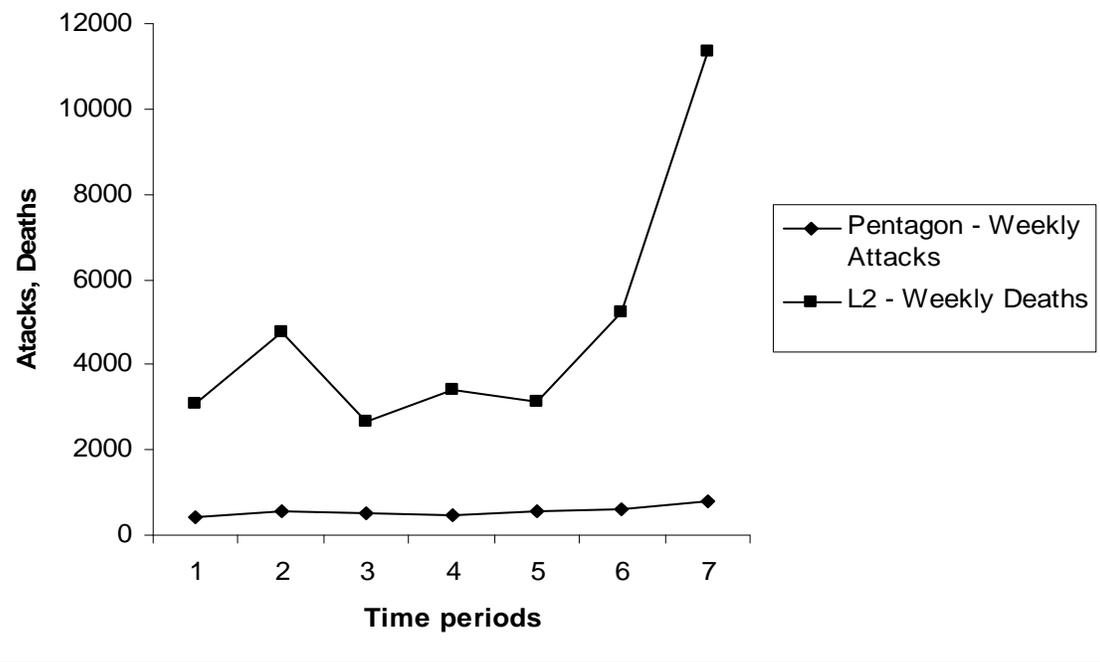


Figure A2 shows Pentagon attacks data together with L2 violent-death data. The Pentagon time periods and curves are exactly the same as in figure A1. The L2 time periods are as close as possible to these Pentagon-defined periods subject to the constraint that only monthly data on L2 are available.² The Pentagon trends do not corroborate the L2 trends; the L2 curve increases much more sharply in 2006 than does the Pentagon curve. IFHS violent mortality trends are consistent with IBC trends so these IFHS trends must track the Pentagon attack trends fairly closely as well.³ Thus, the Pentagon attacks data and IBC and IFHS data on deaths are consistent with each other, but inconsistent with L2.

Les Roberts concedes in the above quote that Pentagon mortality data do not support L2 mortality time trends. Yet material posted on the Bloomberg website continues to claim that these Pentagon data, and the IBC data, do actually corroborate L2's time trends.

“Though the numbers differ, the trend in increasing numbers of deaths closely follows that measured by the U.S. Defense Department and the Iraq Body Count group.” [Bloomberg \(2006\)](#).

These claims were exposed as false as long ago as January of 2007 after two letters were published in the *Lancet* showing that neither the Pentagon data nor the IBC data corroborate L2's time trends.⁴ Moreover, the Bloomberg claim, made both in the title of the document and inside, that L2 “affirms” L1 is also incorrect. The L2 data suggest roughly twice as many violent deaths as the L1 data do outside Anbar governorate (the big outlier in the L1 data).⁵

Appendix B

A Bibliography for both the Main Paper and the Appendix Complete with Links

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² For example, the Pentagon time period 1/4/04 – 28/6/04 was compared with the L2 time period 1/4/04 – 30/6/04. For the Pentagon time period 12/2/05 – 28/8/05 I allocated the fraction 12/28 of the February, 2005 violent deaths in L2 to this time period and included all deaths from August of 2005. I will provide all the details of these calculations upon request. Note that the divergence in time trends between the L2 violent-death data and the Pentagon attack data will remain under any reasonable procedure for defining the L2 time periods.

³ The IFHS has not yet released detailed time breakdowns so that would enable me to create plots like those given in figure A1 and figure A2 using IFHS data.

⁴ See [Dougherty \(2007\)](#) and [Guha-Sapir, Degomme and Pedersen, \(2007\)](#). Spagat (2008), section 3.8 summarizes all the discussion on this issue and goes a bit beyond these two letters to the *Lancet*.

⁵ See [Gourley et al. \(2007\)](#).

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