THE ROLE OF RELIGION, VALUES AND IDEOLOGY IN RADICALISATION PATHWAYS

Summary of Key Findings

* Research participants in the Islamist extremist (ISE) milieus studied were more likely to report having a religion and practising that religion than those in the 'right-wing' extremist (RWE) milieus. In two RWE milieus (in Greece and Russia) there were equally high levels of respondents who were religious and practising.

* Respondents from neither RWE nor ISE milieus recognise their own views, beliefs or values as 'radical' or extremist. They describe themselves, rather, as socially conservative, traditional or orthodox.

* For both RWE and ISE respondents, religion is closely associated with 'traditional' attitudes. RWE respondents use religion to underpin their promotion of 'traditional' values whereas ISE respondents often seek a religious path that is not bound to 'traditional' religious doctrine.

* In both ISE and RWE milieus, actors are motivated by a sense that their 'in-group' is threatened and in need of protection.

* The majority of actors in the RWE milieus neither participate in nor support violence. However anti-Islam, anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments are widely expressed alongside a belief in the unique incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with Western society.

* Among ISE milieus, concern is expressed that the notion of the 'Ummah' is exploited by ideologues with political agendas that rationalise and justify the use of violence to defend and protect fellow Muslims.

* ISE respondents often cite Islam as a protective factor against extremism, or as offering a path away from radicalisation, while some RWE respondents view Christianity as providing an essential moral framework for Western societies.

The DARE Research

This research briefing is based on qualitative data collected and analysed as part of the DARE (Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality) project. The project focuses on young people (loosely defined as those aged 15 to 30 years) and on two strands of extremism, which we refer to as 'Islamist' extremism (ISE) and 'right-wing' extremism (RWE).

The DARE project uses a mixed-methods approach and has multiple research strands. In this research briefing, data are drawn primarily from 19 milieu-based ethnographic case studies (10 of ISE milieus, 9 of RWE milieus) in 12 countries including just under 400 semi-structured interviews.

We cannot do justice to the complexity and contentious nature of many terms used in this briefing. For brief conceptual definitions, see: http://www.dare-h2020.org/concepts.html. For critical discussion and contextualisation of these terms, please consult the individual research reports: http://www.dare-h2020.org/research-reports.html

Further information on the project and participating institutions can be found at the end of this briefing.

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What is the relationship between religion, ideology and radicalisation?

The role of religion in relation to radicalisation, extremism and terrorism – especially Islamist or jihadist-inspired terrorism – has been the focus of considerable academic research and public debate in the post-9/11 environment. This context means that Islam has come in for significant, arguably disproportionate, attention in this debate (Grossman and Hellyer, 2019).

In the DARE research, we – along with many writing in the field - employ the term 'Islamist' to indicate a range of ideological positions rooted in the interaction between Islam and politics as distinct from 'Islamic', understood as relating to Islam as a body of religious thought. Islamism includes elements of a range of systems of beliefs, values and ideologies, which should be understood as a political articulation of Islam, but not one which is necessarily linked to, or a feature of Islamic societies, Islamic history or Islam as religion. However, we recognise that, for others, the term 'Islamist' remains problematic by implying that 'Islamism' is articulated from within the religion and thus positioning religion (Islam) as central to extremism and paying insufficient attention to other root causes.

Cavanaugh (2017: 30), for example, argues that 'the myth of religious violence causes us to turn a blind eye to the causes of non-Western grievances against the Western world'. Political grievances rather than religion are identified as the key factor in radicalisation also by Sonn (2016) while others point out that increased religiosity does not necessarily signal a radicalisation pathway (Abbas and Hamid, 2019: 291). It is clear that there is no simple causal connection between Islamic theology, Islamism, and Islamist radicalisation. Even scholars who point to the belief among jihadists that Islam is under attack and the only way to defend it is through violence, also argue that violence in jihadism goes beyond the realm of religion and has become a self-contained goal or 'culture' (Khosrokhavar, 2009: 59).

By contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to examining the role of religion in facilitating RWE radicalisation pathways in the recent period. Right-wing extremism is used as a 'catch-all' for political beliefs which include a combination of ideological positions (anti-democracy, authoritarianism and exclusionary nationalism) as well as psychological dispositions (closed-mindedness, intolerance of ambiguity, 'need-for-closure' etc.) while the role of religion among RWE milieus in the European context is less frequently discussed. However, a central component of contemporary RWE ideology mobilises anti-Islam rhetoric and Christianity is often invoked, even by non-believers or non-practising believers, in RWE milieus as a core pillar of European civilisation and culture in need of defence against the threat of Islam or 'Islamisation'.

In both cases, our findings appear to confirm Juergensmeyer's (2017: 19) argument that religion is not the initial problem, but the ideologising of economic, social and political grievances using a religious framing may become problematic. In the present moment of late modernity, he suggests, secular concerns – a sense of alienation, marginalisation, and social frustration - have been expressed through a range of rebellious religious ideologies and the protest against these grievances has been organised, in some cases, by religious leaders through the medium of religious institutions (ibid.).

In this Research Briefing, we explore the relationship between religion and radicalisation as expressed and experienced by actors in RWE and ISE milieus across Europe. By unpacking and analysing how individuals and groups mobilise different aspects of religion, tradition, and morality, we illuminate the paradoxes, parallels and points of connection between and across RWE and ISE milieus in order to better understand the relationship between religion, ideology and radicalisation.

Religion: its meaning and role in milieu actors' lives

More research participants in the ISE milieus studied describe themselves as religious and practising than their counterparts in RWE milieus (see Figure 1). Among ISE milieus, between 50% and 100% of respondents saw themselves as believers who practised their faith. Among RWE milieus, the proportion ranged from as low as 13% to 91%. This variation between ISE and RWE milieus is, in part, a product of the initial selection of milieus of study.

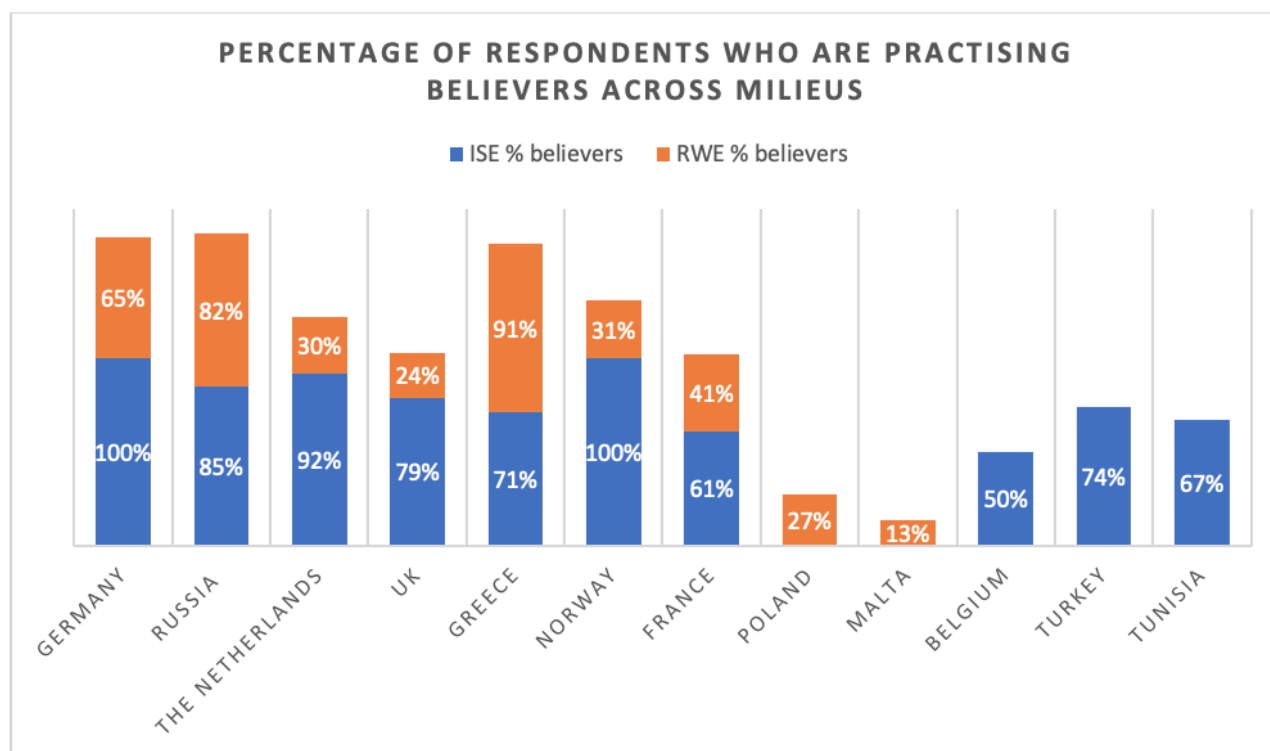## PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO ARE PRACTISING BELIEVERS ACROSS MILIEUS

Figure 1: Levels of religiosity across milieus

We selected milieus on the basis of where young people were exposed to Islamist or right-wing extremist messages. The ISE milieus tended to be either culturally defined milieus or territorial neighbourhoods with a high proportion of Muslims. In the case of RWE milieus, religious identification was not a factor for exposure to such content, which was connected, rather, to political activism. However, in the case of Greece and Russia, the RWE milieus selected did have a direct connection with religion. In Greece, the case focuses on Islamophobic/anti-Muslim attitudes, behaviours and sentiments among young people associated with the Greek Orthodox Church. In Russia, the study focused on a right-wing milieu of young (neo) Cossacks who, ideologically, see themselves as defenders of Orthodox Christianity but also share xenophobic and anti-immigrant positions. In these cases, the proportion of milieu actors saying they are religious and practising reaches equivalent levels to that of the ISE milieus (91% in Greece and 82% in Russia). As evident from the discussion below, in some respects these two religiously oriented RWE milieus present similarly to ISE milieus.

There are as many paths to personal beliefs and connection to Islam as there are individuals. Stories recounted include those of: being born into practising families and being taught the religion at home; being encouraged to 'choose' one's own religion at one's own pace; seeking knowledge for oneself; choosing to practise faith in a 'practical' way – as suited to wider commitments and lifestyle; and becoming Muslim through conversion/reversion.

BEN (GERMANY, ISE)

Ben was born into a Catholic family but grew up feeling agnostic in relation to faith. Whilst a student studying in another country he was introduced to a German speaking Salafist student to whom he became close. He began to inform himself about Islam and slowly integrated into the Muslim students' community before converting to Islam himself (following a life-threatening accident). Practising his faith gave him support and self-confidence. On return to Germany, he became involved in Salafist circles and worship but moved away from them when raids against jihadists started to get closer to his immediate environment. He feels that Islam has healed him from psychological problems he experienced growing up and, despite the restrictions of Salafism, freed him.

Being a Muslim is often a defining element of identity and religion provides a sense of belonging that the world of liberal secularism fails to deliver.

Securing this identity is not straightforward, however. It is often a struggle initiated in response to personal challenges or crises (including health and mental health issues) and secured only through conflict with parents or other community members. Alongside a sense of connection and belonging, sometimes this struggle for identity can bring disappointment or disillusion.

'my main principle in life is religion, of course. Everything that moves me, that gives me some understanding of everything else, keeps me from bad things, purifying my life is the religion'. Omar (Russia, ISE)

MAMUKA (RUSSIA, ISE)

'I am a Sunni and for Shiia, this is the number one enemy […] And, of course, I had problems with my father, mother, and brothers […] They said that I was born a Shiia and should be a Shiia. I said, "no, [...] God forbids us to follow our fathers if they are in error. God forbids it in the Koran."'

Among RWE milieus, for individuals who were believers, religion might play an important role in their everyday lives. Craig (UK, RWE) states that although he does not talk about religion in the milieu, *'it is a big part of who I am'* while Respondent 18 (Netherlands, RWE) considers that the way he looks at the world is very much *'shaped by my religion'*. Ronia's (Germany, RWE) experience suggests *'if you have faith, I think you feel a little bit more secure'* while for Respondent 6 (Netherlands, RWE), finding faith had proved, literally, life-saving.

'If I had not become a believer I would have hung myself, I honestly mean that. I have also been given a purpose, perspective to look at the world, dare I say: I have become a better person. Charity, forgiveness, that sort of thing; it benefits me an incredible amount' R6 (Netherlands, RWE)

CHRISTOPHER (FRANCE, RWE)

'Religion is very important, in the sense that Corsica, I'll go even further in terms of faith…in terms of the practice…I'm not a practising Christian, I'm not a Catholic extremist like in the Crusades…But I'm talking about in the cultural sense because you have to remember something (…) even if not all Corsicans are Christian, Corsica itself is Christian, it's the culture.'

For many, Christianity, or religion more widely, constitutes an important part of the moral fabric of society without being an active source of personal identity or meaning. Kristine (Malta, RWE), for example, believes *'religion provides morals'* but that it should be kept separate from politics, while Respondent 15 (Netherlands, RWE) thinks *'Christian values are good, traditional values. I am also very much in favour of that'*. In this way, Christianity becomes valorised as part of a wider cultural or civilisational background or heritage regardless of individual faith. For Paul (UK, RWE) this means that *'there is a huge component of Christian sort of morality within our society. And these things build a shared sense of moral values, shared sense of outlook'* while for Christopher (France, RWE), Christianity is intrinsic to Corsican identity.

For a section of the Greek RWE milieu, radical Christian values are even more deeply entwined with political nationalist identity. Father Daniel and Father Gabriel both lead militant Orthodox groups that comprise far-right sympathisers and activists and former military officers/soldiers. In the Corsican RWE milieu also, political groups have formed over the last five years that promote the defence of the Corsican people, and the non-Islamisation of Corsica whilst aligning with the wider French extreme right and pan-European identitarian movements such as Generation Identity. In this way, expressions of anti-Islam rhetoric are intertwined with the defence of Corsican, European and Christian identity.

It should also be noted, however, that some actors within RWE milieus declared themselves to be atheist, agnostic or pagan and sometimes expressed very negative attitudes to (all) religion. As Lee (UK, RWE) puts it, *'I'm very, very anti-religion, me. I don't like any of it'*. Dan (UK, RWE) and Lara (Germany, RWE) both express negative attitudes towards any kind of religion, believing it to be a trigger of much of the conflict in the world.

LARA (GERMANY, RWE)

'*I don't have much to do with religion, because I think that it's more the extreme belief in religion or the meeting of people who believe very strongly in religion and are not so tolerant towards others that is the main conflict between people. And most wars are also because of religion, so they are religious wars and therefore I think that every person should distance themselves a little bit from religion.*'

Among ISE actors, this generalised anti-religion position is not found although some respondents reflect on the partial nature of their following of Islam such as not performing Ramadan (Kylian, France, ISE).

Religious or radical: How do respondents see themselves?

Respondents from both RWE and ISE milieus rarely recognise their own views, beliefs or values as 'radical' or 'extremist.' Rather, they describe themselves, as socially conservative, traditional or orthodox. Where respondents do acknowledge that there are 'extreme' or 'radical' interpretations of their religion or value sets, they almost universally reject the label of 'extremist' when attributed to themselves. They are most likely to recognise its use in relation to oppositional 'others' but, in some cases, 'extremist' or 'radical' are used relationally to refer to people or groups within respondents' own milieus, whom they view as 'more extreme' (RWE milieus) than them or as having 'lost their way' (ISE milieus). These associations and dissociations are discussed in more detail in the Research Briefing 'A common language? Emic perspectives on 'extremism', 'radicalism' and 'terrorism'. Figure 2 below illustrates who and what are considered 'extremist' or 'radical' by milieu actors.

Research participants in ISE milieus most consistently associate '*takfiris*', '*jihadis*' and, historically, '*kharijites*'[1] with 'radical Islam' and distance themselves from these ideological positions and movements such as Islamic State. Indeed, such positions and groups are identified as '*heretical offshoots of Islam*' (Pavlos, GR) or simply '*not Islamic*' (Nikos, GR). However, the term 'Salafi' is used more ambivalently. Some respondents self-identify as Salafis and are adamant that '*Salafism has nothing to do with ISIS*' (Sevgi, Turkey, ISE). Others consider Salafism to be at the extreme end of the spectrum, and in some cases use the term Salafi and 'radical' interchangeably (Zehra, Turkey, ISE).
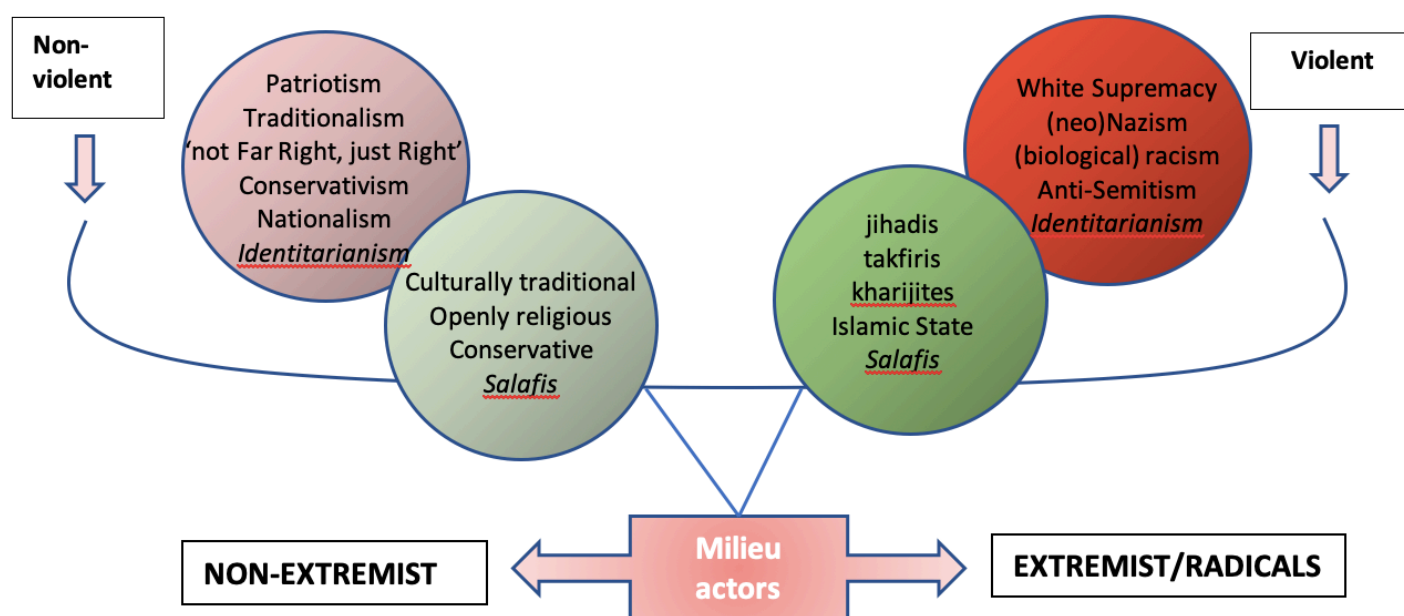

Figure 2: Who and what is 'extremist' and 'radical' for actors in ISE and RWE milieus

[1]'*Kharijites*' is a reference to the first religious sect of Islam whose denunciation of those not adhering strictly to Islamic norms leads them to be associated today with so-called '*takfiris*'.

It is important to note also that some ISE respondents reject the very distinction between 'moderate' and 'extreme' or 'radical' Islam seeing them as western constructs that undermine the unity of Islam. There is only one Islam, they argue, which is intrinsically a 'religion of balance' ('*wasatiyya*') and tolerance (Fatma, TUR). To deviate from this path of tolerance is itself to be radical or extremist.

In contrast to the ISE milieu, 'extremism' for RWE respondents is not automatically associated with a radical *religious* persuasion even though some RWE respondents do subscribe to a militant Christian orthodoxy or take anti-Islam, anti-Muslim or anti-Semitic positions. Those considered to be extremist, however, are most usually referred to as those supporting neo-Nazism, white supremacy, anti-Semitism and (biological) racism. In the case of the RWE milieu, identitarianism[2] is seen by some as 'too extreme' while others are active in identitarian movements such as Generation Identity.

RWE respondents, like their ISE counterparts, reject the language used by others to describe their beliefs and values. They do this, however, not by rejecting the possibility of right-wing extremism but arguing that the term is used indiscriminately towards all those active on the Right and talking about themselves as not RWE but 'patriots', 'traditionalists' or 'nationalists'. As Paul (UK, RWE) puts it, referring to how he feels right-wing activists are portrayed: '*A Muslim extremist is a Muslim that advocates violence or carries out violence. But a nationalist is always an extremist. There's not nationalists and nationalist extremists.*' (Paul, UK, RWE).

Traditionalism, religion and extremism

As evident in Figure 2, among both RWE and ISE milieus, traditionalism can be viewed as a positive marker of identity, although its relationship to religion and extremism is differently construed across the milieus. Despite varying levels of religiosity (see Figure 1), both ISE and religious RWE respondents feel a strong urge to protect their communities from the secularisation of modern society, which they believe has been detrimental to their visions for a healthy and morally sound existence. This reflects Juergenmeyers' (2017: 18) finding that

violent extremism is driven by the sense of a loss of identity and control in the modern world.

This perception is prominent among a number of RWE milieus in our study, where religion is seen as providing an important counter-force to 'progressive ideas' by maintaining some traditional values and ideas - something '*to hold on to*' as Anita (Norway, RWE) puts it - as crisis threatens to engulf society. When respondents in RWE milieus talk about their ideal society, they most frequently refer to a 'traditional' society, by which they mean one that existed before it became 'threatened' by 'others' (immigrants, those from other cultures or faiths) or by materialistic or non-spiritual values. It is a society imagined as being 'like it used to be', that is having strong community and morality as well as 'traditional' or socially conservative values including a patriarchal gender order. Among some milieus, the current crisis is believed to be community and morality as well as 'traditional' or socially conservative values including a patriarchal gender order. Among some milieus, the current crisis is believed to be fuelled also by consumerism, which has turned people into '*consumer monsters who do not think too much […]*' (ONR, PL).

> ### ONR (POLAND, RWE)
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> '*In my opinion, we are not here, we are not on this Earth just to live our lives. We are like little ants fitting into this consumerist world, into the consumerist order, but it seems to me that we should have, or aspire to have, greater goals, objectives, in our lives - both as people and as a nation, as a society. […] A nation should be aware of its... mission? Right? […] in my opinion, our mission, as a nation, should be, I dunno... re-Christianisation, or... I'm struggling to find the words... of Europe, simply restoring it to... perhaps restoring is the wrong word, but... rediscovering its Christian roots, plus, developing them in the contemporary reality […]*'

In this discourse, religion features as the need to defend Christianity and is invoked often within identitarian cultural and political arguments for pushing back against the perceived 'Islamisation' of Europe and calls for 're-

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[2] Identitarian ideology is rooted in the ideas of French new right thinkers such as Alain de Benoist and advocates 'ethnopluralism' - that ethnic groups are equal but different and thus should be territorially separate - in place of multiculturalism. It is frequently associated with the belief that there is a 'Great Replacement' of the native, white European population with non-European immigrant populations.

migration'. Gunnar and Ulf (Norway, RWE) use the concept of 'remigration' to indicate a strategy of making Norway as hostile as possible an environment for Muslims in order to encourage their 'voluntary' exit.

GUNNAR (NORWAY, RWE)

'*We think that if we sort of make society European again, then Islamists won't feel at home, and that implies, for example, to end halal slaughtering. I mean, if you in fact keep up the law against animal abuse and refuse the financing of mosques, and…so we use the word remigration.*'

For the most religious RWE respondents, primarily those in Greece and Russia, religious orthodoxy functions as a key institution projecting traditional values. Father Gabriel describes the root of the current problems as a '*spiritual crisis*' that has left Greek society 'in a state of decay'. Vaggelis (Greece, RWE) also attributes the problems in Greek society to a decline in the value attached to the nation, religion and the family. The connection between visions of society, pre-globalisation, rooted in 'traditional' values and views on patriarchy, heteronormativity, gender differentiated roles and family are discussed in a separate Research Briefing on 'Gender dimensions of radical(ising) milieus'.

VAGGELIS (GREECE, RWE)

'*Religion, the traditional faith that we inherited from our ancestors and we must pass to our descendants, is being degraded. And, of course, the institution of the family which is being degraded through new, additional, artificial rights such as gay couples' marriages, or adoption by gay couples, things that will lead to freak families and people with psychological problems.*'

The deployment of such powerful ideological symbolism linking the nation and the family, and often infused with religious rhetoric, is becoming a feature also of mainstream politics. Radical right parties in Western Europe increasingly use 'religious references as a campaigning strategy [to present] themselves as defenders of Christianity against a Muslim threat' (Schwörer and Romero-Vidal, 2020). This is illustrated by the example of the People's Party (il-Partit

Popilari) in Malta, which gained traction among traditionalists by highlighting their commitment to a society built around family values, especially in opposing abortion. They articulate a nationalism that is intimately tied in with a version of Catholic morality, patriarchy and tradition (Mitchell, 2006). This sentiment was exhibited also during the 2011 divorce referendum in the country where the anti-divorce campaign used an image of Christ, apparently advocating for a 'no' vote in the referendum (see Plate 1).

Plate 1: An anti-divorce campaign advertisement depicting an image of Christ alongside text reading 'Yes to Christ - No to divorce' during the 2011 referendum. Source: https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/divorce.363949

Among ISE respondents, we also find concern that modernity has disrupted the natural order and this has resulted in the breakdown of the family model (Adrian, France, ISE). Indeed, many ISE respondents feel that Muslims living in the West have lost their way due to the morally bankrupt, secular lifestyles that they perceive are promoted by Western democracies. However, this does not necessarily lead to a yearning for a 'traditional' Islamic lifestyle but to the search for alternative versions of Islam that present a tool for action rather than a guiding framework of principles.

Indeed, our findings suggest that disengagement from 'traditional' religious knowledge, promoted by parents, members of their communities or traditional religious establishments like mosques or madrasahs, is associated by ISE respondents with a tendency to gravitate towards 'extreme' interpretations of Islam. The role of internet teachers and preachers, who appear more in touch with the specific socio-cultural and political grievances facing young Muslims across the world, is noted by respondents in this regard. The proliferation of sources of alternative knowledge on the internet (lectures, online

talks, chatrooms, online khutbah (preaching)), can reinforce existing prejudices and grievances by directing individuals to polarising narratives and affirm and validate radical ideological stances. Disconnected from local religious authority or support, radical Islam may appear to offer the possibility of joining a world of 'virtue' that validates socio-political grievances and injustices whilst easing the sense of powerlessness.

R8 (NETHERLANDS, ISE)

'I was in contact via the internet. I first went to search for Islam […] and I ended up on very radical sites. I was shocked. Then I went to Morocco.nl [a chat forum] I expressed my dissatisfaction there. About the war started by Bush. He said very clearly that 'you are either with us or you are against us'. So for me I had the feeling as if he spoke to me, that I have to make a choice. And of course, I was not with him. I was not on his side… So it kind of got polarised. A black and white image.'

Religion, ideology and the justification of violence

In both ISE and RWE milieus, respondents voiced a sense that their respective 'in-group' is threatened and in need of protection. The 'in-group' sentiment is expressed through an 'us' versus 'them' discourse, albeit conveyed in different forms between and among RWE and ISE respondents. Although violence is a threshold that most respondents appear unwilling to cross, for some the process of radicalisation can be understood as an emotional experience where 'triggers' that justify violence are not necessarily uniform or linear. These triggers include the defence of justice, the preservation of 'faith and Fatherland' or for the protection of an imagined global Muslim community (the Ummah).

The perceived 'Islamification' of Europe is a common theme among RWE respondents. Both religious and secular RWE respondents see Islam as a threat to their societies and their futures. Many respondents perceive Christian nations as exposed to the threat of Islamisation; a process that must be stopped if they are to achieve their vision of an ethnically and religiously homogeneous society. RWE respondents express their objections to Muslims and Islam in Western society through discourses of Islamophobia on the one hand, and through an 'in-group' protectionist sentiment, which seeks to defend

their desire for ethnically, racially and religiously homogenous societies.

Plate 2: English Defence League demonstration, Telford, 12 May 2018

Anti-Islam sentiment is expressed by religious and secular RWE respondents in different ways. In a secular vein, respondents object to, and are suspicious of, the perceived importing of Muslim cultures and values into society. Islam is understood as backward, aggressive, expansionist and violent and its followers as characterised by fanaticism, intolerance and even hatred for non-Muslims. This gives rise to prejudiced and hostile representations of Islam and presents Muslims as radically foreign and incompatible with European and Western civilisation and culture. Plates 2 and 3 illustrate aparticular focus in the discourse of the UK RWE milieu on the issue of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), referred to popularly as the problem of 'grooming gangs' and

Plate 3: Generation Identity 'Free Tommy Robinson' demonstration, London, 14 July 2018

perceived as consisting primarily of men of Pakistani heritage who perpetrate organised sexual abuse against white girls. The association of this with aggressive 'Islamification' is reflected in the reference to organised CSE of this kind as 'rape jihad' (see Plate 3). Examples of assumptions made by RWE respondents from other milieus studied about the incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with Western society are illustrated in Figure 3.

The majority of actors in the RWE milieus studied do not participate in nor support violence. The main exceptions are found among the Greek and Russian milieus, which are also those most closely linked to religion. The Greek milieu included Orthodox fundamentalists who see themselves as 'soldiers of Christ', Greek Orthodox far-right activists, militarists and neo-Nazi Golden Dawn supporters who supported or enacted violence. Father Tryfonas, a radicalised Greek Orthodox Church priest, advocated people's armed revolution against politicians, political parties and all enemies of Greece and Orthodoxy. Father Tryfonas and other sympathisers advocate political authoritarianism and the use of violence (physical and symbolic) as a legitimate means for the pursuit of political goals. Father Gabriel similarly endorses a militant version of Orthodoxy and far-right nationalism which is unequivocally anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and strongly supports violence as a means to achieve its goals. He stated his readiness 'to shed our blood for our fatherland, our religion and our relatives' (Father Gabriel, Greece, RWE).

RWE respondents who use religion to advocate violence are often motivated by the fear of the mixing of peoples and cultures. This discourse presents Islam as being a threat to the very moral fabric of Christian society and perceives Muslims to be attacking Christian nations through migration and terrorism in order to Islamise them. As Dassios, a respondent from Greece puts it, immigrants from Islamic countries 'have come to our homeland to slaughter. We have to do something while we still can'. These views are often fuelled by conspiracy theories such as the Eurabia theory, promoted by RWE terrorist Anders Breivik according to which a conspiracy between Muslims and political leaders underpinned a planned Islamic takeover of Europe (see: Sætre 2013; Bangstad 2014, 2018). The Eurabia theory has since

Perceptions of cultural incompatibility

POLITICALLY INCOMPATIBLE	CULTURALLY/SOCIALLY INCOMPATIBLE	RELIGIOUSLY INCOMPATIBLE
'So Islam is dangerous for the French Republic and for European democracies [...] a person who comes from the Ivory Coast and who's Christian will have an easier time assimilating to French society than a person who's Muslim. That's just my opinion.' (Gary, France, RWE)	'...they will never assimilate with us. Arabs and so on, because this is a different world' (Pawel, Poland, RWE)	'Islam is a religion that teaches about disciplining women through beating. This is written in the Qur'an and it is very different from our culture. [...] They walk in the streets and women walk behind men and they are obliged to wear the hijab. This means that they are incompatible with European culture' (Vaggelis, Greece, RWE)

Figure 3: Perceptions of incompatibility between Islam and 'the West' among RWE respondents

featured also in Brenton Tarrant's violent extremist ideology, which resulted in his murder of 51 Muslims in a mosque in Christchurch in 2019.

Among actors in the Russian RWE milieu, Russian Orthodoxy, with its dogmas of 'humility' and 'love towards fellow human beings', is reinterpreted through the logics of 'protecting the faith and the Fatherland'. In this vein, respondents proclaim the need to protect Russia's borders territorially, but also the interests of Russia politically and the Russian people through maintaining 'purity of blood'. In this vein, respondents expressed negative attitudes towards anyone with a migrant background and representatives of other ethnicities. The legitimisation and justification of violence is most clearly articulated through narratives related to military actions, where the image of 'the enemy' is clearly delineated and distinguished from what constitutes 'us'. As Nikolai (Russia, RWE) declares: '*Well, they are the enemies – they [ISIS] must be killed*'. Indeed, this role of 'protector' (in physical and military terms) is deeply embedded in Cossack identity in which the 'Orthodox warrior' not only believes in God but is 'prepared to die at any moment' (Alexandr, Russia, RWE).

ROMAIN (FRANCE, ISE)

'*Muslims are like family. For me, Muslims are family. I don't know them, but I don't need to know them. Just by reading the Qur'an, I know them already. From the moment someone confirms their faith, I defend his kin. How I see it, a Muslim - whether French, American or whatever else - is more valuable than a non-believer from [his country of origin], even if we come from the same mother. It might be surprising, but that's how it is [he laughs, somewhat awkwardly]. What ties us together is faith, Islam… [we are] a community. We're like parts of one man. If one of us is attacked, the whole body feels the pain and is going to do whatever it takes to heal itself.*'

ISE respondents express their 'in-group' preferences through various idealised visions of a strong 'pan-Islamic'

identity that transcends borders, nationalities and race. Expressions of violence are generally articulated through a discourse of protectionism combined with the desire to be part of a strong and resilient 'in-group', represented by the global Ummah, and a corresponding 'enemy' that threatens it. The way in which the religious notion of the 'Ummah' can be exploited by ideologues who rationalise and justify the use of violence is evident in the narrative of Romain (France, ISE). Romain, a Muslim convert, articulates the compelling sense of duty, purpose and validation that accompanies this sense of becoming engaged with a just cause to defend and liberate fellow Muslims.

Among both RWE and ISE respondents, the ideologising of religion thus provides the motivation and the legitimation for violence. In both milieus, actors are motivated by a sense that their respective 'in-group' is threatened and in need of protection. Even though most respondents reject the use of violence, some may be moved towards violence as a result of their emotional commitment to defence of justice, preservation of 'faith and fatherland' or for the protection of an imagined global Muslim community.

Religion as a protective factor against extremism

Religion, whilst mobilised by some respondents to justify violence, also appears in the narratives of both ISE and RWE respondents as a potentially protective factor against extremism. Figure 4 illustrates the different ways in which religious values and practices are cited across RWE and ISE milieus as acting as a bulwark against extremism and facilitating non-radicalisation pathways. These include a sense that religion need not be divisive but having religion, regardless of whether that be Christianity or Islam, indicates a certain set of shared values. When these values are referred to directly by respondents, in both ISE and RWE milieus, these include the rejection of violence and the promotion of peace and tolerance as well as harmony, forgiveness, acceptance and respect (ISE milieus) and loving thy neighbour, turning the other cheek and pacifism (RWE milieus).
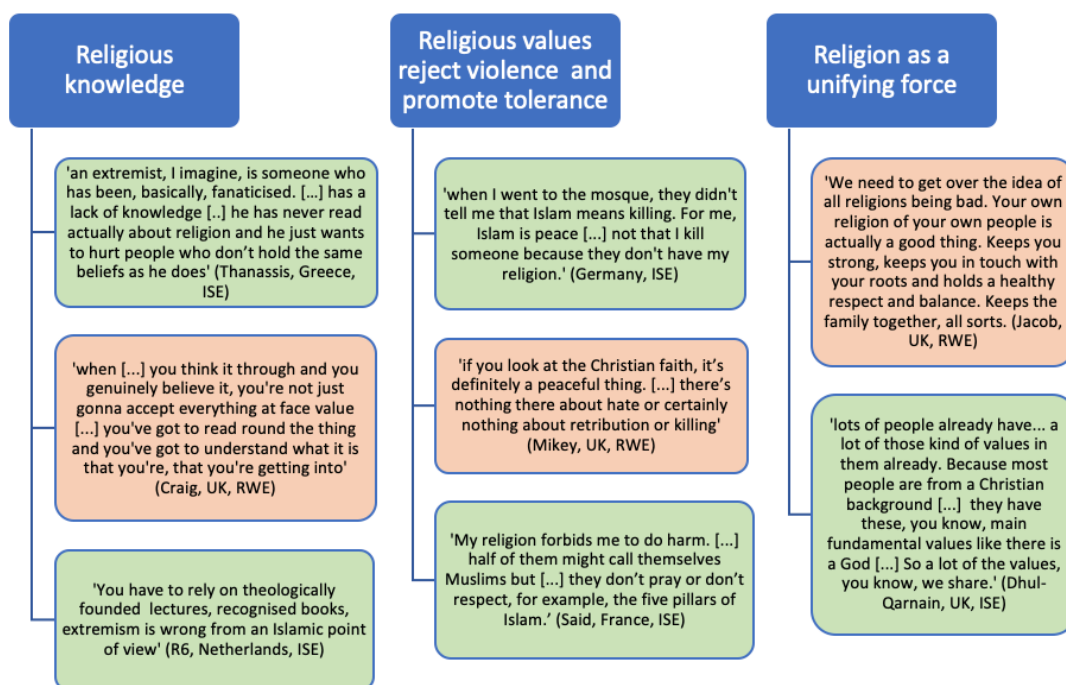
Religious knowledge

'an extremist, I imagine, is someone who has been, basically, fanaticised. [...] has a lack of knowledge [..] he has never read actually about religion and he just wants to hurt people who don't hold the same beliefs as he does' (Thanassis, Greece, ISE)

'when [...] you think it through and you genuinely believe it, you're not just gonna accept everything at face value [...] you've got to read round the thing and you've got to understand what it is that you're, that you're getting into' (Craig, UK, RWE)

'You have to rely on theologically founded lectures, recognised books, extremism is wrong from an Islamic point of view' (R6, Netherlands, ISE)

Religious values reject violence and promote tolerance

'when I went to the mosque, they didn't tell me that Islam means killing. For me, Islam is peace [...] not that I kill someone because they don't have my religion.' (Germany, ISE)

'if you look at the Christian faith, it's definitely a peaceful thing. [...] there's nothing there about hate or certainly nothing about retribution or killing' (Mikey, UK, RWE)

'My religion forbids me to do harm. [...] half of them might call themselves Muslims but [...] they don't pray or don't respect, for example, the five pillars of Islam.' (Said, France, ISE)

Religion as a unifying force

'We need to get over the idea of all religions being bad. Your own religion of your own people is actually a good thing. Keeps you strong, keeps you in touch with your roots and holds a healthy respect and balance. Keeps the family together, all sorts. (Jacob, UK, RWE)

'lots of people already have... a lot of those kind of values in them already. Because most people are from a Christian background [...] they have these, you know, main fundamental values like there is a God [...] So a lot of the values, you know, we share.' (Dhul-Qarnain, UK, ISE)

Figure 4: Religion as a protective factor against extremism

SAYYID QUTB (UK, ISE)

'I think what the masjid are doing now is good. They're getting more involved with the youth and doing projects and such. They're actually taking a lot more responsibility for the youth as an organisation, and they know it's their responsibility now. Because obviously, learning from the past mistakes and looking towards things that have happened now, they know it's much more important to...'

Especially in ISE milieus, respondents pointed to the lack of religious knowledge or distorted religious knowledge as a key issue in radicalisation and thus having access to proper religious guidance was an important protective factor. In some cases, the role of mosques in engaging with young people who might be exposed to radicalising messages was welcomed. Sayyid Qutb (self-selected pseudonym) from the UK ISE milieu, for example, praised a mosque a young person had attended before going to Syria for jihad for subsequently seeking to deter other young people from becoming radicalised. In Russia, mosques are described as providing moral fabric and community, and a non-radicalising message while non-official clergy (i.e. those who do not work on behalf of the government) are seen as being able to reach out to radicalised youth and function as a resource for religious knowledge when countering radicalisation. Dutch respondents emphasise the importance of adhering to the '*strict standards for taking something as true*' that apply to Islam and the danger of young people relying on '*living room teachers*' rather than recognised theological sources (R6, Netherlands, RWE).

Overall, the ethnographic data suggest that the influence of political ideology can distort and manipulate religious ideas, beliefs and values held by both RWE and ISE respondents. While the ideologising of religion can contribute to respondents adopting violent mentalities, there is no linear or causal pathway along which respondents travel and that ultimately leads them into violence. Radicalisation journeys are highly varied, complex and dependent on many other influencing factors such as existing grievances, friendships and family ties, level of education and sources of information/ knowledge. The data indicate that religion, far from inherently facilitating or encouraging radicalisation pathways, may do so when mobilised within wider ideological agendas. Furthermore, respondents whose religious values are rooted in values of generosity, non-violence, peace, tolerance and respect are inclined to practise religion as a way of resisting or militating against radicalisation rather than legitimising it.

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