

# CRITERION A

The investigative study has been thoroughly researched using a wide range of sources, and excellent supporting evidence has been produced. The rationale is clearly stated and well developed.

For my Internal Assessment, I chose to investigate the connection between the Koran and extremism to satisfy my desire to solve the debate between proponents and opponents of Islamic extremism; namely, if the Koran encourages (or even requires) people to wage jihad on those who do not follow Islam. Since 9/11, the number of religion-based attacks have only grown, from the Boston Marathon Bombings, to the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand, to the current Austria terror attacks. Even more pressingly, the current political scene in many countries is bringing religion and politics dangerously close. For example, the current US president has polarized religious conflicts with many of his policies, including instituting an immigration ban on Muslim-majority countries, being reluctant to denounce anti-Semitism, and formally recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The US isn't the only culprit in this, however: many Muslim-dominant countries have made policies that coincide strongly with *sharia*, or Islamic law. These include discrimination against women and LGBTQ+ communities, beheading or amputation for minor crimes, destruction of ancient, non-Muslim monuments, and child marriages/polygamy.

To better focus my investigation, I have determined a research question that I would like to answer:

To what extent does animosity between Islam and other religions stem from the Koran?

The main source I consulted was, of course, the Koran. As we are dealing with how the Koran interprets violence in the name of Islam, I had to find the best version of the Koran to use. My criteria for choosing a version of Koran were as follows:

- In modern English; I realize that older translations offer more information about the Koran to the reader, but as I am a high school student without much experience with archaic English, I wanted to find a source that was easily digestible to a modern reader.
- Not biased towards any one sect. As sects in Islam largely exist due to their different interpretations of the Koran, I was looking for a book without much commentary from the author about the text.
- Lastly, from a somewhat reputable Islamic scholar. This requires no explanation.

Using these three criteria, I settled on Muhammad Asad's *The Message of the Koran*. This translation is known as the most logical translation of the Koran, with as little opinionated commentary as possible. This is probably due to a result of the author being Westernized; Asad was a Viennese Jew who carried the ideas of 1920s Enlightenment with him to the Middle East. As a result, this translation of the Koran has, in my opinion, the most logical interpretation of the text.

As for finding reliable coverage of Islam-inspired terror attacks, I had to find a news source that was the most in the center. In this case, it wasn't that hard -- I looked at bias charts from AllSides and Ad Fontes Media, and I found that the Associated Press consistently ranked in the center. Fortunately, it was founded in 1846, so there's plenty of coverage!

## CRITERION B

The scope and plan for the study are appropriate and focused. The research question is clearly focused and closely related to the scope and plan.

Once again, my research question is:

To what extent does animosity between Islam and other religion stem from the Koran?

Obviously, this question is very broad and hard to answer. To narrow the scope of the question, I will use evidence from 1950 to the present and focus on the United States and the Middle East in terms of terror attacks and *sharia*-based policies, respectively.

The structure of my investigation will be as follows:

- Introduce verses of the Koran that either condemn/support Islam-based violence, and determine whether it's one, the other, or a mixture of both
- Explore Islamic terrorist groups' ideology like ISIL or Al-Qaeda and how Muslim governments either condemned or supported them
- Explore terror attacks in the United States, what statements the terrorist groups who perpetrated the attack made, and how Muslims responded.
- Conclude if the Koran itself is a precursor to Islamic extremism.

## CRITERION C

Identify and outline significant findings from the investigation through observation, interview and/or participation. Explain the relationship between research findings and the research question. Discuss the rationale and plan of study in relation to the significant findings.

I have prepared a selection of Ayahs, or verses, in the Koran, that discuss Islam's stance towards other religions. For efficiency's sake, I compiled this list using other articles discussing Islam's relationship with other religions and fed them into Asad's translation. The first mention of People of the Book that I found, or in Asad's terms, "followers of earlier revelation", is 2:105; "Neither those from among the followers of earlier revelation who are bent on denying the truth, nor those who ascribe divinity to other beings beside God, would like to see any good ever bestowed upon you from on high by your Sustainer; but God singles out for His grace whom He wills - for God is limitless in His great bounty.". According to Asad, this passage alludes to "the unwillingness of the Jews and the Christians to admit that revelation could have been bestowed on any community but their own.". The Q'uran's logical argument towards people who do not have faith in Islam illustrates the benevolent toleration -- at least so far -- that Islam has towards other faiths. This moderately tolerant tone repeats throughout the book; in 2:109, the Q'uran states, "Out of their selfish envy, many among the followers of earlier revelation would like to bring you back to denying the truth after you have attained to faith - [even] after the truth has become clear unto them. None the less, forgive and forbear, until God shall make manifest His will: behold, God has the power to will anything." This passage asserts that people who do not believe in Islam do not have a logical reason for their argument, but it also says that they should be forgiven for these supposed sins -- since God will pass his own judgment on them anyway. From these two quotes, we can see that Islam has a passive-aggressive relationship with other People of the Book -- Jews and Christians. But what about other religions? Most critics of Islam cite the Sword Verse (9:5) to show that Islam is not a peaceful religion; "but when the forbidden 4 months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem." However, the Q'uran offers a conditional reprieve in the next verse: "If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge.". With these two quotes from the Q'uran, we can see that Islam's attitude towards People of the Book also somewhat extends to other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism; killing of infidels, non-People of the Book, is encouraged, but so is peacefully converting those said infidels to Islam.

## **CRITERION D**

My initial response to this question was that most animosity between Islam and other religions stemmed from the Koran, since most of my knowledge of Islam stemmed from my Hindu parents. Due to Hindu-Muslim conflict in India in the 80s -- and today -- my parents grew up in an environment that was, on the whole, hostile to Muslims, considering them foreign and dangerous. As a result, their outlook on Muslims as a population is generally negative, which caused my view of Islam to become negative as well.

What I didn't realize back then was that a small minority of people in Islam have caused Islam on the whole to be viewed as a violent, extremist religion, even though the book that this religion was derived from says otherwise. However, it is also important to consider that the Q'uran does provide that small violent minority with a way to interpret their verses as a means to commit violence against the "infidels", ones who are not People of the Book (Jews, Christians, and Muslims). The Q'uran's tone towards these infidels may not be explicitly violent, but it causes readers to consider these people as inferior to Muslim -- as less human. This dehumanization helps propagate violence against this group -- in fact, Hitler did the same thing with Jews in the 1930s, with his Night of Broken Glass (*Kristallnacht*) and the subsequent policies against Jews that made them second-class citizens and therefore expendable, such as the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, which prevented Jews "and the 'politically unreliable' from civil service" (Holocaust Encyclopedia).

An inconsistency in my research that I made was that I only considered the Q'uran. I think a much better source would be to interview practitioners of the Muslim faith, but with the quarantine and pandemic the way it is and the fact that I do not personally know any followers of Islam, this would be impossible.

The findings I found out from this study mesh well with the core principle of World Religions -- that religions, no matter how major they are, change over time based on geographic and social factors. They are a product of the people, not some divine cosmic force that remains unchanged over time. Islam changed from a peace-loving religion to a slightly aggressive religion not because of the Q'uran, but because of what some followers of Islam experienced in their lives. These experiences snowballed into the rationale for Islamic terrorist groups' attacks on places like France this year and the World Trade Center in 2001.