

Understanding Islamic Extremism Away from the Dominant Normative Paradigm

Mostafa Soueid¹ and Rita Merhej²
Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon

Abstract : Much academic interest has been given to the relationship of Islam with extremism, with such relationship being too often articulated in terms of religiosity as the main predictive factor, and a language of normativity positing that extremism is the negative manifestation and excess of Muslim discourses. This systematic review attempts to account for such normative assumptions by looking at the predictive ability of psychosocial and environmental factors related to social identity processes, in addition to the predictive ability of religiosity in accounting for Islamic extremism. Two search rounds were performed using several databases for peer reviewed English language articles, of all types of research designs, between 2012 and 2023 defining Islamic or Muslim extremism as a deviation from the dominant Eurocentric normative definition and delineating its predictors. The review revealed a differing account regarding the roots of Muslim extremism in which exclusion from the modern world-system—framed in terms of perceived threat, deprivation, discrimination, and oppression—is highlighted, while religiosity had predominantly insignificant effects. The paper calls for a reconsideration of extremism among Muslims away from the normative paradigm set forth by the modern world-system.

Keywords: extremism, religiosity, social identity, Islam, modernity, secularism, democracy.

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Long before the 9/11 attacks, Islam has often been regarded as a violent religion (Huntington, 2000; Johansen, 1997; Lewis, 1990). This orientalist stereotype was exacerbated after the attacks on the World Trade Center, and ever since then Islam became synonymous with extremism, and a plethora of works is dedicated to uncovering the relationship between the two (Alonso, 2012; Hwang & Schulze, 2018; Varvin, 2017). Loza (2007), for example, wrote that “extreme religious ideologies play a central role in radicalizing young Muslims, recruiting and indoctrinating them into the terrorist ideology, and eventually asking them to commit terrorist acts” (p. 142). In his discussion of the tenets that underlie the religious portion of Islamic terrorist ideology, Loza (2007) explained that these tenets include the assertion that there must be a continuous state of (holy) war (Jihad) between the house of peace (Islam) and the morally corrupt house of war (non-Muslim and secular countries), and as such, Muslims are taught that it is their

¹ Corresponding Author: A Researcher in Social Sciences, Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon.
E-Mail: soueid.mostafa@gmail.com

² Corresponding Author: An Assistant Professor in Psychology at Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon.
E-Mail: rita_merhej5@hotmail.com; rita.merhej@haigazian.edu.lb

duty to wage holy war against the unbelievers or the infidels. More recently, Albaghli and Carlucci (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and negative attitudes toward the West on a large Arab-Muslim community sample with a variety of age groups from 17 countries in the Arabian Gulf, Middle East and North Africa. Keeping in mind that the vast majority of respondents were from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, the study indicated that Islamic fundamentalism is a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward the West, and that a religious Arab-Muslim is more likely to hold negative attitudes toward the West compared to a less religious Muslim. Given the limitations of their study regarding the sample constituents, the authors do recommend to examine other mediators than religiosity to explain the relationship between Islamic fundamentalism and prejudices against the West.

Against the common assumption among many observers that religious beliefs *are* the problem (whether it is the teachings of the Quran or verses of the Old Testament), Juergensmeyer (2015) posits a different framing. He interviewed Hamas leaders in Gaza, convicted members of Al Qaeda, a Lutheran pastor convicted of bombing abortion clinics in the United States, Catholic and Protestant leaders from Northern Ireland, Sikh separatists in India, Muslim insurgents in Iraq, and hard-line extremist Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Japan. Most interviewees were ignorant about the textual and intellectual aspects of their religious texts; instead, they talked about the defense of their community and their faith in general, and the threat of particular groups, including secular politicians, in particular. “Religious beliefs and traditions are a part of their worldview, but only a part of it, even though it may be the vocabulary through which other social and political issues are enunciated” (Juergensmeyer, 2015, p. 853).

Islamic Scripture is an over 1000 year old constant, composed of the words and deeds attributed to the Prophet Muhammad by his followers. McCants’ (2015) argument is that if the Scripture is a constant but the behavior of its followers is not, then one should look elsewhere to explain why some Muslims engage in violent extremist acts. There is no doubt that many who identify as Muslim—and many movements signified by Islam—are prone to hold “extremist” attitudes that endorse violence. One needs only look at the voluminously mediatized Muslim reactionary movements to the events across Europe blaspheming the Prophet Mohammed and burning the Quran, themselves acts of anti-Islam extremism. However, this does not allow for the argument that Islamic Scripture causes Muslim terrorism (McCants, 2015).

Research in Australia shows that Islamophobia has burgeoned well beyond racial suprematism and is being normalized in mainstream media, in political discourse, in the workplace, and in education settings (Dunn et al., 2020; Topal, 2022). Bell et al. (2021) used data from the European Values Study to analyze anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attitudes in the period from 1990 to 2017. They found that these negative attitudes have been increasing on average in Europe as a whole, with anti-Muslim attitudes being more prevalent than anti-immigrant attitudes. Their data revealed the phenomenon of *phantom Islamophobia*, referring to the increase of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attitudes in Eastern European countries which have a significantly smaller influx of immigrants than countries in Western Europe, and a nearly non-existent Muslim population. In the United States, a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2017 revealed that 41% of all US adults agree that Islam encourages violence more than other faiths, and 44% believe that there is a natural conflict between Islam and democracy; however, another survey in 2015 shows that that most people (up to 94%) in several countries with significant Muslim populations have an unfavorable view of ISIS (Lipka, 2017).

Conceptual Background

The research on extremism delineates its constituents as including (a) a sense of alienation resulting from perceived victimization, injustice, humiliation, and exclusion, (b) a strong connectedness with the in-group for security, purpose, and meaning, associated with an inflated self-esteem and feeling of superiority over other groups, and (c) a perception of the other as a threat, a persecutor, thus legitimizing the hostility, support and use of violence against the other, as a moral responsibility (Doosje et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Saucier et al., 2009; Stankov et al., 2018; Trip et al., 2019; Victoroff, 2005)

It is often impossible to define extremism. For instance, the 19th century first feminists who fought for their right to vote were seen as extremists; today, calling for equal gender participation in society is seen, in many countries, as the norm. Since norms vary between groups, societies, cultures and times, the perception of normality, deviance and extremism also varies. Today, most people associate extremism with right wing movements and Muslim *jihadism*; however, extremism also encompasses environmental activists, radical animal right supporters, anti-atomic plant activists, anti-abortion activists and various religious extremists from all religions around the world (Kessler et al., 2014).

In general, extremism is conceptualized as a set of political, religious and/or ideological issues that oppose the fundamental mainstream belief systems and values of contemporary Western societies founded on liberalism, individualism, secularism, principles of democracy and universal human rights (Kilp, 2011; Knight et al., 2019; Trip et al., 2019), or a desire for power in opposition to legally defined authority and sovereignty (Midlarsky, 2011).

In psychology, several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to conceptualize extremism in terms of personality profiles, distinguishing between violent and non-violent extremists (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Borum, 2014; Schmid, 2014), behavioral patterns (Saucier et al., 2009; Stankov et al., 2018), and attitudinal constraints (Davies, 2009).

Other theories provided a developmental explanation. Psychoanalytical theories stressed narcissistic needs as the prime factor motivating extremism (Abella, 2018; Falk, 2004). Social learning theories addressed environmental contingencies (Akers et al., 1979), while social identity theories focused on the individual's need for belonging and affiliation (Al Raffie, 2013; Hogg, 2014; van Zomeren et al., 2018). Terror management theory related the need to join extremist organizations to the existential need to find meaning in one's life by boosting one's self-esteem (Rosenblatt et al., 1989), and significance quest theory emphasized the universal need for significance, feelings of worthiness and respect that trigger marginalized people to find meaning in sociocultural contexts where one's values are embedded (Kruglanski et al., 2014, 2022). This of course is not an exhaustive list, but is enough to highlight the difficulty in reaching a unified conceptual and operational definition of extremism

Extremism is sometimes used as synonymous with radicalism, while other times it is differentiated from it. Schmid (2014) claimed that views that deviate from secular, democratic, and egalitarian should be framed as radicalism, while authoritarian and close-minded discourses are to be considered extremist. This a-priori ethnocentric and deviation-ridden definition of extremism is precisely the problem. Radicalism, an older term than extremism, has been associated with an enlightened, liberal to left-wing stance, opposing the reactionary, monarchic and aristocratic status quo; it was even considered pro-democratic and some of its demands (female suffrage) have become mainstream ideas in the 20th century. Although both radicalism and extremism are anti-establishment movements, radicalism has been historically portrayed as progressive reformism while extremism has been associated with dogmatism, authoritarianism, intolerance, fanaticism

and violence (Bötticher, 2017). In other words, when deviations from normality follow a Western paradigm of democracy, egalitarianism and secularism, these deviations are considered “radical”, which holds positive connotations, in comparison with extremist deviations which are always deemed authoritarian, close-minded, “faith-based ideologies with apocalyptic traits” (Bötticher, 2017, p. 74).

However, to have a full understanding of Islamic extremism, it is important to explore the underlying factors that promote extremism aside from the religious-cultural explanations that have been traditionally posited. To this date, there are only two systematic reviews which addressed this topic (Christmann, 2012; McGilloway et al., 2015). Both reviews covered the research before 2012 and were limited in their scope such that, in the case of Christmann (2012), the focus was on the process of radicalization of Western-based Al-Qaeda militants, and in the case of McGilloway et al. (2015), the focus was on general radicalization occurring in the West exclusively.

The present review seeks to contribute to the available research by examining the research between 2012 and 2023, and focusing on predictors to Islamic extremism in general. It seeks to uncover the underlying factors which compel Muslims to endorse extremist attitudes and extremist behaviors, be it in the West or elsewhere. Psychological and psychosocial processes are considered in order to establish why Muslims often hold views which society deems extreme. Most importantly, no normative assumption is made regarding extremism: Invariably, many—if not most—of the papers on the topic of Islamic extremism are interested in violent extremism, and extremism is already value ridden as a deviance away from what is considered ordinary (Saucier et al., 2009; Schmid, 2014; Stankov et al., 2018). In this regard, including Muslim participants from non-Muslim countries, more specifically countries from the secular industrialized world, in our systematic review may lead to interesting insights into contributing variables such as the feeling of belonging, the need for affiliation, and perceived self and collective esteem.

Purpose of the Review

This systematic review looks at Islamic extremism without any previous normative assumptions. Consequently, extremism will be used in a broad sense to refer to deviations from the dominant worldview. In all the reviewed research on extremism, past and recent, extremism is referred to as a deviance from normality, an irregularity (Moghaddam, 2005; Saucier et al., 2009; Schmid, 2014; Stankov et al., 2018). Consequently, all irregularities, whether they come in the form of religious fundamentalism, Islamic extremism, attitudes in support for violence or support for martyrdom in the name of a cause are all included in this paper as “extremism” or “extremist tendencies.” This paper does not differentiate between violent extremism and non-violent extremism since violent extremism is often defined through the intentions to commit violence or support for violence and not by the violent act itself (Atran, 2021; Victoroff et al., 2012; Wibisono et al., 2019). Such use of extremism in a broad sense is an attempt to make up for the conceptual problem of the term extremism.

There is a considerable overlap between the many different definitions used to highlight Muslim irregularities, and as Larsen (2020) mentions, using a single definition often relativizes certain Muslim irregularities based on ethnocentric values. In other words, extremism is always value ridden as a negative behavior or cognition because it deviates away from normative Eurocentric behavior and cognitions. Consequently, the focus in this paper is not on why these behaviors are wrong and non-normative, but instead on why it is that Muslims feel the need to express themselves in these non-normative (extreme or extremist) ways.

Hence, predictors which maintain a sense of agency among those that are deemed extremist are explored in an attempt at removing any normative assumptions related to Islamic extremism. Our focus is on two variables: (a) psychological and psychosocial factors related to social identity processes and intergroup perceptions, and (b) religiosity, or the extent to which religious practices are associated with extremism.

Research question

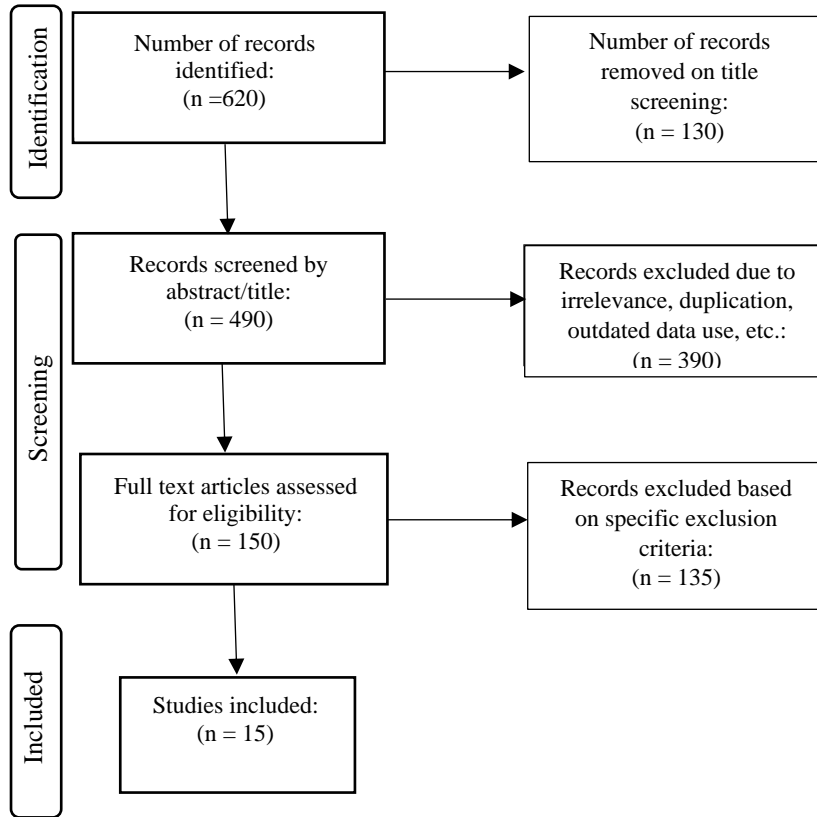
Based on the above, this systematic review seeks to answer the following question: Why do Muslims, all over the world, feel the need to express themselves in non-normative ways that are deemed extremist?

Methodology

Two search rounds were performed for this systematic review: In the first round, we used one database—APA PsycINFO—to gather peer-reviewed articles published after 2012 using the following keywords: (Extremist* or Radical* or Fundamental*) AND (Islam* or Muslim*). These terms were used to define extremism as a deviation from the dominant Eurocentric normative definition. “Islam or Muslim” were included to specify extremism among only Muslims. Articles addressing support for violence, support for terrorism, violent inhibition, fundamentalism, and many other relevant concepts were all included. Articles using all types of research methodologies (quantitative, qualitative and mixed) were included. In the second round, we searched several online databases, namely Cambridge Core, JSTOR, Scopus, and Wiley Online Library for articles published after 2012 adding the keywords Predictors of Extremism to the above used keywords.

Articles prior to 2012, and that were not in English, were excluded from our search in order to ensure there was no overlap with the two previous reviews (discussed above). In addition, all articles which did not address our two variables of concern (psychological and psychosocial factors related predominantly to social identity, and religiosity) were excluded. Theoretical articles based on reviews, and that sought to propose a conceptual model without any empirical data were excluded. Articles seeking to predict de-radicalization and protective factors against extremism were also excluded. Finally, all reports of policy recommendations or intervention programs were excluded, as these were based on normative assumptions.

The full search operation yielded a total of 620 articles. Abstracts were examined and 130 articles were immediately excluded as they were irrelevant to the topic at hand—they either did not address Islamic extremism, or were not looking at predictors. A further abstract re-examination on the remaining 490 articles eliminated 340 due to irrelevance, duplication, outdated data use, overemphasis on normative assumptions of extremism, or exclusion of social identity discussion. The remaining 150 articles then went through detailed screening by full text. This led, after thorough application of our exclusion criteria, to select 15 articles for the present systematic review (see Figure 1 for article selection process).

Figure 1*PRISMA Flowchart of Article Selection for the Systematic Review*

Results

Of the 15 articles selected for this study, 10 were related to psychosocial processes related to social identity, three of which highlighted the role of perceived threats in predicting religious attitudes (Table 1), four highlighted the role of perceived oppression/discrimination (Table 2) and three highlighted the role of perceived group deprivation (Table 3). The remaining five articles highlighted the role religiosity plays in predicting extremism (Table 4).

Psychological and Psychosocial Factors

Perceived Threat

Three studies looked at the effects of perceived threats on extremist tendencies (Table 1). Perceiving threats to one's group can contribute to negative attitudes and hostility towards an out-group. Stephan et al. (2016), in their discussion of the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT), talked about the evolutionary reasons for our devotion to our own social groups which, since the dawn of time, have been fundamentally tribal in nature, and because people's own tribes are important to them, other tribes are regarded as a threat either to one's very existence if the other tribe possesses the power to harm (referred to as realistic threat), or a threat to the ingroup's unified meaning system (referred to as symbolic threat). "One outcome of the tribal psychology mindset is that people may be inclined to perceive threats where none exist (...) and thus, by default, people may be

predisposed to perceive threats from out-groups” (Stephan et al., 2016, p. 256). Symbolic and realistic threats are important because of their destructive effects on intergroup relations, such as arousing powerful negative emotions (anger, fear, and hatred), attitudes and cognitions (prejudice, biases, stereotypes), and behavioral responses both at the individual level (avoidance, unfriendliness, insults, aggression) and the group level (dehumanization, discrimination). In sum, “realistic group threats are threats to the ingroup’s power, resources, and general welfare, while symbolic group threats are threats to the ingroup’s religion, values, belief system, ideology, philosophy, morality, or worldview” (Stephan et al., 2016, p. 258). Moreover, according to ITT, threat does not have to be real: The very perception of it is sufficient to elicit a negative emotion, attitude, cognition or response.

As minorities in Western countries, Muslims are often confronted with stressors such as perceived and actual discrimination in their everyday lives and in the media, and thus might perceive the majority society as a threat to their religion, their culture, their practices, and develop out-group hostility and retaliatory reactions in the form of violence (Tahir et al., 2019).

The three studies (Mashuri et al., 2015; Obaidi et al., 2018; Tahir et al., 2019) included both Western and non-Western countries, and in all three, symbolic threat was a significant predictor, while results for realistic threats varied. Mashuri et al. (2015) conducted two studies to look at the effects of both symbolic and realistic globalization threats in mediating the effects of competitive victimhood and its relationship to Islamic fundamentalism. The underlying assumption is that “globalization gives rise to Muslims’ religious fundamentalism because Muslims fear that Western secularization asserting the domination of global culture subjugates Islamic traditions and communities” (Mashuri et al., 2015, p. 203). Competitive victimhood is defined as a belief in having anguished more than other groups; it could manifest itself directly (when people perceive a personal suffering due to the out-group’s oppression or injustice) or indirectly (when people witness the suffering of their fellow ingroup members at the hands of the out-group). The opposing concept, inclusive victimhood, refers to the situation where the adversaries acknowledge the same degree of suffering and victimization. Competitive victimhood is a detrimental factor contributing to escalation of negative emotions, attitudes and responses toward the out-group. In both studies, symbolic (identity) threats but not realistic threats were significantly able to account for competitive victimhood and its ability to predict fundamentalism ($p < .05$).

Obaidi et al. (2018) posited that there is a common psychology of out-group hostility in response to perceived threats, and considered Western foreign policy as realistic threat to Muslims and one of the main causes of Muslim extremism and terrorism. For instance, documented suicide attacks between 1980 and 2003 show that they were primarily a consequence of foreign occupation, domination, and frustrated aspirations for autonomy, and not of religious fanaticism. Obaidi et al. (2018) conducted five studies across three different groups in different countries to systematically test whether similar psychological threat processes relate to mutual out-group hostility among (a) non-Muslim Westerners, (b) Muslims living in the West, and (c) Muslims living in the Middle East. They hypothesized that Muslims’ perceived realistic threat due to foreign policy and occupation is associated with hostility towards Westerners, that Westerners’ symbolic threat perceptions are associated with hostility to Islam and Muslims, and that out-group hostility of Muslims living both in Europe and the Middle East towards non-Muslims and the West is grounded in symbolic threats from perceived discrimination, marginalization and assimilation pressures.

In all five studies by Obaidi et al. (2018), predictions of a common psychology of threat (both realistic and symbolic) were strongly supported by very similar patterns of results across the different cultural contexts (non-Muslims in Europe and the US, and Muslims in Europe, Afghanistan and Turkey), with symbolic threat taking a more prominent role across all populations

and contexts. Across all five studies, in Turkey, Afghanistan, Sweden, and Denmark, symbolic threats had a significant effect of extremist tendencies ($p < .05$, $p < .001$, $p < .001$, and $p < .001$ respectively). Only in Afghanistan and Denmark were realistic threats significantly able to predict extremist tendencies ($p < .001$ in both studies). There was no evidence in any study that the strength of religious identification moderated the effect of perceived threats on out-group hostility

Tahir et al. (2019) investigated whether one reason for why threat perceptions lead to higher violent behavioral intentions among Muslims may be that they are related to distinct acculturation orientations. Acculturation strategies range from full integration (adopting the new culture while maintaining one's heritage culture), to assimilation (giving up one's heritage culture in favor of the host society's culture), marginalization (giving up one's heritage culture and not adopting the new culture), and separation from mainstream society (maintaining one's heritage culture and rejecting the dominant culture).

Studying two different samples of Muslims living in the West (Norway and the UK), Tahir et al. (2019) focused on *religious acculturation* which is the degree to which individuals prefer or choose their own religious values, entertainment and religious sociability over the values and behaviors that are a part of the majority society (referred to as *host acculturation*). Hence, the suggestion is that religion may not act as the primary motivator for joining violent extremist organizations or committing acts of terrorism; many Muslims who perceive the host society as a threat to their religious culture and norms might be attracted to violent religious groups as a result of disengagement, dis-identification and separation from the host society. As a result, Muslims living in Western societies who show high host cultural integration and assimilation should be less likely to support violent religious ideologies or behavior. The findings provided by Tahir et al. (2019) revealed that, in general, participants who experienced threat to the symbolic values of Islam were supportive of Muslim military aggression and presence internationally. However, in the Norway sample, symbolic threat was also related to less violent behavioral intentions while realistic threat was related to more violent behavioral intentions: This suggests that Muslims in Norway are not willing to use violence if they fear the West as a danger to their Islamic culture and values, but they would be prepared to use violence if they perceive it as a rival for scarce economic resources. In the case of the U.K. sample, only symbolic threats were significantly able to predict support for Muslim military violence ($p < .000$). Level of acculturation was able to mediate the levels of perceived threats only in Norway, with higher levels of acculturation related to lower threat perceptions.

Investigation of the link between acculturation and (a) Muslims' intentions to commit violence and (b) their support for military violence yielded a surprising finding for the UK sample: Higher levels of mainstream acculturation were positively related to violent behavioral intentions. This suggests that high degrees of engagement in the host society may also give more awareness of the prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination towards one's group. No such relationship was observed for the Norway sample. Another interesting finding exclusive to the UK sample was that religious acculturation negatively associated with violent behavioral intentions, suggesting that Muslims' religious involvement does not predict a higher willingness to commit violence; this may even have the opposite effect: When faced with symbolic threats, the increased religious acculturation of British Muslims along with the decreased violent behavioral intentions may be seen as an attempt to reduce intergroup tensions and counter the negative image of Muslims in Britain as violent extremists (Tahir et al., 2019).

Table 1

Summary of Studies Highlighting the Role of Perceived Threats in Predicting Extremist Attitudes

<i>Study (Author(s) & Year)</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Extremism Defined as</i>	<i>Variable of Interest</i>	<i>Results</i>
<i>Living Under Threat: Mutual Threat Perception Drives Anti-Muslim and Anti-Western Hostility in the Age of Terrorism (Obaidi, Kunst, Kteily et al., 2018)</i>	Global	Regression Analysis	Violent intentions/support for Violence against the West	Perceived Threats	Turkey: Only symbolic threat had a significant effect on support for anti-Western violence (p<.05). Afghanistan: Both symbolic and realistic threats had significant effects on violent intentions (p<.001) Swedish Muslims: Only symbolic threat had a significant effect on violent intentions (p<.001) Danish Muslims: Both symbolic and realistic threats had a significant effect on violent intentions (p<.001)
<i>When agony begets zealotry: The differential role of globalization threats in mediating the effect of competitive victimhood on Muslims' religious fundamentalism (Mashuri et al., 2015)</i>	Indonesia	Path Analysis	Extremism as Islamic Fundamentalism	Perceived Globalization Threats	Study 1: Identity Globalization Threat instead of Realistic Globalization Threat mediated the effect of Competitive Victimhood on Religious Fundamentalism (booth indirect effect = .042, booth SE = .034, 95% LLCI = .003, 95% ULCI = .135) Results were replicated in second study (Booth indirect effect = .046, booth SE = .027, 95% LLCI = .007, 95% ULCI = .116).
<i>Threat, anti-Western hostility and violence among European Muslims: The mediating role of acculturation (Tahir et al., 2019)</i>	U.K., Norway	Path Analysis	Support for military violence, Intention to commit violence	Perceived Threats	Norway: Realistic threat was positively related to violent behavioral intentions ($\beta = .20$, $p = .006$), but not to support for Muslim military violence ($p = .412$) symbolic threat had a positive effect on support for Muslim military violence ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$) U.K.: No significant effect of realistic and safety threats on support for Muslim military violence and violent behavioral intentions Symbolic threat did not influence violent behavioral intentions ($p = .700$), however a strong, positive effect on support for Muslim military violence was found ($\beta = .54$, $p < .000$) Mediated by level of acculturation

Table 2

Summary of Studies Highlighting the Role of Perceived Oppression and Discrimination in Predicting Extremist Attitudes

Study (Author(s) & Year)	Country	Design	Extremism Defined As	Variable of Interest	of Results
<i>From oppression to violence: the role of oppression, radicalism, identity, and cultural intelligence in violent disinhibition (Lobato et al., 2018)</i>	Spain	Regression Analysis	Violent disinhibition	Perceived oppression	Predictive capacity of perceived oppression on violent disinhibition ($\beta = 0.576, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.314$).
<i>Intention of activism and radicalism among Muslim and Christian youth in a marginal neighborhood in a Spanish city (Moyano & Trujillo, 2014)</i>	Spain	Regression Analysis	Intention of radicalism	Perceived oppression	Perceived oppression explained 29% of the total variation in intention of radicalism ($\beta = .557; t = 3.86; R^2 = .29; p < .001$). Perceived oppression was only able to predict intention of radicalism among Muslims and not Christians
<i>Psychological factors associated with support for suicide bombing in the Muslim diaspora (Victoroff et al., 2012)</i>	West	Regression Analysis	Justification of suicide bombing	Perceived discrimination	Justification of suicide bombings was associated with difficulty being a Muslim ($r = .10, p = .04$), and with experience of discrimination ($r = .16, p < .01$).
<i>Religiosity and perceived religious discrimination as predictors of support for suicide attacks among Muslim Americans (Beller & Kroger, 2021)</i>	U.S.	Regression Analysis	Support for suicide attacks	Perceived discrimination	Reporting one additional discrimination experience made it about 46% more likely that an individual would more strongly support suicide attacks ($\beta = 1.36; t = 1.46, p < .001$)

Perceived Oppression and Discrimination

Four studies looked at the role of perceived oppression and perceived discrimination in predicting extremism. There was strong and significant support for oppression and discrimination in predicting extremism across all four studies (Table 2).

Lobato et al. (2018) conducted two studies on Muslim and non-Muslim residents of Spain to test whether (1) in Muslims but not in non-Muslims, radical intentions (“I would attack the police or the security forces if I saw them hit members of my group”) will have a mediating effect on the relationship between perceived oppression and violent disinhibition (“In the last month I have had wishes to end the lives of others”), and (2) mediation will be moderated by cultural identity (Western-Christian and Arab-Muslim culture) and cultural intelligence (“I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures”), whereby people with higher cultural identity and lower cultural intelligence will be more prone to violent disinhibition. The first hypothesis was confirmed in the Muslim sample but not in the non-Muslim sample where radical intentions did not have a mediating effect between perceived oppression and violent disinhibition. With respect to the second hypothesis, cultural intelligence moderated the relationship between the radical intentions and violent disinhibition in the Muslim sample with a lower level of cultural intelligence, while in the non-Muslim sample (Western Christian), high cultural identity allowed the indirect effect of radical intentions on the relationship between perceived oppression and violent disinhibition. The authors conclude by saying that for Muslims, the intention of radicalization contributes to a greater vulnerability for violent action. Here, violent actions are perceived as lawful and instrumentally valid in achieving the group’s objective.

Moyano and Trujillo (2014) assessed the intended level of religious and political activism (“I would join an organization that fights for my group’s political and legal rights”) and radicalism (“I would continue to support an organization that fights for my group’s political and legal rights even if it sometimes uses violence”) in a sample of Muslim and Christian youth living in Spain, and studied the interrelationship between activism and radicalism and other psychosocial factors that potentially contribute to processes of political-religious mobilization (such as group identification, self-esteem, violent disinhibition, perceived oppression, and religious extremism, including attitudes toward martyrdom and the use of violence in defense of one’s religion). The most significant findings showed that perceived oppression and the different indicators on violent disinhibition and religious extremism were highly correlated with the intention of radicalism in the Muslim group, but not with activism, and not for the Christian sample (the non-significance in the findings of the Christian sample may be due to the greater identity heterogeneity of the Christian group). Moyano and Trujillo (2014) conclude by saying that everything points to the fact that perceived oppression, humiliation, and conflict play a key role in the radicalization processes of individuals and groups.

Victoroff et al. (2012) performed secondary analyses of two large scale surveys from the Pew data-sets of Muslim residents of Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain and the United States to test the hypothesis that Muslims living in the West who experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination are more likely to support suicide bombing. Their results showed that justification of suicide bombings was associated with younger age ($r = -.183, p < .001$), perceived European hostility toward Muslims ($r = .06, p = .019$), Arab preference ($r = .18, p < .001$), perceived difficulty being a Muslim ($r = .10, p = .04$), experience of discrimination ($r = .16, p < .01$), and with having had a bad experience, such a stinging personal humiliation ($r = .106, p < .001$). Because the correlations are not strong, the authors are cautious in concluding that perceived discrimination is the major explanation for Muslims’ endorsement of extremism and terrorist acts; however, these

analyses may serve as empirical evidence that suboptimal intergroup relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the existence of anti-Muslim prejudice, and experiences of discrimination are important risk factors.

Finally, Beller and Kroger (2021) were interested in testing whether religiosity (personal importance of religion, prayer frequency, religious service attendance, religious fundamentalism) or adverse circumstances (such as perceived religious discrimination) are the main cause of religious extremist violence, as in supporting suicide attacks, in Muslim Americans. Their findings show that no aspect of religiosity among most participants predicted support for religious extremist violence. Instead, perceived religious discrimination, which is experienced at a greater rate by religious minorities in the US, was associated with increased support for suicide attacks. The authors conclude by suggesting that reducing discrimination might be an effective general strategy to prevent religious radicalization among Muslims living in the U.S.

Group Relative Deprivation (GRD)

Group-based relative deprivation (GRD) refers to feelings of discontent that occur when people perceive that members of their group are deprived of the rights and resources they are entitled to. Second-generation Muslims of the Muslim diaspora community of the West are particularly vulnerable to such feelings of deprivation. Although poverty and low educational attainment have been posited as causes for extremism and terrorism, GRD explains why “educated Western Muslims may be more likely to compare their status and earnings with those of similarly educated non-Muslims, which may fuel resentment and ultimately pose a risk that they will endorse extremism” (Obaidi, Bergh, Akrami et al., 2019, p. 2).

In our systematic review, GRD was identified as one of the factors predicting extremism in Muslims (Table 3): While in only one out of the three studies was GRD not related to extremism (Pavlovic & Storm, 2020), across the other two studies (Doosje et al., 2013; Obaidi, et al., 2019), GRD was significantly able to predict extremist outcomes. Obaidi et al. (2019) sought to determine whether GRD explains the difference in extremist tendencies between foreign-born Muslims (Muslims who have migrated to the West) and native-born Muslims (Muslims born in the West). Extremism was defined based on facets of collective action as well as violent inhibitions, and GRD was able to predict the variance across Muslims’ identification, perceived injustice, group-based anger, and violent inhibitions ($p < .001$ for all), and explain why Muslims born in the West were more likely to show these extremist tendencies: In line with self-categorization theory which posits that intergroup comparison makes social identity salient, Muslim identification is likely to be more salient among Muslims born in the West and possibly more potent as a predictor of non-normative attitudes and behaviors. Obaidi et al. (2019) say that these findings are consistent with personal accounts of Western foreign fighters in Syria, where feelings of alienation and deprivation were among the main drivers behind their decision to travel to Syria and fight for the Islamic State

In their study, Doosje et al. (2013) focused on the role of *normal* psychological variables that may lead non radical youth to become susceptible to adopting a radical belief system, as opposed to the psychopathological variables once posited as explanation of extremism and terrorism. They focused on Islamic youth living in the Netherlands to examine three important determinants of radicalization (personal uncertainty, perceived injustice, and perceived intergroup threat), and tested whether a combination of these three factors can contribute to support for a radical belief system and for intentions to engage in violent behavior. Their findings showed that GRD was able to account for perceived injustice ($p < .05$), personal uncertainty ($p < .05$), and perceived threat ($p < .05$), all of which were found to predict extremism. Specifically, perceived

injustice was associated with perceived societal disconnectedness. Ingroup identification, together with individual and collective forms of relative deprivation, were significant predictors of endorsement of a radical belief system; the collective form of relative deprivation was particularly influential in the study, predicting not only symbolic and realistic group threat but also personal emotional uncertainty, and perceived illegitimacy of Dutch authorities.

Religiosity

Endorsement of fundamentalist religious attitudes has been understood as a potential openness towards adopting extreme forms of religious ideologies. Research suggests that whereas religious practice seems to play only a marginal role as a risk factor for developing extremist attitudes, religious identity seems to have a much stronger influence. Across all five studies in our systematic review examining the role of religiosity in predicting extremist tendencies, only 2 articles found significant predictive ability for certain religiosity dimensions (see Table 4): In Beller and Kroger (2018), only social religious activities (such as frequency of mosque attendance) and perceived threat were able to predict support for extremist violence, with each 1 standard deviation change in mosque attendance making support 23% more likely ($p < .001$); conversely, other aspects of individual religiosity (such as importance of religion in one's life) and even religious fundamentalism were associated with a decrease in support for extremist violence.

Setiawan et al. (2020) conducted a survey of support for interreligious conflict on a random sample of Muslims ($n = 1451$) and Christians ($n = 575$) across the Indonesian archipelago. Support for interreligious conflict was categorized into either lawful protests or violent protests. In general, support for interreligious conflict among Muslims (both lawful and violent protests) was higher than for Christians, and was significantly associated with certain religiosity facets but not others. For instance, religiocentrism (examples of statements included: "Thanks to our religion, most of us are good people" and "Other religions are often the cause of religious conflict") significantly related to support for lawful ($p = .001$) and violent protests ($p = .000$), and showed the strongest relationship with support for violent protest compared to the other beliefs. As for particularism (examples of statements included: "The truth about God is found only in my religion"), it was positively related to support for lawful protest ($p = .015$), but not to violent protest ($p > .05$). And fundamentalism (examples of statements included: "Everything in the Sacred writing is absolutely true without question") was positively related to support for lawful protest ($p = .018$), but negatively yet weakly related to support for violent protest ($p = .043$). Other religiosity facets such as religious practices (frequency of attending religious service, participation in religious ceremonies and religious rites of passage such as weddings and funerals) did not necessarily induce people's support for interreligious conflict. Religious salience (the role of religious identity) was found to decrease support for interreligious conflict, possibly due to the fact that religiously salient people are more likely to associate themselves with benevolent traits (mercy and forgiveness) and to dissociate themselves from hostility against religious out-groups.

Acevedo and Chaudhary (2015) used the nationally representative random probability samples of the 2007 Pew survey of American Muslims measuring the source and intensity of their devotion to Islam, including the degree to which they support the use of suicide bombings. Such data were collected at the height of U.S. military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan. Acevedo and Chaudhary (2015) note that the data depicted American Muslims as a largely assimilated, highly educated, and economically flourishing population, and that the overwhelming majorities of U.S. Muslims did not justify the idea of violence in the name of Islam. Their hypotheses stated that among American Muslims, there will be no statistically significant relationship between (a)

religious salience and views of politically motivated violence (PMV), (b) Quranic authoritativeness, (c) religious exclusiveness, (d) political messages emanating from mosques, and (e) support for PMV. Their findings showed minimal effects from religious and political factors on support for PMV, and there was an inverse relationship between acceptance of Quranic authoritativeness and support for PMV as a means of protecting Islam. There was also minimal and non-significant linkage between views of U.S. foreign policy, support for political messages from mosques, and attitudes toward PMV. The authors gave special consideration to the finding regarding Quranic authoritativeness (the view that the Quran is the word of God), especially that the data analyzed in their study were collected at a time when the United States was involved in major military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, that is a time where a justification of PMV in order to defend Islam from its enemies would be expected (the Muslim faith being in peril). In this regard, Acevedo and Chaudhary (2015) explain that Muslims in the United States might feel more insulated from threats to their religion than Muslims in other parts of the world, and that it is quite plausible that more authoritative scriptural views lead adherents to focus on messages of acceptance, tolerance, forgiveness and peace found in the Quran. Overall, in light of the generally high levels of education among the study sample, the minimal relationship between religiosity and support for PMV was not surprising; the results of this study suggest that arguments linking Islam and heightened radicalization are overstated.

Finally, a case study by Aly and Streigher (2012) of Jack Roche, the Australian Muslim convert who was convicted of conspiring to bomb the Israeli Embassy in Canberra in 2000, found that religiosity was not a significant part of his discourse, but instead social identity factors were.

Table 3

Summary of Studies Highlighting the Role of GRD in Predicting Extremist Attitudes

Study (Author(s) & Country Year)	Design	Extremism Defined As	Variable of Interest	Results
<i>Group-based relative deprivation (GRD) explains endorsement of extremism among Western-born Muslims (Obaidi, Bergh, Akrami et al., 2019)</i>	West	Correlation	Extremism as collective action	GRD GRD mediated effects of birthplace across all studies Muslim Identification: (M=.38/SE=.11, p=.001) Perceived Injustice: (M=.53/SE=.11, p=.001) Group based anger: (M=.61/SE=.16, p=.001) Violent behavioral inhibitions: (M=.43/SE=.13, p=.001) GRD was a stronger predictor for Western born Muslims as opposed to foreign born Muslims
<i>Machiavellianism, Islamism, and deprivations as Predictors of Support for Daesh among Muslims (Pavlovic & Storm, 2020)</i>	Middle East and North Africa	Correlation	Support for DAESH	GRD Perceived deprivations were not associated with Extremism (p>.05)
<i>Determinants of radicalization of Islamic youth in the Netherlands: Personal uncertainty, perceived injustice, and perceived group threat (Doosje et al., 2013)</i>	Netherlands	Path Analysis	Silber and Bhatt (2007, p. 16) define radicalization as “the progression of searching, finding, adopting, nurturing, and developing this extreme belief system to the point where it acts as a catalyst for a terrorist act.”	GRD GRD was significantly able to predict for perceived injustice ($\beta = .17$, $R^2=.27$, $p<.05$), personal uncertainty ($\beta = .26$, $R^2=.07$, $p<.05$), and perceived threat ($\beta = .51$, $R^2=.43$, $p<.05$ (realistic threat); $\beta = .53$, $R^2= .40$, $p<.05$ (symbolic threats)). These three factors were subsequently able to predict extremism attitudes

Table 4

Summary of Studies Highlighting the Role of Religiosity in Predicting Extremist Attitudes

Study (Author(s) & Year)	Country	Design	Extremism Defined As	Predictor of Interest	Results
<i>Religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and perceived threat as predictors of Muslim support for extremist violence</i> (Beller & Kroger, 2018)	Global	Regression Analysis	Extremism as support for extremist violence	Religiosity	<p>Mosque Attendance Frequency: Each increase of one standard deviation in mosque attendance frequency made stronger support for EV about 23% more likely (p<.001)</p> <p>Quran Reading Frequency: (p>.001)</p> <p>Prayer Frequency: (p>.001)</p> <p>Personal Importance of religion: (p>.001)</p>
<i>Examining the role of religion in radicalization to violent Islamist extremism</i> (Aly & Striegher, 2012)	Australia	Case Study	Silber and Bhatt (2007, p. 16) define radicalization as “the progression of searching, finding, adopting, nurturing, and developing this extreme belief system to the point where it acts as a catalyst for a terrorist act.”	Religiosity	Religion did not seem to be a significant factor in the discourse of Jack Roche. It wasn’t Islam per se that motivated him to carry out his actions. Instead, social identification processes were at the forefront of his discourse.

<p><i>The relation between religiosity dimensions and support for interreligious conflict in Indonesia</i> (Setiawan et al., 2020)</p>	<p>Indonesia</p>	<p>Correlation</p>	<p>Extremism as support for interreligious conflict</p>	<p>Religiocentrism is significantly related to support for lawful ($b = .16, p = .001$) and violent protests ($b = .41, p = .000$).</p> <p>Particularistic views are positively related to support for lawful protest ($b = .27, p = .015$), but not to violent protest.</p> <p>Fundamentalism is positively related to support for lawful protest ($b = .12, p = .018$), but negatively and weakly related to support for violent protest ($b = -.08, p = .043$).</p>
<p><i>Religiosity and perceived religious discrimination as predictors of support for suicide attacks among Muslim Americans</i> (Beller & Kroger, 2021)</p>	<p>U.S.</p>	<p>Regression Analysis</p>	<p>Support for suicide attacks</p>	<p>Religiosity No aspects of religiosity were significant predictors of extremism</p>
<p><i>Religion, cultural clash, and Muslim American attitudes about politically motivated violence</i> (Acevedo & Chaudhary, 2015)</p>	<p>U.S.</p>	<p>Regression Analysis</p>	<p>Support for suicide bombing</p>	<p>Religiosity All religiosity dimensions were insignificant in predicting support for suicide bombing across all studies, save for Quranic authoritativeness, wherein it predicted lower levels of support for suicide bombing ($p < .05$)</p>

Discussion

This systematic review attempted to delineate the factors contributing to Islamic extremism away from the normative worldview associating Muslim religiosity with violent extremism or endorsement of violent extremist ideologies. As Acevedo and Chaudhary (2015) say, since the tragic events of September 11, 2011, the popular and academic discourse initiated by Huntington's Clash of Civilizations has shaped public opinion regarding Muslims and contributed to the erroneous perceptions of the Muslim world and much of the Islamophobia witnessed in a great deal of Western countries. Indeed, in the Islamophobic discourse, Muslims are stereotyped as extremists even in the absence of violence, and in the United States, the common narrative, on television, in the movies, on the news, and in government policy is that "terrorists are always (brown) Muslims" (Corbin, 2017, p. 456). For example, when terrorist attacks are perpetrated by Muslims, they receive significantly more media coverage than non-Muslim terrorist attacks (where attention is paid to the perpetrators' individual mental health and personal traumas triggering the violence), and news about Muslims is generally news about terrorism (ISIS or other militant groups) (Corbin, 2017). Today, Islamophobia is the perfect tool for far-right populist leaders in Europe and the United States to convey a message of mistrust and hostility towards Islam and Muslims (Bertran, 2018). In contrast to such a discourse, empirical evidence from studies on Muslim Americans shows that they actually reject the idea of an inherent clash between Christianity and Islam and view divisive rhetoric as potentially damaging (Acevedo & Chaudhary, 2015).

Extremism was used throughout this paper to highlight attitudinal and behavioral deviations from normative expectations. Too often, Islamic extremism is already value ridden—it is an excess, something irregular and negative, and must be explained away as to restore the subject to normality (Hankir et al., 2017).

Hakim et al. (2020) explain how perceptions of Muslims in Europe and the United States have undergone different stereotypic framings: In the nineteenth-century European travelers' input during the colonial period, Muslims were portrayed as exotic, sensuous and depraved. The twentieth-century witnessed the struggle for independence in sovereign state nations as well as massive migration patterns, and Muslims were seen as either anti-communist allies, or resentful antagonists to the West. In 2001, as the world's sociopolitical landscape was reconfigured after the 9/11 attacks and the global "War on Terror" was launched, being Muslim became a solidification of violent anti-American extremism.

This systematic review does not aim at creating a subtype of Muslims (the *good* moderate Muslim versus the *bad* extremist Muslim) for such sub-typing serves more to maintain the status quo and justify the ongoing harm, as discussed by Hakim et al. (2020). Instead, this review accepted common assumptions of extremism: Certain practices or views among Muslims are extreme, and they do deviate from norms of the dominant Western paradigm. The aim was to predict why it is that Muslims often deviate from normality, and why it is that they hold these extreme views. More specifically, extremism was used as a tool in order to assess why Muslims are at odds with normative Western standards. The review clearly identified social identity factors, not religiosity, as contributors to extremism: Feelings of oppression, discrimination and exclusion, low self-esteem, and perceived threat, whether realistic or symbolic, were all significantly associated with support for Islamic extremism (Acevedo & Chaudhary, 2015; Beller & Kroger, 2018, 2021; Doosje et al, 2013; Lobato et al., 2018; Mashuri et al., 2015; Moyano & Trujillo, 2014; Obaidi et al., 2019; Obaidi et al., 2018; Setiawan et al., 2020; Tahir et al., 2019; Victoroff et al., 2012).

The results of the current systematic review are in line with other research (D'Amato, 2019; Lobato et al., 2021; Nuraniyah, 2018; Samata, 2018) where religiosity was predominantly insignificant in accounting for extremism. It is not that religiosity and Islam lead to irregular or deviant behavior; rather, Muslims often feel threatened and/or discriminated against because of their identification, and feel that they do not belong. Dunn et al.'s (2020) study of Islamophobia in Australia showed that poor factual knowledge about Islam and little contact with Muslims were strong predictors of extremist attitudes towards Muslims; respondents from the Islamophobic group (as opposed to those in the Progressive and Assimilationist groups) were more likely to say they knew nothing at all about the Muslim religion and practices.

Cultural explanations—religious faith, prayer, Quran reading, piety—were predominantly unable to explain variations in extremism, with the exception of mosque attendance (Beller & Kroger, 2018), and certain religiosity aspects in Indonesia (Setiawan et al., 2020). This is consistent with a study by Wolfowicz et al. (2020) where it was shown that while factors related to religious practice and adherence played an insignificant role in radicalization, religious group identity and religious fundamentalism had much larger effects. A deeper exploration is needed for the significance of mosque attendance and the political impact this plays in the 21st century. Recent research has actually confirmed that frequently attending religious services, whether one is a Muslim or a Christian, positively predicted pre-extremist attitudes; however, being a Muslim and frequently attending religious services strongly negatively predicted pre-extremist attitudes, whereby Muslims' intense religious practice may act as a protective factor against religious extremism and radicalization (Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger et al., 2022; Lösel et al., 2018). An earlier study of Muslims in Indonesia (Muluk et al., 2013) showed that religiosity, fundamentalism, or support for Islamic law did not predict belief or endorsement of extremist violence or hate crime among a representative sample of Indonesian citizens: "Respondents who practiced their religion probably already felt assured. They did not think that it was necessary to reach God through violence" (Muluk et al., 2013, p. 109).

In contrast, in the present review, Setiawan et al.'s (2020) study of the Indonesian case did show some predictive ability for religiosity on extremism; however, the authors say that this owes to certain situational specificities in Indonesia not found in other countries, such as "a combination of weak law enforcement, late interventions, and laws that allow the emergence of vigilantes under the banner of religion" (Setiawan et al., 2020, p. 245). The contradictions between these two claims regarding the case of Indonesia highlight the ambiguities between what Muluk et al. (2013) referred to as *sacred violence* (as in raiding discotheques or vandalizing houses of worship, in an attempt to uphold God's rulings) on the one hand, and extremism, interreligious violence, and radicalism on the other hand. In the latter case, the political, not the religious and the sacred, is front-and-center (Muluk et al., 2013). This falls in line with this paper's argument that religion per se is not what guides extremist behaviors; instead, psychological and social circumstances are at the forefront.

Additional support for our argument comes from a 2015 special report by the United States Institute of Peace which clearly states that the overarching narrative among Afghans living in the province of Nangarhar (in east Afghanistan, and the stronghold of Osama bin Laden in the 1990s) is *Jihad* against the foreign occupying forces and the corrupt un-Islamic Afghan government, where "the violence is more about fighting against uninvited guests than for a particular ideology" (Fazli et al., 2015, p. 1). The report was based on a field survey and in-depth interviews to ascertain the drivers of radicalization among Afghans. Interviewees ranged from university and *madrassa* students, teachers, journalists, tribal and religious leaders, civil society activists, to taxi drivers, shopkeepers, and laborers of all types. The majority of interviewees viewed actions tied to violence

and terrorism as un-Islamic, and expressed their opinion that religion was being used by violent extremists to advance self-interest, denouncing the behavior of the radical *mullahs* (Muslim scholars or religious leaders) as selectively quoting Quranic passages to justify the use of violence and contextualizing religion as the means to expel occupiers (Fazli et al., 2015).

In conclusion, we borrow Pfeifer's (2019) ideas based on her analysis of the Tunisian Ennahda (Islamist) Party's discourse on religion, politics, and the state. Pfeifer (2019) thoroughly discusses the Party's attempt at merging faith (Islamic religiosity) with freedom (the discourse of human rights), a model referred to as *Islamic democracy* and state neutrality. Ennahda's argument is that for a State to be democratic (in a neutral way), it must neither pursue secular extremism nor side with any one Islamic school of thought (there should be no preferred one version of Islam over another, no interference with religious institutions, nor any disqualification of any form of Islam as a distortion of Islam). Indeed, "there is no singular, abstract model of democracy that would follow the principle of one size fits all" (Pfeifer, 2019, p. 490). In this context, Pfeifer (2019) discusses the *normative power of secularism* whereby, she explains, "secularism has become a standard of recognition of political actors as legitimate" (p. 479), and endorses the view that secularism is not a universal, abstract, neutral, and natural principle for separating religion and politics. Rather, secularism draws the line between politics and religion both at the level of discourse and state practice. The Tunisian Ennahda Party is an example of how secularism's normative discourse was adapted to religion and politics. Pfeifer (2019) goes on to say that it is not clear yet whether Ennahda's Islamic democracy model will be successful (will Ennahda be recognized as a legitimate part of Tunisian politics?), but even in the case of success, "the question remains whether adapting to the normative standards of secularism is the only way for Islamists to enter democratic politics" (p. 497).

In a similar vein, Sayyid (2017 b) asserts that to understand Islamism means to acknowledge the way in which Orientalism and Eurocentrism have interfered in its understanding, and thus, understanding political Islam is possible in the context of decentering the West. Islamism is a discourse used to re-center Islam within the Muslim community, within the political center of Islamic societies, hence signaling a decolonial moment in a wider postcolonial context (Sayyid, 2017 a). Ayoub (2004) talked of the Western-nurtured misleading image of Muslims which he believes is largely the result of the Muslims' collective memory of subjugation to the West and their perception of being weaker than the West. Ayoub (2004) writes that "transnational extremist activities, including acts of terrorism, are the exception, not the rule, when it comes to political action undertaken in the name of Islam" (p. 12). This explains why the yearning of today's Muslims for the golden age of Islam, for a restoration of dignity away from feelings of subordination to the West is deemed extremist by Western standards.

Based on the above discussion, the takeaway from this review is that instead of asking why Muslims deviate from normativity, it may be more pertinent to ask how the dominant Western and Eurocentric paradigm can be revisited away from the "democracy is a one-way street only" paradigm (Mignolo, 2011, p. 50). Mahmood (2004) writes:

No study of Islami[c] politics situated within the Western academy can avoid engaging with the contemporary critique of Islamic ethical and political behavior, and with the secular-liberal assumptions that animate this critique. This owes to the fact that the 'problem' giving rise to current scholarly concern surrounding Islam centers on this tradition's (potentially dangerous) divergence from the perceived norms of a secular-liberal polity. The force this framing commands is apparent not only in the

writings of those who are critical of Islamist politics but also in the posture of defense that many Islamist writers must adopt in order to make their case in the court of international public opinion. (p.189)

In every engagement with Islam and Islamism, there seems to be a need to engage with the content of Muslim non-normativity, to evaluate Islam based on preconceived Western notions of what it means to be a Muslim. In the present review, we have attempted to move away from the normative and away from the cultural; by looking at the ingroup identification factor and related processes (feelings of discrimination, perceived threat, etc.), we hope to socio-politicize the otherwise cultural arguments that permeate popular discourse, whether in media or in academia. Islam is not an object of study. Muslims' political behavior as a function of their navigation of an increasingly Eurocentric world is. Hence, this is a call for thinking *otherwise* about extremist tendencies in Muslims by exploring how racialized and marginalized Muslim subjects are navigating an increasingly hostile world. There is a question of who sets the terms of the conversation when one interacts with a Muslim, if such an interaction exists. If we constantly find ourselves interrogating Muslims' radicalism, extremism and terrorism, then we are engaged in the same normative discourse that has led to their demonization for centuries. Instead of viewing the other as Muslim, we may benefit well from viewing them primarily as humans.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this review is the small number of articles reviewed. This is due to the fact that we limited our investigation to a specific set of inclusion criteria; at any rate, such a small number of studies does not allow for the findings to be generalized, in spite of the high quality of these studies. Also, more databases should have been included in our search strategy in order to gather more substantial data. But as we tried to incorporate more databases, we noted that it was becoming extremely laborious and time consuming to obtain the type of studies that matched our inclusion and exclusion criteria, and in many cases, we had to discard articles that had already been included in some of the systematic reviews in our review.

Another limitation has to do with mixing different research designs, as this does not allow for delineating consistent trends in analyzing the data. Furthermore, whilst we identified and investigated a range of potential variables to explain extremist tendencies among Muslims, we may have neglected other potential variables, perhaps in relation to demographic factors.

One further limitation has to do with the fact that the participants in the majority of studies included in this review were Muslims living in the West (Australia, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, UK and US) and fewer studies were drawn from the Muslim world. This calls for more in-depth exploration of the variables at stake in a Muslim context in relation to extremism. One last limitation of this review is our use of the term extremism in a broad sense; this encapsulates all the different variations of non-normative tendencies, but it also highlights the sensitivity to a variety of different nuances which may be specific to only one of these extremist tendencies (support for terrorism, violent vs. non-violent extremism, sacred violence etc.), or to certain dynamics within a country (as in the case of Indonesia).

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Notes on Contributors

Rita Merhej, an Assistant Professor in Psychology at Haigazian University, Beirut, Lebanon. She received her post-graduate degree in clinical psychology from the Sorbonne University in Paris, and is currently working on her Doctorate degree in Social Psychology at the Lebanese University. Her research expertise are in prejudice, extremism and peacebuilding.

Mostafa Soueid is Graduate student in Psychology. Researcher in international cooperation for sustainable development and international education work.

ORCID

Rita Merhej, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9041-7955>