Alienation, Religion, Economics and Politics: Testing Theories of Radicalization in Polls of U.S. Muslims

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About START

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Abstract

Four national polls of Muslim-Americans conducted between 2001 and 2007 were examined to test possible predictors of sympathy and justification for jihadist violence: perception of anti-Muslim bias, religiosity, and economic and political grievance. These predictors were correlated with three elements of the global-jihad frame: seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam, justifying suicide attacks in defense of Islam, and favorable views of Al Qaeda. The three elements were no more than weakly related and had different correlates. Discussion suggests that the war of ideas may need to target separately the different elements of mass sympathy and support for terrorism.

Attempts to understand terrorism usually begin with the terrorists, and a sizeable literature has attempted to understand how terrorists emerge from conditions of poverty, alienation, extremist ideology, and political grievance (Blair, 2009; Brown & Smith, 2009; Krueger, 2007; Sageman, 2004); . But active terrorists are only a tiny fraction of the base of supporters and sympathizers on which the terrorists depend, just as active-service military are only a tiny fraction of the base of national support for the military. In this paper I follow Tessler and Robbins (2007) in moving the focus away from terrorists to the wider population of those who sympathize with or justify terrorism.

In national polls conducted in Algeria and Jordan, Tessler and Robbins (2007) found that approval of jihadist terrorism was not linked with respondents' gender, economic situation, religiosity, or support for political Islam. Rather it was younger respondents and those with negative views of American foreign policy and local politics who were more likely to approve of terrorism. The goal of the research presented here is to extend this kind of bottom-up study of radicalization to Muslims living in the U.S.

I begin by setting forth some assumptions about how public opinion is related to radicalization and terrorism, including establishing the elements of the 'global-jihad frame' that rationalizes jihadist terrorism. Then I offer brief reviews of ideas about where terrorism comes from -- alienation, ideology, and economic and political grievance – and translate these into items available in four polls of U.S. Muslims. Finally I test the extent to which these items can distinguish those who agree with various aspects of the global jihad frame from others who do not agree.

Public opinion and the global-jihad frame

It is important to recognize that radicalization of opinion is not the same as radicalization of behavior. A poll of U.K. Muslims after the July 7, 2005 suicide bombings in the London Underground asked "Do you think any further attacks by British suicide bombers in the U.K. are justified or unjustified?" Five percent of poll respondents thought that further bombings would be justified, a result that implies that about 50,000 of one million adult U.K. Muslims believe further bombings would be justified. But terrorism-related arrests in the U.K. have not exceeded two thousand, indicating that, of every hundred U.K. Muslims condoning suicide attacks, at most four are actively involved in terrorism (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009).

Similarly, results of the polls studied by Tessler and Robbins (2007) indicate the importance of distinguishing between mass opinion and the opinions of terrorists. Most jihadist terrorists are male, for instance, but polls in Algeria and Jordan found males no more likely than females to approve of terrorism. Active terrorists can be above average in education and income in relation to the communities they emerge from – as Kreuger (2007) found for Palestinian and Jewish terrorists – even as they depend on a base of sympathizers and supporters who are poor and uneducated.

A pyramid model linking a small apex of terrorists with a larger base of sympathizers and supporters (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009) is consistent with the U.K. government's definition of radicalization: "Radicalisation … is the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to participate in terrorist groups" (Brown & Smith, 2009, p.43). Indeed there is some evidence that public opinion has an effect on terrorism. Krueger (2007) has used polling data to show that terrorists are likely to come from countries where higher percentages disapprove of the leadership of the country terrorists attack. Terrorists attacking the U.S., for instance, are likely to come from countries with higher percentages who disapprove of the job performance of the leadership of the U.S.

A different kind of evidence for the effect of mass opinion comes from two case studies of 'sudden desistence' from terrorism: the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, and the Egyptian Islamic Group. For both cases, there was reason to conclude that fast decline in terrorist attacks could be attributed, at least in part, to sudden loss of sympathy and support for terrorism in the broader public on whom terrorists depended (Dugan, Huang, LaFree, & McCauley, 2009; Wheatley & McCauley, 2009).

If mass radicalization means increasing numbers who sympathize with terrorist goals and justify terrorist means, it remains to ask what specific opinions signal radicalization in relation to jihadist terrorism. In simplest form, the recent jihadist frame is that the West is engaged in a millennial battle against Islam and Muslims must defend themselves – Islam is under attack and Muslims have an obligation to rise to its defense (for substantiation from primary Taliban sources, see Johnson, 2007). Betz (2008, p. 520) offers a more detailed version of what we will call the "global jihad" frame: (1) Islam is under general unjust attack by Western crusaders led by the United States; (2) *Jihadis*, whom the West refers to as "terrorists," are defending against this attack; (3) the actions they take in defence of Islam are proportionally just and religiously sanctified; and, therefore (4) it is the duty of good Muslims to support these actions.

It would be useful to conduct polls assessing separately each of the four parts of the frame that Betz identifies, but the current study depends on data from polls already conducted. In these polls, agreement with the global-jihad frame is assessed by focusing on three kinds of item: items assessing perception that the war on terrorism is a war on Islam (Betz 1), an item assessing attitude toward Al Qaeda (Betz 2), and an item assessing justification for suicide terrorism in defense of Islam (Betz 3). The next three sections turn to possible predictors of accepting elements of the global jihad frame. Although these predictors could be derived from psychological theories (Tessler & Robbins, 2007), I focus here on ideas prominent in analyses published by the U.S. and U.K. governments.

Alienation

Two prominent intellectuals have advanced the idea that Muslim radicalization, especially in Europe, is a product of political alienation. Olivier Roy (2004) sees radical Islam, the kind that supports jihadi terrorists, as emerging from modern challenges to traditional Muslim identity. These challenges are especially acute for Muslims who emigrate to Europe. Francis Fukuyama (2006) puts a twist on the same idea to explain why Europe's Muslims are more alienated and more prone to terrorism than U.S. Muslims. In brief, Fukuyama's argument is that Muslims in Western countries, especially in Europe, adopt Osama Bin Laden's global *umma* as an identity to the extent that ethnic nationalism blocks their acceptance in the country they live in. Identification with the *umma* brings susceptibility to bin Laden's claim that Islam is under global attack by Western forces, and the result of this frame is the justification of violence in defense of Islam.

Alienation theory is also featured in the analysis of terrorism developed by U.K security agencies.

In many countries, including the UK, people are not only vulnerable to radicalisation because of political and economic grievances. A range of social and psychological factors are also important. Radicalisation seems to be related directly to a crisis in identity and, specifically, to a feeling of not being accepted or not belonging.   This is itself the result of a range of factors, which may include the experience of discrimination and inequalities, racism, recent migration and more generally a lack of affinity with and disconnect from family, community and state. (Brown and Smith, 2009).

Another version of the alienation argument is that Muslims in Western countries are rejecting, or are being encouraged to reject, the integration that is in fact offered them. This version can be found in the U.S. 2009

Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

The social, political, and economic integration of Western Europe's 15 to 20 million

Muslims is progressing slowly, creating opportunities for extremist propagandists and recruiters. The highly diverse Muslim population in Europe already faces much higher poverty and unemployment rates than the general population, and the current economic crisis almost certainly will disproportionately affect the region's Muslims. Numerous worldwide and European Islamic groups are actively encouraging Muslims in Europe to reject assimilation and support militant versions of Islam. (Blair, 2009, p. 5).

Two versions of alienation theory can be distinguished: that Muslims in Western countries see themselves as a minority not fully accepted as citizens by the majority, and that Muslims in Western countries are a minority determined not to melt away into the majority. Either way, Muslims in Western countries are likely to see themselves as suffering from bias and discrimination: either because the majority does not accept them or because they interpret pressure to integrate as bias and discrimination. In the polls examined here, items tapping perception of bias and discrimination against Muslims are included as potential predictors of agreement with the global-jihad frame.

Radical Islam

A second major idea about Muslim radicalization is that an extremist form of Islam is the major driver of Muslim radicalization and jihadist terrorism. This idea has been particularly popular in the U.S. military (but see Smart, 2005, who acknowledges this popularity even as she argues that ideology is more justification than provocation of violence). Indeed radical Islam is often described in military terms as the terrorist "center of gravity" – the primary source of enemy power (Eikmeier 2007, p. 86). If the ideological center of gravity can be destroyed, the enemy is finished (Lloyd, 2003).

The popularity of an ideological view of radicalization has probably increased thanks to an unusual film, *Obsession*. Produced in a documentary style, the film highlights parallels between the power of political Islam and the power of Nazi ideology. The film has been widely distributed, including millions of DVDs given away as inserts in major U.S. newspapers before the 2008 election (JewsOnFirst, 2008).

Radical Islam goes to the roots of life, prescribing not just politics but personal and public morality, spiri-

tual life, and religious expression in a life-dominating "Puritan Islam." Individuals participating in the ideology of radical Islam should show high religiosity, including reporting religion as an important part of their life and frequent participation in prayers at their mosque. In the polls examined here, these religiosity items are included as potential predictors of agreement with the global-jihad frame.

Grievance

Perhaps the most intuitive idea about political radicalization is that it is a response to some kind of grievance. This idea is represented in the U.S. State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008:* "Rather, we saw increasing evidence of terrorists and extremists manipulating the grievances of alienated youth or immigrant populations, and then cynically exploiting those grievances to subvert legitimate authority and create unrest." Similarly, according to the Office for the Coordinator for Counterterrorism (2009), "Efforts to manipulate grievances represent a 'conveyor belt' through which terrorists seek to convert alienated or aggrieved populations, by stages, to increasingly radicalized and extremist viewpoints, turning them into sympathizers, supporters, and ultimately, in some cases, members of terrorist networks."

What are the grievances that can move Muslims toward radicalization? A common view is that radicalization and terrorism arise out of economic frustration. In the polls we examine, we test this idea by using standard demographic measures of education and family income to predict opinions representing elements of the the global-jihad frame. Because most terrorists are young and male, we also look at age and gender as potential predictors of agreement with the global-jihad frame.

Another kind of grievance is political: U.S. policies in relation to the Islamic world may be a source of radicalization for many Muslims (Tessler & Robbins, 2007). According to Scheuer (2004, 2006), the major grievances behind jihadist terrorism are U.S. troops in Muslim countries and U.S. support for police states controlling Muslim countries. In the polls examined here, this idea is tested by using an item about opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan as a potential predictor of agreement with elements of the global-jihad frame.

In sum, the current study tests three broad ideas about the sources of Muslim radicalization – perceived discrimination, religious fervor, economic or political grievance -- in polls of U.S. Muslims that included measures of agreement with three elements of the global-jihad frame: seeing a war on Islam, support for suicide bombing, and favorable opinion of Al Qaeda.

Methods

The data analyzed come from four national polls of U.S. Muslims conducted between 2001 and 2007. Only brief descriptions of these polls are provided here; additional details including sampling methods are available from McCauley & Stellar (2009). Zogby2001 and Zogby2004 polls were purchased; Zogby2002 was made available by Dennis Gilbert at Hamilton College, and Pew2007 is available by download (http://people-press. org/dataarchive/).

Four polls of U.S. Muslims 2001-2007

Zogby2001 The American Muslim Poll (n=1781) was conducted in November and December 2001 by the Muslims in American Public Square (MAPS) supported by the Pew Research Center (http://pewre-search.org/about/) in collaboration with Zogby International (http://www.zogby.com/). In this and other polls considered here, all respondents were 18 years of age or older. A telephone list was created by matching the zip codes for 300 Islamic centers nationwide against their respective local telephone exchanges; listings of common Muslim surnames were then identified from the local telephone exchanges and a random sample of names were called using Random Digit Dialing (RDD). An additional sample of African American Muslims was obtained in face-to-face interviews conducted 7-9 December 2001 at locations in New York, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, GA, and Detroit, MI.

Zogby2002 The Hamilton College Muslim American Poll (n=521) was designed by Sociology Professor Dennis Gilbert and a team of Hamilton students and supported by the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center. It was conducted in April 2002 in collaboration with Zogby International. A national call list was created by software that identifies common Muslim names in telephone listings.

Zogby2004 The American Muslim Poll (n=1846) was conducted in August and September 2004 by Muslims in the American Public Square (MAPS) supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts in conjunction with Zogby International. Telephone interviews were carried out with a nationwide sample of American Muslims using the same methods as for Zogby2001 except that no additional face-to-face sample was included.

Pew2007 The Muslim Americans Survey (n=1050) was conducted by Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuva-las Incorporated (SRBI) between January and April of 2007, according to the specifications of the Pew Research Center. The sampling frame had three parts: two RDD samples and one re-contact sample of Muslims identified in earlier polls. The complexities and advantages of this multiple-strata polling are detailed in pages

57-71 of the poll report (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Variation in item wording across polls.

For some items, there are slight variations in wording of question or response alternatives across surveys. We judge that these variations do not affect the substantive meaning of the item, but the variations are represented in Table notes so that readers can judge for themselves. In any case, we focus here on correlations among items rather than on change over time in responses to the same or similar items, and consistent correlations across polls despite variation in item wording indicate that the variations have little impact on results.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The first section of the Results presents the distribution of opinion for three criterion items, the second section reviews the distribution of opinion for five predictor items, and the third and fourth sections present correlational analyses linking predictors with criterion items.

Criterion items

Table 1 shows that substantial and increasing percentages of U.S. Muslims see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam rather than "a sincere effort to reduce terrorism." Here we assume that believing that the war on terrorism is not "sincere" (Pew item) is equivalent to believing that there is a war on Islam (Zogby item). A more conservative approach might reduce the Pew item to a choice between seeing the war on terrorism as sincere versus not-sincere, but recoding as a two-response item did not produce any change in the pattern of correlations we report here (differences in correlations in column four of Table 7 ranged from -.09 to +.09 with mean difference of -.01).

Table 1

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, do you feel the U.S. is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam? (percentages)

	Zogby 2001 N=1781	Zogby 2002[a] N=531	Zogby 2004[b] N=1846	Pew 2007[c] N=1050
Terrorism	67	41	33	26
Islam	18	31	38	55
Neither/Both	--	20	--	2
NS, DK, Refused	16	7	29	17

[a]*Some describe the U.S. worldwide response to the Sept. 11 attacks as a war on terrorism. Others say it is a war on Islam. Which do you think is more accurate?*

[b]*Do you feel the U.S. is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?*

[c]*Do you think the U.S.-led war on terrorism is a sincere effort to reduce international terrorism or don't you believe that?* Responses converted: sincere effort = Terrorism; don't believe that = Islam.

Two additional criterion items are available only in **Pew2007**, one about suicide bombing and one about Al Qaeda.

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? Responses were as follows: 1=never 82%, 2=rarely 4%, 3=sometimes 6%, 4=often 2%, and don't know-not sure-refused 6%. To ensure comparable correlations, DK-NS-R were recoded as 2.5.

The second criterion item available only in Pew2007 was: *Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?* 1=very unfavorable 67%, 2= somewhat unfavorable 8%, 3=somewhat favorable 3%, 4=very favorable 1%, DK-NS-R 22%. Here again, DK-NS-R were recoded as 2.5. For both Pew-only items, correlations with DK-NS-R recoded (Table 8) never differed by more than .03 from the corresponding correlations with D-NS-R treated as missing data (not tabled).

The two Pew-only items have skewed distributions, with the great majority of respondents disapproving of suicide bombing (86%) and unfavorable toward Al Qaeda (75%). In addition, the Al Qaeda item has a substantial percentage (22%) not answering the question and recoded as neither favorable or unfavorable. These item characteristics imply that the items will be difficult to predict, but the significant correlation between the two items is encouraging. Respondents favorable toward Al Qaeda are more likely to justify suicide bombing, $r = .30$ with recodes ($r = .32$ without recodes). It is interesting to note that opinions about suicide bombing and about AQ show negligible correlations (.04, .08) with opinions about the war on terrorism.

Predictor items

Standard demographic items included in all four polls included gender, age, education, income, and birthplace.

Religiosity. Polls in 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2007 show that the importance of Islam in the lives of U.S. Muslims has remained consistently high for the great majority of Muslims (79%, 81%, 82%, and 72% "very important"). The same polls show that about half of Muslims (55%, 51%, 54%, 40%) attend mosque at least once a week.

Table 2

Would you say the role of Islam in your life is very important, somewhat important or not very important? (percentages)

	Zogby2001	Zogby2002[a]	Zogby2004	Pew2007[b]
	N=1781	N=531	N=1846	N=1050
Very important	79	81	82	72
Somewhat important	16	13	14	18
Not important	5	5	4	9
NS, DK, Refused	1	1	1	1

[a]*On a scale from 1 to 10, how important is Islam in your life?* Responses converted: 1-3 = Not important; 4-6 = Somewhat important; 7-10 = Very important.

[b]*How important is religion in your life?* Responses converted: not too important and not at all important = Not important.

Table 3

On average, how often do you attend the mosque for salah and Jum'ah Prayer? (percentages)

	Zogby2001	Zogby 2002[a]	Zogby2004	Pew 2007[b]
	N=1781	N=531	N=1846	N=1050
More than once a week	31	22	29	17
Once a week for Jum'ah prayer	24	29	25	23
Once or twice a month	10	11	10	8
A few times a year, especially for the Eid	14	16	16	18
Seldom	9	11	9	16
Never	11	11	10	18
NS, DK, Refused	1	1	1	0

[a]*Approximately how often do you attend a mosque for prayer?*

[b]*On average, how often do you attend the mosque or Islamic center for salah and Jum'ah prayer?*

Perceived discrimination. Over half of U.S. Muslims believe that Islam and Muslims are unfairly portrayed fairly in the media: 77% believed this in 2001, 76% in 2004, and 57% in 2007. At least a quarter of U.S. Muslims report experience of personal discrimination: 26% in 2002, 40% in 2004 and 27% in 2007.

Table 4

Do you think the media is fair in its portrayal of Muslims and Islam? (percentages)

	Zogby2001	Zogby2004	Pew2007[a]
	N=1781	N=1846	N=1050
Yes fair	13	17	22
No biased against	77	76	62
Depends	--	--	7
NS, DK, Refused	10	7	9

[a]*Do you think that coverage of Islam and Muslims by American news organizations is generally fair or unfair?* Response converted: Unfair = Biased against.

Table 5

Aside from restrictions on religious expression at work, have you yourself suffered anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment, verbal abuse, or physical attack since Sept. 11? (percentages)

	Zogby 2002	Zogby 2004[a]	Pew 2007[b]
	N=531	N=1846	N=1050
Yes	26	40	27
No	74	59	71
NS, DK, Refused	0	1	1

[a]*Have you yourself experienced any discrimination of this sort since September 11th?*

[b]*And thinking more generally - NOT just about the past 12 months - have you ever been the victim of discrimination as a Muslim living in the United States?*

Political grievance. U.S. Muslims' support for U.S. military action in Afghanistan declined between 2001 and 2007 (52%, 53%, 35%, 35%). Events between 2002 and 2004 may explain a shift in sentiment. The routing of the Taliban in December of 2001 appeared to open an opportunity for democracy and stability in Afghanistan, but, over succeeding years, Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan and stagnation in the war in Iraq may have contributed to increasing doubts about U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.

Table 6

Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the U.S. military action against Afghanistan? (percentages)

	Zogby 2001[a]	Zogby 2002[b]	Zogby 2004[a]	Pew 2007[c]
	N=1781	N=531	N=1846	N=1050
Support	52	53	35	35
Oppose	43	42	53	48
NS, DK, Refused	6	6	11	17

[a]Responses converted: support and somewhat support = Support; somewhat oppose and oppose = Oppose.

[b]*U.S. military action in Afghanistan after Sept 11 was justified under the circumstances. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree?* Responses converted: strongly agree and somewhat agree = Support; somewhat disagree and strongly disagree = Oppose.

[c]*Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force in Afghanistan?* Responses converted: right decision = Support; wrong decision = Oppose.

Predicting opinions about the war on terrorism

Table 7 shows correlations of demographic and opinion items with seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. The first thing to notice is the consistency of the pattern of correlations across the four surveys (three columns of Table 7, first column Table 8). Demographic predictors – gender, age, education, family income – are consistently uncorrelated with seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. Being born in the U.S. is slightly but consistently associated with seeing a war on Islam. The two religiosity items -- importance of Islam and frequency of mosque attendance --show consistent positive correlations, such that increased religiosity is associated with increased likelihood of seeing a war on Islam, but the correlations are very weak (.06 to .16). The two perceived discrimination predictors also show consistent positive correlations, a little stronger than the religiosity predictors but still the correlations are weak (magnitudes .17 to .27). The fifth predictor, opposition to the Afghanistan war, produces consistently the strongest correlations (.30 to .52).

Table 7

Correlations (regression betas) with seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam.

	Zogby 2001 N=1781	Zogby 2002 N=521	Zogby 2004 N=1846
Gender (male=1, female=2)	.03(-.01)	.13(.07)	.10(.05)
Age	-.10(.00)	.02(.06)	-.03(.04)
Education	-.01(-.05)	.05(.02)	-.04(-.05)
Family income	-.03(-.03)	.04(.05)	-.02(.04)
Born in the U.S. (yes=2,no=1)	-.18(-.07)	-.08(-.03)	-.18(-.07)*
Would you say the role of Islam in your life is very important, somewhat important, or not very important? (very impt=1, not impt=3)	-.14(-.01)	-.16(.06)	-.15(-.07)*
On average, how often do you attend the mosque for salah and Jum'ah Prayer? (1= more than once/wk, 6=never)	-.16(-.05)	-.12(-.07)	-.11(-.01)
Do you think the media is fair in its portrayal of Muslims and Islam? (yes=1, no=2)	.23(.11)*	--	.27(.16)*
Aside from restrictions on religious expression at work, have you yourself suffered anti-Muslim discrimination, harassment, verbal abuse, or physical attack since Sept. 11? (yes=1, no=2)	--	-.22(-.17)*	-.18(-.11)*
Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the U.S. military action in Afghanistan? (strongly support 1, strongly oppose 4, other 2.5)	.52(.46)*	.46(.41)*	.40(.32)*

*beta different from zero, p<.01. For 2001, R(1282)=.52; for 2002, R(508)=.51; for 2004, R(1527)=.47

Note. Tabled correlations (betas) with *Do you feel the U.S. is fighting a war on terrorism or a war against Islam?* (terrorism = 1, Islam = 2, other = 1.5). Owing to missing responses, n of 2001 correlations ranged from 1655 to 1781 (except income n=1480); n of 2002 correlations 513-521; n of 2004 correlations 1790-1846 (except income n=1591. See Tables 1-6 for variations in wording of predictors; 2002 *importance of Islam* reversed.

In order to examine further the predictability of opinions about the war on terrorism, we conducted multiple regression for each of the four polls, entering all available predictors in one step. Multiple Rs were .52 in 2001, .51 in 2002, .47 in 2004, and .39 in 2007. Regression betas that show the unique contribution of each predictor appear in parentheses in Tables 7 and 8.

The betas are very like the corresponding zero-order correlations, and similarly consistent across polls. Demographic and religiosity items are useless or weak predictors, although betas show a small but consistent tendency for respondents born in the U.S. to be MORE likely to see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. Perception of personal or group discrimination provides weak prediction of seeing a war on Islam (beta magnitudes .11 to .17). Only opposition to the U.S. military in Afghanistan shows consistent strong prediction of seeing a war on Islam (betas .46, .41, .32, and .25).

Predicting opinions about suicide bombing and Al Qaeda

Table 8 shows that the best (but weak) predictors of seeing suicide bombing as justified are two demographic items, age and education (-.14, -.16). These correlations indicate that there is a small but consistent tendency for younger and less educated respondents to justify suicide bombing more than older and more educated respondents. Regression betas (-.13, -.13) confirm that only age and education are significant predictors of justifying suicide bombing, but the multiple R is only .22.

The best correlates of favorable opinion of Al Qaeda are education (-.29) and opposition to the war in Afghanistan (.22). These correlations indicate that respondents with lower education are more likely to have favorable opinions of Al Qaeda, and that respondents more opposed to the Afghan war are more likely to have favorable opinions of Al Qaeda. Again, regression betas (-.17, .19) confirm that only low education and opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan are significant predictors of favoring Al Qaeda. The multiple R is .37.

Thus more positive opinions about suicide bombing and about Al Qaeda are both predicted by lower

education, but only opinions about Al Qaeda are predicted by opposition to the Afghan war. Given that the correlation between the suicide bombing item and the Al Qaeda item is .30, it is not surprising that these two items do not have the same predictors.

Table 8

Pew2007: Correlations (regression betas) with seeing war on terrorism insincere, with justifying suicide bombing, and with sympathy for Al Qaeda.

	War on terrorism not sincere	Suicide bombing to defend Islam justified	Favorable opinion of Al Qaeda
Gender (male=1, female=2)	.08(.00)	.05(-.01)	.10 (-.02)
Age	-.04(-.05)	-.14(-.13)*	-.05(-.02)
Education	.00(-.01)	-.16(-.13)*	-.29(-.17)*
Family income	.06(.07)	-.09(.02)	-.22(-.06)
Born in the U.S. (yes=1,no=2)	-.19(-.12)*	-.03(.03)	-.11(-.07)
How important is religion in your life? (very important=1, not at all important=4)	-.08(-.02)	-.05(-.02)	-.13(-.03)
On average, how often do you attend the mosque for salah and Jum'ah Prayer? (1= more than once/wk, 6=never)	-.06(.02)	-.04(-.02)	-.09(-.07)
Do you think that coverage of Islam and Muslims by American news organizations is generally fair or unfair? (fair=1, unfair=2, depends 1.5)	.25(.17)*	-.05(-.03)	-.08(-.08)
And thinking more generally - NOT just about the past 12 months - have you ever been the victim of discrimination as a Muslim living in the United States? (yes=1, no=2)	-.17(-.08)	-.04(-.06)	.02(.00)
Do you think the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force in Afghanistan? (right=1, wrong=2, other =1.5)	.31(.25)*	.08(.08)	.22(.19)*

* beta different from zero, *p*<.01. For war on terrorism, R(798)=.39; for suicide bombing, R(798)=.22; for favoring AQ, R(798)=.37.

Note. First column: *Do you think the US led war on terrorism is a sincere effort to reduce international terrorism or don't you believe that?* (sincere effort=1, don't believe that=2, other=1.5). Second column: *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?* (often=4, never=1, other =2.5). Third column: *Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Al Qaeda?* (Very favorable=4, very unfavorable=1, other=2.5). N of tabled correlations 1024-1050, except n=959 for media item and n=868 for income item.

Conclusion

Discussions of political radicalization of Muslims in Western countries have generally advanced one or more of three kinds of explanation. The first explanation is alienation: the idea that Muslims feel discrimination blocking their integration into a Western identity and turn instead to an Islamic identity that supports them in hostility toward those who will not accept them. The second explanation is radical Islam: the idea that religious fanaticism moves Muslims toward anti-Western hostility. The third explanation includes two kinds of grievance: economic and political.

These three explanations are not mutually contradictory, and it is possible that all three can be supported. Also, each explanation may apply to the kind of radicalization that produces active terrorists, or to the radicalization that occurs in the pyramid of sympathizers and supporters that terrorist depend on, or both. For instance, economic frustration may be associated with increased sympathy for terrorism in opinion polls of Muslims even if, as Krueger (2007) has argued, most Muslim militants come from families above average in socioeconomic status.

The present study focused on testing explanations of mass radicalization of U.S. Muslims. Only about one half of one percent of the U.S. population are Muslims, a very small minority for which ordinary sampling methods are prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless we found four national polls of U.S. Muslims conducted between 2001 and 2007 that contained items that could be related to theories of radicalization. In particular we found measures of socioeconomic status, religiosity, perceived discrimination, and opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan that could be correlated with three elements of what we call the "global-jihad" frame: seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam, justifying suicide attacks in defense of Islam, and favorable opinion of Al Qaeda.

The first result of interest is that the three aspects of the global-jihad frame are relatively independent in the one poll (Pew2007) that included all three relevant items. Support for suicide attacks and favorable opinion of Al Qaeda are correlated .30 but neither of these items is related to seeing the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. This independence can be seen is well in the distribution of opinions: few U.S. Muslims favor suicide attacks or Al Qaeda, but most have come to doubt the sincerity of the war on terrorism.

Doubts about the war on terrorism are not associated with gender, age, education, family income, or religiosity, and are only weakly associated with perceptions of anti-Muslim bias in the U.S. and U.S. birthplace.

But Muslims who oppose U.S. forces in Afghanistan are much more likely to see the war on terrorism as a war on Islam. This linkage suggests that U.S. Muslims evaluate the war on terrorism more in terms of relations between the U.S. and Muslim countries than in terms of their own experience of discrimination in the U.S. If this interpretation is correct, it follows that eliminating public or official references to a "war on terrorism" will not have much impact on U.S. Muslims unless U.S. policies change in relation to Muslim countries.

Compared with opinions about the war on terrorism, opinions favoring suicide attacks and Al Qaeda are relatively extreme: only 8% of Pew respondents said that suicide attacks are sometime or often justified, and only 4% reported very or somewhat favorable opinion of Al Qaeda. Despite their correlation (.30) however, these two opinions have different predictors. More precisely, justifying suicide attacks has no useful predictors, with only slight tendencies for younger and less educated respondents to report this rare opinion. But a favorable opinion of Al Qaeda, though no less rare, is predicted by low income and opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan. This pattern of correlations was not predicted and, given that the two radical items appeared only in the Pew2007 poll, the pattern should be confirmed before interpretation is attempted.

Finally, returning to the three explanations of radicalization with which we began, our results offer a complex picture. Alienation, as indexed by perceived discrimination, is consistently but weakly associated with seeing a war on Islam, but unrelated to justifying suicide bombing or favorable opinion of Al Qaeda. Religiosity, as indexed by importance of Islam and frequency at mosque, is unrelated to any of the elements of the jihadist frame. Economic grievance, as indexed by low education and low family income, is weakly related to justifying suicide bombing and favorable opinion of Al Qaeda. Political grievance, represented by opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan, is the best predictor of a political judgment that the war on terrorism is actually a war on Islam and also predicts favorable opinion of Al Qaeda. Overall, results least support the idea that radicalization is linked with extreme religiosity, and best support the idea that radicalization is linked with opposition to U.S. policy in relation to Muslim countries. The importance of opposition to U.S. policy among U.S. Muslims is notably consistent with the conclusions of Tessler and Robbins (2007), who found that a negative assessment of U.S. foreign policy was a significant predictor of support for terrorism in Algeria and Jordan.

In brief, results of four polls indicate that different elements of the global-jihadist frame depend on different perceptions and experiences of U.S. Muslims. This kind of complexity is likely to increase as more is learned about the political opinions of U.S. Muslims: different theories will be useful in understanding different

aspects of opinion radicalization. As well, theories of opinion radicalization are likely to differ from theories about how individuals and groups make the transition to violent action.

Most generally, the results of this study suggest new directions for the "war of ideas" against terrorism. At least in the U.S., different elements of the global-jihadist frame are believed by different subsets of Muslims. These different audiences will need different communications, perhaps in different media, to combat sympathy and support for jihadist terrorism. The war of ideas is part of a political competition between the U.S. and its enemies, and the usual techniques of political competition – audience research, market segmentation, targeted communication – will be required.

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