Who supports Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq? Assessing the role of religion- and grievance-based explanations

Eylem Kanol

View supplementary material ↗

Published online: 25 Jan 2024.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

Article views: 564

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Who supports Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq? Assessing the role of religion- and grievance-based explanations

Eylem Kanol

WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin, Germany

ABSTRACT

This article explores public support for Jihadi foreign fighters, an area largely unexplored in existing literature, despite its relevance to counterterrorism. The study draws on two key theoretical perspectives: grievance-based explanations that propose support for militancy arises from perceived societal injustices, and religion-based explanations that look at the role of religious factors in fostering support for religious militancy. Using original survey data from 5145 Muslim respondents across seven countries (Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey), the study empirically tests these perspectives. The findings underscore religious fundamentalism as a potent influencer of support for foreign fighters. By providing large-scale survey data and a comprehensive comparative analysis of dominant theories, this research enhances our understanding of the dynamics that underpin public support for Jihadi foreign fighters.

Introduction

This article investigates the reasons behind favorable attitudes held by ordinary Muslims towards Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. While extensive research has been conducted on the motivations of foreign fighters traveling to conflict zones, focusing on various micro-, meso-, and macro-level push and pull factors, comparatively less attention has been given to understanding the conditions that contribute to approval of foreign fighters among Muslim populations (e.g. Benmelech & Klor, 2020; Coolsaet, 2016; Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017; Holman, 2015; Reynolds & Hafez, 2019). The significance of comprehending popular support for terrorist organizations has been recognized by both terrorism scholars and counterterrorism experts (see Tessler & Robbins, 2007, pp. 305–306). Accordingly, militant and terrorist organizations rely on (both active and passive) support from society that provides concealment, necessary resources, and

CONTACT Eylem Kanol ✉ eylem.kanol@wzb.eu 🖅 WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Reichpietschufer 50, D-10785 Berlin, Germany

financial backing, enabling them to evade government forces and sustain their operations (Goodwin, 2006; Shafiq & Sinno, 2010, p. 147). Therefore, it is important to unravel the factors associated with public support for militant organizations.

Except for a study conducted among adolescents in Norway, there is currently a lack of evidence specifically addressing support for Jihadi foreign fighters (Pedersen et al., 2018). Nonetheless, a considerable amount of literature exists that examines support for religiously motivated violence, terrorism, or militant religious groups. This line of research exploring the determinants of support for religiously motivated violence and militant religious groups has shed light on several influential factors. So far, the majority of these accounts have been based on grievance-based explanations which investigate the role of societal factors and their association with attitudes towards and involvement in religious militant groups (see, e.g. Agnew, 2010; McCauley, 2012; Roy, 2006; Silke, 2008; Tessler & Robbins, 2007; Victoroff et al., 2012). According to this perspective, individuals support militant groups because they experience discrimination, or face political injustices.

Comparably fewer contributions have explored if and to what extent religion and religion-related variables can predict support for religious militancy (see e.g. Ciftci et al., 2017; Fair et al., 2017a; Ginges et al., 2009). The role of religion as a motivator of support for religious violence is a highly contentious issue. Yet, despite the level of controversy surrounding this debate, empirical evidence is scarce, as this issue has not been adequately addressed by scholars who study militant or terrorist organizations and their constituencies (for a discussion see Dawson, 2017). Moreover, empirical comparisons of the two overarching theoretical perspectives, i.e. the grievance- and religion-based explanations, have received even less attention.

In this study, a comprehensive review of the existing literature on support for militant Islamist groups and Jihadi foreign fighters is conducted. Theoretical and empirical approaches pertaining to grievance- and religion-based explanations are identified, examined, and discussed in detail. Building on this theoretical framework, a set of hypotheses is derived and tested using original survey data on 5145 Muslim respondents from 7 countries (Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey) while controlling for a range of relevant covariates.

The present study makes several contributions to the literature on public support for religious militancy. Firstly, it addresses a significant research gap by providing novel observational data on public support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Second, research on terrorism is over-reliant on secondary sources and more specifically on inquiries based on data gathered from the media, or other published documents (Schuurman, 2020). Many empirical studies that make use of primary data are mostly limited to analyses of profiles of perpetrators or are case studies of single terrorist cells or groups (e.g. Amble & Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2014; Holman, 2015). Although these studies provide useful in-depth insights and are an important source of information for deriving hypotheses, they are nevertheless hampered by a number of shortcomings (Rink & Sharma, 2018, p. 1230; Safer-Lichtenstein et al., 2017): First, they select their sample on the dependent variable, e.g. terror offenders, and hence lack a suitable counter-factual; second, they are not suited to systematically testing competing hypotheses; and third they usually include a large portion of missing data due to the nature of their sources, which may bias their findings.

Moreover, most of the observational studies that use larger samples either focus on contexts where Muslims constitute the majority or the minority. To overcome these limitations, this study provides cross-sectional large-N survey evidence to test and compare theoretical concepts using samples from both contexts. Finally, previous accounts, which addressed religion-based explanations, have often focused on the role of individual dimensions of religiosity such as religious beliefs, practices, or knowledge, but their effects have rarely been analyzed simultaneously. Religion and religiosity are multidimensional phenomena, and the present study makes use of multiple survey items specifically designed to measure these different dimensions.

Theoretical framework

Both in academia and in the public sphere, scholars, journalists, and public officials are divided on whether and to what extent perpetrators and supporters of religious militancy are in fact driven by religious motivations.

Some authors emphasize the role of religion and contend that violence or conflict can be explained by religious factors (e.g. Atran, 2006; Avalos, 2005; Harris, 2004; Lewis, 1990). According to this line of thinking, religions are a major source of belief systems, norms, and interpretive frameworks, all of which serve as tools in assisting individuals in making sense of events, interactions, and experiences encountered in daily life (Fox, 2002, pp. 11–30). Anything that affects how people see and perceive the world is also likely to influence how they act and behave in it. Similarly, Bruce (2000, p. 103) doubts that religion can be without any consequences and questions how something that takes up so much of so many people's wealth and time, and that dominates so many cultures would not matter beyond merely serving as a repertoire of convenient justifications for any sort of behavior. However, as Dawson (2017, p. 32) correctly identifies, 'there is a marked reticence to treat religion as an independent variable in assessments of the causality of terrorism.' Therefore, investigations into the role of religious factors are limited.

For other authors, religious beliefs have limited relevance as an explanatory factor for extremism (Acevedo, 2016; Cavanaugh, 2009; Gunning & Jackson, 2011; Roy, 2006). According to these authors, religion only serves as a means of legitimizing and justifying violence, although the root causes lie elsewhere. These grievance-based explanations focus on social circumstances that may drive individuals to support political or religiously motivated violence. Existing literature examining the determinants of support for militant groups or endorsement of religiously motivated attacks in Pakistan, Kenya, and the Middle East indicates that socioeconomic marginalization, a commonly cited grievance-based explanation, does not occupy a central role (see e.g. Rink & Sharma, 2018; Shapiro & Christine Fair, 2010; Tessler & Robbins, 2007). Considering these findings, I do not focus on economic grievances but include them in the analyses as control variables. Another strand of literature utilizes concepts from social movement theories to investigate Jihadi mobilization, encompassing biographical availability, social networks, and bloc recruitment (Jasko et al., 2017; Kanol, 2022; Krueger & Malečková, 2003; Reynolds & Hafez, 2019). While these concepts are arguably more relevant to behavioral measures, such as direct recruitment, this study concentrates on the preceding phase, namely attitudinal support for mobilization. In the following, I discuss in detail the existing literature

and the available relevant empirical evidence on both religion- and grievance-based explanations.

Religion-based explanations

To further our understanding of a possible relation between religion and support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, I disentangle different dimensions of religiosity and discuss how they may be related to support for foreign fighters.

Religious observance

Drawing from literature on religion and conflict, I distinguish between personal and collective religiosity (Adamczyk & LaFree, 2019; Ginges et al., 2009; Hoffman & Nugent, 2015). Personal religiosity focuses on individual religious importance, encompassing personal dimensions like prayer (Wald, 1987). Theoretical assumptions by scholars such as Harris (2004, p. 110) suggest that simply being a devout Muslim is a sufficient condition for supporting violence in the name of Islam. However, at the individual level, many empirical studies reveal little or no correlation between personal religious aspects and support for political violence. For example, Ginges et al. (2009) found that regular prayer was not linked to support for martyrdom. Other observational studies from the Middle East (Ciftci et al., 2017), Southeast Asia (Jo, 2012) and among the Muslim diaspora in the West (Acevedo & Chaudhary, 2015) feature similar findings. Based on this set of studies, I derive the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1a: Praying does not increase support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

On the other hand, collective religiosity, also termed the collective-commitment hypothesis, highlights community involvement and prioritizes religious attendance (Ginges et al., 2009; Hoffman & Nugent, 2015). Collective religiosity may impact support for religious militancy through several mechanisms. Engaging in collective rituals can foster in-group bonding, potentially increasing support for political violence (Hoffman & Nugent, 2015). Membership in religious organizations might also predispose individuals towards political activism due to the skills and insights gained in congregational engagement (Cavendish 2000). Similarly, proponents of social movement theories conceptualize religious institutions as mobilizing structures and argue that these may facilitate and encourage the emergence of collective action (McAdam, 1982). Mosques can provide space for activists to meet, communicate, and spread their ideas in sermons or seminars (Wiktorowicz, 2004). Militant groups may also specifically target mosques to recruit new members (Wiktorowicz, 2005). In line with these observations, the study by Ginges et al. (2009) show that attending religious services was a strong predictor of support for violent attacks. Similarly, Adamczyk and LaFree (2019) found an association between formal worship and support for violent political action across 34 African nations. Recent investigations into the backgrounds of European foreign fighters have also revealed a common trend of attending Salafi mosques or engaging with radical preachers (Kanol, 2022; Reynolds & Hafez, 2019). These findings lead to the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1b: Mosque attendance increases support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Religious fundamentalism

A second line of inquiry into the role of religiosity focuses on religious fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalists possess certain characteristics that distinguish them from their mainstream counterparts. First, religious fundamentalism is defined as a defensive reaction to modernization and secularization (Emerson & Hartman, 2006, p. 134). Fundamentalists believe that secularism forces religion to the margins of society and brings about moral decay (Gregg, 2014, p. 8). A second characteristic associated with fundamentalism is strict literalism and the belief in the inerrancy of scripture. Accordingly, there is only one true set of religious teachings and this 'truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past' (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992, p. 118). Other characteristics of religious fundamentalists are their adherence to a dualistic worldview and to Messianism (Emerson & Hartman, 2006, p. 134). Juergensmeyer (2017) highlights how fundamentalists employ religious images of divine struggles and how they draw on metaphysical conflicts between good and evil to frame contemporary issues. Fundamentalists believe that participation in the final battle against evil forces is necessary for the good to triumph and for the eternal salvation of the self-proclaimed apocalyptic warriors (Gregg, 2014, pp. 11–13). These forces of evil include among others those who are accused of corrupting the religion. Following the takfiri doctrine, Islamist groups are known to be hostile towards out-groups, and some have used violence as a means of purifying the world of those whom they consider to be enemies of Islam (Wood, 2015). Scholars have long pointed to a robust association between religious fundamentalism and prejudice (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). Fostering hostile attitudes and prejudiced views towards out-groups does not necessarily mean that individuals would also show sympathy for radical Islamist groups. However, as Koopmans argues 'the combination of a fundamentalist belief in the absolute truth and righteousness of the own cause, hostility and mistrust towards other groups, […] may motivate a minority to act upon such beliefs' (Koopmans, 2015, p. 54).

So far, empirical research has not extensively explored this possible link between embracing religious fundamentalist beliefs and supporting Jihadi violence. Most of the available literature has only addressed some of the dimensions of religious fundamentalism. For instance, a number of studies examined the role of scriptural literalism and Quranic authoritativeness: Observational evidence from the Middle East suggests that religious outlooks that adhere to politicized and strict interpretation of religious texts can predict positive attitudes toward al-Qaeda (Ciftci et al., 2017; for similar findings from Bangladesh see Fair et al., 2017b). Using the Arab Barometer's survey data on Muslims, Piazza (2021) found that individuals who support the implementation of *Shari'a* law, endorse clerical rule, and view Islam as incompatible with democratic principles are significantly more inclined to back ISIS (for similar findings from Pakistan see Fair et al., 2018). However, one comparative survey study documented some contrary findings (Beller & Kröger, 2018).[1] Despite these contrary findings, the majority of the theoretical and empirical approaches suggest a strong association between religious fundamentalism and support for religious violence. Based on the theoretical discussion and the available empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is derived:

> Hypothesis 2: Religious fundamentalism increases support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Religious knowledge

A third line of religion-based explanations concerns the extent of knowledge adherents possess about their religion and whether this can impact support for radical groups. Drawing on his ethnographic work among members of al-Muhajiroun in the UK, Wiktorowicz (2005, p. 127) observes that religious seekers who are drawn to the movement are 'not in a position to objectively evaluate whether al-Muhajiroun represents an accurate understanding of Islam.' In fact, most would be considered religious novices who were dealing with their faith intensively for the first time. These observations are echoed by Roy (2017) who argues that the majority of individuals involved in terrorism in France did not grow up in a religious environment and had no particular religious education prior to their radicalization. Juergensmeyer (2018) interviewed supporters of Isis in Iraq and found that many had a limited theological grasp of the movement's principles. He concluded that a significant number were more 'opportunists' than genuine believers. Silke, similarly asserted that 'at the early stages those that become involved in terrorism have a very limited understanding of the ideology – they are not scholars' (cited in Weaver, 2015). Reports suggest that some foreign fighters purchased books like 'The Koran for Dummies' and 'Islam for Dummies' before departing, hinting at their minimal prior understanding of the religion (Dawson, 2021). In 2016, further evidence emerged in line with this argument, as a leaked cache of documents from Isis's border authority disclosed details of 22,000 recruits. Some of these documents also included an insight into the recruit's level of knowledge of Sharia and the Hadith. An analysis of these documents revealed that 70% of recruits were listed as having 'basic' knowledge of Islamic law, whereas only 5% were categorized as having an advanced one (Batrawy et al., 2016).

Although these accounts illustrate that perpetrators of Islamic terrorism and foreign fighters are, on average, not very knowledgeable about Islam, they are nevertheless limited due to their sampling bias and their lack of counterfactuals. By sampling only radicalized individuals, they fail to consider the average level of religious knowledge among the general population. In contrast, an experimental study involving Christians, Jews, and Muslims showed that well-informed Muslim respondents were more likely to justify the use of violence against those they deemed evildoers in God's eyes (Koopmans et al., 2021). Notably, only one research has directly examined the relationship between religious knowledge and support for Islamist groups (Fair et al., 2017a). The authors tested the religious knowledge hypothesis using an additive index consisting of five questions on Islamic rules, practices, and verses from the Quran among Pakistani respondents. They find that individuals who are more knowledgeable about Islam are significantly less likely to support Islamist groups. Except for this study, there is no sound empirical evidence that documents whether the proposed relationship applies to support for Islamist militancy in different contexts. The theoretical, qualitative, and empirical accounts discussed here suggest that religious knowledgeable individuals may be less susceptible to radicalization. Based on this discussion:

> Hypothesis 3: Religious knowledge decreases support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Grievance-based explanations

In the following, I discuss theoretical and empirical approaches regarding two salient grievance-based explanations, experiences of discrimination and political grievances.

Religious discrimination

One line of research on grievance-based explanations identifies experienced or perceived discrimination as a possible catalyst for mobilization and engagement in religious extremism (e.g. McCauley, 2012; Silke, 2008; Victoroff et al., 2012). On the individual level, we know from the social psychology literature that being a target of discrimination or prejudice can be a frustrating experience and can cause victims to feel anger and resentment toward the perpetrating group (Dion, 2002; Swim et al., 1998). Some victims of prejudice and discriminatory behavior may in turn 'inflict on others what they themselves receive' (Allport, 1954, p. 153). On the macro level, scholars in conflict studies contend that the systematic and selective limitation of minority members' access to economic opportunities and political positions by a dominant group increases their likelihood of grievance formation (Gurr & Moore, 1997). These grievances can then facilitate collective action, which may in some cases turn violent. In line with this argument, experiences of discrimination have been highlighted as a major root cause of ethno-nationalist terrorist campaigns (Bjørgo, 2005). Fox (2002, pp. 11–17) argues that religious frameworks or belief systems are central to people's identities, as they define how adherents make sense of their world and guide their actions and behavior. Accordingly, 'if a religious framework is challenged in any way, for example by religious discrimination, this challenge constitutes a challenge to the inner souls of that religion's adherents' (Fox, 2000, p. 1). Such a challenge is likely to incite a conflictive response from these adherents.

Large parts of the literature on discrimination deal with experiences of Muslims living in the West. Silke (2008) points to a set of disadvantages that Muslim communities face and argues that these evoke feelings of being unfairly marginalized. These feelings are identified as a potential risk factor for radicalization. Wiktorowicz (2005, pp. 87–92) describes how experiences of religious discrimination prompted some young Muslims to question their identity and sense of belonging in the British society. Apart from these qualitative accounts, some quantitative studies have also tested the relationship between discrimination and support for terrorism, albeit with mixed evidence. McCauley (2012) reports that anti-Muslim discrimination does not predict popular support for suicide bombings or for al-Qaeda among Muslim Americans. Similarly, a study conducted among Norwegian Muslim adolescents found no significant effect of exposure to harassment based on immigrant and/or religious background on support for fighters in Syria (Pedersen et al., 2018). However, both studies relied on only one item to measure discrimination. Victoroff et al. (2012), on the other hand, use multiple items to operationalize discrimination and a larger sample of US-American and Western European Muslims. They do find evidence that perceived discrimination is indeed significantly associated with support for suicide bombing among the Muslim diaspora. In sum, the available empirical evidence consisting of qualitative studies and quantitative data, mostly supports the theoretical assumptions discussed here, and leads to the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 4a: Religious discrimination increases support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Political grievances

Another line of research on grievance-based explanations relates political grievances to support for religious extremism. According to this approach, political violence 'is primarily

motivated by a desire to resist what are perceived to be political acts of domination and oppression' (Sidanius et al., 2016, p. 345). A prominent example in this tradition is the study by Pape (2005), where he makes the argument that militant groups resort to suicide terrorism in order to coerce foreign occupying powers into making territorial concessions. Accordingly, suicide bombing campaigns are not driven by religious or socioeconomic factors but are mainly a response to military invasions. Silke (2008, p. 114) contends that perceived injustices are important drivers of involvement in militant activism: 'Within the context of Jihadi terrorism, the perception of a strong shared identity and link with the wider Muslim world-the umma-has serious consequences when the individual perceives that some Muslim communities are being treated brutally or unfairly.' Injustices, whether experienced or perceived, can spawn feelings of humiliation and despair among the general population, which can in turn be easily used to mobilize widespread support for reactive violence (Fattah & Fierke, 2009; Stern, 2003). Western foreign policies, particularly US foreign policy, and their consequences have long been identified as a major source of resentment in the Muslim world and are thought to generate sympathy for Islamist groups (Nugent et al., 2018). Terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda are believed to be motivated by an antagonism towards the United States, an antagonism that is fueled by its global dominance, its continuing support for Israel in the ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict, and its military interventions into Muslim countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan (Silke, 2008; Walt, 2001; Zhirkov et al., 2014).

Survey research among Muslims has shown that geopolitical grievances and perceived injustices can predict favorable attitudes towards political violence (e.g. Mostafa & Al-Hamdi, 2007; Zhirkov et al., 2014). Tessler and Robbins (2007), for instance, find that respondents from Jordan and Algeria who strongly disapprove of US foreign policy are more likely to express approval of terrorism against US targets. Findings by Jo (2012) suggest that Pakistani respondents who oppose the US presence in Afghanistan and believe the USA favors Israel too much are significantly more likely to sympathize with bin Laden. Based on this discussion, I test the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 5: Political grievances increases support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Data and variables

The primary data used for the present study is drawn from an original survey conducted in 2016 in seven countries across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. The survey study was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board I of the McGill University (#475-0417). Research companies with local expertise were commissioned for the administration of the surveys. Trained enumerators conducted face-to-face interviews within selected primary sampling units in Cyprus, Israel, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine, and Turkey, whereas a nationwide onomastic phone-book sample was used for computer-assisted-telephone-interviews in Germany.[2] Respondents had to be at least 18 years old to participate in the survey. A number of quotas were used to ensure that different sociodemographic, ethnic, and denominational groups were represented adequately in the sample. As a result, both genders and diverse age groups were equally represented in the survey. Respondents were classified as 'Muslim' solely based on their self-declared

religious affiliation, thereby avoiding any assumptions about the religious beliefs or affiliations of individuals from particular countries. Individuals who did not indicate a religious affiliation were omitted from the following analysis. Further detailed information on the survey design, sampling procedures and methods can be found in the online appendix. The sample consists of 5145 Muslim respondents: 673 from Cyprus, 516 from Germany, 343 from Israel, 597 from Kenya, 699 from Lebanon, 811 from the Palestinian territories, and 1506 from Turkey. More detailed information on the sampling strategy, survey methods, and data can be found in the Online Appendix 2.

Dependent variable

To measure support for foreign fighters, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the following statement: 'Muslims who go to Syria and Iraq to fight to establish an Islamic State are heroes.' The survey was fielded during the height of the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, when many individuals who identify as Muslims journeyed to join forces with the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq or Al-Qaida affiliates to establish an Islamic state. This context accentuates that the dependent variable captures the glorification of and thus support for these individuals. Possible answer categories were 'completely agree;' 'agree;' 'neither agree nor disagree;' 'disagree;' and 'completely disagree' (see also Online Appendix Table S1). The answer categories were re-coded as binary, where (1) indicates that a respondent 'completely agreed' or 'agreed' with the statement, and (0) indicates that a respondent 'neither agreed nor disagreed,' 'disagreed,' or 'completely disagreed' with the statement. A binary variable was used because the primary focus is to differentiate between supporters and non-supporters and a binary outcome also simplifies the interpretation of the findings (see e.g. Acevedo & Chaudhary, 2015; Berger, 2014; Piazza, 2021).

Overall, 1192 respondents (26%) expressed support for foreign fighters (see also Online Appendix 1 Table S2). There were notable variations among survey countries regarding support for foreign fighters. For instance, respondents from Kenya (233 respondents, 39%), Palestine (310 respondents, 38%), and Cyprus (192 respondents, 36%) exhibited notably higher levels of support compared to respondents from Germany (47 respondents, 9%), Israel (36 respondents, 10%), and Lebanon (85 respondents, 14%). On the other hand, respondents from Turkey (289 respondents, 23%) displayed support levels closer to the overall average across the entire sample. The findings from the survey indicate that while still in the minority, a significant proportion of participants expressed support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Independent variables

Descriptive statistics for the independent and control variables are shown in Online Appendix 1 Table S3. To test if the independent variables measure distinct phenomena, I calculate correlation coefficients. The results indicate that the independent variables are weakly correlated, but there is a moderate positive correlation between praying and religious fundamentalism (.41) and between praying and religious fundamentalism (.41).[3]

Religious observance

Two survey items were used to measure respondent's religious observance. Respondents were asked how often they prayed and how often they visited a religious service in a mosque, with answer categories: 'several times a day,' 'daily,' 'weekly,' 'rarely/on special occasions,' and 'never.' The majority of the respondents stated that they pray at least once a day (63%), while almost half of the respondents stated that they visit their mosque at least once a week (43%).

Religious fundamentalism

The following seven well-established survey items were used to measure religious fundamentalism (Koopmans, 2015; Moaddel & Karabenick, 2018): 'Islam is superior to other religions,' 'What we are seeing in the world today is the final battle between Islam and the forces of evil,' 'There is only one correct interpretation of the Quran to which every Muslim should stick,' 'Those who do not strictly follow the rules prescribed in the Quran can no longer be called Muslims,' 'There is only one perfectly true religion,' 'It is more important to be a good person than to have the right religion,' 'Religious leaders should play a larger role in politics.' The answer categories consisted of a five-point Likert scale ranging from (5), 'completely agree,' to (1), 'completely disagree.' The seven items were averaged (M = 3.2, SD = 0.8) and standardized to create an index of religious fundamentalism (Cronbach's α of 0.72).

Religious knowledge

To measure religious knowledge, the number of correct answers to three multiple choice quiz questions were used (the right answer is emphasized): 'What was the name of the son that Abraham offered as a sacrifice to God?' with answer categories '*Ismael*,', 'Yakub,' 'Younes,' 'Youssef'; 'What was the name of the uncle who raised Mohammad?' with answer categories '*Abu Talib*,' 'Ali,' 'Hussein,' 'Abdullah'; 'Where did the Mi'raj take place?' with answer categories: 'Mecca,' 'Medina,' '*Al Quds/Jerusalem*,' 'Damascus.' Using these questions an additive religious knowledge index was constructed, ranging from 0, respondent answered all questions wrong to 3, respondent answered all questions right. Respondents scored on average 2.1 points (SD = 0.9) on this scale.

Religious discrimination

Religious discrimination was operationalized using eight indicators. First, respondents were asked how often they experienced hostility, discrimination, or unfair treatment in the previous 12 months in the respective survey country because of their religion, with answer categories ranging from 'never,' to 'all the time.' Then, they were asked if they had experienced any hostility, discrimination, or unfair treatment in the respective survey country in a number of contexts (e.g. 'at work' or 'looking for housing,' etc.) with answer categories 'yes' and 'no.' Finally, respondents were asked how often they think that Muslims in their country of residence experienced hostility, discrimination, or unfair treatment, with answer categories ranging from 'never,' to 'all the time.' To harmonize the findings across the answer categories, the items were scaled to a range from 0 to 1. Respondents scored on average 0.48 points (SD = 0.3) on this scale. For the regression

analyses, the eight items were averaged to generate an index of religious discrimination (Cronbach's α of 0.79).

Political grievances

To measure political grievances respondents were asked to what degree the following four problems upset them: 'The suffering of Palestinians,' 'the presence of U.S. troops in the Middle East,' 'the persecution of Muslims around the world,' and 'Western influence in Muslim countries.' The answer categories range from (4), 'very strongly,' to (1), 'not at all.' The four items were averaged (M = 2.3, SD = 0.6) and standardized to generate an index of political grievances (Cronbach's α of 0.7).

Control variables

In the regression models, I control for a range of demographic and socioeconomic variables including age, survey countries, religious denomination, level of education, employment status, gender, marital status, and income (detailed information on and summary statistics of these variables can be found in the Online Appendix 1).

Results

For this study, logit regression models were estimated to examine the relationship between the independent variables and support for foreign fighters. Logit regression coefficients, however, can be challenging to interpret directly in terms of their impact on the outcome. Therefore, average marginal effects (AMEs) of the independent variables were estimated. AMEs provide a more straightforward interpretation of the effect of each independent variable on the probability of the outcome. They represent the expected change in the probability of the outcome associated with a one-unit increase in each independent variable. In the first step of the analysis, I calculate the AMEs of the independent variables using the pooled sample. I also conduct a series of complementary analyses with alternative model specifications which ensure the robustness of the findings (Online Appendix 1). In the subsequent step, I divide the sample into two distinct groups: respondents belonging to Muslim-majority (Cyprus, Lebanon, Turkey, and Palestine) and Muslim-minority contexts (Germany, Israel, and Kenya). By estimating the AMEs using these sub-samples, I investigate whether the relationships hold true in different contexts.[4]

The first set of hypotheses, Hypotheses 1a and 1b, explores the influence of religious observance on expressing favorable opinions towards foreign fighters. The results from the regression analyses indicate that, at the aggregate level, praying has a small yet significant negative impact on support for foreign fighters (Figure 1). Specifically, an increase of one standard deviation in prayer is associated with a decrease in the probability of supporting foreign fighters by approximately 3 percentage points. This finding holds statistical significance at the 0.001 level. These results align with Hypothesis 1a, which posited that praying would not contribute to an increase in support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. It is worth noting, however, that the analysis in Figure 2 reveals that this relationship is specifically observed among Muslim respondents who constitute the majority within the sample.
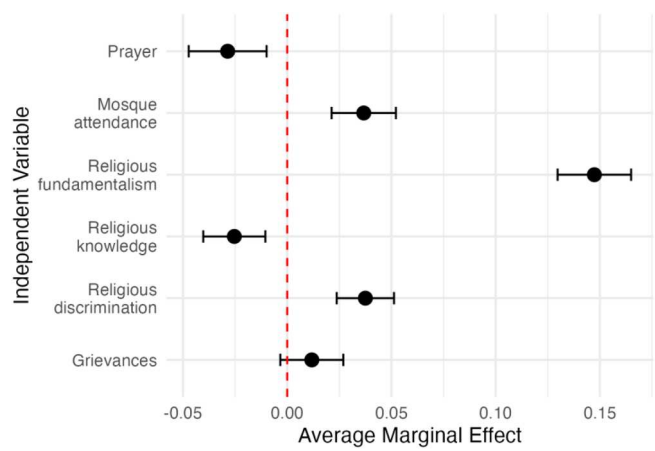
Figure 1. Average marginal effect of independent variables on support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq (pooled sample). Note: The figure shows the AME of independent variables on support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. AMEs are estimated from logistic regression models controlling for age, conversion status, level of education, employment status, income, gender, marital status, survey country, and denomination. Markers are point estimates, lines are 95% confidence intervals. Full regression models in Online Appendix.

Mosque attendance, on the other hand, demonstrates a significant and positive association with support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. An increase of one standard deviation in mosque attendance corresponds to an approximate 4 percentage point increase in the probability of supporting foreign fighters ($p < 0.001$). Based on these results, Hypothesis 1b is confirmed, which predicted a positive association between worshiping
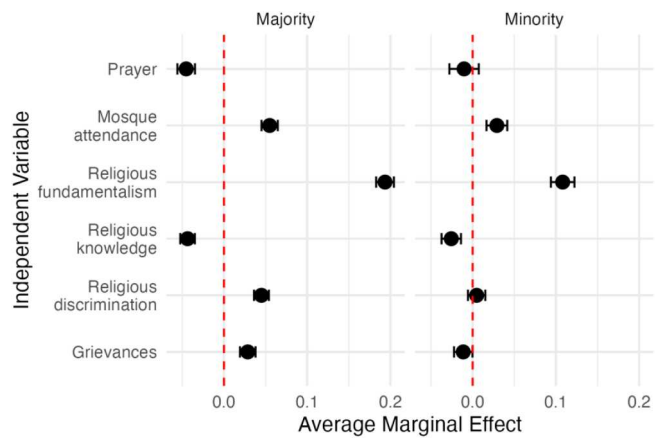

Figure 2. Average marginal effect of independent variables on support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq depending on minority status. Note: The figure shows AMEs of independent variables on support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. AMEs are estimated from logistic regression models controlling for age, conversion status, level of education, employment status, income, gender, marital status, and denomination. Markers are point estimates, lines are 95% confidence intervals. Full regression models in Online Appendix.

and support for foreign fighters. This finding also appears to be robust, as it generalizes to respondents belonging to both minority and majority status groups (Figure 2).

Hypothesis 2 posits that religious fundamentalism contributes to favorable attitudes towards foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. At the aggregate level, the religious fundamentalism index exhibits a significant correlation with support for foreign fighters. Notably, an increase of one standard deviation in the fundamentalism index is associated with a remarkable increase in the probability of support by approximately 15 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). This effect size underscores the considerable impact of certain religious ideas, particularly those associated with a literal interpretation of scripture, belief in the inerrancy of scripture, and a reactionary approach to secularization. Evidently, these elements can foster favorable attitudes towards individuals who have traveled to Syria and Iraq with the aim of establishing a caliphate. Notably, this relationship exhibits robustness, extending across both majority and minority group respondents, with the effect being particularly pronounced among majority group members (almost 20 percentage points). Consequently, Hypothesis 2 is substantiated.

Hypothesis 3 posits that individuals with higher scores on the religious knowledge index are less likely to support Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. The regression analysis results support this hypothesis, revealing that an increase of one standard deviation in religious knowledge is associated with a notable decrease in the probability of supporting foreign fighters by approximately 3 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). As illustrated in Figure 2, this relationship remains consistent and applicable to respondents from both the majority and minority status groups.

Hypothesis 4 states that individuals who experienced religious discrimination are more likely to express support for Jihadi foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Results on the aggregate level suggest a relatively strong and significant relationship (Figure 1): An increase of one standard deviation in the discrimination index is associated with an increase in the probability of support by approximately 4 percentage points ($p < 0.001$). This finding is in line with Hypothesis 4. Interestingly, the observed effect in the pooled sample appears to be primarily driven by respondents from the majority status group rather than the minority status group, as depicted in Figure 2.[5]

Hypothesis 5 suggests that political grievances may play a role in shaping favorable attitudes towards foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. The results indicate that at the aggregate level, political grievances have a negligible impact on support for foreign fighters. The relationship between political grievances and support is not statistically significant at the conventional threshold of 0.05. These findings provide evidence that, on a broader scale, political grievances may not serve as the primary driver of favorable attitudes towards foreign fighters. Among respondents from the majority group, the results do indicate a statistically significant, albeit very small, positive impact of grievances on support for foreign fighters. On the other hand, the small negative effect observed among respondents from the minority group is not statistically significant. Given the lack of a significant relationship at the aggregate level, Hypothesis 5 is cautiously rejected.

Discussion

This article investigated determinants of public support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq using a sample of 5145 Muslim respondents from seven countries. A review of the

existing literature suggested two prominent theoretical approaches that shed light on the phenomenon, emphasizing either religion or grievance-based explanations. To explore the role of religious and grievance-based variables in explaining support for foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, a series of regression analyses were conducted. Results from the regression analyses show that on the aggregate level, religion-based variables are more relevant for explaining support for Jihadi foreign fighters. More specifically, religious fundamentalism is the strongest predictor of favorable attitudes towards foreign fighters, and this association is robust across the survey countries.

Other variables linked to religiosity, including prayer frequency, mosque attendance, and depth of religious knowledge, also exhibited significant correlations. However, their impact on the study outcome was comparatively much smaller in magnitude. Particularly, the findings regarding prayer align with existing literature on public opinion trends surrounding Islamist extremism (Acevedo & Chaudhary, 2015; Ciftci et al., 2017; Ginges et al., 2009). Moreover, the results complement previous studies emphasizing that it's the *communal* or *collective* aspect of religiosity, rather than *individual* or *personal* dimensions, which tends to be associated with support for Islamist violence and extremism (Adamczyk & LaFree, 2019; Ginges et al., 2009).

Of significant note, the findings of this study provide new, robust evidence that reinforces a body of literature emphasizing the relationship between religious fundamentalist attitudes and religious extremism (Ciftci et al., 2017; Fair et al., 2017b). As observed by many scholars, militant Jihadi organizations advocate a religious fundamentalist perspective, emphasizing a strict and literal interpretation of Islam with an aim to reestablish the caliphate based on the principles of Sharia (Ciftci et al., 2017; Sidanius et al., 2016; Turner, 2014). Respondents with aligned views appear to show the strongest support and admiration for those who journeyed to Syria and Iraq to join these groups. These results also resonate with recent studies underscoring the strong association between a rigid, non-democratic, and absolutist interpretation of Islam and Sharia laws with support for religious violence (Fair et al., 2018; Piazza, 2021, 2022).

These findings carry important implications for counter-extremism and deradicalization efforts. To effectively stem support for foreign fighters, a deeper understanding of the determinants of religious fundamentalist beliefs is crucial. Future research should employ longitudinal cross-national research designs to further explore and isolate the causal drivers of religious fundamentalism. To curb popular support for foreign fighters, it is imperative to address the mobilization and recruitment efforts facilitated by radical preachers, Salafist networks, and proponents of fundamentalist interpretations of religion.

Existing literature suggests that a deeper understanding of religious texts might reduce support for Islamist militancy (Fair et al., 2017a; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Similarly, this study corroborated that religious knowledge, to a lesser degree, may also act as a deterrent for support towards Jihadi foreign fighters. However, due to budgetary constraints and the extensive subject scope of the survey, there were limitations in the number of questions available for operationalizing certain concepts, including religious knowledge. In the future, more refined research designs could delve deeper into investigating the precise impacts of historical and theological knowledge on religious extremism.

Regarding grievance-based explanations, while religious discrimination does hold relevance at the aggregate level, international political grievances do not. A potential reason might be ISIS's portrayal of practicing a 'true Islam.' Individuals facing discrimination and

moral constraints might have been attracted to this portrayal, believing they could practice their faith more authentically than in their home country Another plausible reason why international grievances were not significantly linked to support for Jihadi foreign fighters in the regression models may be due to ceiling effects. Unlike the discrimination index, grievance question responses were heavily skewed towards strong agreement.[6] The widespread nature of these attitudes might have limited the variability in the data, thereby affecting its predictive power in the regression models.

But is important to highlight that this study underscores the significance of country context in shaping the impact of discrimination and political strains on attitudes, thereby emphasizing the challenge of generalizing this relationship. The impact of discrimination appears to be predominantly influenced by respondents in Muslim-majority countries. This observation poses a challenge to theoretical and qualitative approaches that assert a direct link between experiences of discrimination and radicalization within the Western context (Silke, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Contrary to these theories, this study found that discrimination doesn't significantly affect the attitudes of minority Muslims, including those in Germany. This adds an individual-level perspective to recent macro-level studies, such as the work by Mishali-Ram and Fox (2022), which showed that discrimination didn't significantly increase the number of foreign fighters leaving non-Muslim-majority countries for Syria and Iraq.

Existing studies have indicated that political grievances might influence support for certain forms of religiously motivated violence, but not others. For example, Berger's (2014) study found that grievances related to contentious US foreign policies shaped approval for attacks on US military targets, but not civilians. Another investigation noted that perceived US domination of the Arab world strongly predicted support for Hamas and Hezbollah, but not for Al-Qaida, which was more closely linked with perceived cultural clashes between Arab and US cultures (Sidanius et al., 2016). The absence of significant impact of political grievances on the aggregate level in this study may be attributed to the phrasing of the dependent variable, which specifically focused on fighting for an Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Posing the survey question to reflect the perception of foreign fighting as resistance against Western influences in Syria and Iraq might have prompted different responses.

Certainly, this study has a number of caveats and limitations that need to be addressed. This study is based on observational evidence and is limited in terms of establishing causality. For instance, respondents who express support for foreign fighters, might have adopted religious fundamentalist beliefs after they became supporters. Future research should further gauge the causal links between the predictors examined here and the endorsement of foreign fighters by employing experimental or longitudinal designs in multiple country settings. Furthermore, the survey included only a single question addressing support for foreign fighters. Incorporating multiple items would have facilitated a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration into the multifaceted dimensions of support for Jihadi foreign fighters. In this comparative study, grievances highlighting international issues were prioritized to ensure consistency across survey countries. While local grievances, which can vary widely by context, were not the focus, their role in specific contexts could be investigated further. It is also important to note that expressing support doesn't necessarily imply that respondents are prepared for recruitment. Factors influencing actual mobilization may differ from those affecting potential

mobilization. An innovative approach could compare attitudinal and behavioral determinants within a unified empirical framework. There is also the issue of potential bias due to nonresponse or social desirability associated with survey research on sensitive topics. Incorporating list experiments in surveys can help address these types of limitations. Finally, it is important to note that sample is not fully representative of all Muslim denominations and subgroups. While it includes diverse countries from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, where Muslims make up both majority and minority populations, it lacks representation from countries with the largest Muslim populations, such as Indonesia and Pakistan, as well as other significant regions with Muslim-majority populations like North Africa and the Caucasus. Further research is necessary to assess the generalizability of these findings to other regions and contexts.

Notes

1. However, in another study, the same authors find a very strong impact of religious fundamentalism on honor violence (Beller et al., 2021).
2. To oversample Muslims in Kenya, the survey study was focused on four cities with diverse religious populations: Nairobi and Mombasa, due to their sizable Muslim communities, Malindi, a primarily Muslim coastal town and the fourth city is 'Nakuru', an inland town predominantly inhabited by Christians. In Germany, the name-based (onomastic) sampling procedure was used to identify and oversample Muslim respondents.
3. I also estimate the variance in inflation factor (VIF) for each regressor in the regression model to detect multicollinearity. The VIFs for the predictors are all well below the threshold value of 10.
4. Country-level models were not estimated due to insufficient sample size for Israel and the models not converging.
5. The discrimination index distinguishes between individual experiences of religious discrimination and broader perceptions of discrimination against Muslims in their home country. Despite their conceptual differences, both forms of discrimination have a significant effect, as detailed in Online Appendix 1.
6. Ceiling effects occur when data points are heavily clustered at the high end of a scale, limiting variability and potentially the variable's predictive capacity in regression models. Unlike the discrimination index, where only 41% of respondents scored equal to or higher than the mean score of 0.48, the grievance index showed 76% of respondents scoring at or above its mean of 2.25.

Notes on contributor

Eylem kanol, b. 1985, MA in Sociology (Free University of Berlin, 2014), MA in Racism and Ethnicity Studies (University of Leeds, 2010); PhD in Sociology (Humboldt University of Berlin, 2020); research fellow at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center (2015—). Main research interests: social movements, political violence, extremism.

References

Acevedo, G. A. (2016). Islamic fatalism and the clash of civilizations: An appraisal of a contentious and dubious theory. *Social Forces*, *86*(4), 1711–1752. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0033

Acevedo, G. A., & Chaudhary, A. R. (2015). Religion, cultural clash, and Muslim American attitudes about politically motivated violence. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *54*(2), 242–260. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12185

Adamczyk, A., & LaFree, G. (2019). Religion and support for political violence among Christians and Muslims in Africa. *Sociological Perspectives*, *62*(6), 948–979. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121419866813

Agnew, R. (2010). A general strain theory of terrorism. *Theoretical Criminology*, *14*(2), 131–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480609350163

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Basic Books.

Altemeyer, B., & Hunsberger, B. (1992). Authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, quest, and prejudice. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *2*(2), 113–133. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327582ijpr0202_5

Amble, J. C., & Meleagrou-Hitchens, A. (2014). Jihadist radicalization in East Africa: Two case studies. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, *37*(6), 523–540. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.893406

Atran, S. (2006). The moral logic and growth of suicide terrorism. *Washington Quarterly*, *29*(2), 127–147. https://doi.org/10.1162/wash.2006.29.2.127

Avalos, H. (2005). *Fighting words: The origins of religious violence*. Promotheus Books.

Batrawy, A., Dodds, P., & Hinnant, L. (2016). Leaked Isis documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith. *The Independent* (16 August). Retrieved on April 4, 2018 from https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-documents-leak-recruits-islam-sharia-religion-faith-syria-iraq-a7193086.html

Beller, J., & Kröger, C. (2018). Religiosity, religious fundamentalism, and perceived threat as predictors of Muslim support for extremist violence. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *10*(4), 345–355. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000138

Beller, J., Kröger, C., & Hosser, D. (2021). Disentangling honor-based violence and religion: The differential influence of individual and social religious practices and fundamentalism on support for honor killings in a cross-national sample of Muslims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *36*(19–20), 9770–9789. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519869071

Benmelech, E., & Klor, E. F. (2020). What explains the flow of foreign fighters to ISIS? *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *32*(7), 1458–1481. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1482214

Berger, L. (2014). Foreign policies or culture: What shapes Muslim public opinion on political violence against the United States? *Journal of Peace Research*, *51*(6), 782–796. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343314527983

Bjørgo, T. (2005). Conclusions. In T. Bjorgo (Ed.), *Root causes of terrorism: Myths, reality and ways forward* (pp. 256–264). Routledge.

Bruce, S. (2000). *Fundamentalism*. Polity Press.

Cavanaugh, W. T. (2009). *The myth of religious violence: Secular ideology and the roots of modern conflict*. Oxford University Press.

Cavendish, J. C. (2000). Church-based community activism: A comparison of black and white Catholic congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *39*(3), 64–77.

Ciftci, S., O'Donnell, B. J., & Tanner, A. (2017). Who favors Al-Qaeda? Anti-Americanism, religious outlooks, and favorable attitudes toward terrorist organizations. *Political Research Quarterly*, *70*(3), 480–494. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912917702498

Coolsaet, R. (2016). *Facing the fourth foreign fighters wave. What drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic state? Insights from the Belgian case*. Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations.

Dawson, L. (2021). Bringing religiosity back in: Critical reflection on the explanation of western homegrown religious terrorism (part II). *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *15*(2), 2–22.

Dawson, L. L. (2017). Discounting religion in the explanation of homegrown terrorism: A critique. In J. R. Lewis (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to religion and terrorism* (pp. 32–45). Cambridge University Press.

Dawson, L. L., & Amarasingam, A. (2017). Talking to foreign fighters: Insights into the motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *40*(3), 191–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1274216

Dion, K. L. (2002). The social psychology of perceived prejudice and discrimination. *Canadian Psychology*, *43*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086899

Emerson, M. O., & Hartman, D. (2006). The rise of religious fundamentalism. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *32*(1), 127–144. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.32.061604.123141

Fair, C. C., Goldstein, J. S., & Hamza, A. (2017a). Can knowledge of Islam explain lack of support for terrorism? Evidence from Pakistan. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *40*(4), 339–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1197692

Fair, C. C., Hamza, A., & Heller, R. (2017b). Who supports suicide terrorism in Bangladesh? What the data Say. *Politics and Religion*, *10*(3), 622–661. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048317000347

Fair, C. C., Littman, R., & Nugent, E. R. (2018). Conceptions of Shari`a and support for militancy and democratic values: Evidence from Pakistan. *Political Science Research and Methods*, *6*(3), 1–20.

Fattah, K., & Fierke, K. M. (2009). A clash of emotions: The politics of humiliation and political violence in the Middle East. *European Journal of International Relations*, *15*(1), 67–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108100053

Fox, J. (2000). The effects of religious discrimination on ethno-religious protest and rebellion. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, *20*(2), 1–14.

Fox, J. (2002). *Ethnoreligious conflict in the late twentieth century: A general theory*. Lexington Books.

Ginges, J., Hansen, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2009). Religion and support for suicide attacks. *Psychological Science*, *20*(2), 224–230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02270.x

Goodwin, J. (2006). What do we really know about (suicide) terrorism? *Sociological Forum*, *21*(2), 315–330. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11206-006-9017-3

Gregg, H. S. (2014). Three theories of religious activism and violence: Social movements, fundamentalists, and apocalyptic warriors. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *28*(2), 1–23.

Gunning, J., & Jackson, R. (2011). What's so 'religious' about 'religious terrorism'? *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, *4*(3), 369–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2011.623405

Gurr, T. R., & Moore, W. H. (1997). Ethnopolitical rebellion: A cross-sectional analysis of the 1980s with risk assessments for the 1990s. *American Journal of Political Science*, *41*(4), 1079–1103. https://doi.org/10.2307/2960482

Harris, S. (2004). *The end of faith. Religion, terror, and the future of reason*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Hoffman, M. T., & Nugent, E. R. (2015). Communal religious practice and support for armed parties. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *61*(4), 869–902.

Holman, T. (2015). Belgian and French foreign fighters in Iraq 2003–2005: A comparative case study. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *38*(8), 603–621. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1038105

Hunsberger, B., & Jackson, L. M. (2005). Religion, meaning, and prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, *61*(4), 807–826. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2005.00433.x

Jasko, K., LaFree, G., & Kruglanski, A. (2017). Quest for significance and violent extremism: The case of domestic radicalization. *Political Psychology*, *38*(5), 815–831. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12376

Jo, J. I. (2012). Who sympathizes with Osama Bin Laden? Revisiting the hearts and minds of Pakistani and Indonesian muslim people. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *24*(4), 495–507. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edr047

Juergensmeyer, M. (2017). Does religion cause terrorism? In J. R. Lewis (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to religion and terrorism* (pp. 11–22). Cambridge University Press.

Juergensmeyer, M. (2018). Thinking sociologically about religion and violence: The case of ISIS. *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review*, *79*(1), 20–34. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx055

Kanol, E. (2022). Contexts of radicalization of jihadi foreign fighters from Europe. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *16*(3), 45–62.

Kanol, E., Koopmans, R., & Stolle, D. (2021). Religious fundamentalism and radicalization survey. Retrieved on January 6, 2024 from https://data.gesis.org/sharing/#!Detail/10.78022104

Koopmans, R. (2015). Religious fundamentalism and hostility against out-groups: A comparison of Muslims and Christians in Western Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *41*(1), 33–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.935307

Koopmans, R., Kanol, E., & Stolle, D. (2021). Scriptural legitimation and the mobilisation of support for religious violence: Experimental evidence across three religions and seven countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *47*(7), 1498–1516. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1822158

Krueger, A. B., & Malečková, J. (2003). Education, poverty and terrorism: Is there a causal connection? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *17*(4), 119–144. https://doi.org/10.1257/089533003772034925

Lewis, B. (1990). The roots of muslim rage. *The Atlantic*, *266*(3), 47–60.

McAdam, D. (1982). *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930-1970*. The University of Chicago Press.

McCauley, C. (2012). Testing theories of radicalization in polls of U.S. Muslims. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *12*(1), 296–311. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-2415.2011.01261.x

Mishali-Ram, M., & Fox, J. (2022). Is governmental and societal discrimination against Muslim minorities behind foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq? *Journal of Peace Research*, *59*(2), 122–135.

Moaddel, M., & Karabenick, S. A. (2018). Religious fundamentalism in eight Muslim-majority countries: Reconceptualization and assessment. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *57*(4), 676–706. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12549

Mostafa, M. M., & Al-Hamdi, M. T. (2007). Political Islam, clash of civilizations, U.S. Dominance and Arab support of attacks on America: A test of a hierarchical model. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, *30*(8), 723–736. https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701435779

Nugent, E., Masoud, T., & Jamal, A. A. (2018). Arab responses to western hegemony: Experimental evidence from Egypt. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *62*(2), 254–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002716648738

Pape, R. A. (2005). *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*. Randon House.

Pedersen, W., Vestel, V., & Bakken, A. (2018). At risk for radicalization and jihadism? A population-based study of Norwegian adolescents. *Cooperation and Conflict*, *53*(1), 61–83. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836717716721

Piazza, J. (2021). 'Nondemocratic Islamists' and support for ISIS in the Arab world. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, *13*(2), 95–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2019.1707257

Piazza, J. (2022). Intolerance of non-Muslim political rights and engagement in political violence: A study of public opinion in 11 Arab countries. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2022.2061570

Reynolds, S. C., & Hafez, M. M. (2019). Social network analysis of German foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *31*(4), 661–686. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1272456

Rink, A., & Sharma, K. (2018). The determinants of religious radicalization: Evidence from Kenya. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *62*(6), 1229–1261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002716678986

Roy, O. (2006). Terrorism and deculturation. In L. Richardson (Ed.), *The roots of terrorism* (pp. 159–170). Routledge.

Roy, O. (2017). *Jihad and death: The global appeal of Islamic state*. Oxford University Press.

Safer-Lichtenstein, A., LaFree, G., & Loughran, T. (2017). Studying terrorism empirically: What we know about what we don't know. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *33*(3), 273–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986217697873

Schuurman, B. (2020). Research on terrorism, 2007–2016: A review of data, methods, and authorship. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *32*(5), 1011–1026.

Shafiq, M. N., & Sinno, A. H. (2010). Education, income, and support for suicide bombings: Evidence from six Muslim countries. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *54*(1), 146–178. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002709351411

Shapiro, J. N., & Christine Fair, C. (2010). Understanding support for Islamist militancy in Pakistan. *International Security*, *34*(3), 79–118. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.3.79

Sidanius, J., Kteily, N., Levin, S., Pratto, F., & Obaidi, M. (2016). Support for asymmetric violence among Arab populations: The clash of cultures, social identity, or counterdominance? *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *19*(3), 343–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430215577224

Silke, A. (2008). Holy warriors: Exploring the psychological processes of jihadi radicalization. *European Journal of Criminology*, *5*(1), 99–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370807084226

Stern, J. (2003). *Terror in the name of god: Why religious militants kill*. HarperCollins.

Swim, J. K., Cohen, L. L., & Hyers, L. L. (1998). Experiencing everyday prejudice and discrimination. In J. K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice* (pp. 37–60). Academic Press.

Tessler, M., & Robbins, M. D. H. (2007). What leads some ordinary Arab men and women to approve of terrorist acts against the United States? *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *51*(2), 305–328. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706298135

Turner, J. A. (2014). *Religious ideology and the roots of the global Jihad. Salafi Jihadism and international order*. Palgrave-Macmillan.

Victoroff, J., Adelman, J. R., & Matthews, M. (2012). Psychological factors associated with support for suicide bombing in the Muslim diaspora. *Political Psychology*, *33*(6), 791–809. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00913.x

Wald, K. D. (1987). *Religion and politics in the United States*. St. Martin's Press.

Walt, S. M. (2001). Beyond Bin Laden: Reshaping U.S. foreign policy. *International Security*, *26*(3), 56–78. https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753399718

Weaver, M. (2015). Cameron's anti-terror strategy is 'Barking up wrong tree', says expert. *The Guardian*. Retrieved on October 20, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/20/david-cameron-anti-terror-strategy-wrong-expert-says

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2004). Introduction: Islamic activism and social movement theory. In Q. Wiktrowicz (Ed.), *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach* (pp. 1–33). Indiana University Press.

Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam rising. Muslim extremism in the West*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Wood, G. (2015). What Isis really wants. *The Atlantic*, *315*(2), 78–94.

Zhirkov, K., Verkuyten, M., & Weesie, J. (2014). Perceptions of world politics and support for terrorism among Muslims: Evidence from Muslim countries and Western Europe. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *31*(5), 481–501. https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894213510121