

Combating Prejudice with Reason: America's Irrational Perceptions of Muslims as Terrorists Following 9/11

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Abstract

There is currently a dearth of analysis regarding the potential disparity between the beliefs held by Americans regarding Muslim support for terrorism and the actual level of support for terrorist activities among Muslims. Since the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the general perception of Muslim populations among average Americans, both within the United States and globally, has increasingly become negative. The sensationalized media coverage of jihadist and Islamist terrorist activities has fueled fear and prejudice, leading a significant portion of the American public to perceive all Muslims as inherently dangerous. This research paper aims to assess the extent to which Muslim populations worldwide endorse or engage in terrorist activities, with the objective of evaluating the rationality or irrationality of American prejudices towards Muslims.

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The Terrorist Shift

The meaning of “terrorism” has largely shifted over the past two-hundred years. Initially used to describe acts of state repression and revolution, it has since changed to describe the violence used by non-state actors against civilians to achieve a certain political, religious, economic, or social goal. Likewise, the field of terrorism studies recognizes that there is no one correct way to define and classify terrorism. As an example, the definition used by the Department of State is drastically different from the one used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Because of such discrepancies, there exists a severe lack of existing research on terrorism as we know it today prior to 9/11, as the idea of terrorism was described differently prior to this date. It is then important to first recognize the ways in which the perception of what a ‘terrorist’ is has shifted for the American public in recent history. Isabelle Duyvesteyn (2004) notes that prior to 9/11, the ways in which the public profiled terrorists is much different to how they are viewed in the modern day. Specifically, the average terrorist profile from the 1960s and 1970s was described as “university trained, reared in an urban environment, middle to upper class in social origin, and anarchist or Marxist in ideology” (Duyvesteyn, 2004, p.441). A description which is actually still largely accurate till this day when excluding anarchist or Marxist ideologies, and yet, the majority of the current American public would most likely disagree on such profile. Similarly, Taryn Butler (2015) finds that the majority of news coverage of terrorism prior to 9/11 was reported on the Irish Republican Army (IRA) rather than groups such as Al Qaeda. Despite both groups existing during this time period, American media and research on terrorism largely focused on issues outside of the Middle East and within the Western Hemisphere. As noted by Butler, “in research, it has been shown that before 9/11, the media was very careful and selective about how often and in what way they discussed terrorism”

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(Butler, 2015, p. 5). In terms of academic study, research on terrorism prior to 9/11 is similarly few and far between. Andrew Silke (2001) finds that not only was terrorist research not very abundant prior to the year 2001, but the majority of the research being done actually failed in their attempts to provide proper insights and conclusions on terrorist activity.

There are two major events in American history that began to shift public perspectives on terrorism. The first, which I argue acted as a catalyst for the second, was the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. This was one of the first times in history that terrorists attacked American targets on American soil, which thus provoked the idea that America was not really immune from international terrorist actors (Butler, 2015). Following the success of the first world trade center bombing, Jihadist terrorist groups around the world took note of America's inability to prevent terrorist attacks, thus leading to the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers. The traumatic media coverage of 9/11 essentially brought the term "terrorism" to the contemporary American household, which then shifted the average public view of terrorists from Marxist radicals to Islamic extremists (I use Islamic here not because it is accurate, but rather because the majority of American media falsely uses this description to describe Islamist and Jihadist terrorist ideology). With the American public becoming more knowledgeable of terror on American soil, research on terrorism skyrocketed. In just two years, the amount of research and articles on terrorism increased from 50 to over 300 from 2000 to 2002 (Phillips, 2021). Such increase has continued to surge far after the 9/11 attacks, with the majority of the research focusing on terrorism within the Middle East.

American Opinions/Prejudice

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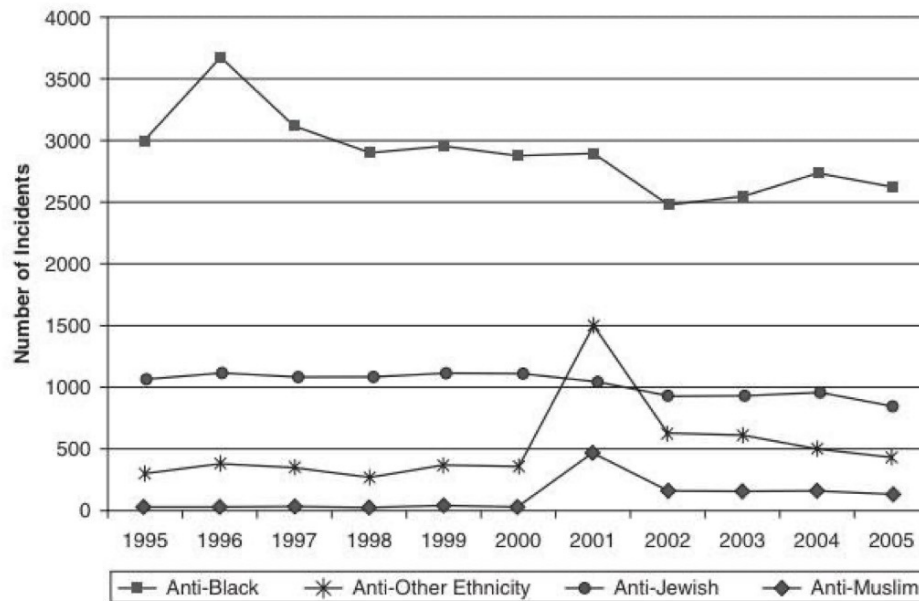
Pre-9/11

Surveys and polling about American perceptions of Muslims pre-9/11 are extremely few and far between, but we are able to get an idea of American prejudices through a variety of other means. As seen in Figure 1, the number of documented hate crimes towards Muslims in the United States prior to 9/11 is extremely low; only peaking at about 50 incidents in 1999. Compared to other groups that have been historically discriminated against in the United States (i.e., African Americans, Jewish Americans, Mexican Americans), Muslims were found to experience the least amount of hate crimes. This should not detract from the rampant prejudices and stereotypes that many Americans harbored against Muslims, however. Abdullah (2015) asserts that Hollywood movies and popular Western culture were some of the key factors that influenced initial negative American perceptions of Muslims. In many popular movies made in the 1990's, Muslims were often made out to be dirty, despicable and violent people, which Abdullah argues was a precursor for America's ability to label them as dangerous so easily after 9/11 (Abdullah, 2015). Likewise, coverage of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing also led to increasing sensationalist news coverage that labeled Muslims as violent and terroristic. So, while there is not currently much polling regarding how Americans felt towards Muslims prior to 9/11, evidence does suggest that there was at least a slow-growing prejudice against Muslims due to how they were portrayed in popular media.

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Figure 1

Documented Hate Crimes in the United States



Note: This model shows the amount of documented hate crimes by race in the United States from

1995 to 2005. From “Historical events and spaces of hate: Hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in post-9/11 America,” by I. Disha, J. C. Cavendish, and R. D. King, 2011, *Social Problems*, 58(1), p 29.

Immediate Reactions Post-9/11

As expected, research data on the perception of Muslims in America sees its greatest movement immediately after the 9/11 attacks (Sept. 11, 2001, to May 31, 2002). Pew Research data found that in November 2001, only about 4.9% of Americans held “very unfavorable” views of Muslim Americans, despite the attacks occurring just two months prior (Bail 2012). The number of individuals who held favorable feelings towards Muslims prior to 9/11 actually

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doubled to more than 15% just a month after the attack as well (Panagopoulos, 2006). Likewise, Panagopoulos (2006) notes that public opinion data suggests that “the initial public response to 9/11 reflected considerations for fairness, tolerance, and restraint” (p. 609). It is likely that this reaction largely has to do with the overabundance of sensational news coverage that began targeting Muslim Americans. Such reasoning can be explained by the fact that the majority of Americans felt that the general public and media had begun to unfairly single out Muslims and other Middle Eastern immigrants (Panagopoulos, 2006).

On the other hand, research shows that although public opinion polling may have indicated that Americans were tolerant of Muslims immediately after 9/11, the number of hate crimes towards Muslims and Arabs in America still significantly increased. From Jan. 1, 2001, to May 31, 2022, the number of hate crimes attributed to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bias increased from 260 to 1502 and 26 to 517 incidences respectively (Disha et al., 2011). The Federal Bureau of Investigation also found a 17x increase in the number of anti-Muslim crimes in 2001, despite public polling indicating that Americans felt more comfortable around them (Singh, 2002). We can conclude that research on American prejudices towards Muslims directly after 9/11 is extremely split, which most likely explained by aforementioned dearth of research surrounding terrorism and American prejudices towards Muslims. But, it is important to recognize that taking public polling data at face value can often be misleading, as many respondents may have given false answers to make themselves seem more tolerant than they actually are. It is also possible that while favorability towards Muslims increased in America immediately after 9/11, individuals who had already held prejudices against Muslims prior to 9/11 may have become further indoctrinated in their biases and began to act upon them.

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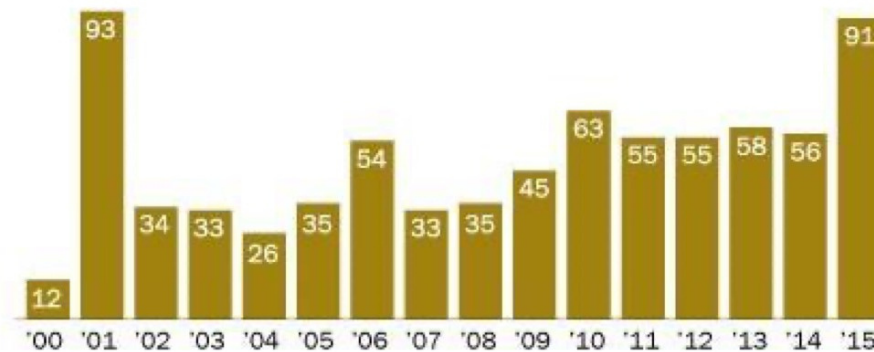
Contemporary Opinions

American favorability towards Muslims did not last very long after 9/11, however. We see that favorability largely begins to decline quite rapidly as media coverage on terrorism continues to grow through the early 2000's. In just nine years (from 2001 to 2010), American favorability towards Muslims decreased over 10% (Ogan, 2013). By 2006, only 32% of Americans expressed favorable opinions towards Islam, most likely due to the increased media attention surrounding the conflict in Iraq (Nisbet et al., 2009). Likewise, a 2004 Pew Global Attitudes Project survey found that 45% of Americans described Muslims as both violent and fanatical (Nisbet et al., 2009). Similarly, from 2002 to 2006, there was a 19% increase in the amount of people that believed that mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, further showcasing that the majority of anti-Muslim sentiment arose far after the attacks on the World Trade Center, not directly after (Panagopoulos, 2006). As seen in Figure 2, hate crime statistics show a massive spike in incidents between 2000 and 2001. While this spike very quickly decreased in 2002, further data shows that incidents have been slowly starting to increase back to the levels seen after 9/11.

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Figure 2

Anti-Muslim assaults reported to the FBI



Note: This model shows the number of Anti-Muslim assaults reported to the FBI in the United States from 2000 to 2015. From “Anti-Muslim assaults reach 9/11-era levels, FBI data show,” by K. Kishi, 2020, Pew Research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/21/antimuslim-assaults-reach-911-era-levels-fbi-data-show/>).

Anti-Muslim sentiments continued to climb throughout the 2010s as the Trump administration enacted its famous “Muslim-ban”, which saw a complete shutdown of travel to and from majority Muslim countries to the United States. In March of 2016, one poll found that over 50% of Americans supported the “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” (Collingwood, 2018). While much of this sentiment later declined as media continued to cover the ban, it stands to reason that Americans were quick to label Muslims as dangerous. Likewise, data suggests that about 30-40% of Americans would agree with policy measures that would be generally harmful towards Muslims (Haner et al., 2019). Out of these respondents, the majority of them identified as conservative and supported Donald Trump’s presidential campaign in 2016 (Haner et al., 2019). Overall, we can see that Americans have become extremely prejudiced towards Muslims in general.

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Factors of Prejudice

We must first recognize that the prejudice and Islamophobia that American Muslims face is not a fault of their own. Rather, it has been mass media coverage and the framing of Muslims as terrorists that has largely caused such sentiments to prosper. Freis-Beattie (2020) outlines three ways that media can function as a catalyst for islamophobia: mass media functions as propaganda and manipulates public opinion, politicians in media incite fear by overstating risks and directing the public's attention to particular topics, and politicians capitalize on the fear that media spreads to win office. In such functions, the media has the ability to massively influence public opinions on both Muslims and terrorism in general. If Muslims and terrorists are framed together in a way that makes it look like the terms are synonymous, it is extremely likely that the American public will begin to group them together.

Powell (2011) finds that at the height of the “War on Terror”, extensive media coverage of terrorism often fed into ideals of Orientalism and a cultural fear of Islam. Likewise, such heightened fear of terrorism was often juxtaposed next to the idea of the United States as a “good Christian nation”, furthering the divide between white America and Muslim Americans. As Semati (2010) notes, “the constant drumbeat, by selfish and opportunistic politicians, lazy journalists, and uninformed pundits, about ‘Islamic terror’ or Muslim Other is a dangerous component of identity politics” (p. 270). This idea of identity politics further drives Muslims in America as an “outgroup”, as they are continually associated with terrorists in mass media. We often see that coverage in which a terrorist labeled as Muslim (whether or not they actually identify with this faith) attacks everything good that represents a white Christian America, effectively pushing an “us versus them” narrative (Powell, 2011). Not only are Muslims often

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framed as terrorists, but other studies find that the majority of media outlets in the United States depict Islam as an intolerant, antidemocratic, and oppressive religion (Eid & Karim, 2014). The existence of this “in-group” and “out-group” ideal is unfortunately unavoidable as individuals in any society at any level feel the need to group individuals that look and act differently from them into groups (Posner, 2015). But it should be noted that the media has acted as a way to further polarize this division, especially due to the fact that Muslims only make up about 1% of the total population in the United States.

As Muslim populations are not widespread throughout the country, many Americans have little to no knowledge on any Muslim cultural practices and traditions (Nisbet et al., 2009). This is especially true of older conservative individuals who spend close attention to news coverage, whose characteristics, coincidentally, make up the main predictors of anti-Muslim attitudes (Ogan, 2013). Unaware of the biases and prejudices that are framed in their sensationalist media, corporations and campaigning politicians are able to capitalize on this dearth of knowledge in their viewing audience and turn the idea of being Muslim into a controversial and fear-mongering ideal. Media outlets sensationalize terrorist attacks in Muslim countries, while politicians are then able to rally around an “us versus them” mentality between conservative Christian Americans and Muslims (Powell, 2011). Along with media’s partisan and sensationalist nature, coverage of terrorism in media itself is extremely anxiety-producing by itself (Slone, 2000). With all of these factors working together, we see a compounding cycle in which media corporations repeatedly portray Muslims as terrorists and politicians paint Muslims as violent people. Through this cycle, we see the creation of a conservative culture of fear towards Muslims and Islam that is unlikely to end due to the drive for media corporations to push for exciting and racy coverage that boost ratings and profits.

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In reality, the number of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Muslims tends to be extremely exaggerated and overcovered. One study found that Muslim perpetrators were more likely to be portrayed as terrorists (81%) than non-Muslims that commit similar acts (19%) in media coverage spanning over 14 different news stations (Dixon & Williams, 2014). This, despite that fact that in reality, non-Muslims make up about 94% of terrorist activity in the United States, while Muslims only make up about 6% (Dixon & Williams, 2014). Similarly, another study found that in mass-media, Muslim perpetrators often tend to be linked to religious motivations, while non-Muslim perpetrators (primarily white) are only described as mentally unstable and as coming from households that do not support violence (Powell, 2011). As we can see, there is at least a clear disconnect between the amount of coverage of Muslims as terrorists compared to the true number of Muslim terrorists. This is then further exacerbated by the media's inability to portray white Christian perpetrators as religiously motivated.

Muslim Support for Terrorism

Given research has shown that Muslims have been overrepresented as terrorists in media coverage in comparison to acts of terrorism perpetrated by Muslims. To further such study, we will now look at polling and statistics for the support of terrorism in countries throughout the world, rather than just looking at statistics regarding the act of terrorism itself. In this, we will be able to determine whether or not a sizeable percentage of popular support for terrorist organizations and activity actually exists among Muslim populations.

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Support in Muslim-majority countries

The support for terrorism among Muslim-majority countries often depends upon the state of conflict within the country. For example, countries such as Lebanon have consistently recorded higher notions of support for both the 9/11 attacks and subsequent terrorist attacks against the United States. One study found that after 9/11, 88% of Lebanese respondents agreed that the grievances of Al-Qaeda terrorists warranted the 9/11 attacks (Haddad & Khashan, 2002). This is confirmed by a separate study, which found that in 2002, 74% of Lebanese respondents felt that suicide terrorism was at least somewhat justifiable (Fair & Shepherd, 2007). A 2006 study also found that across 14 different Muslim-majority countries, the average Muslim felt that support for terrorism was somewhat justifiable, with countries such as Lebanon and Bangladesh having much higher support and countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkey having much lower support (Fair & Shepherd, 2006). This data is quite concerning, but fortunately the support for terrorism in all Muslim countries is not entirely widespread and has largely decreased over recent years. Fair et al. (2017) found that support for terrorism in Lebanon decreased by over 50% from 2002 and 2014, and that it is likely that such support will continue to dwindle. Likewise, in the year 2014, over 75% of respondents in Palestine felt that terrorism was either rarely or never justified (Fair et al., 2017). Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on support for terrorism in Muslim-majority countries within the past 8 years (2014-2022), so it will be important for future researchers to expand research and polling in these countries in order to come to a definite conclusion here. Either way, the Muslim world has begun to see a significant drop off in support for terrorism after its initial spike in 9/11, which will be important to keep in mind going forward.

Support in the United States

Similar to the decrease of support for terrorism worldwide, Muslims in America have also begun to take a harsher stance against terrorism in general. In 2011, only 3% of Arab respondents had a very or somewhat favorable opinion of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda (Fajmonová et al., 2017). Likewise, only 7% felt that religious violence against civilians was often or sometimes justified (2% and 5% respectively) (Fajmonová et al., 2017). While support for terrorism among American Muslims is extremely low, it is important to note their growing grievances surrounding the war on terror in general. In 2007, 55% of American Muslim respondents in one study felt that the U.S. has begun to fight a war on Islam rather than a war on terror, a percentage which likely increased since (McCauley & Stellar, 2009). Essentially, American Muslims are not satisfied with the United States military's approach to countering terror and feel as though military policy has largely targeted Muslim populations rather than terrorism in general. This coincides with the increased media framing of Muslims as terrorists, which has thus further exacerbated tensions between Muslims and white Christian Americans. Muslims in America are largely split on the ways to address this issue. Around 50% of American Muslims in one study felt that American Muslim leaders need to condemn terrorism publicly to reassure Americans that American Muslims do not sympathize with terrorism, while 30% felt that they should not have to condemn terrorism because the American public should assume that all American Muslims reject it anyway (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017). Either way, American Muslims overwhelmingly do not support terrorism and feel that the American public's perceptions of them are inaccurate.

So, American Muslim support for terrorism is extremely low, but do these findings parallel the amount of terrorism committed by Muslims in the United States? As mentioned, the amount

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of news coverage on Muslim-American terrorism is disproportionately higher than the amount of terrorist attacks actually committed by Muslims. In fact, Charles Kurzman (2011) finds that in the 10 years after 9/11, Muslim-American terrorism in the United States has actually downturned in pace. Of the cases reported, a majority of the attacks were actually thwarted thanks to information given to officials by individuals of the Muslim-American community (Kurzman, 2011). Not only are Muslims in the United States opposed to terrorism, but they are actually extremely active in preventing possible attacks from occurring. Further research finds that not only are domestic cases of Muslim terrorism decreasing (as well as decreasingly fatal), but the profile of terrorists in the United States has become increasingly whiter and politically far-right (Silva et al., 2020). Over 82% of domestic terrorists in the United States in 2017 were white, while only 6.5% of them were Arab (Silva et al., 2020). Likewise, over 49.6% of the terrorists were inspired by far-right extremism, while only 18.3% of them were jihadist-inspired (Silva et al., 2020). With such extensive findings, we can conclude that not only is the support for terrorism among American Muslims decreasing but acts of terrorism committed by Muslims are decreasing as well. It is therefore important to recognize that the media's portrayal of Muslims as terrorists has not only exaggerated the issue, but caused much of the spotlight to shine away from actual problems of far-right White extremism within the United States.

Rationale for Support

When individuals think of terrorists, we tend to group them into categories such as “insane” and “mentally unstable”. However, research on the justifications and rationalization of the use of terror tactics may actually suggest the opposite. According to the Rational Choice Theory, “terrorist action derives from a conscious, rational, calculated decision to take this

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particular type of action as the optimum strategy to accomplish a sociopolitical goal” (Victoroff, 2005, p. 14). That is, the process of planning and committing an act of terror is one that is heavily weighed and calculated. Much evidence also suggests that the idea of mental illness being an explanatory variable in the rationale for terrorism cannot be applied to individuals that operate within terrorist organizations (Webber & Kruglanski, 2018). Instead of terrorism being an act of mental illness, Webber and Kruglanski outline three factors to the rational radicalization process that terrorists endure: the individual *need* that motivates one to engage in political violence, the ideological *narrative* that justifies political violence, and the social *network* that influences one’s decisions along the pathway to extremism (Weber & Kruglanski, 2018).

The second idea of the *narrative* that motivates an individual to commit an act of terror is perhaps the broadest, as these are the factors by which individuals begin to justify their violent actions. In terms of Muslim support for terrorism, the largest rationale we see is usually some sort of religious justification. Out of all of the world’s religious groups, Muslims tend to be the most tolerant of terrorism as a practice, especially when they consider religion as extremely important (Egger & Magni-Berton, 2019). As Richardson and Juergensmeyer (2013) present, religion creates the idea of “sacred resources” of which individuals contend over. Examples of such resources include that of salvation, blessings, and the favor of God. The drive to obtain these theological and physically unobtainable goods is often the driving force of Jihadist suicide terrorism, in which individuals take part of religiously sanctioned warfare to reach enlightenment in the afterlife. The ideas of obtaining these goals can not only be used by terrorist organizations to manipulate people into committing acts of violence, but they are very attractive to people in desperation (which we often see a lot of in countries with extensive conflicts).

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Other narratives that influence Muslim terrorists are those that coincide with the idea that the United States is attempting to rid the world of Islam, which thus creates a false need for Muslims to act in retaliation to such hostility. This idea is further exacerbated by proximity to violence in war zones that the United States is operating in, as individuals are often struck by extreme grief when their loved ones are accidentally killed in drone strike operations (Hijazi et al., 2019). Terrorist propaganda in the media also heightens such radicalization, which will often cause individuals to become lost in echo chambers of extremism (an example of how social networks influence one's decisions). One study also finds that social exclusion within a state often increases the likelihood that an individual will accept terrorism as justifiable (Treistman, 2021). This reasoning is perhaps why we see such a strong abundance of terrorist organizations in Palestine, as many Palestinians feel as though the Israeli government is abusive and illegitimate. Lastly, along the same lines as religious indoctrination, we see that Islamism, or "the belief that Islamic law or Islamic values should play a central role in public life" is also a key rationale in terrorist activity (Guarrieri, 2021, slide 6). While research shows that Islamist propaganda does not cause the radicalization of ordinary Muslims, we see that the aspiration to uphold Islamist values of sharia law are common justifications for terrorist organizations (Egger & Magni-Berton, 2019). There are a multitude of justifications as to why terrorists commit the atrocities that they do and there is often not just one cause. Rationales are often compounding, and it is therefore important to take note of the main reasonings that Muslim terrorists use to explain their violence.

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Muslim Support for Islamist Parties

To preface, the support for an Islamist party by no means entails an individual's support for terrorism. As mentioned, the political ideology of Islamism relates to the want to reestablish authentic Islamic practice in a country's constitutional, economic, and judicial system. When taken to its absolute most extreme, those that idealize Islamism take concepts such as shariah and jihad and attempt to force them back into society. This is where Islamist terrorism comes in, with terrorist organizations attempting to establish sharia law using violent tactics against civilians to achieve their goal of establishing an Islamic state under jihad.

Here we will take note of the popular support for Islamist parties in the majority-Muslim countries of Iraq, Tunisia, and Indonesia. These countries were selected as they all rank differently on the Economist Intelligence Units' Democracy Index, which attempts to measure the freedoms and democracy of political institutions in countries worldwide. By taking into account different levels of democracy, we may be able to infer more about the true level of popular support for Islamist parties. Along the same lines, the more authoritarian a country gets, the possibility of manipulated polling results becomes even more possible. A support for an Islamist party in an authoritarian country may seem popular, but we must be skeptical of its' validity. So, we therefore choose to look at a multitude of governments at different democracy scales.

At the authoritarian end is Iraq, which scores a 3.5 out of 9 on the democracy scale (EIU, 2022). As an authoritarian country with conservative values, we can expect to see a greater support for Islamist parties. In the 2021 parliamentary election, the Shia-Islamist Sadrist Movement won a sizeable 73 out of 329 seats, making it the largest represented party in the new Iraqi legislature (Yuan, 2021). Other notable parties include the Fatah Alliance with 17 seats,

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who are most famous for their use of violent militia groups in the Syrian Civil War (Yuan, 2021). The Fatah Alliance saw a dramatic drop off in votes between the 2018 and 2021 elections (1,366,789 to 462,800) with the introduction of the Sadrist Movement (Yuan, 2021). In terms of ideology, both organizations follow Shia-Islamism, however, the Sadrist Movement is known to be much more religiously conservative than the Fatah Alliance. Either way, Iraq sees intense popular support for both religious conservative and right-wing Islamist parties that could possibly suggest some existent popular support for Islamist terrorist ideology.

With a score of 5.99 out of 9, Tunisia is described as a hybrid regime that has both authoritarian and democratic characteristics (EIU, 2022). The largest Islamist party in Tunisia is the Ennahda Movement, which grabbed a majority 52 out of 217 seats in the 2019 legislative assembly election (Rahman, 2019). What is important to note here is that compared to the political parties of Iraq, the Ennahda Movement is much more moderate in practice. They have been known to be largely conciliatory in order to uphold the democratic process, all while holding true to their belief in Muslim values. In hopes to garner more popular support,

Ennahda's leaders decided to abandon sharia in favor of more secular principles (Netterstrøm, 2015). This decision paid off, as Ennahda is now the largest legislative party in the Tunisian government. We can conclude that popular support for Islamist parties in Tunisia only grew once those parties began to separate themselves from far-right conservative ideals, thus demonstrating a lack of support for the radical Islamist ideals that could translate to terrorism.

Lastly is the "flawed democracy" of Indonesia, scoring a 6.71 out of 9 on the democracy scale (EIU, 2022). The largest Islamist party in Indonesia is the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which holds 50 out of 575 seats in the Indonesian Representative Council (Yulisman, 2019). It is currently the 7th largest party by seats and is often considered as an opposition party to the

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current government. The party is notably more religiously conservative than the previously mentioned Ennahda but saw similar growth in support after it became more moderate over time. Still, while PKS does not explicitly support the implementation of sharia, its campaigns are based strongly on anti-Western and pro-religious conservatism (Priamarizki, 2013). Outside of the PKS, there exists an Islamist party within the majority government called the United Development Party (PPP), which only grew in numbers after a number of smaller Islamist parties banded together to impact the legislature. Even with this combination, PPP only holds 19 seats in the legislature and has begun to concede many of their religious conservative values (Yulisman, 2019). Islamist parties in Indonesia do see some popular support, but like the trends seen in other semi-democratic countries, this support dwindles the more conservative the party is.

Overall, we see that growing support for Islamist parties in “democratic” countries correlates to a party’s concession to more moderate policies and ideals. In the context of support for terrorism, we are able to infer that even in states that have support for Islamist parties, it is unlikely that this support translates to a support for violent extremism because the parties are extremely more moderate than Islamist terrorist organizations. It is harder to determine the level of support for terrorism based upon Islamist parties when looking at authoritarian countries such as Iraq, but as mentioned, the authoritative nature of the government may have a manipulative impact on voting results. Therefore, we should be apprehensive in drawing conclusions about populations in countries whose governments function similarly to Iraq’s.

Discussion

As we move more and more into a globalized and religiously diverse society, it will be important to take note of the growing trends of prejudices against Muslims in the United States.

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Sensational news organizations and the Internet has further driven the divide between Americans and Muslims after 9/11 through its' over coverage and overrepresentation of Muslims as terrorists in mass media. This has then led to an increased abundance of discrimination and hate crimes towards Muslims in America based upon false justifications and prejudices. On the other hand, Muslim support for terrorism in majority Muslim countries has begun to dwindle after its initial spike after 9/11. Likewise, American Muslim support for terrorism is not only increasingly rare, but terrorist activity among American Muslims has decreased drastically when compared to right-wing White-nationalist terrorist attacks. While support for Islamist parties worldwide has steadily grown, these parties have also become more and more moderate over time. With this growing "progressiveness", we can infer that less and less Muslims worldwide will be subject to Islamist extremist radicalization that could lead to terrorist activity.

To conclude, we find that American perceptions of Muslims as violent terrorists has become increasingly irrational over time as Muslims both in America and around the world have become increasingly moderate and anti-terrorist over time. Despite less and less Muslims supporting terrorist activity and ideology, more and more Americans have begun to harbor Islamophobic sentiments. It will be interesting to see how this complex and dynamic discrepancy evolves in the wake of American far-right extremism and a global Muslim population boom. Further research on American prejudices will need to be conducted in order to assess how such beliefs can be mitigated in a world of never-ending sensationalist news coverage. Likewise, further studies will need to be conducted in other Muslim-majority countries to determine their population's support for terrorism in order to further support this research.

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