

THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN 'RADICAL ISLAM': AN EVALUATION OF PHENOMENON AND TERMINOLOGY ACCURACY

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Abstract

Mentions of "radical Islam" can be heard weekly, if not daily, on various media platforms. The "umbrella" term "radical Islam" is often used to describe extremist interpretations of Islam that involve violence and terrorism, therefore the term by itself encompasses several concepts, which lack clear definitions not only in academia, but also international legal system. The research question is: "What concepts constitute "Radical Islam" and whether their terminology corresponds to Islamic teachings". Aim of this paper is to compare proposed terminologies of different authors, to propose a more unified terminological framework while analyzing the term "radical Islam" itself. Methods included but were not limited to literature analysis, document analysis, context and content analysis. The obtained results include terminology comparative analysis, and a new terminology framework proposed by the authors which contributes to the originality of the research.

Keywords: radical Islam, violence, terminology, European security

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Introduction

The term "radical Islam" not only shapes public perception but also raises questions about its accuracy and the subsequent impact on Muslim communities. What is surprising, is that "radical Islam" as a term, does not have official definition (i.e. it is not clearly explained in any international legal document), even if it is widely used in academia and in informative papers compiled by international organizations. What makes this term even more complex is that it functions as an "umbrella" term, encompassing several different other concepts such as "terrorism", "Jihad", "extremism" etc., leading to misunderstanding and misconceptions of Islam.

The paper delves into the complexities of what "radical Islam" denotes, based on definitions from different sources, probing whether its usage is founded upon accurate representations of Islamic teachings or whether it perpetuates misconceptions that may contribute to discrimination, particularly within the European milieu where Muslims account for a notable minority. A fundamental inquiry into the essence of Islam – its doctrines, historical development, and role in contemporary society—lays the groundwork for this discussion. The challenge lies in reconciling the multifaceted nature of a faith that spans various cultures and historical contexts with the oversimplified narratives that often dominate Western understanding. It is essential to discern how the term "radical Islam" and its concepts, aligns or diverges from the core principles of Islam as practiced by the majority of its followers. Lack of clear and consistent terminology usage aggravates the situation, especially regarding the term "Jihad", which often is defined over – simplistically.

Through a critical analysis that traverses the landscape of religious extremism across Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, the paper challenges the prevalent narrative that unjustly associates Islam with inherent violence.

Theoretical review and relevance

Our focal point in this paper is on “radical Islam”. To fully understand the terminology, first we should delve into fundamental questions, on which we will further build our analysis. At first sight, a very simple question: “What is Islam?”, actually is particularly complex. According to Campo (2009): “This is a question that Muslims have been answering for centuries when it is raised... It is also a question posed by many non-Muslims—never more than now, in the first decade of the 21st century. The answers given ... have varied greatly, depending on their education, social status, background, and the wider historical and cultural contexts in which they live.” (p. xxii). Some undoubtful, among sources, characteristics of Islam is that it is a monotheistic, one of the world's majority religions, and its origins can be dated to 7th century CE Saudi Arabia and the prophet Muhammad (Schimmel et al., 2024; Campo, 2009, p. xxi - xxii). Hjarpe (1997) explains that: “The historiography of Islam is complex and the relationship between doctrine and behavior is largely governed by this complexity” (p. 267). Quite surprisingly, according to Campo (2009): “The modern study of Islam was mostly relegated to a few elite universities until the 1980s, and it was hardly mentioned in social studies textbooks used by secondary school students and teachers” (p. xxi), therefore lack of knowledge on Islam by Western society is an understandable result. “Muslim relations with Europe have shaped the way Muslims remember their heritages, practice their faiths, and even think about their religious principles” (Blumi, 2015, p. 31). Professor Halit Eren (2015) explains that: “It is crystal clear that the development of social and political movements with an anti-Muslim agenda is a truly global phenomenon” (p. 9). Today, Muslims are significant players in the global economy and society, but they encounter challenges to their sense of belonging, security, and dignity both publicly and privately. When Muslims change residences, migrate or are mobile in other ways, they often confront stereotypes that unfairly link them to past and potential violence, forcing them to defend themselves and assert their innocence. However, this defensive response can inadvertently reinforce the negative stereotypes against them. Misuse of religious terms contributes to discrimination. Citing Blumi and Hacısalıhoğlu (2015): “the first quarter of the 21st century perhaps the most difficult period for Muslims since the birth of the faith” (p. 15). Mentions of violence, extremism or radicalism, especially regarding Islam, are not rare. As Eren (2015) points out “in an age of extreme atrocities and breaches of fundamental human rights and liberties across the globe, one of the most adversely affected social groups is constituted by the Muslims”, and continues exemplifying different regions: “From Myanmar to Palestine, from East and Southeast Asia to Central and Western Europe Muslims face various forms of violence, bigotry, hatred, stereotyping and discrimination today informed by anti-Muslim extremism” (p. 9). Even though this statement has been published almost a decade ago, we still have to question ourselves, whether the situation has improved. Blumi and Hacısalıhoğlu (2015) state that “much of the public and professional discourse on European values, integration, and democracy reflects how Islamophobia impacts not only Europe’s public spheres, its institutions, and moral boundaries; but increasingly also how Muslims in the rest of the world, particularly in societies with historic Muslim minority populations, interact.” (p. 12 - 13). They collectively call it European unwillingness to escape the politics of xenophobia. To conclude the theoretical part of the paper, it is crucial to emphasize that the use of correct terminology is essential to avoid aggravating Islamophobic behavior. Therefore, terminology involving violence and Islam needs to be revisited.

“Radical Islam” is not a definite term, however, it has been widely used both in academia and media, as well as social discourse. Big part, possibly the majority, of most cited papers do not include a clear definition of the term “radical Islam”, however, many scholars mention terrorism, fundamentalism, “Jihad”, extremism or radicalism when talking about “Radical Islam” (e.g., see Botticher, Miller, Mohapatra, works of Quintan Wiktorovicz and others, as well as documents of international organizations). Due to this reason, authors have analyzed all these terms under the umbrella term “radical Islam”. Currently, international legal instruments (e.g. UN Security Council Resolution 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters or International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism) lack clear definitions of several of these terms, including “radical Islam”. Therefore, the research question is: “What concepts constitute “Radical Islam” and whether their terminology corresponds to Islamic teachings”. The aim of this paper is to compare proposed terminologies of different authors, to propose a more unified

terminological framework while analyzing the term “radical Islam” itself. To achieve this aim, authors have 1) identified concepts, and consequently – terms, that constitute “radical Islam”; 2) analyzed terminologies proposed by different authors; 3) compared proposed terminology to Islamic teachings; and finally, 4) proposed a new terminology framework.

Methods and Materials

Several interdisciplinary methods have been employed to achieve the aim of this paper. Data was collected through literature and document analysis, and where feasible - case study analysis. The data was then processed using content analysis, contextual analysis, and legal interpretation methods, including Islamic legal theory. Specifically, terminology such as "radicalism" and "terrorism" was compared to Islamic religious teachings. Terminology analysis was restricted to semantic analysis. Additionally, to evaluate the appropriateness of term usage, these concepts were compared to teachings from other monotheistic religions and case studies.

Selection criteria for materials: Primarily, the authors worked with sources that analyze terminology. First, academically reputable encyclopedias and dictionaries were used for definitions. This choice was made with the understanding that encyclopedias are often compiled by multiple experts working on the same definition and offer editions from different years for comparison. This approach ensures additional neutrality in terminology and avoids representing any specific ideology. Next, the authors selected papers and articles that provided terminological explanations of the terms of interest (primary criteria), preferably kept neutral stance (i.e. did neither promote negative or positive terminological stance) (secondary criteria) and had the highest citation rates (at least 200 (third criteria), i.e. were impactful enough to influence terminology usage). The articles had to be peer-reviewed, published in indexed journals, or issued by public institutions of international standing. Google Scholar was used as the main search engine. This combination was chosen to analyze terminology used not only in academia but also in the broader political sphere.

Results and discussion

Radicalism, extremism, and terrorism

Authors have used several sources for terminology comparison. Namely, terminology proposed by Bötticher (2017), Miller (1993), Mohapatra (2002), UNDP (2016), EUROPOL (2022), Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024), and dictionaries (Merriam – Webster (2024) and Cambridge University Press (2024)) has been analyzed:

1 Table. Comparison of concepts in “Radical Islam”

(source: summary of sources used in the research, compiled by the authors)

Radicalism	Bötticher	UNDP	Merriam – Webster	Cambridge
	Describes radicalism as advocating for sweeping political change and often standing in opposition to the establishment. It’s noted as historically linked to the progress towards greater democracy.	Discusses radical behavior more broadly, noting that non-violent radicalism can promote positive change. Radicalization is seen as a precursor to violent extremism.	[Radical] - Very different from the usual or traditional: extreme. Favoring extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions. advocating extreme measures to retain or restore a political state of affairs	The belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change
Extremism	Bötticher	UNDP		
	Provides an extensive description, emphasizing that extremism is dogmatic, intolerant, and often resorts to violence to achieve its goals. Extremist movements are seen as authoritarian and oppose diversity and democratic principles	Focuses on violent extremism as radical behavior that employs indiscriminate violence.		
Jihad	Britannica	Miller & Mohapatra	Merriam - Webster	Cambridge
	Defines it simply as a war fought by Muslims to defend or spread their beliefs.	Discuss jihad as a holy war with spiritual and moral implications and note the Western misinterpretation of the term as a secular war.	1: a holy war waged on behalf of Islam as a religious duty. Also: a personal struggle in devotion to Islam especially involving spiritual discipline. 2: a crusade for a principle or belief.	In Islam, a religious struggle against evil in yourself or in society.
Fundamentalism	Bötticher	Miller	Mohapatra	
	Suggests that some authors equate fundamentalism with non-violent extremism.	Militant Islam, or Islamic fundamentalism (an inappropriate but widely used term borrowed from American Protestantism to describe the phenomenon).	For the fundamentalists, nationalist particularism is the negation of Islamic universalism and inhibits the unity of the Umma (p. 93). the fundamentalists’ call for “the return to Islam” and waging holy war (p. 94).	

Terrorism	Britannica	EUROPOL	Merriam - Webster	Cambridge
	Typically involving violence to achieve political goals, often targeting civilians. Definitions of terrorism vary. Terrorism lacks a universal legal definition.	Focuses on jihadist terrorism and the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. Jihadist militants are able and willing to inflict upon EU citizens [violence], legitimised by the interpretation they adopted of selectively sampled religious texts.	Systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion.	(threats of) violent action for political purposes.
Islamism	Britannica	Miller	Merriam - Webster	Cambridge
	Broad set of political ideologies that use Islamic symbols and traditions for sociopolitical objectives.	Islamists - "believers living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles (p. 46)	1: the faith, doctrine, or cause of Islam; 2: a popular reform movement advocating the reordering of government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam	the belief that Islam should influence political systems.

In the process of search for terminology definitions, authors have concluded that there is a lack in consistency regarding terms such as "Jihad", "radicalism", "extremism", "radical Islam" and others. There is also a lack of official terminology in legal documentation, regulations or other public documents. Usage of terminology in media is even more inconsistent. Terminology usage among scholars and experts varies widely, oversimplistic or usage of different terminology as synonymous was commonly identified. Terms such as "extremism" and "radicalism" where often used interchangeably to refer to "terrorism" or "jihad" or "Islamism" (i.e. referencing to violence).

In Islam, extremism can be characterized by interpretations or usage of religious texts and teachings that advocate for violent or militant actions to achieve ideological or political goals. This may include acts of terrorism, intolerance towards other religious groups, and the imposition of ideological interpretations of Islamic law. Similarly, extremism can be found in other religions as well. For example, in Christianity, extremist groups may promote hate speech, discrimination, or violence against individuals or groups based on religious, racial, or ideological differences. In Judaism, extremist movements may advocate for the use of force to achieve nationalist or religious objectives, often leading to conflicts with other communities. Violence in separate religious groups will be examined in detail in the further sections, while this section will further concentrate on terminology of concrete violent acts, such as terrorism and other expressions of violence.

Terrorism is a complex and controversial concept, often carrying a strong negative connotation due to its association with violence and fear. While terrorism lacks a universal legal definition, it typically involves violence or the threat thereof to instill fear, aiming to achieve political objectives when direct military victory is unattainable. Unlike conventional or guerrilla warfare, terrorism relies on fear as its primary weapon. Terrorist acts, ranging from hijackings to bombings, are designed to generate widespread publicity and shock by targeting places frequented by civilians or symbols of political or economic importance. Definitions of terrorism vary, with some treating it purely as criminal activity and others emphasizing its targeting of innocent civilians to create fear. The blurred lines between terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and political violence pose challenges in defining and addressing this phenomenon (Britannica, 2024; Merriam – Webster, 2024; Cambridge University Press, 2024). Europol in its annual report on

terrorism (EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)) mentions that: “The main concern of Member States is jihadist terrorism and the closely related phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters who travel to and from conflict zones” (Europol, 2022), even though it is not explained, what exactly “jihadist terrorism” is. However, further they continue stating that: “The attacks in Manchester (with explosives) and Barcelona (with vehicles), which intended to randomly kill and wound as many people as possible, again demonstrated the harm jihadist militants are able and willing to inflict upon EU citizens, legitimised by the interpretation they adopted of selectively sampled religious texts.” (Europol, 2022). Here we should pay attention to the part stating, “legitimised by the interpretation they adopted of selectively sampled religious texts”. Several questions arise - which religious texts? And what is their interpretation? This definition might promote the idea that violence comes from religious texts and not the terrorist ideology itself; or that terrorist ideology comes from the religious texts themselves. Just like Christian or Jewish terms are not used to describe violent acts, term “Jihad” (analyzed further) should not be used regarding terrorism, just because it is organized by people who identify themselves as Muslim.

Political Islam encompasses the involvement of Islam in the political sphere. It can refer to efforts to establish Islamic governance based on Islamic principles or the participation of Islam-inspired political parties in democratic processes. Political Islam seeks to influence politics and society through legal and peaceful means, though it can vary significantly in its goals and methods. Islamism is a broader term that encompasses both political and social movements seeking to establish Islamic governance or uphold Islamic principles in society. It often advocates for the integration of Islamic law (Sharia) into the legal and political systems. While many Islamist movements engage in political processes peacefully, others may resort to more radical or militant tactics. However, Islamism by itself is not inherently violent. According to Britannica (2024): “Islamism, broad set of political ideologies that utilize and draw inspiration from Islamic symbols and traditions in pursuit of a sociopolitical objective. The aims and objectives of these movements vary widely, as do their interpretations of Islamic tradition and practice, and, as such, the precise scope and definition of the term remain debated... The term “Islamist”, denoting someone or something in pursuit of a sociopolitical objective using the symbols and traditions of Islam, is distinguished from the term Islamic, which refers directly to aspects of Islam as a religion”. Even though, at least in the West, the term “Islamist” usually has a negative, extremist connotation, based on the previous definition, any advocate of Islamism might be called an “Islamist”. Other sources propose slightly different definitions, however, what unites them is the aspect that Islamism includes promotion of Islamic values in sociopolitical sphere. However, it is worth noting that Islamism is not directly linked to violence, as mentioned before. In fact, many instances of Islamism are peaceful and democratic. For example, Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey promotes a vision of political Islam that emphasizes democracy, free-market economics, and moderate social conservatism. It seeks to integrate Islamic principles into governance while upholding Turkey's secular constitutional framework. The Justice and Development Party (Parti de la Justice et du Développement, PJD) is an Islamist political party in Morocco. In the 2011 Moroccan parliamentary elections, the PJD won the largest share of seats and formed a coalition government. This marked the first time an Islamist party led the government in Morocco. During its time in government, the PJD pursued policies aimed at economic development, anti-corruption efforts, and social welfare programs. The party has generally respected democratic norms and institutions, engaging in peaceful political competition and coalition-building. While the PJD's approach to governance has been influenced by Islamic values, it has also emphasized pragmatism and cooperation with other political forces in Morocco's pluralistic political landscape.

On the other hand, the branch of Islamic fundamentalism emphasizes a strict adherence to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices. It rejects modern interpretations of Islam and seeks to return to what it perceives as the fundamental principles of the faith. Islamic fundamentalists may advocate for conservative social values and resist secular influences in society, sometimes through political activism or legal means. Here it might be worth mentioning a statement by Astrid Bötticher (2017), a political scientist, which states that both terms – extremism and radicalism, are misused: “While some authors use the term 'non-violent extremism' for Islamist fundamentalists who are not active jihadists, holding extremist views without the political will to translate thoughts into action might be more a question of circumstances and

opportunities than principles.” (p. 74). The question is, can “extremism” be peaceful? Or it should be redefined as “radicalism”? Also – if the proponents of such ideology do not actively engage in promotion of reforms, are they “radicals” or “Islamists”? However, she does not explain the definition of Islamist fundamentalism or the reasoning for its conjunction with jihadism and violence. Further, she continues with citations of other authors. Summarizing: extremism represents an ideological stance embraced by anti-establishment movements that perceive politics as a struggle for dominance rather than peaceful competition. Operating at society’s fringes, extremists aim to seize control by instilling fear of internal and external enemies, dividing people into allies and adversaries while rejecting diversity and alternative viewpoints. Characterized by dogmatism, extremism is intolerant and unwilling to compromise, often resorting to aggressive militancy and criminal acts in pursuit of political power. When in power, extremists suppress social diversity and enforce homogeneity based on a faith-based ideology. Societally, extremist movements tend toward authoritarianism, with extremist rulers often becoming totalitarian. Extremists advocate violence as a means of conflict resolution and oppose constitutional states, majority-based democracy, the rule of law, and universal human rights (Bötticher, 2017, p. 74). On the other hand, Miller (1993) even states that militant Islam is Islamic fundamentalism, leading to even further confusion (p. 45). Definitions by UNDP (2016) are also abstract, not drawing concrete lines between radical and extreme political behavior: “Many drivers apply to other forms of extreme behavior. Radical behavior in itself is not necessarily a problem. Non-violent radical behavior, especially if undertaken purposely in the political, economic or cultural sphere, can help to promote positive change. Violent extremism kicks in when radical behavior starts making use of indiscriminate violence as the means of expression” (p. 4). They further continue and even state that: “Radicalization, an important precursor to violent extremism, is also on the rise globally.” (p. 9).

On the other hand, “radicalism, advocating sweeping political change, represents a form of hostility against the status quo and its establishment. . .Historically, radical political parties were key drivers in the progress towards greater democracy in a number of states” (Bötticher, 2017, p. 75). Radical Islam, typically, refers to a more extreme interpretation or practice of Islam, often associated with violent or militant actions. However, almost all the sources mentioned in this paper have included wide range of terminology under the umbrella term “radical Islam”, such as “terrorism” or “militant Islam” which, as a result, means it is not interchangeable with the term “Islamic radicalism.” Radical Islamists, on the other hand, may advocate for the use of force to achieve their goals, which can include political, social, or religious objectives. Therefore, we can conclude that such terminology, especially when used in context of Islam, might be contradictory and ideology oriented.

Radicalism and Extremism are closely related terms, and often used interchangeably, even though, depending on context, they can have different nuances. In the context of religion and politics, extremism refers to the adherence to beliefs or practices that are perceived as radical or extreme, often leading to actions that are outside the mainstream or considered socially unacceptable. Extremism can manifest in various forms across different religions, including Islam and others. It is important to note that extremism is not inherent to any particular religion but arises from the interpretation and manipulation of religious teachings by individuals or groups with specific agendas. Most adherents of religions, including Islam and others, do not support or condone extremist ideologies or actions. According to Bötticher (2017), in conclusion: “Radical movements tend to use political violence pragmatically and on a selective basis, while extremist movements consider violence against their enemies as a legitimate form of political action and tend to embrace extreme forms of mass violence as part of their political credo... Radicalism stands in rebellious opposition against the establishment; extremism, on the other hand, is directed not only against the establishment but against all those who do not embrace its dogmatic recipe for a transformation of society” (p. 75). Authors conclude that the fundamental difference between “radicalism” and “extremism” lies in usage of instruments of violence. Although, radicalism does not inherently lead to violence.

Violence in Islam, Judaism and Christianity

In addressing the intricate relationship between religion and violence, it is crucial to venture beyond surface-level interpretations and engage with the deeper, often complex historical and theological underpinnings within Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, as well as other religious movements. Such an analysis is essential for understanding the nuanced ways in which religious teachings are interpreted and the varied contexts in which they have been invoked to both incite and prevent violence.

Misinterpretations and oversimplifications of religious concepts can lead to significant misunderstandings and stereotypes, particularly when terms are extracted from their doctrinal and historical contexts. The connection between religion, interpretation, identity, and politics can be complex. This complexity is evident when examining situations, for example, in Myanmar and Sri Lanka, where Buddhists, often viewed as symbols of peace and harmony, are orchestrating brutal pogroms against Muslims. These pogroms are spearheaded by monks who justify their actions with religious texts. However, it's widely acknowledged that the violence against Muslims stems from the political conflicts prevailing in both countries, and rarely if in any case, such actions have been called "radical Buddhism". Few argue that Buddhism inherently incites such violence; instead, it's understood that the root cause lies in the broader political turmoil engulfing these nations (Malik, 2014). Malik points out that: "few apply the same reasoning to conflicts involving Islam. When it comes to Islam, and to the barbaric actions of groups such as ISIS or the Taliban, there is a widespread perception that the problem, unlike with Buddhism, lies in the faith itself" (Malik, 2014).

Regarding Christian radicalism, violent actions performed, apparently, by devoted Christians against other groups, almost never are termed as "radical Christianity". While the 9/11 terrorist attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda in the US were unparalleled in terms of their scale of devastation, the individuals directly responsible have yet to be fully identified. Nonetheless, an examination of US history reveals the presence of numerous Christian terrorist groups that were operational in the country even prior to the events of 9/11. "Many of the episodes of terrorist violence in the 1990s in the US were perpetrated by white supremacists and organisations, such as the neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan and others, with sympathisers across the US. These white supremacists are radically anti-government, racist and anti-Semitic." (Shah, 2005, p. 127 - 128), however, such attacks have never been defined as "radically" Christian, mostly racist or supremacist, even though often they promoted seemingly "Christian" ideas. Citing Elena Lukinykh (2015): "As a populist movement, Pegida [a German populist right-wing movement] often resorts to using simplistic characterizations of otherwise complex issues concerning Islam and Muslims" (p. 125). She further explains that Pegida frequently relies on oversimplified portrayals of intricate matters related to Islam and Muslims. By simplifying the dynamics between Muslims and non-Muslim Europeans into straightforward statements, they seek to incite Islamophobic reactions from voters who may otherwise be politically apathetic (p. 124 - 125), all while using Christian symbols.

Violence in Islam is not inherently present. Several Quranic verses prohibit violence surpassing necessary limits, such as self defence. For example, Surah (chapter of Quran) 2:190 expresses following: "Fight in the cause of Allah only against those who wage war against you, but do not exceed the limits. Allah does not like transgressors."; Surah 2:193: "Fight against them 'if they persecute you' until there is no more persecution, and your devotion will be to Allah 'alone'. If they stop 'persecuting you', let there be no hostility except against the aggressors."; Surah 2: 195: Spend in the cause of Allah and do not let your own hands throw you into destruction 'by withholding'. And do good, for Allah certainly loves the good-doers." and many others.

Jihad is a very common term that is used regarding "religious war of Muslims against unbelievers", which is immensely untrue. According to the Britannica (2024) and other sources (e.g. Merriem – Webster, 2024), Jihad is "a war fought by Muslims to defend or spread their beliefs", which is a very oversimplified and quite inaccurate definition. Contradictory, according to Britannica (2024): "It should be noted that the Qur'ān (2:190) explicitly forbids the initiation of war and permits fighting only against actual aggressors (60:7–8; 4:90).", and "Jihad, in Islam, a meritorious struggle or effort". Mohammad (1985, see also

Mohapatra, 2002), explains that "Jihad is frequently confused with the current Western concept of secular war. It is an erroneous identification, for under Islamic doctrine secular war (Harb) is morally unacceptable...Islam permits only Jihad and not Harb (secular war)" (p. 384). "Jihad applied internally against unacceptable leaders and externally against non-Muslim rulers is often described by Westerners as Islamic fundamentalism. (This is an unfortunate category insofar as it allows Westerners to dismiss the intellectual and theological depth and meaning of Jihad)" (p. 396).

The concept of jihad has multiple dimensions in the Qur'ān, evolving from internal struggles for patience during the Meccan period to defensive combat against aggressors in the Medinan period. In later literature, these dimensions are referred to as "the greater jihad" (internal struggle) and "the lesser jihad" (physical combat). Classical Muslim jurists focused primarily on jihad as a military duty in articulating international law, emphasizing state security and defense. While the Qur'ān prohibits the initiation of war and permits fighting only in self-defense, historical interpretations allowed for wars of expansion under certain circumstances. Wars against non-Muslims were often labeled as jihads to grant them religious legitimacy throughout Islamic history. In modern times, conflicts such as the Afghan wars have been viewed by participants as jihads. Islamist extremists have also invoked jihad to justify violent attacks, though many contemporary Muslim thinkers advocate for a more nuanced and restrained interpretation of jihad, emphasizing self-defense and criticizing classical rulings on warfare as historically contingent (Britannica, 2024).

Dr. Ibrahim Najm, an advisor to the Grand Mufti of Egypt, highlighted the distortion of certain Quranic verses and noble Prophetic traditions by ISIS to justify their terrorism. In statements to Al-Arabiya, a Saudi Arabian media provider, he mentioned that the Observatory for Takfir Fatwas affiliated with the Egyptian Dar al-Ifta issued a report on "Combat Verses in the Quran and the Exploitation of Terrorist Political Organizations, including ISIS." This report clarifies that legitimate Sharia jihad, conducted under the banner of the state to repel aggression and liberate countries, is an honorable endeavor, with its impact being guidance. However, labeling terrorism as jihad, shedding blood, killing, terrorizing the peaceful, displacing people, and violating covenants is sheer fabrication. He pointed out a number of Quranic verses that have been distorted out of context to justify deviant behaviors, including one prominent verse: {Then, when the sacred months have passed, kill the polytheists wherever you find them, capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.} (Quran, Surah At-Tawbah: 5). Furthermore, he emphasized the existence of methodological errors committed by terrorist organizations in their interpretation of jihad verses in the Quran. These errors include the distortion of the concept of jihad, the malfunctioning of the jihad system, and the failure to achieve the objectives of Sharia rulings (Abdel-Hamid, 2020). Authors conclude that using term "Jihad" should be avoided, even if Islamic militant groups refer to their actions using this term. Several Islamic and non - religious scholars, have concluded that its usage has been over – simplified, potentially leading to misconceptions.

To compare, violence in Judaism and Christianity has been a subject of considerable academic research, revealing a complex relationship between religious beliefs and the manifestations of violence throughout history. Historical analyses show that Judaism, like any religion, has a nuanced relationship with violence. The Hebrew Bible, rabbinic Judaism, and modern Zionism are just a few historical contexts in which Eisen (2021) examines the potential for Judaism to incite Jews to commit acts of violence against non-Jews. Eisen emphasizes the role that social psychology, in particular Social Identity Theory, plays in explaining Jewish violence. Furthermore, this viewpoint is strengthened by an examination of the intricate ways in which religious beliefs and historical narratives interact, complicating our understanding of violence in Jewish contexts. The exploration into the beliefs and myths surrounding violence within the Jewish religion over three thousand years highlights the evolving relationship between Jewish traditions and violence. This investigation demonstrates that the presence of violence in Judaism, like in any religion, is not inherently constant but is instead shaped by the changing dynamics of societal, cultural, and political environments (Aran & Hassner, 2013). Violence, as reflected in the context of Judaism and the state of Israel, represents a complex and multifaceted issue, deeply entangled with historical, religious, and political dimensions. The

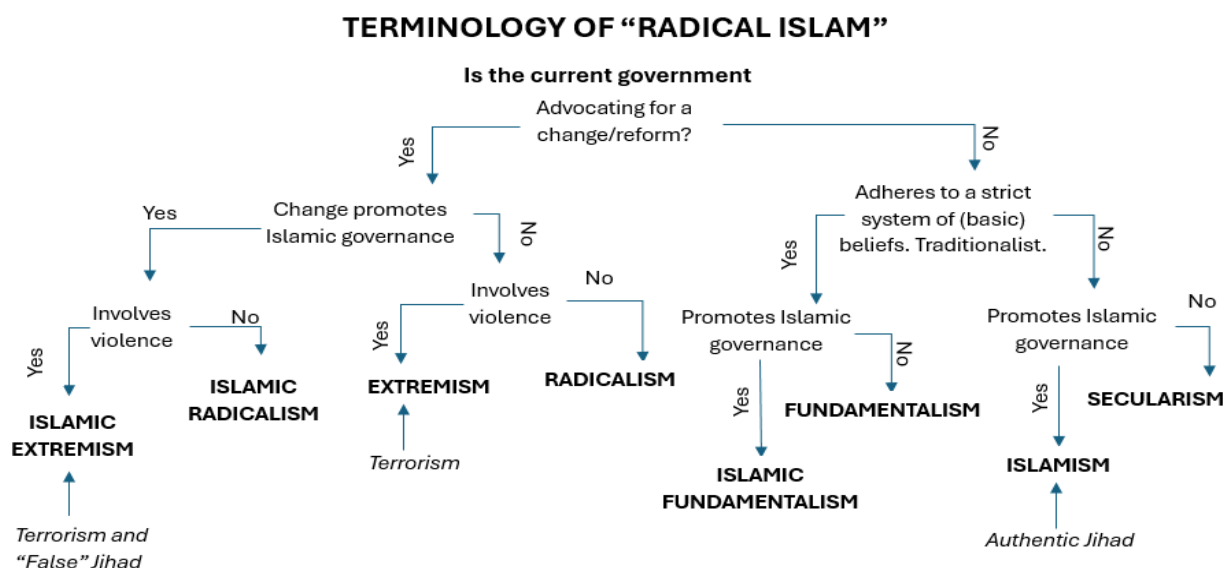
emergence of the Jewish state, celebrated by many as a haven for a people long subjected to persecution and exile, has also been marked by episodes of violence, both internal and external. Recent critiques from Jewish thinkers illuminate this duality, emphasizing the tension between the ideals of Jewish exile, which historically embraced pluralism and ethical coexistence, and the realities of sovereignty that often manifest in violence and exclusion. These critiques urge a reevaluation of Jewish political vision, suggesting a return to exilic principles that resist sovereignty and violence, advocating for a society that prioritizes social ethics, coexistence, and the recovery of a Jewish tradition rooted in peace and justice (Lapidot, 2024). Patrick Madigan, in the publication *"Christian Inversion of Jewish Nationalist Monotheism, and Its Romantic, Revolutionary and Narcissist Corruptions,"* discusses the broader context of how the internal and external dynamics of religious transformations, including the shift from Judaism to Christianity and their interactions with secular ideologies, have influenced societal and psychological aspects of violence. He highlights the complex interplay between religious identities, societal changes, and individual psychological responses, suggesting that violence emerges not simply from religious doctrines but from deeper human struggles with alienation, identity, and the failure to achieve a sense of belonging in a changing world (2024). Madigan's analysis aligns with the perspectives of other authors, underscoring that while Judaism and its evolution are significant, the emergence of violence is a complex issue shaped by a diverse array of historical, psychological, and societal factors. This consensus among scholars highlights the importance of viewing religious and ideological transformations not in isolation but as part of a broader matrix of influences that contribute to the dynamics of violence.

Christianity has always been at a crossroads, struggling to reconcile the seeming contradiction between Jesus's teachings on nonviolence - such as the command to "turn the other cheek" - and the times when Christians have either engaged in or approved of violence, thinking that it is required by God. Historical occurrences like the Crusades and the Inquisition, as well as contemporary debates about pacifism and just war theory, provide as striking examples of this dichotomy. This contradiction, according to Krueger (2013), highlights both the complexity of Christian theory and its historical implementation in a range of sociopolitical circumstances. Moreover, Christianity's connection to violence extends beyond historical or global events and into more intimate domains like domestic abuse. In these situations, religious convictions can influence the experiences of violence, providing aggressors with a rationale and survivors with comfort and fortitude. Wendt (2008) highlights how important it is to comprehend the cultural and theological contexts in which acts of violence of this kind occur, implying that there is a complex and profound relationship between faith and behavior. A deeper look at the New Testament and early Christian writings, however, reveals a story that is interwoven with both nonviolence and violence. This contradiction challenges the binary view of Christianity as either essentially pacifistic or inherently violent by illuminating the complex link between Christian teachings and the deeds of its followers. According to Villiers (2012), this uncertainty calls for a more complex interpretation of Christianity's position on violence.

In addition the differentiation between "thin" and "thick" religion provides valuable insights into the ways in which faith shapes actions. According to Volf (2002), there is a chance that a shallow religious devotion can lead to violence, but a deep and deliberate religious commitment will most likely foster a culture of peace. This point of view challenges the oversimplified claim that religion inherently breeds violence, arguing that one's level of faith and its characteristics have a substantial impact on how religion is seen by society.

Terminological framework

As the deliverable of terminological analysis and case study evaluation, authors propose a terminology usage framework. In summary, we can differentiate “extremism” and “radicalism” by identifying usage of instruments of violence. In instances of “extremism” terrorism is common, including phenomena labeled as “Jihad” even if the term does not correspond to Islamic teachings (please see previous sections of the paper). Generally, “radicalism” does not involve usage of violence. If “extremism” or “radicalism” instances promote governance based on Islam (Islamic governance), then term “Islamic” can be added for specification. As a general term, “Islamism” denotes any practice that advocates for governance based on Islamic beliefs and includes “Jihad” based on authentic Islamic teachings. “Islamism” is not inherently violent. On the other hand – “Islamic fundamentalism”, due to its strictness, is likely to take authoritative governance form and therefore – use some kind of violence for power retention.



1 Image. Terminology framework for political Islamic terms (source: compiled by the authors)

It is important to highlight that the term “radical Islam” has not been included in the framework. Such choice can be explained by several arguments – summarizing the results, even if “radicalism” is quite a clear term, “radical Islam” might encompass wide range of concepts, as has been seen in works of several scholars mentioned in this paper. On the other hand, we can conclude that the term consists of two terms “Islam” and “radical”. “Radical” might mean “to belong to radicalism”, which would mean that “Islamic radicalism” and “Radical Islam” could be used interchangeably. However, keeping in the mind the first argument, that several scholars use the term of “radical Islam” to encompass wide range of concepts, authors of this paper propose limitation of usage of this term. First, due to lack of clarity of the meaning, secondly, not to promote misconceptions about Islam (i.e. if “radical Islam” encompasses terrorism, then, logically, Islam as a religion should include terrorism in its teachings).

Regarding all the other terms (“terrorism”, “radicalism”, “extremism” etc.) used in the framework, authors propose including clear definitions in the international legal system.

Conclusions

The term "radical Islam" encompasses several concepts that lack clear definitions in both academia and the international legal system. These concepts include radicalism, extremism, terrorism, jihad, and Islamism. There is significant inconsistency and oversimplification in the usage of these terms across scholarly works, media, and public discourse. Terms like "extremism" and "radicalism" are often used

interchangeably, and concepts like "jihad" are frequently misinterpreted. Many of the concepts associated with "radical Islam" do not accurately correspond to Islamic teachings: Jihad, often misinterpreted as "holy war," actually has multiple dimensions in Islamic teachings, primarily referring to internal spiritual struggle. Violence and terrorism are not inherently present in Islam. Several Quranic verses explicitly prohibit violence beyond necessary self-defense, therefore, Islamism, while advocating for governance based on Islamic principles, is not inherently violent according to authentic Islamic beliefs. The term "radical Islam" itself is problematic and potentially misleading. It can encompass a wide range of concepts, some of which contradict core Islamic principles. Its usage may promote misconceptions about Islam as a religion. A new terminological framework is proposed to address these issues, for example, by differentiating between "extremism" (which may involve violence) and "radicalism" (which generally does not). The study recommends limiting the use of the term "radical Islam" and due to its lack of clarity and potential for promoting misconceptions. Instead, more specific and accurately defined terms should be used. Usage of term "Jihad" has to be carefully selected. Authors advocate using "Islamic" as a qualifier only when ideas genuinely promote governance based on authentic Islamic principles. There is a need for clear definitions of the terms used in this paper in the international legal system to promote consistent and accurate usage.

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