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Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Support for Violent Extremism: Evidence from Five Large-N Surveys

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Abstract

Both academic and public policy accounts often draw a link between perceived anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent Islamist extremism. However, robust empirical evidence is lacking. Such a link would be particularly worrying, given that anti-Muslim discrimination has been on the rise in the West. Are Muslims living in the West who experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination more likely to support violent Islamist extremism? This article tests this association with the help of five large-N nationally representative surveys of Muslims living in the US and the UK. In addition, the article also tests whether Muslims' support for violent extremism increases when the experience or perception of anti-Muslim discrimination combines with (1) young age and (2) low identification with the majority population. The results are inconclusive, indicating that the link between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent Islamist extremism is likely more complicated.

Introduction

Public accounts often make a link between anti-Muslim discrimination and Islamist violent extremism. For example, an article in the Guardian describes at length how the brothers Amer, Abdullah, and Jaffar Deghayes from Brighton (UK) were “mercilessly targeted” with anti-Muslim abuse and how this was one of the factors behind their subsequent journey to Syria, where they joined an al-Qaida affiliated group in 2013/14 (Townsend, 2016).

Policy-makers make the link too. In its counter-terrorism strategy, the UK government pledges to address the root causes of terrorism by tackling discrimination (Home Office, 2018) and the UK Counter-Extremism Strategy talks about far right's anti-Muslim activities as leading to “reciprocal radicalization” (Home Office, 2016, p. 37). The Canadian counter-radicalization strategy identifies perceived personal discrimination as one of the factors important to the radicalization process

(Government of Canada, 2018, p. 9). The Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism lists combating discrimination as one of its responses to counter radicalization and terrorism (Council of the EU, 2014, p. 6).

A number of qualitative studies argues that national counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policies and practices discriminate Muslims, which can even lead some of them to adopt radical beliefs or actions (e.g., Abbas & Awan, 2015; L. Blackwood et al., 2016; Lindekilde, 2012). Other qualitative studies point to the radicalization effect of anti-Muslim verbal and physical attacks (e.g., Abbas, 2020; Atnashev, 2016; Feldman, 2012).

If anti-Muslim discrimination plays a role in the radicalization process of Muslims living in the West, we should be doubly concerned. The reason is that Islamist violent extremism remains the most deadly form of extremism in most Western countries with sizeable Muslim minorities (Bjørge & Ravndal, 2019) and, at the same time, these countries report high and rising levels of anti-Muslim discrimination (Henley, 2017; Kishi, 2017; Torre, 2019; Zine, 2019).

Despite its potential significance, there are only few academic studies on the link between individually perceived anti-Muslim discrimination and violent extremism that would use quantitative methods (Bhui et al., 2014; Frounfelker et al., 2019; Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Victoroff et al., 2012) and most of them rely on surveys with small and convenient samples. Their results are mixed. While some find indication that there is a correlation between experienced discrimination and support for violent extremism (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Victoroff et al., 2012), others conclude that there is no relationship (Bhui et al., 2014; Frounfelker et al., 2019).

This article sets out to test the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and violent extremism by analyzing five large-N surveys of Muslims living in the US and the UK. These surveys represent

the best publicly accessible data on the personal level to date because of their large samples and robust sampling techniques.

The reason for testing the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on support for violent extremism and not the actual engagement in violent extremism is mainly practical. No major survey of Muslim minorities collects information on actual engagement in violent extremism. The incident level would be extremely low and the risk of social desirability bias extremely high. Although the gap between cognitive radicalization and behavioral radicalization is large (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2014, 2017; Neumann, 2013), supporting violence for political, religious or ideological goals is now a standard part of governments' definition of radicalization and thought to, under certain circumstances, potentially lead to behavioral radicalization. In addition, there is some evidence that public support for violence increases the risk of such violence occurring (Ali et al., 2011; Krueger & Maleckova, 2009; Linke et al., 2015).

Discrimination and Support for Violent Extremism

Discrimination, in its broadest sense, can be defined as an “unequal treatment of individuals or groups based upon characteristics that bear no actual relevance to the situation in hand” (Koomen & van der Pligt, 2016, p. 24). Anti-Muslim discrimination can thus be understood as an unequal treatment of individuals or groups based up their perceived “Muslim-ness”. In this article, anti-Muslim discrimination is interchangeable with Islamophobia, which can be also defined as anti-Muslim racism (Elahi & Khan, 2017).

Discrimination is a multifaceted and complex concept, which is difficult to measure empirically. It can be political (institutional) and/or societal (interpersonal) (Oskooii, 2016). It can take different forms in different contexts: verbal or physical, implicit or explicit, at work or in the street (Blank et

al., 2004). Discrimination can also have different intensity and individuals can be differently predisposed to discrimination related stress on account of their different personalities (Leger et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is challenging to distinguish between perceived (subjective) and real (objective) discrimination (Quillian, 2006). Some people are quicker than others to attribute certain experiences to discrimination, while some tend to deny even objective discrimination. Finally, a distinction should be made between perceived personal discrimination and group discrimination. Research showed that minority members tend to perceive higher levels of discrimination against their group than against them personally (Taylor et al., 1990). At the same time, it is argued that perceived group discrimination rather than personal one is prone to politicization (Rafiqi & Thomsen, 2020) and forms a part of perceived group-based relative deprivation, which is linked to violent extremism (Obaidi et al., 2019). These various dimensions of discrimination need to be kept in mind when discussing the results and limitations of the studies investigated in the next section.

The term “violent extremism” proliferated globally after it was adopted by US counter-terrorism policy-makers in 2005 (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018). Similarly to the terms “radicalization”, “extremism” and “terrorism”, violent extremism is a contested concept. Its prevailing understanding corresponds to the definition provided by the Australian government: "Violent extremism is the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence" (Barker, 2015).

The theoretical link between anti-Muslim discrimination and violent extremism is largely based on research that focuses on responses to stress and grievances and identity management. Psychologists showed that discrimination leads to negative mental health outcomes such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression (Mackie et al., 2000; Major et al., 2002). It can also lead to anger and frustration (Mackie et al., 2000) as well as anti-social behavior and inter-personal violence (Estrada-Martínez et

al., 2012; Kang & Burton, 2014; Park et al., 2013). However, scholars have also demonstrated that discrimination might lead to positive pro-social behavior (Mattis et al., 2004; White-Johnson, 2012) and even counter-stereotypical behavior in an effort to escape the stigmatized identity and assimilate with the majority (Lamont & Mizrachi, 2013; Steele et al., 2002).

Scholars who theorize a positive relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and violent extremism point out that discrimination leads to feeling of injustice and humiliation, which can be a powerful grievance motivating people to take action in response to it (Frounfelker et al., 2019; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015). The collective action literature tells us that if grievance is perceived as affecting one's entire group (e.g., Muslims), it can stir up group-based emotions such as anger or contempt, which in turn make people more likely to participate in normative and non-normative action in defense of their group (van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Tausch et al., 2011). It needs to be highlighted that only a minority of those supporting the goals of the prospective group-based action would progress to actually taking such action and only a fraction of these would engage in a non-normative action (Klandermans, 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). According to some qualitative studies, those who suffer personal experiences of discrimination are more likely to progress all the way (Borum, 2011; Wiktorowicz, 2005).

Identity plays a crucial role in the process of mobilization to collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008). In order to support or take action for the sake of a group one needs first to feel as a member of that group. The strength of one's group identity is further reinforced by grievances through collective emotions and various group processes (Klandermans, 2015). According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979; Tajfel, 1978), the importance of group identity lies in the fact that it shapes our self-concept and fulfils one of the strongest human needs – to belong. Feeling belonging to a certain social group, according to the theory, results in ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation or even hostility, especially if members of the ingroup feel insecure, anxious or threatened (Hogg, 2016). In

a related research stream, recent scholarship stresses the role of significance loss and uncertainty as predictors of violent extremism (Hogg, 2014; Hogg et al., 2013; Kruglanski et al., 2014). Discrimination (social rejection by the majority) is one of the factors that can lead to feelings of personal insignificance and self-uncertainty (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012; Webber et al., 2018). To regain self-worth and ontological certainty, people tend to turn to more radical groups (Hogg et al., 2013).

Positive relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and radicalization to violent extremism was suggested in a number of theoretical and qualitative studies (Abbas & Siddique, 2012; Cesari, 2009; Wiktorowicz, 2005). Verification of these results in quantitative research proved less unambiguous. On the country and group level, scholars found positive association between discrimination of minorities and political violence (Choi & Piazza, 2016; Ghatak & Gold, 2017; Piazza, 2011, 2012). However, these studies usually do not focus specifically on Muslim minorities in the West. One exception is Fox et al. (2019) who, on the country level, found statistically significant correlation between Muslims' engagement in political violence and government-based religious discrimination. However, another recent study found no correlation between the level of grievances from religious discrimination perceived by religious minority groups in the world and conflict (Basedau et al., 2017).

When it comes to the individual level of analysis, there are only few studies focusing on the discrimination-radicalization nexus among Muslims living in the West and their results are mixed. On the one hand, Victoroff et al. (2012) found weak correlation between perceived discrimination and justification of suicide bombings among samples of American and European Muslims using Pew surveys from 2007 and 2006, respectively. In a small sample of Dutch Moroccans, Kamans et al. (2009) found that Moroccans who felt negatively stereotyped by the Dutch and held negative view about the Dutch were more likely to legitimize Muslim extremism. Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) found, in a small sample of Muslim Americans, that experiences of discrimination were linked to support

for fundamentalist group and radical interpretation of Quran via significance loss and that discrimination coupled with marginalization increased the effect. In a recent study, Mitts (2019) demonstrated that anti-Muslim hostility on a local level in four European states correlated with on-line radicalization. Based on these findings, I formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Muslims living in the West who experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination are more likely to support violent extremism.

On the other hand, Bhui et al. (2014) did not find association between perceived discrimination and sympathy towards violent protest and terrorism among a sample of Muslims of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin from East London and Bradford, UK. Similarly, Frounfelker et al. (2019) did not find correlation between experiences of religious discrimination and radical intentions among a sample of young Muslims in Belgium. Ungar et al. (2018) also concluded that perceived discrimination was not associated with pro-violence belief in a sample of young Somali Canadians. Finally, *anonymized* (2020) found that perceived personal anti-Muslim discrimination of “medium” intensity is associated with increased willingness to take action *against* Islamist extremism. This leads to the second hypothesis opposite to H1:

H2: Muslims living in the West who experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination are not more likely to support violent extremism than Muslims without such experience or perception.

In this article, I will test additional two hypotheses. Scholars consistently argue that young age is a risk factor in the radicalization process (Bakker, 2006; Haddad & Khashan, 2002; Klausen et al., 2016; Victoroff et al., 2012). Not only is rejection of and rebellion against authorities and the status-quo part of the youth development, young Muslims in the West also often face a major identity crisis (Heinke & Persson, 2016). Experience or perception of discrimination can exacerbate the crisis and

channel the rebellious energy towards violent extremism. Many studies mentioned above are actually limited to samples of young Muslims. The third hypothesis is:

H3: Young Muslims living in the West who experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination are more likely to support violent extremism.

Finally, policy-makers often assume that the lack of belonging to and identification with the host society is linked to radicalization (e.g., Cameron, 2015). There is no shortage of terrorism studies arguing that alienation from the majority society represents vulnerability to radicalization (e.g., L. M. Blackwood et al., 2012; Bonino, 2013; Post & Sheffer, 2007; Silber et al., 2007). Lack of belonging and identification with the majority can thus have a compounding effect on experiences of discrimination, since the ingroup-outgroup boundary will be much brighter than in the case of more integrated individuals. The latter would be less inclined to view their experience as a proof of systematic hostile threat from the outgroup. The study of Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) showed that integrated and assimilated Muslims did not experience as much loss of significance as a result of discrimination than those marginalized or separated Muslims. This leads to the last hypothesis:

H4: Muslims living in the West who experience or perceive anti-Muslim discrimination are more likely to support violent extremism the less they identify with or feel belonging to the majority population.

One limitation of the quantitative studies reviewed above is that they draw on samples that are far from being representative and often quite small. The exception is Victoroff et al. (2012) who used the PEW Muslim American 2007 survey featuring a robust sample. Another limitation lies in the use of different variables and measures. For example, “support for a fundamentalist group” in Lyons-Padilla et al. (2015) study did not explicitly mention violence and the operationalization of the “pro-violence belief” in Ungar et al. (2018) did not include political or ideological violence. While this article does

not address the problem of heterogeneous measures, its added value lies in testing the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent extremism with the use of the best available data featuring robust samples.

Study 1: Muslim American Survey 2011 and 2017

Data

The data in this study comes from two almost identical surveys organized by the Pew Research Center and conducted by the research firm Abt SRBI (which became Abt Associates in 2017) in 2011 and 2017. Both surveys had a complex sampling design that yielded a probability sample of Muslim Americans. In case of the 2011 survey, the sample had 1033 respondents (572 men and 461 women). In the 2017 survey, the sample had 1001 respondents (616 men and 385 women). More details on the sample characteristics and data collection methodology can be found in online reports published by the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Measures

Support for Violent Extremism. The dependent variable was measured by a single item, whose phrasing differed slightly between the two surveys. In the 2011 survey, the item read as follows: “Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?” To this question, 1% of respondents replied “often justified”, 7% “sometimes justified”, 5% “rarely justified”, 81% “never justified” and 6% did not know or refused to answer (treated as missing values

in the analysis). Following Victoroff et al. (2012), I created a dichotomous variable where 0 = violence against civilian targets can never be justified and 1 = this kind of violence can sometimes be justified.

In the 2017 survey, this item was rephrased as follows: “Some people think targeting and killing civilians can be justified in order to further a political, social or religious cause. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence can never be justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence can often be justified, sometimes be justified, rarely be justified, or never be justified?” To this question, 3% replied “often justified”, 4% “sometimes be justified”, 6% “rarely be justified”, 84% “never be justified” and 3% did not know or refused to answer. Again, the variable was coded as dichotomous with 0 = targeting and killing civilians can never be justified and 1 = this kind of violence can sometimes be justified.

Perceived Personal Discrimination. In both surveys, the respondents were asked whether they had some specific experiences in the past twelve months because they were a Muslim. These experiences included being: 1) acted towards with suspicion by other people, 2) called offensive names, 3) singled out by airport security, 4) singled out by other law enforcement officers, 5) physically threatened or attacked. The variable is measured as a simple additive index created by adding up values assigned to respondents’ answers to the individual experiences, where having such experience was coded as 1 and not having such experience as coded as 0, resulting in a scale from 0 to 5. In the 2011 survey, 62% of respondents had no such experience (55% in 2017), 18% had one (21% in 2017), 10% had two (14% in 2017), 6% had three (7% in 2017), 3% had four (3% in 2017) and 1% had all 5 experiences (1% in 2017).

Perceived Group Discrimination I. The variable was measured by coding the answers to the following survey question: “Are the American people generally friendly, neutral, or unfriendly toward Muslim Americans?” In the 2011 survey, 48% of respondents answered “friendly” (57% in 2017), 32%

“neutral” (29% in 2017) and 16% “unfriendly” (12% in 2017). The variable is dichotomous where 0 = friendly/neutral and 1 = unfriendly.

Perceived Group Discrimination II. In the 2017 survey, the respondents were asked if “in the United States, is there a lot of discrimination against Muslims?” Possible answers were: “Yes, there is a lot of discrimination” (76%) and “No, not a lot of discrimination” (21%). The variable is thus dichotomous where 0 = not a lot of discrimination and 1 = a lot of discrimination.

Disidentification. In the 2011 survey, I use a dichotomous variable measured by coding the answers to the question whether the respondents think of themselves as an American first / both an American and a Muslim equally (coded as 0; 29% and 19%, respectively) or as a Muslim first (coded as 1; 45%). In the 2017 survey, I also use a dichotomous variable measured by coding the answers to the question “How much would you say you have in common with most Americans?” Answers “a lot in common” (69%) and “some in common” (24%) were coded as 0 and answers “not much in common” (5%) and “nothing at all in common” (2%) were coded as 1.

Age. The respondents were categorized into four age categories: a) 18-29, b) 30-39, c) 40-54 and d) 55 and over. The variable was treated as continuous.

Sex and education were added as additional control variables, since they are thought to be relevant radicalization factors by some scholars (e.g., Gambetta & Hertog, 2018; Maes et al., 2014; Silke, 2008; Smith, 2018).

Method and Results

To analyze the data, I conducted multiple linear logistic regressions using the dependent, independent and control variables detailed above. Table 1 displays the results in three models for each survey. The first model does not include any interaction terms, the second model includes interaction effect of age

on perceived personal discrimination and the third model includes interaction effect of disidentification with the majority (Americans) on perceived personal discrimination.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The results show that support for violent extremism is positively and significantly associated with perceived personal discrimination, but only in 2011 survey. Perceived group discrimination does not show statistically significant relationship with support for violent extremism in any of the two surveys. Both interaction effects are not statistically significant as well (replacing perceived personal discrimination with perceived group discrimination produces the same result). Among the control variables, only education appears significantly related (inversely) to support for violent extremism.

Study 2: Policy Exchange Survey 2016

Data

The data in Study 2 comes from a survey of British Muslims conducted by the company ICM on behalf of the British think-tank Policy Exchange. The data was collected in face-to-face interviews in May and June 2016 and ICM used a random location, quota-based sampling approach, where the list of locations consisted of areas with Muslim population higher than 20%. Therefore, the sample is not fully representative (the respective areas cover about 51% of the British Muslim population). In the analysis, I used the weights supplied by ICM to approximate the British Muslim population with respect to age, gender, work status, region and whether born in Britain or not. The sample consists of 3040 individuals (54% male, 46% female), all over 18 years old, with the mean age group of that

between 35 to 39 years. More details on the sample characteristics and sampling methodology can be found in an online report (ICMUnlimited, 2016).

Measures

Support for Violent Extremism. The main dependent variable was measured as a simple additive index by adding up scores from the following survey question: “For each, to what extent do you sympathise with or condemn people who...?” For the purpose of this study, the options included in the calculation of the index were these three: 1) “...use violence in political protest”; 2) “...make threats of terrorist action as part of political protest”; 3) “...commit terrorist actions as a form of political protest.” The possible answers to each option were: a) “completely sympathise”, b) “sympathise to some extent”, c) “neither sympathise nor condemn”, d) “condemn to some extent” and e) “completely condemn”. The answers were scored from 0 to 5 (5 = completely sympathise), added up and rescaled to range from 0 to 1 (1 = completely sympathise). The final variable had the mean of .07 (SD= .15).

Perceived discrimination. The only item in the survey close to a measure of perceived anti-Muslim discrimination was the following survey question: “In this local area, how much of a problem would you say each of these is here, even if it doesn't affect you personally?” The variable is dichotomous and based on replies to the option “harassment on grounds of religion” where 0 = no problem at all/a slight problem (N=2829) and 1 = a big problem (N=178).

Non-Belonging. This variable is dichotomous where 0 = very/fairly strong belonging to Britain (N=2802) and 1 = not at all/not very strong belonging to Britain (N=215).

Age. The respondents were assigned to 13 age categories. The first category was 18-24 and then each category included a four-year range. The last category was 80 and over.

As in the previous study, sex and education were added as controls.

Method and Results

I conducted three multiple linear regressions, which are displayed in Table 2. The first model shows the prediction values of all independent variables and controls with respect to support for violent extremism. The second model includes the interaction effect of age and perceived discrimination. The third model includes the interaction effect of belonging and perceived discrimination.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The results show that perceived discrimination is positively related to support for violent extremism and the relationship is statistically significant (Model 1). The interactions between perceived discrimination and age (Model 2) and perceived discrimination and belonging to the UK (Model 3) do not reach statistical significance. Age and education are positively related to support for violent extremism but only at 90% confidence level.

Study 3: Tausch and Spears Survey 2010

Data

This study draws on data collected by Tausch and Spears (2016) and accessed from the UK Data Archive. Tausch and Spears, on behalf of the Cardiff University, commissioned the company Ipsos MORI to conduct a survey of British Muslims in 2010. The sampling method was similar to the one in Study 2 - a random location, quota-based sampling approach, where the list of locations consisted of areas with Muslim population higher than 10% (65% of Muslims living in Britain). The interviews were conducted face-to-face (CAPI) and yielded a sample of 670 respondents (57% male and 43%

female). Recommended weights were applied in the analysis to reflect the key demographics of the Muslim population in Britain.

Measures

Support for Violent Extremism. The main dependent variable was measured by scoring responses to the following item on the survey: “And to what extent do you support or oppose violence by organised Jihadist groups against CIVILIAN targets in Britain in order to remove British forces from Afghanistan?” The respondents could select from an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from “oppose completely” to “support completely”. The variable was scaled 0 to 1, where 0 is “completely oppose” and it has a mean .1 (SD= .23).

Perceived discrimination. The variable was measured by scoring responses to the following survey question: “In the last 5 years, have you personally experienced verbal insults or verbal abuse from non-Muslims in this country BECAUSE you are a Muslim?” Answers were scored in the following way: 0 = No, never; .25= Yes, once; .5 = Yes, a few times; .75 = Yes, quite often; 1 = Yes, very often. The mean of the variable is .15 (SD=. 26).

Disidentification. The variable was measured by scoring and adding up responses on a 7-point Likert scale to the following survey questions: 1) “Being British is an important part of who I am”; 2) “I am glad to be British”. It is scored 0 to 1, where 0 = most identified and 1 = the most disidentified with Britain. The mean is .32 (SD=.27). Unfortunately, the two questions were asked only those respondents who held the British citizenship, reducing the number of observations $n=417$. For this reason, the variable is not included in the first model of the regression analysis below.

Age. The variable is continuous with the mean of 35 (SD=14).

As in the previous studies, sex and education were included as controls in the analysis.

Method and Results

A multiple regression was conducted predicting the main dependent variable, *Support for Violent Extremism*. The results are displayed in Table 3. Perceived discrimination is not associated with support for violent extremism (Model 1). This does not change even if we measure perceived discrimination as a categorical variable (where 1 = quite/very often experienced verbal abuse and 0 = all other answers). The survey also included a number of questions that could serve as alternative measure of support for violent extremism. These questions asked about respondents' support for Jihadi attacks on British military targets in Afghanistan and on civilian targets in Afghanistan; support for Jihadi violence aimed at getting British military out of Muslim countries; support for British Muslims fighting British military in Afghanistan; justification of London 2005 bombing; understanding for why some young British Muslims might have wanted to carry out suicide operations in Britain. Replacing the dependent variable with any one of these measures did not produce statistically significant correlation between that measure and perceived discrimination. The only exception was the last item (understanding motivation for suicide operations in Britain).

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Interacting perceived discrimination with age produced a positive but only marginally significant effect (90% CI). The interaction effect between perceived discrimination and disidentification was negative but statistically insignificant. From other variables, only sex of respondents produced marginally significant result (90% CI) in the first two models where women appeared somewhat more likely to support violent extremism than men.

Study 4: UK Citizenship Survey 2010/2011

Data

The last study draws on data from the UK Citizenship Survey commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The survey features a nationally representative sample of the adult population in England and Wales and contains a boosted sample of Muslims ($n=3491$; 51% males and 49% female; mean age 37). The data were collected by the companies Ipsos MORI and TNS-BMRB from April 2010 to March 2011. The technical report detailing the sampling method can be found on-line (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

Measures

Support for Violent Extremism. The dependent variable was measured by scoring and adding up responses to the following survey questions: 1) “How right or wrong do you think it is for people to use violent extremism in Britain to protest against things they think are very unfair or unjust?”; 2) “People in Britain using violent extremism, in the name of religion, to protest or achieve a goal are ...?” The respondents could choose answers on 5-point Likert scale ranging from “always right” to “always wrong”. Replies to both questions correlated highly ($r=.55$). Therefore, I added the scores from the two questions and transformed the final scores into a scale ranging from 0 (always wrong) to 1 (always right). The variable has a mean .04 ($SD=.11$).

Perceived Personal Discrimination. This is a categorical variable constructed by adding up yes/no answers to the following questions: 1) “In the last five years, do you think you have been discriminated against when you have been refused or turned down for a job?”; 2) “Thinking about anything that has happened in this local area, have you personally experienced harassment because of your skin color, ethnic origin, or religion in the last two years in any of the ways listed on the card?”; 3) “In the last five years, do you think you have been discriminated against at work with

regard to promotion or a move to a better position?”, 4) “Please could you look at this card and tell me if you think that any of the organizations on the card have ever discriminated against you because of your religion?”¹ The variable is dichotomous where 0 = no perceived discrimination (n = 3,059) and 1 = perceived discrimination (n = 432).

Perceived Group Discrimination. The closest approximation to the measure of perceived group (anti-Muslim) discrimination was provided by a survey question that asked the respondents whether they thought there was more, less or about the same amount of religious prejudice in Britain than there was five years ago. The variable is dichotomous, where those who explicitly identified Muslims as a group that was being more prejudiced against were assigned the value 1 (n = 1,201) and everybody else was assigned the value 0 (n = 2,290).

Non-Belonging. The variable is dichotomous and it was constructed by scoring the answers to the following survey question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree that you personally feel a part of British society?” Those who replied “strongly agree” or “tend to agree” were assigned value 0 (n = 3202) and those who tended to disagree or strongly disagreed were assigned the value 1 (n = 242).

Age. This is a continuous variable ranging from 16 to 90 and with the mean of 37 (SD = 13.6).

As in the previous studies, sex and education of respondents were added as control variables.

Method and Results

A multiple regression was conducted with three different iterations (models). Table 4 shows the results. Perceived personal discrimination is positively associated with support for violent extremism and statistically significant and so is perceived group discrimination (Model 1). The interaction effect of perceived personal discrimination and age is negative and statistically not significant (Model 2). The interaction effect of perceived personal discrimination and non-belonging is positive and

marginally significant (on 90% confidence level) (Model 3). Replacing personal discrimination with group discrimination in the interactions terms does not produce statistically significant results.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

With respect to other variables, non-belonging is positively and significantly associated with support for violent discrimination. Age is negatively and significantly associated with support for violent extremism. Finally, being a female is associated with less likelihood of supporting violent extremism than being a male.

Discussion

The results of the analyses of the five surveys are inconclusive in regards to finding strong support for either H1 or H2. Positive and statistically significant relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent extremism was found in three surveys (Study 1 – PEW Muslim American Survey 2011, Study 2 – Policy Exchange Survey 2016, Study 4 – UK Citizenship Survey 2010/11). However, the PEW Muslim American Survey 2017 (Study 1) and the Tausch and Spears Survey 2010 (Study 3) found a negative and positive association, respectively, but not statistically significant.

The inability to replicate the findings from the PEW Muslim American Survey 2007 (Victoroff et al., 2012) and the PEW Muslim American Survey 2011 in the latest PEW Muslim American Survey 2017 is important given the structural similarities between the surveys. One explanation for the divergence could be the changed phrasing of the item measuring the dependent variable in the 2017 survey. While the first two surveys asked about the justification of violence “in order to defend Islam from its

enemies”, the 2017 survey replaced the phrase with a more general “to further a political, social or religious cause”. It is possible that the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for Islamist violent extremism becomes sharper in the former case, since the phrasing makes the ingroup-outgroup conflict more salient and fitting the personal discriminatory experience. After all, aligning personal experience with a grand narrative of the “War against Islam” was proposed as an important factor in the radicalization process (Sageman, 2004). One can also speculate that the Tausch and Spears Survey 2010 might have not delivered statistically significant results because it relied only on a small subset of anti-Muslim discrimination, i.e. verbal insults only.

Another noteworthy finding is that perceived anti-Muslim *group* discrimination does not seem to be related to support for violent extremism and is less important in this regard than perceived *personal* discrimination. A measure of perceived group discrimination was available for analysis only in studies 1 and 4. In the former, the relationship was positive but statistically not significant. In the latter, the relationship was negative and statistically significant. One explanation for the negative significant finding in Study 4 is that the variable really measured perceived prejudice rather than discrimination. It is not inconceivable to think that many Muslims feel that the majority holds prejudice against them mainly due to the acts of the few violent Muslim extremists and as a result they would make conscious efforts to minimize the association between them and violent extremism, including in the way they answer the survey. However, if they were personally subjected to anti-Muslim discrimination they might have been more likely to harbor feelings of injustice and anger that might have led them to express more support for political violence.

The results also do not support both H3 and H4. Although there is some evidence that young age alone is associated with more support for violent extremism, the interaction between age and anti-Muslim discrimination was statistically significant only in Study 3, but it took an opposite than hypothesized direction. Moreover, the level of significance was lower than the normally accepted

threshold. Similarly, with exception to Study 4, non-belonging or disidentification with the majority do not seem to be associated with support for violent extremism, both in combination with anti-Muslim discrimination and as separate independent variables.

With respect to the control variables, the results show mixed findings too. Level of education is negatively and statistically significantly related to support for violent extremism in Studies 1 and 2. This means that with higher educational attainment the respondents were less likely to support violent extremism. The negative relationship is preserved in the two remaining studies but does not reach statistical significance, indicating that this relationship is weak. Indeed, a number of studies point to the opposite direction and argue that higher education combined with unemployment/underemployment leads to perception of relative deprivation that in turn facilitates radicalization, at least for Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries (Bhatia & Ghanem, 2017).

When it comes to sex of the respondents, women are less likely than men to support violent extremism in Study 4, but marginally more likely in Study 3. Women are less likely to support violent extremism in Study 2 and more likely in Study 1, but both studies do not report statistically significant levels. These mixed findings parallel results of other studies, which sometimes report females as more supportive of terrorism than males (Fair & Shepherd, 2006), sometimes as less supportive (Wike & Samaranayake, 2006), and sometimes there is no significant difference (Victoroff et al., 2012).

One reason for the inconclusive results regarding the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent extremism, even when using the best available data, can be the inadequate measurement of discrimination. Practically no relevant survey I am aware of measures the full possible spectrum of perceived personal discrimination. Instead, virtually all surveys limit the experiences either by time (e.g., in the last two/five years), type (e.g., verbal insults), location (e.g., in the local area) or source (e.g., institutions / employer) and often by the combination of all of these.

As a result, we get an incomplete measure of discrimination that leaves out many relevant experiences of discrimination.

In addition, most surveys lack a measure of intensity of discriminatory experiences. After all, the theory linking discrimination and support for violent extremism relies on mediating factors, such as grievances and negative emotions, which do not have to become relevant with a single experience of discrimination as opposed to more intensive experiences. Using some of the existing elaborate scales that measure perceived discrimination (e.g., the Everyday Discrimination Scale) would considerably increase the validity of the findings. The problem is that surveys of minorities that have representative or nearly representative samples are extremely costly. The few existing ones, which were utilized in this article, were not conducted specifically to answer the question of the relationship between discrimination and support for violent extremism and so their operationalization of perceived anti-Muslim discrimination is not optimal. Addressing this limitation requires a combination of considerable resources and smart research designs that pays attention to the key variables.

A different reason for the inconclusiveness of the results with respect to the link between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent extremism is simply that there is little or weak direct association between the two. It might be that discrimination leads to support for violent extremism only in combination with some other factor(s). After all, in the Deghayes case mentioned in the introduction, the uncle of the boys was a Guantanamo detainee and their father allegedly espoused extremist ideology, apart from behaving violently toward his own children (Townsend, 2016). Individual personality characteristics also play an important role in dealing with discrimination through various coping styles. Some individuals might experience large loss of personal significance and self-certainty as a result of discrimination and seek “palliative” refuge in extremist groups (Hogg, 2014; Kruglanski et al., 2014), others might turn to non-violent civic or political activism (Ellis et al., 2016). The lack of relevant data prevented the test of these potential moderating effects in this article.

Finally, the recurring limitation of studies that investigate sensitive topics is the potential for social desirability bias, which also applies to this article. Some respondents might avoided answering questions about support for violent extremism truthfully for the fear of repercussions or because they wanted to appear “nicer” in front of the interviewer or the society. However, the level of support for political violence reported in this article corresponded to results of other similar surveys, the scales of the relevant items allowed for sufficiently nuanced answers and there was a variance in replies suggesting that the potential need to hide the “true answer” was not all-compelling.

Conclusion

This article used the best available data for Muslim minorities in the US and the UK to investigate the relationship between perceived anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent extremism. The analysis did not bring conclusive findings, suggesting that either the direct association is very weak or that the operationalization of the key independent variable (i.e., perception of anti-Muslim discrimination) was not optimal. However, the results suggest that it is perceived *personal* discrimination rather than perceived *group* discrimination that, likely in combination with other factors, tend to be linked to support for violent extremism.

Future research should pay particular attention to the operationalization and measurement of perceived personal anti-Muslim discrimination and secure resources to match the sample quality of studies used in this article, while using more theoretically informed questionnaire tailored specifically to the research question at hand. Studies using experimental design, while challenging from the ethical perspective, could be valuable in establishing causal relations.

A noteworthy finding of this article is the relative irrelevance of non-belonging and disidentifying with the majority or the host country to support for violent extremism. It adds to the argument that

policy-makers should keep questions of integration separate from counter-terrorism policies (Husband & Alam, 2011).

That three out of five surveys found association between anti-Muslim discrimination and support for violent extremism and that the results of the remaining two surveys might have been clouded by limitations particular to their respective designs, is an additional (but not the most important) argument for policy-makers to redouble their efforts to tackle anti-Muslim discrimination and hostile anti-Muslim attitudes in the society.

Notes

¹ The card listed the following organizations: A local doctor's surgery, a local school, a council housing department or housing association, a local council (apart from the housing department), a private landlord or letting agent, the courts (Magistrates Courts and Crown Court), the Crown Prosecution Service, the police, the Prison Service, and the Probation Service.

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Table 1

Logistic regression predicting probability of Support for Violent Extremism, Study 1.

	2011	2017	2011	2017	2011	2017
Age	.91 (-.10)	.94 [†] (-.06)	.83 (-.19)	.96 (-.05)	.90 (-.10)	.94 [†] (-.06)
Sex (1=male)	1.27 (.24)	1.07 (.07)	1.25 (.23)	1.06 (.05)	1.27 (.23)	1.08 (.08)
Education	.69*** (-.37)	.70*** (-.36)	.69*** (-.38)	.70*** (-.36)	.69*** (-.37)	.70*** (-.36)
Perceived Personal Discrimination	1.25* (.22)	.93 (-.07)	1.03 (.03)	1.05 (-.05)	1.29* (.26)	.91 (-.09)
Perceived Group Discrimination I. (0=Americans perceived friendly/neutral)	1.23 (.21)	1.32 (.28)	1.22 (.19)	1.33 (.29)	1.23 (.21)	1.27 (.24)
Perceived Group Discrimination II. (0=perceived less anti-Muslim discrimination)	-	.73 (-.31)	-	.74 (-.31)	-	.74 (-.30)
Disidentification (0= American identity)	1.46 (.38)	1.12 (.12)	1.47 [†] (.39)	1.11 (.11)	1.56 (.44)	1.11 (-.07)
Age x Perceived Personal Discrimination	-	-	1.09 (.09)	.97 (-.03)	-	-
Disidentification x Perc. Personal Discrimination	-	-	-	-	.94 (-.06)	1.31 (.27)
_cons	.20*** (-1.61)	1.07*** (-.07)	.25** (-1.38)	.97 (-.03)	.19 (-1.64)	1.08 (.08)
N	868	896	868	896	868	896
Pseudo r2	.053	.062	.056	.063	.053	.063

Note: Table reports odds ratios. Logistic regression coefficients in parentheses. Reference category for DV=0 (never justified).

[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2

Multiple regression predicting Support for Violent Extremism, Study 2.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.00 [†] (.00)	-.00 [†] (.00)	-.00 [†] (.00)
Sex (1=male)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Education	-.00 [†] (.00)	-.00 [†] (.00)	-.00 [†] (.00)
Perceived Discrimination	.04** (.02)	.04 (.03)	.04* (.02)
Non-Belonging (0= very/fairly strongly)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Age x Perceived Discrimination	-	.00 (.01)	-
Non-Belonging x Perceived Discrimination	-	-	.00 (.04)
_cons	.08*** (.01)	.08*** (.01)	.08** (.01)
N	2704	2704	2704
R2	.007	.007	.007

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3

Multiple regression predicting Support for Violent Extremism, Study 3.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.00 (.00)	-.00* (.00)	-.00 (.00)
Sex (1=male)	.04 [†] (.02)	.04 [†] (.02)	-.02 (.03)
Education	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.01 [†] (.01)
Perceived Discrimination	.04 (.04)	-.20 (.13)	.12 (.11)
Disidentification	-	-	-.06 (.04)
Age x Perceived Discrimination	-	.01 [†] (.00)	-
Disidentification x Perceived Discrimination	-	-	-.18 (.19)
_cons	.06 (.04)	.09* (.04)	.12* (.06)
N	552	552	350
R2	.010	.019	.025

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4

Multiple regression predicting Support for Violent Extremism, Study 4.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.00*** (.00)	-.00*** (.00)	-.00*** (.00)
Sex (1=male)	-.01* (.00)	-.01* (.00)	-.01* (.00)
Education (0 = no qualification)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)
Perceived Personal Discrimination (0 = no)	.02*** (.01)	.05** (.02)	.02** (.01)
Perceived Group Discrimination (0 = no)	-.01* (.00)	-.01* (.00)	-.01* (.00)
Non-Belonging (0 = belong)	.03** (.01)	.03** (.01)	.02* (.01)
Age x Perceived Discrimination	-	-.00 (.00)	-
Non-Belonging x Perceived Discrimination	-	-	.01 [†] (.01)
_cons	.07*** (.01)	.06*** (.01)	.07*** (.01)
N	3168	3086	3086
R2	.019	.018	.020

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.[†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$