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The Role of Islamist Ideology in Shaping Muslims Believers' Attitudes toward Terrorism: Evidence from Europe

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the role religious beliefs play in leading European Muslims to justify terrorism, using survey data collected in twenty-one countries. Results show that the factors leading Muslims to justify terrorism contextually vary. Where Muslims are predominant, this probability decreases with the importance respondents assign to religion, while it increases where Muslims are a minority. We find no evidence in support of the thesis that Islamist propaganda causes ordinary believers' radicalization. Yet, in Western countries affected by homegrown terrorism, we observe that justifying terrorism is strongly associated with an increase in religious practice, providing support to the thesis that Islamist groups are attracting Islam radical individuals.

Since the 11 September 2001 (9/11) attacks, Islamic political violence—used by groups mobilizing Islamic rhetoric to define their goals and shape their political agenda—has become consequential in shaping global terrorism patterns.[1] According to the most recent estimates, Islamic violence accounts for the largest number of events as well as for the most lethal attacks in the world. Out of the twenty deadliest groups since 2011, thirteen are Islamic groups.[2] This predominance is recent: while non-Islamic groups perpetrated more attacks than Islamic groups in 2002 (235 vs. 94), this trend reversed in 2011, where attacks perpetrated by Islamic groups increased of approximately 2,000 percent. In 2015, 74 percent of the casualties caused by terror attacks were attributed to the following four groups: the Islamist State of Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram, The Taliban, and Al Qaeda. Despite their divergent political agendas, they all mobilize Islam to back up their violent strategies.[3]

This global trend hides specific regional patterns. Europe appears as a relatively spared continent—when compared to Asia and the Middle East—although attacks have suddenly increased since 2015 after a decade of decrease following the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) events.[4] Recent attacks in Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom are predominantly due to "homegrown terrorism" perpetrated "within

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a country by a perpetrator with the same citizenship as the victims."[5] Although this phenomenon is not new,[6] the radicalization of European Muslims—defined as the change of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify inter-group violence[7]—has recently attracted an unprecedented level of media and govern-mental attention, predominantly taking religious beliefs as a root cause of the radicalization of Muslim believers.[8]

So far, two competing mechanisms have been identified to assess the causes of Islamic political violence. On the one hand, some scholars have taken the Islamic ideol-ogy as a direct cause of the radicalization of Muslim people, leading in some extreme cases to the involvement in terror attacks.[9] The diffusion of extreme beliefs on the justi-fication and use of violence within the Muslim communities would then be due to an increased audience of Islamist groups on topics related to the interpretation of Islamic principles.[10] On the other hand, other scholars claim that the predominance of Islamic violence can be explained by the fact that radical people increasingly turn to Islam because they find in extremist Islamist ideology a way to justify their attitudes.[11] In other words, Islamist groups are framing the demands and agenda of radicalized people. Overall both explanations have so far only received limited empirical validation.

Our article seeks to contribute to this debate in two directions. It first aims to assess whether the marks of the influence of Islamist groups can be traced back in the atti-tudes ordinary Muslims hold toward violence. Do Muslims' attitudes toward terrorism differ from the attitudes of other religious groups? It then investigates two channels through which Islamist groups play a role in the radicalization of ordinary Muslims. These groups can directly influence the beliefs and opinions of a friction of ordinary believers or, on the contrary, be attractive for radicalized people, which then adopt or increase an Islamic religious practice.

Our demonstration rests on an empirical strategy whose originality lies in three aspects. First, in a context where studies of Islamic violence mostly rely on small-N cases focusing on specific contexts or Islamic groups,[12] we use large-N data collected through international surveys. This enables us to distinguish between political attitudes that are shared by Muslims wherever they live from attitudes they develop in specific sociopolitical contexts. Second, to examine the role of extreme religious beliefs in the radicalization of Muslim believers, we do not focus on extraordinary radicalized individ-uals, but on ordinary people. Our research assumption is that the influence Islamist groups have on the interpretation of religious principles can be traced back to the atti-tudes ordinary Muslims hold toward political violence. By researching the opinions of an average person, we can identify the beliefs that become amplified in exceptional cases of radicalism. Since radicalized people who ultimately use violence are few in relation to all those who share their beliefs, they may hence be thought of "as the apex of a pyramid" whose "base is composed of all who sympathize with the goals the terrorists say they are fighting for."[13] To examine this, we chose not to focus on the years in which most of the attacks occurred, but when convicted individuals were raised and may have forged their opinions on political violence, in a context of increased activism of Islamist groups in Europe. Third, our study focuses on inhabitants of European countries.[14] This is particularly original, since large-N studies of Muslims' attitudes toward political violence have so far largely focused on Middle Eastern countries where

Muslims form a majority group.[15] The results of these studies do not necessarily hold to explain the factors of homegrown terrorism in minority Muslim liberal democracies. They also do not capture the motivations leading European citizens to leave their national territory to join the Syrian uprising.[16] Studying Europe also enables us to assess the impact of the diverse situations in which Muslims live as well as of specific historical trajectories. In some Western European countries Muslims are mainly children or grandchildren of recent waves of economic migration coming from former colonies. The lack of inclusion of Muslim minorities in post-colonial Western societies is often taken as a central factor of the radicalization of a minority of them. In other countries—especially in Eastern Europe—Muslims have been a long-established minority since the Islamization policies of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of Islam as the official religion. They hence faced different challenges than Muslims living in Western post-colonial societies. Finally, Muslims form a majority group in few European countries (Albania, Azerbaijan, Northern Cyprus, Kosovo). This diversity allows us to isolate the characteristics flowing from the fact of being Muslim, from properties commonly associated to it such as living in the Middle East, having experienced war or internal conflicts, living under dictatorial regimes, or being Arabian.

The article is structured into five sections. The first section presents the existing analyses of Muslims' attitudes toward political violence. The second section details our hypotheses. The third section explains our empirical strategy by presenting the dataset we use as well as our output and explanatory variables. The fourth section describes our research results while the fifth section concludes the article with a discussion of these results.

Ideology versus political economy: current explanations of islamic radicalism

As Islamic violence largely took predominance over the course of the 2000s,[17] scholars have strived to explain why radicalized people are increasingly mobilizing an Islamic rhetoric to justify their actions and agenda.[18] A central point of controversy lies in the role ideological and cultural factors play in explaining why some Muslims hold extreme beliefs about the use of violence. Some authors argue these factors are playing a direct causal role in the radicalization of a minority of Muslim believers whereas other scholars emphasize the role of political economy factors to claim that ideology is only contingently mobilized.

The role of ideology and Islamist groups' activism

The emergence of the very concept of "religious terrorism" starts from the assumption that religious beliefs are associated or even lead to specific radicalization patterns. Although the validity of such concept has been questioned,[19] some scholars claim that the specificity of religious radicalism lies in the fact that religious and transcendent goals are much harder to accommodate due to the prospects in afterlife rewards through martyrdom.[20] Despite the alleged specificity of religious radicalization, research has shown that such trajectories are rare among Muslim believers. On the contrary,

existing evidence demonstrates that an overwhelming majority of Muslims—as believers from other faiths—condemn political violence.[21] Moreover, their likelihood of adopting radical beliefs decreases with the intensity of their religious practice.[22]

Yet this overall negative effect of religious beliefs on radicalism may not account for the role extremist militant groups may play in shaping—at a particular point in time and space—the beliefs of ordinary believers. Religious groups—whatever their denomination—are all concerned by the need to manage the activism of some extremist groups with some of them advocating for the use of violence in support of a religious agenda. The audience of such groups varies over time, as does their capacity to influence ordinary believers. For example, research using the World Values Survey data based on sixty-one countries for 1981–1997 showed that religiosity decreases revolutionary attitudes, except for Muslims.[23] This may reflect the ability of militant Islamist groups to influence and radicalize ordinary believers.

The ideological foundations of contemporary Islamist groups point to four inspirational figures: Hassan Al Banna and Sayyid Qutb in Egypt and, to a lesser extent, Sayyid Maudidi in Pakistan and Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran.[24] While the teachings of these four figures differ, they all played a role in turning Islamic religion into an ideology for (armed) political struggle. Hassan el Banna—the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood—considered Islam as a comprehensive political system of life and the Quran to be the only acceptable constitution for Muslims. El Banna's doctrine focused more on the creation of an Islamic economic system through progressive taxation than on the development of a specific political model.[25] Initially, el Banna refused political violence and adopted a rather pragmatic approach to politics—the *Jihad of the spirit* was a central way of furthering the Islamization of Muslim societies, fighting against Western imperialism as well as improving the living conditions of Muslim people.[26] Although the Muslim Brotherhood is still one of the most influential contemporary Islamist movements, el Banna's writings have been far less influential than Qutb's in shaping the radical beliefs of contemporary Islamists. In his book, *Milestones,* Qutb condemned Western modernity and claimed that Muslim communities lived in a state of Godless ignorance (*Jahiliyya*) that needed to be reverted or re-conquered for Islam. To achieve this objective, Qutb refused quietism and advocated for *takfir* (excommunication) through violent means, including the killing of corrupt and lawless leaders.[27] Qutb's influence is still explicit in movements such as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. Maudidi and Qutb shared a lot of stances. Maudidi was one of the first thinkers to advocate for the creation of an Islamic state governed by *Sharia* law.[28] Last, the relevance of Khomeini to contemporary Islamic political violence rests on his issue of the death sentence (*fatwa*) in 1989 of Salman Rushdie, author of the Satanic Verses. Issuing of the *fatwa* expanded the Muslim *umma*'s (community) authority to cover the world—making it a place for *jihad*.[29]

The dissemination of this ideology would be limited without the essential role Islamist transnational groups play to mobilize Muslims in support of a borderless *umma*. In Europe, the structuring and influence of such groups is old and determined by patterns such as Muslim people's transnational flows, confession, and historical background.[30] For example, a branch of Maudidi's party—the Jamaat-e-Islami—was created in 1973 in the United Kingdom to directly target South Asian Muslims.[31] On the

contrary, France is characterized by a strong audience of the Muslim Brotherhood organization through the activism of the Brotherhood-affiliated *Union des Organisations Islamiques en France*, created in 1983. Last, the influence of the Fethullah Gülen movement is mostly visible in Germany and in the Balkans.[32] Although not all Islamist movements advocate for a violent strategy to defend and preserve the unity of the *umma*, some of them share links with various insurgency movements across the Muslim world, like Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kashmir, Chenya, Syria, or Iraq.[33] Some historical events have contributed to the radicalization, reinforcement, and unification of Islamist activism in Europe—leading to the coexistence of two branches of Salafism at the beginning of the nineties: a jihadist and a quietist one. Among these events, the Afghan war (1978–1988) acted as a catalyst for Islamist influence and propaganda. European Muslims joined the ranks of the insurgency and, when back in Europe, acted as spiritual leaders who played a critical role in forging the influence of Al Qaeda in the region.[34] Progressively, they succeed in getting a larger audience through the creation of some clandestine mosques and recruitments cells—some governmental reports claiming that the radicalization of a fringe of European Muslims took over ten to fifteen years.[35] Similarly, the American invasion of Iraq contributed to reinforcing the activism of *jihadi* groups among Muslim youth in Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands from 2003 onward.

The influence of the Islamist ideology over the attitudes of ordinary Muslims toward political violence has been attested to by a large range of research. Studies on the approval of the 9/11 attacks in Muslim countries found that the main predictors of such approval are the respondents' proneness to Islamism,[36] as well as the feeling that Islam is under threat and has a role to play in politics.[37] Based on data from the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP)/World Public Opinion survey, support for the talibanization of Pakistani society was found to be one of the strongest predictors of justifying bombings and attacks targeting civilians,[38] whereas research comparing the perception of terrorism in Western Europe and Muslim majority countries showed that respondents in both groups of countries tend to be more supportive of terrorism when they believe that democracy is a Western political system that is not suitable for Muslims.[39] Last, some researchers have focused on the role of the interpretation of the *jihad* concept. Using survey data collected in Pakistan, Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro found that support for political violence is closely linked to one's individual interpretation of *jihad*. The more people conceive of *jihad* as an internal struggle for righteousness, the less likely they are to justify political violence.[40] On the contrary, believers who understand *jihad* as an external militarized struggle are more likely to be supportive of violent Islamic groups. Studying civil wars between 1940 and 2000, Toft found that in 81 percent of cases Islamic governments and leaders were involved as belligerents and explained it by the role *jihad* plays in mobilizing fighters.[41] Building on such a link, Springer, Regens, and Edger argue that a key motivation for *jihadism* is the will to recreate "a unified system of temporal authority exercised by a successor to the prophet Muhammad over the community of believers"—the caliphate—among the most radicalized Muslims.[42]

Overall, these studies show that ideology plays a critical role in explaining the development of radical beliefs among Muslims. Religious principles, as interpreted and preached by the most extreme groups, are associated with an increased justification of

violence and terror attacks. The radicalization of a minority of Muslims seems to be fueled by regular contacts with these groups (either at the mosque or through the Internet).[43] These results, however, need to be interpreted with caution: they may hide the role played by other factors that are correlated with religious beliefs but do not derive from them. For example, political experiences shared by the Muslim community may lead them to support political violence.

Political and economic accounts of Muslims' attitudes toward violence

To understand why people turn to Islamic political violence, another group of researchers have left aside the role played by ideas to assess the influence of economic and political factors. These studies do not state that ideas do not play *any* role in the radicalization process but that their influence is only contingent. In other words, causal factors leading people to adhere to some specific attitudes with regard to the use of violence are the same whatever the ideology they use to then justify these attitudes.

At the political level, the role of specific experiences in triggering radicalization received large empirical support. These experiences may be common to Muslims wherever they live or may only hold in certain social and political contexts. Overall, radical beliefs have been largely found to be associated with a perceived lack of legitimacy and justice of national and international politics. A study comparing Western European and Arabic Muslim countries showed that opposition to Western foreign policies is a key driver of respondents' justification of political violence.[44] In the same token, several analyses have pointed out that the approval and justification of terrorism are strongly correlated with anti-Americanism and with the perception that the foreign policies of Western powers pose a threat to Islam.[45] At the national level, radical beliefs are associated with the perception that governmental officials are illegitimate[46] or too repressive.[47] Looking at psychological factors, previous studies have demonstrated that the radicalization process is fueled by feelings such as otherness, injustice, and discrimination.[48] This impact of discrimination is also attested to by a study showing that islamophobia and negative attitudes toward Muslim have risen over the past decades in countries where they form a visible minority, such as Britain and France.[49]

Compared to political factors, the impact of economic determinants is less clear cut. In a seminal paper, Krueger and Malečková demonstrated that the evidence of a connection between poverty, low educational attainment, and terrorism is weak and sketchy. Analyzing the background of members of Hezbollah's militant wing and of Palestinian suicide bombers, they showed that militants are as likely to come from an educated and wealthy elite than from disadvantaged and poorly educated families.[50] This result has been confirmed by a study investigating the patterns of support for suicide bombings in six majority Muslim countries. Results showed that the effect of both factors highly depends on the geographic origin of the respondents and on the targets of the attacks (civilians vs. Western military and political personnel in Iraq).[51] Economic factors seem to matter more when they relate to respondents' self-perceived economic standing. Women's perceived financial insecurity is a strong driving force of their support of fundamentalist groups.[52] Feelings of personal and collective deprivation also account for the holding of radical beliefs by Western European Muslims.[53]

What do these results tell about the relationship between radical religious beliefs and attitudes toward violence? They overall show that these beliefs—even in their most fundamentalist forms—are not a central driver of radicalism. The same conclusion has been drawn from the analysis of the biographical paths of a sample of contemporary European perpetrators of Islamic political violence. None of them are born devout but all have experienced illegal actions before becoming "born-again" by either converting to Islam or increasing their religious practice. The rise in Islamic political violence hence seems to be fueled by the activism of Islamist groups whose ideology has a unique capacity to attract and mobilize radicalized people.[54] Islamist groups are able to frame the demands of radicalized individuals, building a coherent and appealing meaning for the causes of their deprivation.[55] Drawing on such an argument, some scholars have studied how Islamist groups produce spiritual incentives that may lead people to rationally justify the most violent form of collective action.[56]

Unpacking the mechanism behind the islamism: justification of terrorism link

Existing accounts of the relationship between religious beliefs and radicalism among Muslims give a central role to an extremist fringe who use Islamic principles to advocate the use of violence to protect Muslims. However, the extent and nature of this role remains unclear. Our analytical framework—structured by two sets of hypotheses—allows us to assess the level of dissemination of radical beliefs among ordinary Muslims (see H1 and H2) and to theorize the nature of the role of Islamist extremism (H3 and H4).

Assessing the impact and dissemination of Islamist extremism among ordinary Muslims

The first step of our empirical analysis consists of determining whether ordinary Muslims are more likely than people from other faiths to justify, under certain circumstances, deadly attacks. We assume that if Muslims are found to hold more radical beliefs, this would indicate that the impact of Islamist extremism is not marginal but is noticeable within larger Muslim communities. Of course, people justifying deadly attacks are a minority in every religious group and, among this minority, only a few individuals are ready to get involved in violent actions. In this sense, we only aim to assess whether Muslims are more likely than people from other faiths to hold radical beliefs—without inferring that such an opinion is predominant among Muslims.

The link between believing in Islam and justifying violence may be universal or conditioned by the specific experiences of Muslim people.

According to the first hypothesis, Muslims should be more prone to justify terrorism wherever they live, either due to a specific interpretation of religious principles, a sense of collective deprivation, or a specific interaction between being Muslim and holding political grievances or feeling discriminated. However, the link may also be conditional: only under specific contexts do Muslims exhibit a stronger tendency to justify violence. This result would suggest that the causes of the success of Islamist extremism depend

on specific social or political contexts. It is also compatible with a spurious causality argument: in some countries, the link is explained by the fact that Muslims' living conditions foster such a support. In such a case, we expect that other groups would justify terrorism to the same extent when faced with the same conditions. These conditions may include, for example, high levels of unemployment or sociopolitical exclusion.

Across Europe, the contexts in which Muslims live considerably vary. Table 1 displays general living patterns. We constituted three groups based on whether Muslims are a majority or a minority group. Group 3 only includes countries where Muslims are predominant such as Albania, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, and Northern Cyprus whereas group 2 includes mostly Eastern European countries where Muslims form a long-established minority. Beside these differences, both groups share some historical patterns. In both groups of countries, the presence of Muslims is mostly due to the Islamization policies of the Ottoman Empire where Islam was the official religion. A large majority of them have known communist regimes, where religious practice was banned or limited. It should be noted that, unlike Middle Eastern countries that are commonly studied, countries included in groups 2 and 3 are not former colonies or protectorates. Yet most of them have experienced war before the 1990s and have known chronic episodes of violence since then.[57] However, in the highest-intensity conflict, Kosovo, an international coalition, mainly made up of non-Muslim European states and organized under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), intervened in support of Kosovo Albanians. Hence, contrary to Middle Eastern countries, Muslims in this country shall not be particularly opposed to non-Muslim states' foreign policies.

The last group is made up of Western European countries where Muslims mainly are a minority group with immigrant backgrounds. Among these countries, Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have experienced, in the last decade, a

Table 1. Muslims in EVS sample.

Country	Number of Muslims in the sample	Percentage of Muslims in the sample
Countries with a immigrant background Muslim minority (Group 1)		
France	46	1.5
Germany	27	1.3
United Kingdom	33	2.1
Belgium	49	3.2
Austria	28	1.9
Spain	21	1.4
Luxemburg	42	2.6
Switzerland	41	3.2
Greece	21	1.4
Countries with a long-established Muslim minority (Group 2)		
Bosnia	481	31.8
Macedonia	265	17.7
Montenegro	190	12.5
Bulgaria	180	12
Georgia	94	6.3
Russia	65	4.3
Slovenia	20	1.5
Cyprus	10	1
Predominantly Muslim countries (Group 3)		
Northern Cyprus	477	95.4
Azerbaijan	1,259	83.7
Kosovo	1,112	69.5
Albania	798	52

considerable rise in Islamist radicalism. Deadly attacks have been perpetrated by national citizens and a fraction of the Muslim population has joined the Syrian uprising against the Assad regime. According to van Ginkel and Entenmann, a striking majority of at least 2,838 documented foreign fighters only come from these four countries.[58]

The variance in Muslims' historical trajectories and living conditions allows us to test the relationship between being Muslim and having a propensity to justify terrorism. Compared to the Middle East, European Muslims are neither massively Arabian, nor live in highly repressive regimes. Anti-American and anti-Israeli feelings are likely to be lower than in the Middle East and their direct or indirect experience of war is variable. We can hence conclude that, overall, for European Muslims merely the fact of being Muslim is determining. Therefore:

> H1: Universal relationship hypothesis. Muslims are more likely to justify terrorism wherever they live.

Our second hypothesis holds that Muslims' justification of political violence is conditioned by their specific situation and historical trajectories such as being a majority, a long-established minority, or a minority with a recent immigrant background. These traits allow us to roughly estimate a Muslim vulnerability index, in which we assume that being part of a minority group is a disadvantage, especially when this minority has a recent migrant background. Therefore, the index is higher in countries where Muslims come from immigration waves and lower in countries where they are a majority.[59] Feelings of vulnerability may be particularly pregnant in Islam given that a central fear of Islamic leaders is the loss of religious practice among Muslim believers living in non-Muslim countries.[60]

Nevertheless, this index also measures the degree of contact with non-Muslim people, which is higher in Western countries and lower in countries where Islam is predominant. While vulnerability increases grievances that may in turn explain the justification of terrorism, contacts decrease hostility toward non-Muslims[61] and hence may lower justification of terrorism. Thus:

> H2: Conditional or spurious relationship: Muslims justify more politically motivated violence only in some countries that display the same features.

Why are Muslims more prone to justify political violence?

Our first set of hypotheses sheds light on the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. The second set focuses on the analysis of the variance in opinions among Muslims. To establish the existence of a causal link between extreme religious beliefs and radicalism, we should not only observe that Muslims justify political violence more than people from other faiths, but also that, among Muslims, a specific profile does so.

According to the direct influence thesis, radical opinions toward violence are shaped by extremist Islamist groups who succeed in getting an audience and legitimacy among their coreligionists. The increased audience of extremist groups could be fueled by the increased visibility they have in places where the interpretation of the Islamic message is discussed.[62] The likelihood of an individual to be influenced by these groups would then increase with the regularity of attendance to such places. In other words, if

extremist groups are increasingly successful in being visible and legitimate within Muslim communities, we could expect that the largely observed negative effect of religious practice on radicalism[63] is reduced or even disappears. This result is an aggregate consequence of the fact that, while many observant believers condemn violence, those who are exposed to extremist Islamist teachings become more prone to justify violence. To assess the influence of extremist groups on this fringe of the population, we compare the effect of religious practice on Muslims' attitudes toward terrorism with its effect on the attitudes of other religious groups. We then argue that if a minority of Muslims are influenced by extremist preaches, we shall observe that, unlike devout from other faiths, devout Muslims shall not condemn violence in a higher proportion than non-practicing ones.

> H3: Direct influence hypothesis: compared to other faiths, a higher degree of Islamic practice leads to higher levels of violence justification.

Our last hypothesis suggests another explanation for the role of extremist groups. According to this hypothesis we argue that extremist groups do not directly shape Muslims' attitudes toward violence but that their visibility attracts individuals to Islamism who already hold radical opinions due to factors exogenous to religious beliefs. In other words, individuals who are first more prone to justify political violence, then find in Islamism a frame for their opinions and, as a result, increase their religious practice. This religion could hence be considered as a focal point for politically radical individuals, who find in Islam a way to give meaning to their radical beliefs—caused by factors such as personal or collective deprivation and political experiences such as discrimination or exclusion.[64] If this is true, we should observe a higher level of justification of political violence among people who have increased their Islamic religious practice over the course of their life. Unlike H3, whereas the absolute level of observance should not matter, the relative increase in religious practice should. Hence:

> H4: Self-selection hypothesis: Compared to other faiths, people who have increased their Islamic religious practice over the course of their life justify more terrorism.

Figure 1 summarizes the mechanisms suggested by H3 and H4.

It should be noted that H3 and H4 are compatible with each other, whereas H1 and H2 are mutually exclusive. Moreover, H3 and H4 may fit with either H1 or H2.

1. Direct influence hypothesis – Religious practice as a cause of radicalism

| Religious practice (Islam) | → | Higher probability to be exposed to Islamism | → | Justification of terrorism |

2. Self-selection hypothesis – Increased religious practice as resulting from self-selection in Islamism

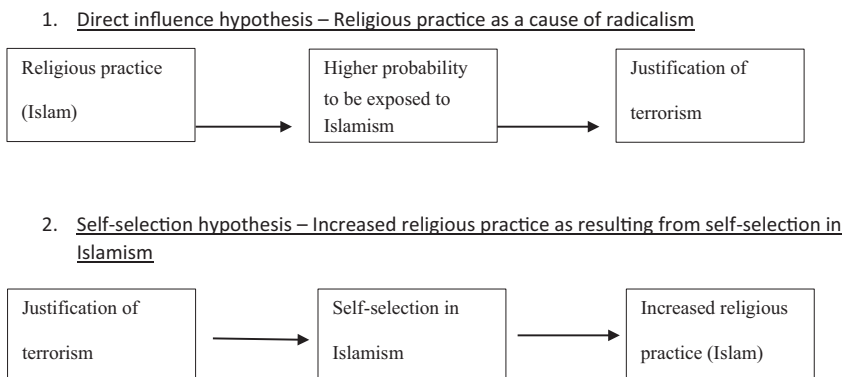| Justification of terrorism | → | Self-selection in Islamism | → | Increased religious practice (Islam) |

Figure 1. Mechanisms linking religious practice to radicalism.

According to H1, the mechanism by which Muslims are more radical—whatever it is—is the same in different contexts, while according to H2, this mechanism can vary and is different depending on the contexts in which Muslims live.

Empirical data and variables

To test our hypotheses, we use data collected in the 2008 wave of the European Values Survey focusing on forty-five European countries. Except for Turkey, an explicit question on the justification of political violence was part of the questionnaire. This question was not included in past questionnaires (except in 1981) and was not selected for the 2017 wave. In this regard, we deal with a rather unique dataset.

2008 is an interesting year to understand the impact of Islamist extremist activism on public opinion in Europe. According to Europol data, 2008 is among the very rare years in which Europe was immune from terror attacks. Given the impact of such attacks on short-term public opinion,[65] this year allows us to avoid such a bias. Besides, after the bloody attacks in Madrid (2004) and in London (2005), 2008 opened a four-year period of decline in terror attacks in Europe, the numbers of arrests and convictions decreasing as well. 2008 was hence not characterized by intensive media coverage of terrorism and the level of threat from Islamic political violence was much less than it is today. In the subsequent period (2012–2016), European Union member states suffered, however, from a dramatic increase in Islamic political violence.[66] In light of this evolution, 2008 can be viewed as relevant to understanding the conditions that set the stage for home-grown Islamic violence. The region was a breeding ground for Islamic radicalism, whose consequences were still invisible.[67] Most of perpetrators of contemporary Islamic attacks were teenagers in 2008[68] and were likely to be affected by this period mood. Studying ordinary European Muslims' attitudes toward terrorism in 2008 is especially relevant to the testing of the two hypothesized causal mechanisms—direct influence and self-selection—since both mechanisms assume an intense and long-lasting activity of extremist Islamist groups before they reach audience and impact a large public. 2008 is therefore calm enough to minimize bias in responses to questions on attitudes toward terrorism but recent enough to capture the process feeding the rise in Islamic violence.

Dataset and output variable

During the survey, respondents were requested to choose between two statements:

A. There may be certain circumstances where terrorism is justified.
B. Terrorism for whatever motive must always be condemned.

They also had the possibility to answer "neither of them" or to refuse to respond. Compared to other surveys seeking to assess the level of support for terrorism, this question appears as less biased since it does not target a specific form of political violence. For instance, the Pew Research Center dataset, used in most of the articles investigating the level of support Muslims have for political violence, uses a question that explicitly links the use of political violence and the defense of Islam.[69]

The number of people who refused to answer was 1,693, corresponding to 4.8 percent of the sample. Most of the respondents always condemned terrorism (91.7 percent) whereas 3,721 respondents (5.9 percent) claimed that it may be justified under certain circumstances. Hence, our output variable is a dummy that equals 1 when people justify, under certain circumstances, terrorism, and 0 when they do not. It should be noted that the question uses the term "terrorism," which is highly negatively connoted. Hence, we are studying a small amount of people but with very strong opinions.

The criteria that led us to include a specific country in our dataset are twofold. First, we included the country if the question on the justification on terrorism was asked. Second, we only keep countries with at least 1 percent of Muslims in the national sample. Note that the percentage of Muslims in the European Values Survey is, almost everywhere, underestimated when compared to the available data (e.g., those of the Pew Research Centre focusing on the Global Muslim Population).[70]

Table 1 describes the twenty-one included countries, which we divided into three groups. The first group includes nine countries in which Muslims form a minority resulting from immigration waves. Among these countries, we especially isolated the four Western European countries (France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium) that have been the main targets of deadly attacks between 2015 and 2017 and have, since 2014, provided the largest share of foreign fighters to the Islamic State. The number of Muslims per country is quite low. The first group of nine countries only include 308 respondents with nearly half of them (155) living in the four aforementioned countries. This low number of Muslim respondents weakens the robustness of our results. In addition, our sample suffers from a self-selection bias: people accepting to take part in surveys are likely to display less hostility toward the sociopolitical system in which they live given their proneness to reveal their opinion.[71] Therefore, our results need to be conservatively interpreted, considering that respondents are, on average, more moderated than ordinary citizens in general.

The second group of countries are those in which Muslims are a long-established minority, stabilized in Europe since the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. In Bosnia, Muslims are predominant but this is not reflected in our sample where they are slightly less numerous than Orthodox Christians. This group of countries counts for 1,305 of the Muslims in our sample.

Finally, the third group includes four countries in which Muslims form a majority group and the largest proportion of Muslims of our sample (3,647; i.e., 69 percent of our sample). The islamization of Albania and Kosovo follows the same historical pattern than the other Balkan countries, Muslims being predominant in the samples for both countries. In Azerbaijan, more than 80 percent of people are Muslims. However, it is also one of the most secular Muslim-majority countries, even though some potential for radicalization has been observed in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[72] Finally, in Northern Cyprus, Islam is traditionally prevalent and, since the Turkish invasion in 1974, the population is essentially Turkish.

Explanatory variables

To test H1 and H2, we need to make a distinction between Muslims and other religious groups. The questionnaire first required respondents to declare whether they belong to

a religious denomination or not. If the answer was positive, the religious group would be asked. Combining these questions allowed us to identify Muslims (7,641), Roman Catholics (7,503), Protestants (2,542), Orthodox (9,215), people belonging to other religions (9,088), and nonreligious people (781). Two measures were estimated: a category variable to compare Muslims with each of the other religious groups and a dummy variable in which 1 means "Muslim" and 0 includes all the other groups.

To better specify what "belonging to a religion" means for respondents, we also used an estimate of the importance of religion in people's life, operationalized in four items (very, rather, not very, not at all important). This question allows us to identify degrees of religiosity among believers. Drawing on such data, Muslims may be considered as justifying more terrorism if they answered this question in a significant and different way than people from other faiths, especially when they assign importance to religion in their life.

To test H3, we need to introduce a measure of exposure to the messages of Islamist groups. We used religious practice, which captures the frequency of contacts with the members of respondents' own religious community and the exposure to the discourses of diverse religious leaders. The question was formulated in this way: "Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?"

Seven items are available: "more than once a week," "once a week," "once a month," "only on specific holy days," "once a year," "less often," and "never, practically never." The interaction of this variable with the dummy variable "Muslim" allows us to analyze whether the exposure to Islam affects a respondent's justification for terrorism when compared to exposure to other faiths' messages. Note that in our sample, Orthodox are the most observant (with as average score of 4 out of 7), followed by Muslims (3.9), Catholics (3.5), Protestants (2.9), and people belonging to other faiths (1.8).

According to H4, the intensity of Islamic practice is not taken as the *cause* of radical opinions on violence, but rather as its *effect*. We claim that radical people are more attracted by Islamism and, as a result, become more observant. This implies that the level of practice should not be statistically associated with a higher likelihood of justifying terrorism, whereas the increase of practice during one's life does. To measure individual trajectories into religious practice, we used a question asking the level of practice of the respondent when she was 12 years old. The question uses the exact same wording than the previous one. This allows us to build up a variable that takes the value 1 when respondents are more observant in 2008 than when they were during their childhood (21.7 percent of people in the sample), 0 when the level of religious practice is unchanged (41.7 percent), and −1 when respondents have become less observant over the course of their life (36.5 percent). This variable also has to be interacted with the dummy variable Muslim to test whether the effect specifically holds for this group. At the religious group level, the absolute majority of Muslims (52 percent) did not change their level of religious practice. Also, they include the lowest level of respondents who have decreased their religious practice during their life (17 percent). Such exit trajectories are most frequent among Catholics (68 percent) and Protestants (55 percent). The Orthodox count the largest number of believers who have increased their level of religious practice (38 percent).

Using this variable limits our analysis in two ways. First, it leads us to measure the level of religious practice at only two points in time: when the respondent was 12 years

old and at the age at which she took the survey in 2008. The first point is fixed and represents the religious practice inherited by the family. Hence, the chosen age is old enough to minimize recall bias, but young enough to exclude that the respondent's practices differ from the ones of her family. The second point in time varies between 18 and 108. Many changes may occur in a long-lasting life, and we have no reason to think that the measured change is monotonic. This variable is hence a rough measure of Islamization (i.e., increased Islamic religious practice) but nevertheless allows us to identify all the respondents who in 2008 declared being more devout than they were during their childhood. Second, this measure is of limited value to predict radicalism. The output variable, indeed, does not provide information on how respondents' opinions on violence have evolved over time. Therefore, we cannot infer that an increase in Islamic religious practice is correlated with radicalization, but only with radicalism. In fact, using this variable, we can only assess whether radicalism is associated with a relative *increase* in religious practice rather than with the absolute *level* of religious practice.

Control variables

Evidence from previous research shows that sociodemographic variables such as age, marital status, and gender are robustly correlated with support for terrorism.[73] We then expect that the justification of terrorism is lower when respondents are female, old, married (or in a registered relation), have children, and have a job position. In contrast, the impact of education and income is highly context-dependent.[74] We included all these variables in the model. We also controlled the origin of respondents' parents: the variable takes the value 1 when both parents were not born in the country and 0 otherwise, and is a proxy for the fact that respondents may feeling of otherness from the community in which they live.[75]

We also included two attitudinal variables that are particularly relevant to explain support for terrorism. First, building on past studies, we included a measure of government approval on a ten-point scale.[76] Second, we used the level of trust in NATO. Several analyses have pointed out that the approval and justification of terrorism is strongly correlated with anti-Americanism and the perception that the foreign policies of Western powers pose a threat to Islam.[77] Over the last decades, NATO has largely been used by the United States to further its foreign policy objectives in the Middle East. The alliance has largely targeted Muslim states and communities with the notable exception of the 1999 intervention in Kosovo in support of predominantly Muslim Kosovo Albanians. We then expect that, given that most *jihadist* fighters are opposed to U.S. and Western interventionism, having a low level of trust in NATO may induce ordinary people to feel that attacks against its member states could be justified. Finally, country fixed effects are included, which capture specific influences associated to each country.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for Muslim and non-Muslim respondents divided into three groups of countries: countries hosting a minority of Muslims having an immigrant background (Group 1); countries made up of a long-established Muslim minority (Group 2); and last, predominantly Muslim countries (Group 3). This analysis shows that when they belong to a minority group, Muslims display sociodemographic

Table 2. Muslims and non-Muslims profiles in EVS sample.

	Group 1 Non-Muslims	Group 1 Muslims	Group 2 Non-Muslims	Group 2 Muslims	Group 3 Non-Muslims	Group 3 Muslims
Structural variables						
Female (%)	54	44,3	56.9	49.2	49.6	52
Age (mean)	47.9	34.5	46.2	42.4	37.9	38.4
Single (%)	28.5	26.6	24.1	24.7	36.2	28.4
No children (%)	31.9	35.7	28.9	28.3	42.3	35.4
One parent born outside (%)	14.1	93.2	4.6	5	4.7	5.4
Education (mean)	3.1	2.8	3.2	2.7	3.3	2.6
Income (mean)	1.44	1.30	0.69	0.57	0.60	0.54
Unemployed (%)	16.2	34.1	41.1	61.6	49.3	38.3
Attitudinal variables						
Government approval (mean)	4.9	5.7	4.6	4.3	4.6	5.4
Confidence in NATO (mean)	1.6	1.8	1.4	2	1.8	1.8

features that are likely to increase their level of justification for terrorism. In our sample, Muslims are younger, more often male and unemployed than other respondents, and more often having parents born abroad—especially for group 1. They are less likely to have children and exhibit lower education and revenue levels. Structural variables hence give some credence to the spurious causality hypothesis (H2): Muslims could be more prone to justify terrorism not because of their religious beliefs, but merely due to their sociodemographic status, which is, on average, more associated with holding such opinions. If H2 is correct, we shall then observe that—after controlling for these variables—faith is not a relevant predictor of their opinions about terrorism anymore.

Regarding attitudinal variables—support for national government and trust in NATO—Muslim respondents do not hold different opinions. They tend to be slightly less critical toward these institutions, with a notable exception for the second group where Muslims are highly critical toward their national government. We hence shall not expect these political attitudes to play a role in explaining the justification for terrorism.

Results

All estimates used are logit regressions with country fixed effects. We provided results for the whole sample but also for each group of countries—Muslim majority, Muslim historical minority, or Muslim minority with an immigration background. Within the latter, we particularly focused on the four countries that have been the most targeted by Islamic political violence over the past decades.

Are Muslims more prone to justify terrorism?

To address this question, we displayed six models examining the relationship between being Muslim and justifying political violence (Table 3). The first three models are run on the whole sample, whereas the last three focus on the three groups of countries, respectively. Note that control variables are quite consistent in these different

specifications. Gender is always significant in the expected direction. Unemployment, age, and family status also have the expected impact, but their coefficients are not significant in all subgroups of countries. The marital status does not covariate with the justification of terrorism, even though this is due to a high collinearity with being a parent ($r = 0.8$). Coefficients for education, income, and being born from foreign parents are not significant. However, our estimates show that in predominantly Muslim countries, education increases the likelihood to justify terrorism, while income decreases it. Finally, attitudinal variables also have the expected impact. People who are satisfied with their national government are less keen to justify terrorism—with the notable exception of predominantly Muslim countries—and people exhibiting the highest level of trust in NATO condemn it more.

Model 1 compares religious respondents with each other. Compared to Roman Catholics, three groups justify terrorism in a more significant way: Muslims, Orthodox, and nonreligious people. The coefficient associated with Muslims is the highest. To estimate more precisely the likelihood of each religious group to justify terrorism, we used odds ratios.[78] They indicate that, compared to a Roman Catholic, a Muslim is 1.8 times more likely to justify terrorism, while this probability is 1.5 for a nonreligious respondent and 1.3 for an Orthodox one. Coefficients associated with Protestants and people belonging to other religions are not significant. We also observed that each religious group justifies terrorism to a significantly lesser extent than Muslims. Only non religious people display a nonsignificant difference with Muslims. Overall, we hence find that in 2008 Muslims tended to justify terrorism more than other religious groups, even though they shared this attitude with nonreligious people.

Model 2 focuses on Muslims and compares them with all the other respondents taken together. In this model, we introduced the variable referring to the importance respondents assign to religion in their life. The coefficient for being Muslim remains significant whereas the importance of religion is nonsignificant.

Model 3 introduces an interaction between being Muslim and assigning importance to religion. Interestingly, the interaction term captures the effect of the Muslim faith. This means that the level of justification of terrorism is only higher among the Muslims who assign a high importance to religion in their life. The positive effect of the importance of religion is only found for Muslims and not for other religious groups.

Taken together, these first three models provide support for the existence of a relationship between holding Islamic religious beliefs and justifying political violence. Our data show that Muslims are more tolerant of terrorism, especially when they consider religion as very important. The next models replicate model 3 but distinguish between the three country groupings, to assess whether this relationship holds in different contexts. Our specifications overall show that the sociopolitical context plays a decisive role in explaining the relationship between the Islamic faith and justification of terrorism.

Indeed, when Muslims are a minority (models 4 and 5), the results are consistent with those displayed in model 3. In both models, Muslims assigning importance to religion justify terrorism more easily—even though in countries where Muslims have a rather recent immigration background, the interaction term does not reach significance.[79] However, this relationship is very different when Muslims are a majority group. In this case, Muslims justify terrorism more easily than other religious and nonreligious

Table 3. Islamic religious beliefs and justification of terrorism.

Variables	(1) All sample	(2) All sample	(3) All sample	(4) Group 1	(5) Group 2	(6) Group 3
Ref. Roman Catholic						
Protestant	0.156					
	(0.125)					
Muslim	0.585***	0.376***	−0.170	0.049	−0.672	1.248***
	(0.119)	(0.094)	(0.219)	(0.605)	(0.415)	(0.412)
Orthodox	0.250**					
	(0.115)					
Non religious	0.411**					
	(0.203)					
Other	0.128					
	(0.082)					
Importance of religion		0.036	0.011	−0.035	0.009	0.797***
		(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.036)	(0.050)	(0.152)
Muslim*importance of Religion			0.252***	0.173	0.415**	−0.568***
			(0.089)	(0.243)	(0.164)	(0.182)
Female	−0.451***	−0.454***	−0.450***	−0.474***	−0.485***	−0.280*
	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.068)	(0.081)	(0.154)
Age	−0.008***	−0.008***	−0.008***	−0.005**	−0.015***	−0.008
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.007)
Married	−0.057	−0.079	−0.081**	−0.169	0.019	−0.394
	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.104)	(0.152)	(0.351)
Has children	−0.311***	−0.302***	−0.302***	−0.390***	−0.157	0.0661
	(0.077)	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.096)	(0.148)	(0.345)
Parents born outside	−0.061	−0.052	−0.051	0.004	−0.309	0.705*
	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.087)	(0.104)	(0.206)	(0.391)
Education level	0.006	0.008	0.007	0.027	−0.040	0.117*
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.025)	(0.035)	(0.064)
Income	−0.002	−0.001	−0.000	0.002	−0.004	−0.278*
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.030)	(0.052)	(0.168)
Unemployment	0.321***	0.304***	0.300***	0.109	0.390***	0.555***
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.088)	(0.092)	(0.164)
Government approval	−0.024**	−0.032***	−0.032***	−0.050***	−0.034*	0.015
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.033)
Confidence in NATO	−0.181***	−0.187***	−0.188***	−0.496***	−0.103	−0.640***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.074)	(0.095)	(0.181)
Constant	−1.126***	−1.103***	−1.012***	−0.928***	−1.259***	−3.066***
	(0.196)	(0.182)	(0.184)	(0.210)	(0.275)	(0.560)
Pseudo R2	0.049	0.048	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.112
Observations	31,554	31,137	31,137	15,952	11,776	4,502

Note. Standard errors in parentheses, country fixed effects are included.
*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$

groups, but this is less true when religion matters to them. Justification of terrorism, in these countries, is therefore more displayed by lukewarm Muslims.

To sum up, the relationship between believing in Islam and justifying political violence we found in 2008 does not proceed from the same mechanism everywhere. In countries where Muslims belong to a minority, justification for political violence is associated with the role respondents assign to religion in their life. Hence, we can infer that a strong religious identity—combined with a minority status—leads people to be more sympathetic with forms of fighting perceived as a way of defending their community. In contrast, when Muslims form a majority, there seems to be a negative linear

relationship between the level of religious salience in people's life and the likelihood of justifying terrorism. H2 is then better supported than H1: the relationship between believing in Islam and justifying political violence is conditioned by contextual effects.

Why do Muslims justify terrorism more than other religious groups?

Table 4 presents the results of the statistical testing of H3 and H4. It displays five estimates of the justification of terrorism, declined in three ways. On the one hand, the *direct influence hypothesis* (H3) predicts that the interaction term between being Muslim and the level of religious practice (Muslim*religious practice) shall display a positive sign. On the other hand, the *self-selection hypothesis* (H4) predicts that the interaction term between being Muslim and the increase in religious practice since respondents' childhood (Δ religious practice) is significantly and positively associated with the justification of terrorism. The five models respectively analyze the whole sample, the three groups of countries and the subgroup made up of Belgium, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. For each model, three estimates are shown: the first includes both interaction terms, the second only the first one (Muslim*religious practice), and the third only the second one (Muslim* Δ religious practice). Finally, control variables are not displayed in the models, since their coefficients do not fundamentally differ from those presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

Model 1 shows that both hypotheses are invalidated. While Muslims are more likely to justify terrorism, neither their current level of religious practice nor an increase in religious practice influences this relationship. We only observe that becoming more devout over the course of one's life decreases the likelihood to justify terrorism, and Muslims do not differ from other religious groups in this regard. These coefficients remain the same when the interaction-term is omitted.

These results hold for almost all groups of countries, with two exceptions.

First, in predominantly Muslim countries (model 4), we observe that the level of religious practice among non-Muslim respondents increases the likelihood of justifying terrorism, but this effect does not hold for Muslim respondents. This finding suggests that being exposed to the messages of a minority religion may lead people to adopt more radical opinions. Second, Model 5 shows that in the four Western European countries, the *self-selection* hypothesis is consistent with our results. Only Muslims who have increased their level of religious practice over the course of their life exhibited a particularly high likelihood to justify terrorism. In terms of odds ratios, these Muslims have four times more chances to justify terrorism, when compared to other religious people, including other Muslims. This suggests that in such countries, Islam—due to the activism of Islamist groups—was particularly appealing for radical people in 2008. However, this is far from being a universal phenomenon.

Conclusion

Our article aimed to empirically assess the relationship between holding religious beliefs and radicalism. To do so, we focused on the role Islamist groups play in shaping ordinary Muslims' attitudes toward terrorism. Our argument put forward two mechanisms.

Table 4. Factors leading Muslims to justify terrorism.

Variables	(1) All sample	(2) Group 1	(3) Group 2	(4) Group 3	(5) Group 1.1
Muslim	0.311*	0.257	−0.045	1.149***	0.674
	(0.176)	(0.435)	(0.291)	(0.349)	(0.616)
Religious practice	0.008	−0.017	0.027	0.205***	0.028
	(0.016)	(0.021)	(0.027)	(0.076)	(0.028)
Muslim * religious	0.028	0.059	0.084	−0.272***	−0.118
practice	(0.041)	(0.100)	(0.063)	(0.091)	(0.140)
Δ religious practice	−0.099**	−0.095*	−0.071	−0.492**	−0.029
	(0.043)	(0.057)	(0.067)	(0.209)	(0.082)
Muslim* Δ religious	−0.179	0.348	−0.237	0.143	1.431***
practice	(0.110)	(0.307)	(0.169)	(0.257)	(0.521)
N	31,268	15,972	11,909	4,489	8,321
R2	0.049	0.050	0.050	0.101	0.042
Muslim	0.382**	0.115	0.053	1.11***	0.509
	(0.171)	(0.424)	(0.282)	(0.342)	(0.598)
Religious practice	−0.003	−0.025	0.018	0.134*	0.026
	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.026)	(0.070)	(0.027)
Muslim * religious	0.007	0.085	0.060	−0.256***	−0.04
practice	(0.039)	(0.098)	(0.061)	(0.086)	(0.132)
N	31,268	15,972	11,909	4,489	8,321
R2	0.048	0.049	0.049	0.094	0.040
Muslim	0.434***	0.455**	0.318**	0.298*	0.239
	(0.092)	(0.221)	(0.127)	(0.174)	(0.350)
Δ religious practice	−0.092**	−0.096*	−0.057	−0.258	0.003
	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.064)	(0.193)	(0.080)
Muslim* Δ religious	−0.133	0.371	−0.164	−0.119	1.320***
practice	(0.104)	(0.300)	(0.162)	(0.238)	(0.499)
N	31,268	15,972	11,909	4,489	8,321
R2	0.049	0.049	0.049	0.099	0.041

Note. Standard errors in parentheses, country fixed effects, demographic controls, and attitudinal controls are included.
*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

The first one, the *direct influence mechanism*, argues that, by gaining audience and legitimacy among Muslims, extremist Islamist groups radicalize the opinions of ordinary believers. The second one, the *self-selection mechanism*, claims that people radicalized due to political or economic factors select themselves into Islamism due to the activism of extremist groups, and, as a result, increase their religious practice.

To bring new evidence to this debate, we analyzed the opinions of ordinary European Muslims in three groups of twenty-one countries—predominantly Muslim countries, countries with a long-established minority, and countries where Muslims form a minority group mainly coming from immigration backgrounds—drawing on the European Values Survey dataset collected in 2008.

Overall, our analysis highlights three results. First, we show that, in 2008, Muslims exhibited a higher likelihood of justifying terrorism than other religious groups. Yet, given they share this tendency with nonreligious and, to a lesser extent, with Orthodox people, we cannot confirm that such an attitude is specific to Muslims. The attitudinal proximity between Muslims and nonreligious people provides an argument for the proponents of a similarity between the profiles of atheist leftists and Muslim radicals.[80] Second, our analysis shows that this relationship does not follow the same pattern everywhere. In countries where Muslims are predominant, the likelihood of justifying political violence decreases with the importance respondents assign to religion in their

life, while it increases in places where Muslims are a minority. Interestingly, previous analyses of Muslim minorities in the United States found contradictory results.[81] This advocates for further studying the specific characteristics and experiences of European Muslim minorities. Our third and last result confirms this specificity. Although we found no evidence in support of a direct influence of extremist Islamist groups on ordinary believers, we observe that, in Western countries targeted by the phenomenon of home-grown terrorism, people who have increased their practice of Islam in 2008, compared to their childhood, are more likely to justify terrorism. So far, very few studies have focused on explaining what makes Islam an appealing ideology for radicals. Our analysis, while being limited by the size of our sample, paves new avenues for research in such a direction.

Taken together, such results suggest that the mechanisms through which believing in Islam and justifying political violence are linked are diverse in nature. In 2008, contrary to what media and political accounts claim, being a devout Muslim did not lead people to be more tolerant of political violence. In countries where Muslims are predominant this even leads them to reject it. In these countries, educated and unemployed believers who do not assign a great importance to religion were more likely to hold radical beliefs. Such beliefs were strongly associated with a feeling that Western countries follow an imperialist agenda through NATO. Hence, their political attitudes have more explanatory power than their religious beliefs. In contrast, when Muslims are a minority group, they justify more terrorism when they value the importance of religion in their daily life. However, we found that, at the time when the data were collected, the importance assigned to religion was not associated with high levels of religious practice, suggesting that religion—rather than devoutness—was the cement of the Muslim collective identity. Especially in Western European countries, although the level of religious practice was not associated with a greater tendency to justify political violence, an increase of religious practice was. Hence, such results tend to confirm that contemporary Islamic radicals were neither raised in a strict observance of religious precepts, nor specifically exposed to Islamic messages. Yet, as they felt political violence was justified due to their political and economic experiences, they somehow (re)activated their Muslim identity.

Notes

1. We use the operational definition of terrorism used in the Global Terrorism Database as being "the threatened or actual use of illegal force by non-state actors in order to attain a political, economic, religious or social goal, through fear, coercion and intimidation." Cf. National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), *GTD: Global Terrorism Database. Codebook: Variables and Inclusion Criteria* (College Park: University of Maryland, 2017), 9.
2. Gary LaFree and Laura Dugan, "Global Terrorism and the Deadliest Groups since 2001," in *Peace and Conflict 2016*, ed. David Backer, Ravinder Bhavnani and Paul Huth (Oxon: Routlegde, 2016), 69–70.
3. Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2016* (New York: Institute for Economics and Peace 2016), 52.
4. Data are provided by Europol in its an annual report entitled "EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report" published since 2007.
5. Gary M. Jackson, *Predicting Malicious Behavior: Tools and Techniques for Ensuring Global Security*. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley 2012), 235.

6. Suspects involved in the foiled plots reported by the United Kingdom and Denmark in 2006 were born or raised in an EU Member State. See Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* (The Hague: European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation 2007), 3.

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13. McCauley and Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization," 417.

14. The question of the boundaries of the European continent is often disputed. In our research, we take as European every country included in the European Values Survey project.

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59. Table 2 displays descriptive data of our sample that is consistent with this fact.

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64. These factors are extensively presented in the literature review section.

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69. Fair and Shepherd, "Who Supports Terrorism?"; Bueno De Mesquita, "Correlates of Public Support for Terrorism in the Muslim World."

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78. We did not report them in the table.
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80. Kristopher K. Robison, Edward M. Crenshaw, and Craig J. Jenkins, "Ideologies of Violence: The Social Origins of Islamist and Leftist Transnational Terrorism," *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2006): 2009–2026; Roy, *Le Djihad et La Mort*.
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