

Under Pressure:  
Muslims' Engagement in  
Counter-Extremism



Sadi Shanaah

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Counter-Extremism

PhD Dissertation

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Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7

DK-8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

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Looking back with the current knowledge of the Danish culture, I can see that I came to my PhD interview slightly overdressed three and a half year ago. Wearing a brand new suit and wedding shoes, but luckily no tie, this nervous Central European with an Arabic name was nevertheless warmly welcomed by Peter Munk Christiansen, the Department's head, in the exceptionally sunny November morning of 2016. That day, I was introduced to my prospective supervisors as well as some members of the faculty and the administration staff. Almost all of them felt the need to pinpoint to me apparently the best thing in the Department – the fact that you can get *danskvand* (soda water) from the tap in the eating lounge. They also took a great pride in the fact that the Department is very egalitarian and has a friendly atmosphere. This all turned out to be true, but there is so much more to it than the soda water (and world-class research).

There are very few places in the world, if any, where the conditions for doctoral students are as superb as in Denmark and specifically at our Department. To this day, I have not ceased to be amazed by the level of support and care provided to me. Starting with office spaces and IT, which would be envied even by professors in many countries, through secretarial support concerning proofreading, translations, financial affairs, or teaching administration, to the salary, additional research grants and the opportunity to participate in international conferences, courses and stays abroad that benefited my personal and career growth as well as my research project. For this incredible investment in my person, I am forever grateful to the Danish taxpayers and the departmental leadership. I hope I can return the investment.

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I am deeply grateful to my dad who has given me everything so I could become something and whose Muslim background led me to take interest in the Middle East and all things Arab and Muslim. This thesis is dedicated to him. I am also deeply grateful to my mum who raised me the way I am. My warm thanks go to my brother and to all my relatives and friends both in the Czech Republic and in the Arab region for keeping me in their thoughts and hearts, for nobody can strive in isolation.

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Sadi Shanaah

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# Preface

This report summarizes my PhD thesis “Under Pressure: Muslims’ engagement in counter-extremism”. The dissertation was written at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University between February 2016 and February 2019 under the supervision of Lasse Lindekilde and Thomas Olesen. The dissertation consists of the following papers:

1. Shanaah, S. (n.d.). Alienation or cooperation? British Muslims’ reactions to counter-terrorism mobilization. *Manuscript*. (Henceforth: Paper 1)
2. Shanaah, S., & Lindekilde, L. (2019). Standing up and Speaking Out? British Muslims’ Collective Action against Islamist Extremism. *Democracy and Security*, 1-22. (Henceforth: Paper 2)
3. Shanaah, S. (2019). What motivates Muslims to engage in counter-extremism? The role of identity, efficacy, emotions and morality. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-21. (Henceforth: Paper 3)
4. Shanaah, S. (n.d.). Demobilizing or Activating? The Effect of Anti-Muslim Discrimination on Muslims’ Counter-Extremism Engagement. *Under review*. (Henceforth: Paper 4)

The summary presents the main research question of the project and provides the main contextual, theoretical, methodological and empirical framework that cuts across the individual papers. It also discusses the combined contributions of the individual papers. For details on specific research questions, theoretical arguments, methods, data and analysis, the reader is kindly referred to the individual papers.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past several years, many Western countries have designed counter-extremism policies in response to the growing threat of Islamist terrorism. A core element in these policies is the emphasis on mobilizing and supporting Muslim (and other) communities so that they help the security and intelligence services in reducing the threat of terrorism (Home Office, 2015, p. 31; 2016, p. 2; 2018, p. 33; Spalek, 2013). The idea is that “communities defeat terrorism” (Blair, 2005; National Counter Terrorism Security Office, 2019), because ordinary Muslims are in an advantageous position to identify, dissuade, or report potential terrorists who hail from the Muslim community. Counter-extremism policies thus view Muslim communities as potentially effective allies in the prevention of terrorism (Sliwinski, 2013; Thomas, 2017a).

At the same time, the counter-terrorism discourse expressed in these policies as well as public debates classify Muslims both as potentially “risky” or “at risk of becoming risky” in terms of extremism (Heath-Kelly, 2013, p. 397). Large sections of Western majority societies believe that Islamist extremism reflects the attitudes of Muslim communities at large (Carter, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2017), that Islam itself is a threat (France24, 2016; Helbling, 2013; Talwar, 2016) and that Muslims are not doing enough to counter extremism in their communities (Jones & Cox, 2015; Silverman, 2013). Frequent calls by politicians on Muslims to be more active in challenging Islamist extremism only fuel such views (e.g., Maidman, 2017; Press Association, 2015b; Sanghani, 2014) as do media reports of alleged unwillingness among Muslims to report Islamist extremists (e.g., Mowat, 2016; Press Association, 2015a). In academic research too, the dominant narrative is that Muslims are hesitant to cooperate in counter-extremism because they are alienated by counter-terrorism policies and widespread Islamophobia (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Innes et al., 2007; Taylor, 2018; Thomas, 2014, 2017a, 2017b).

My dissertation is situated against this backdrop of the heightened policy efforts to mobilize Muslims for counter-extremism and parallel doubts about their willingness to participate. It addresses an urgent need for more systematic research into Muslim engagement in counter-extremism, the lack of which stands in contrast to the magnitude of academic production on the processes of Muslim radicalization. Not only do we know little about the extent to which Muslims are willing to take action against Islamist extremism; we also lack knowledge about the factors that make such action more or less likely.

Therefore, this dissertation is built around the following main research question:

*To what extent are Muslims willing to engage in counter-extremism and what facilitates or hinders such engagement?*

The research question is studied within the British context, where the calls on Muslims to stand up against Islamist extremism have been most intense. Moreover, policies designed to support them in tackling extremism have been in place for more than a decade, which makes it easier to study the factors that facilitate or hinder Muslim engagement than in other Western countries with a shorter history of mobilizing Muslims for counter-extremism (see Chapter 2 for more details).

Essentially, the study of Muslims taking (or not taking) various actions against Islamist extremism and being encouraged to do so by the government and the wider society can be conducted as a case of mobilization and socio-political activism. The most developed theoretical frameworks that can be applied to mobilization and activism come from the inter-disciplinary field of social movement research. However, several aspects make Muslim counter-extremism engagement a rather unusual case within this area. This opens up the possibility to refine and specify aspects of social movement theories by extending their application beyond the typical cases.

Perhaps the most striking aspect that makes the case of Muslim counter-extremism engagement stand out from mainstream social movement studies is that it does not show the typical defining characteristics of a movement, in the UK or elsewhere. Compared to Goss' definition of a social movement (2010, p. 11), Muslims' counter-extremism engagement is not an organized, sustained, visible and locally rooted challenge to Islamist extremism. Yet, as illustrated in Chapter 2, in the British context, some Muslim organizations and individuals are engaged in a sustained form of counter-extremism activism. There are also media reports of Muslim-organized protests against Islamist extremism in the UK and other European countries (BBC, 2017; DW, 2017; Osborne, 2017). Structural conditions (e.g., political opportunities, resources, or organizational networks) that usually facilitate the emergence of a movement seem to be in place too (see Chapter 2 for the UK context). Thus, even though Muslims' counter-extremism engagement so far might be classified as a "non-movement", and might remain that in the future, Muslim communities, especially in the UK, could also be characterized as being "at risk for mobilization" (McAdam & Boudet, 2012). Studying such communities and their "emergent contestation" can teach us more about what facilitates and what

hinders movement emergence than investigating these factors post hoc in full-fledged social movements (McAdam & Boudet, 2012).

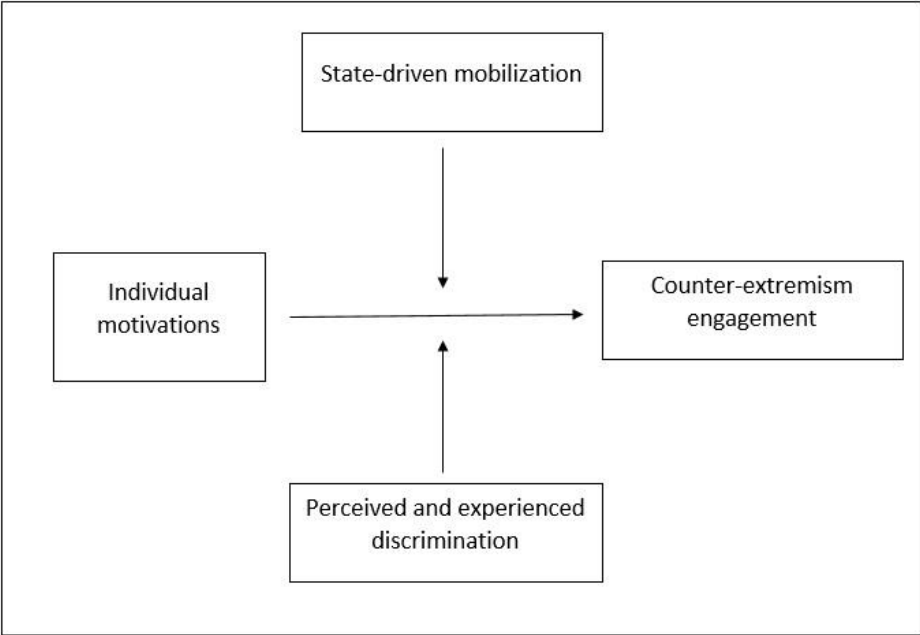
Another aspect distinguishing Muslim counter-extremism engagement is its inwards orientation – it challenges certain sections *within* Muslim communities with support of established political institutions. In contrast, the social movement literature has mainly focused on collective challenges to established political institutions or norms. Although some movements, especially conservative ones, have worked for protection of the status quo, sometimes in tandem with the authorities (Zald & Useem, 2017), the target has rarely been a part of the in-group, let alone one associated with violence and terrorism.

Finally, Muslim counter-extremism engagement takes place in a specific context. Muslims in the West face high levels of discrimination (FRA, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2017), under which some scholars include the actual counter-terrorism policies (Alam & Husband, 2013; Qurashi, 2018; Qureshi, 2017). This would normally lead a social movement scholar to look for signs of Muslim-based mobilization against the political or societal sources of discrimination-related grievances. In the case of counter-extremism, however, we investigate Muslims' mobilization against a target that is not directly responsible for these grievances. Yet, it is likely that the pressure of anti-Muslim discrimination, whether perceived or experienced, has some impact on Muslims' attitude and behavior with respect to their engagement in counter-extremism.

In fact, Muslims' counter-extremism engagement takes place in the context of a double pressure. In addition to discrimination, Muslim minorities are on the receiving side of numerous appeals to “do something” about Islamist extremism; some from the media (e.g., Sullivan, 2014), but most often from politicians (BBC, 2006; Karp, 2018; Montanaro, 2015; Press Association, 2015b; Sanghani, 2014). Counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies adopted in the last several years across many Western countries reflect these appeals in their emphasis on mobilizing and supporting communities, meaning mainly Muslim communities, in the fight against extremism (e.g., Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 21; Department of Homeland Security, 2016, p. 11; Home Office, 2015, p. 31; The Government of Sweden, 2015, p. 31). As a result, Muslim communities have been enticed with grants to come up with and implement projects that would tackle extremism (ANAO, 2016; O'Toole et al., 2015; Warikoo, 2018). The category of a “moderate Muslim” is constructed and exhorted to challenge an equally constructed category of “Islamist extremists” (Cherney & Murphy, 2016). It is therefore foreseeable that the mobilization pressure also influences how Muslims think and act when it comes to counter-extremism.

Figure 1 depicts this context of the double-pressure, in which Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement is situated. The box on the right, “Counter-extremism engagement”, signifies the extent to which Muslims are willing to engage in counter-extremism and captures the first part of the dissertation’s main research question. This area is the focus of *Paper 1*. The paper reacts to the dominant academic narrative that depicts Muslims as deeply alienated by counter-terrorism policies and implies their limited willingness to cooperate in counter-extremism (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Innes et al., 2007; Taylor, 2018; Thomas, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). It contributes to the scholarly literature by demonstrating the need to reassess and nuance the dominant alienation narrative, especially based on nationally representative survey data of British Muslims. The paper argues that the majority of British Muslims do not show signs of alienation and that the level of willingness to engage in counter-extremism is high. It points out the limitations of the extant literature, which is predominantly based on interview data of non-representative samples and often assumes a causal link between Muslim alienation and the willingness to take action against Islamist extremism.

Figure 1: The context of Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement



The upper box, “State-driven mobilization”, is the focus of *Paper 2*, which looks into how state-driven mobilization affects Muslims’ willingness to engage in counter-extremism. More specifically, using a survey experiment, the paper investigates the effect of a mobilization appeal by the government on British Muslims to take action against Islamist extremism and compares it to an appeal from a Muslim organization or no appeal. Its main contribution lies in the examination of what Klandermans (1988) calls “action mobilization”,



which is a phase of the mobilization process when an appeal for a specific action is issued to prospective participants. It follows the “consensus mobilization” phase, which is about building a base of sympathizers with a particular collective action (Klandermans, 1988). Scholars concerned with “action mobilization” are typically interested in why the number of people who eventually show up for a specific action is much lower than the overall number of sympathizers (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McAdam, 1986; Ward, 2015). Paper 2 adds to this line of work by theorizing two new factors: trust in and identity of the source of the appeal. Specifically, it shows how different levels of trust in the government and a Muslim organization interact with the appeal made by the government or the organization and produce different levels of willingness to engage in counter-extremism among British Muslims.

The box on the left, “Individual motivation”, represents Muslim individuals and their psychological motivations to engage in counter-extremism. Using a mixed methods approach, *Paper 3* examines which motivations play a role, and how strong this role is, in pushing Muslims towards both long-term and one-off counter-extremism engagement. It does so by testing four core motivations for collective action derived from the social psychological approach to social movement literature (Stürmer & Simon, 2009; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Van Zomeren, 2013) – identity, efficacy, emotions and morality – on the case of Muslim counter-extremism engagement. It finds that the existing motivational framework can be applied to counter-extremism engagement and that the strongest driver for this type of engagement is the moral obligation to act. Moreover, the paper shows that in case of activism aimed at one’s in-group, identity-based motivation ceases to predict action if measured in terms of belonging to broad “objective” social categories (i.e., Muslims). A stronger predictor of Muslim counter-extremism engagement is identification with opinion-based groups (e.g., groups holding a favorable opinion of counter-extremism). For long-term activists, identification with specific sub-groups of Muslim communities, for example women and marginalized young men, seems to be a strong motivation for engagement.

Finally, the bottom box, “Perceived and experienced discrimination”, is the focus of *Paper 4*, which examines the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on the willingness of Muslims to engage in counter-extremism. Its logic is deductive, as it tests two opposing hypotheses derived from the literature on the effects of discrimination on socio-political behavior. This literature reports mixed findings, as in some studies, discrimination leads to disengagement from mainstream political and social behavior (Kang & Burton, 2014; Park et al., 2013; Piazza, 2011; Sanders et al., 2014; Schildkraut, 2005; Victoroff et al., 2012), while in other studies it stimulates such engagement (Mattis et al.,

2004; Page, 2018; Peucker, 2019; Ramírez, 2007; Sanchez, 2006; White-Johnson, 2012). Paper 4 is the first study that investigates the impact of discrimination on counter-extremism engagement and has a potential to reconcile these mixed results. The paper is based on nationally representative surveys of British Muslims and finds that the relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism engagement is likely curvilinear. Muslims who do not experience discrimination and Muslims who experience it frequently are less likely to engage in counter-extremism than Muslims who have experienced it a few times. This means that the frequency of experienced discrimination might hold part of the answer to whether discrimination leads to more or less activism. The paper compares this finding to the curvilinear relationship found between political repression and mobilization (Muller & Weede, 1990; Opp, 1994; Tilly, 1978), arguing that discrimination could be understood as a form of “soft” repression.

Together, the papers forming this dissertation make a pioneering inroad into the under-studied phenomenon of Muslim engagement in counter-extremism. They demonstrate the high extent to which Muslims are willing to take action against Islamist extremism and identify several factors that facilitate and hinder such engagement. Among the former belong trust in the mobilizer, moral obligation to act, feeling of efficacy, anger at extremists, identification with certain sub-groups of Muslims and, with caveats, exposure to anti-Muslim discrimination. Hindering factors include the feeling of unfair responsabilization, high frequency of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination, fear of repercussions, low efficacy and distrust of the mobilizer.

Although the four papers mainly focus on individual-level factors, typically based on the social psychological approach in social movement studies, I developed insights throughout my research that speak to the larger theoretical picture of mobilization and activism. More specifically, thinking about why there is no genuine Muslim movement against Islamist extremism in the West can shed light on the necessary conditions for movement emergence. I discuss these issues in Chapter 6 and highlight the importance of the clear demarcation of a movement’s target and the attainability of a movement’s goal.

In addition to its contribution to research on social movements, mobilization and activism, this dissertation has relevance for improving policy making and nuancing public discourse. As noted above, there seems to be a consensus within policy circles that Muslim communities in the West are a potentially effective, if not the most effective, force in preventing Islamist terrorism. As a result, Western governments offer political as well as material support to members of Muslim communities who are willing to take action against Islamist extremism. This support ranges from publicly endorsing Muslim coun-

ter-extremism activists by funding educational and counter-narrative campaigns to paying private individuals and organizations for de-radicalization work. Yet, despite formal policies and efforts to galvanize Muslim communities into action and even though some Muslims take such action, our knowledge about why an average Muslim would take the risk and carry the cost of challenging Islamist extremism is limited. The dissertation can therefore improve the effectiveness of counter-extremism policies by uncovering the factors that facilitate or hinder such engagement, which makes it possible for policy makers to adjust these policies in order to increase the chances of successful Muslim counter-extremism mobilization.

The public discourse on Muslims and terrorism is often framed by simplistic and polarized views. Many ordinary members of society think that Muslims have a collective responsibility for Islamist extremism and that instead of living up to this responsibility, they either deny it, play the victimhood card, or remain apathetic. Doubts over Muslim loyalties abound on social media and crystalize in the form of anti-Muslim movements spearheaded by organizations such as PEGIDA in Germany or English Defense League (EDL) in the UK. On the other hand, some Muslim and non-Muslim voices play down the threat of Islamist terrorism and place the responsibility squarely with Western governments' foreign policy and disproportional counter-terrorism measures.

The public discourse has repercussions on the ground. Some non-Muslims start to perceive Muslims with suspicion, ordinary Muslims can dig in and adopt oppositional identities, and Muslim counter-extremism activists can find themselves isolated in the middle. This dissertation seeks to improve the quality of the public discourse by conducting new and empirically based analyses of Muslims' attitudes and behavior vis-à-vis Islamist extremism. More nuanced and accurate public debate has social benefits as it helps to align the information that feeds people's attitudes and behavior with reality. It also makes it possible to re-focus energy from the endless battles between non-verifiable opinions to the constructive use of evidenced-based findings.

The remainder of the summary is structured as follows. Chapter 2 elaborates on the reasons for focusing the research on British Muslims and outlines the British context with respect to counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies aimed at mobilizing Muslim communities against Islamist extremism. Chapter 3 discusses the concept of Muslim counter-extremism engagement and a theoretical framework to study it. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological design of the dissertation. Chapter 5 presents the central findings of the individual papers. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the findings, their contributions in terms of theory, policy and public discourse, the limitations of my research and its implications for future studies.



# Chapter 2: The UK context

## Focus on the United Kingdom

Although the research approach of this dissertation is variable-oriented rather than case-oriented (Della Porta, 2008), the data collection takes place in the United Kingdom. There are two reasons why the British context is particularly expedient for the investigation of Muslims' counter-extremism engagement.

First, the British context can be understood as a type of a *crucial case* (Eckstein, 2000), not for the purpose of theory (dis)confirmation, but in a sense that all four elements depicted in Figure 1 are expected to be most pronounced in the UK. This makes it a prime context to study Muslim counter-extremism contestation or emergent movement and the interplay between individual motivations and the two pressure points: state-driven mobilization and discrimination.

The reason the four elements in Figure 1 are most pronounced in the UK is that this is where we find one of the oldest articulations and institutionalizations of modern counter-extremism policies on the national level. As described below in more detail, the first political and financial support for Muslim-based counter-extremism initiatives materialized in the UK already in 2005. Most other Western countries developed counter-extremism strategies with explicit focus on mobilizing and supporting civil society actors about a decade later (Bundesregierung, 2016, p. 21; Department of Homeland Security, 2016, p. 11; NCTV, 2014, p. 19; The Government of Sweden, 2015, p. 31). During that decade, the UK has witnessed several high-profile actual and foiled terrorist attacks by Islamist extremists, which has increased the pressure on Muslim communities to tackle Islamist extremism. As a result, British Muslims have been exposed to mobilization appeals and incentives from state as well as non-state actors longer and more repeatedly than other Muslim communities in the West. This makes it possible to anchor the research in a setting where Muslims' reactions to the context of different crosscutting pressures have had time to develop. Since one such reaction is actual counter-extremism engagement, the focus on the UK made it possible to identify and collect data from a large number of Muslims who have actually been active in countering Islamist extremism.

Second, most studies that investigate Muslims' reactions to counter-terrorism policies and assess their willingness to cooperate in counter-extremism

draw on data from the UK. Consequently, the dominant narrative of Muslim alienation is largely built on research focused on British Muslims. This makes it possible for this dissertation to build on and join a critical dialogue with a large, existing body of literature. The generalizability of the findings with respect to the focus on the UK is discussed in Chapter 6.

## State-driven mobilization and British Muslims' reactions

The first event that catalyzed public debate about Muslims and their alleged threat to British society was the Rushdie Affair in 1989 (Nickels et al., 2012). The buzzword back then was “fundamentalism”, even though the anti-Rushdie protesters were not particularly religious (Malik, 2010). About a decade later, in the wake of 9/11, politicians started to appeal to Muslims to be more active and challenge “extremism” within their communities. For example, in 2002, then Foreign Secretary Jack Straw urged Muslims to “uphold the ‘common values’ of British society ... and to do more to condemn extremists” (Kite, 2002). Straw also stated “it should be incumbent on those who profess Islam to challenge the fanatics who cite Islam as a justification for appalling acts of violence” (Kite, 2002).

The idea that hard counter-terrorism measures should be complemented by soft community engagement with focus on prevention was introduced in the British counter-terrorism strategy *Contest* already in 2003 and made public three years later in an updated version (P. Edwards, 2014). The strand of *Contest* dealing with the soft counter-terrorism approach was called *Prevent* and its focus was to prevent radicalization of individuals (Home Office, 2006). The document discusses factors influencing radicalization at some length without defining radicalization. It only notes “a tiny minority of radicalised individuals actually cross over to become terrorists” (Home Office, 2006, p. 10). It also exhorts the public to “work[] in their own community, particularly with young people, to encourage community engagement and to counter those who seek to promote radicalisation and terrorist violence” (Home Office, 2006, p. 33).

In the aftermath of the July 7 London bombings in 2005, then Prime Minister Tony Blair urged British Muslims to speak out against the propaganda of the “Crusader Zionist Alliance rubbish” (White, 2005a). The government launched a consultation exercise called “Preventing Extremism Together”, which consisted of seven working groups with about 15 British Muslim members in each. The aim was to find “concrete proposals about how Muslim communities and the Government can further work in partnership to prevent ex-

tremism” (Warraich & Nawaz, 2005, p. 97). Two months later, the group produced 64 recommendations, and the head of the London Metropolitan Police Services proclaimed that “it is not the police and the intelligence agencies who will defeat crime and terror and anti-social behaviour; it is communities” (Blair, 2005). The “communities defeat terrorism” mantra is very much alive today (National Counter Terrorism Security Office, 2019).

A year after the London bombings, speaking in the House of Commons, Tony Blair remarked that “[i]n the end, government itself cannot go and root out the extremism in these communities. [...] It's better that we mobilise the Islamic community itself to do this” (BBC, 2006). The need to mobilize British Muslim communities against Islamist extremism was highlighted in the new *Prevent* guide to local partners. It stated that the government “want[s] communities to take the initiative”, this time against “violent extremism”, and that it will “work with communities to enable them to do so” (Home Office, 2008, p. 31). It further stated that the government would build the capacity of community groups in order to “support them in delivering products and services to prevent violent extremism” (p. 32). To this end, *Prevent* enabled the distribution of money through various channels to Muslim organizations and individuals (as well as to some non-Muslim organizations and government agencies). Between 2007 and 2011, “almost £80m was spent on 1,000 schemes across 94 local authorities” (Casciani, 2014), mainly through the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

When the coalition of Conservatives and Liberals took over government in 2010, *Prevent* narrowed the engagement from a wide range of Muslim organizations to organizations that were more in line with “British values” (Thomas, 2014). It also meant more scrutiny and overall control of *Prevent*'s implementation, which was now centralized and exclusively managed by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism at the Home Office. *Prevent* thus became a police-led program. The strategy was reviewed and updated to reflect these and other changes. The new *Prevent* still stressed that “[t]he Government must help mobilise and empower communities to challenge terrorism” (Home Office, 2011, p. 51).

In 2015, the so-called “Prevent Duty” made it a legal requirement that all state employees (e.g., in education, social services, or health sector) identify and report potential extremists. The same year, the Conservative government published the first UK *Counter-Extremism Strategy*. Unveiling the strategy, then Prime Minister David Cameron addressed British Muslims with the following message:

[W]e are now going to actively encourage the reforming and moderate Muslim voices ... if you want to challenge the extremists in our midst ... we are with you and we will back you – with practical help, with funding, with campaigns, with protection and with political representation (Cameron, 2015).

In the document, the government pledges to “support the individuals and groups who have credibility and experience fighting extremism within their communities, by amplifying their voices and helping them where required” (Home Office, 2015, p. 31). It also outlines a plan to create networks of community organizations and individuals who would combat extremists and be supported with “every means and tool” (p. 31), including training, technical assistance, and funding. Prevent’s annual budgets are now estimated at approximately £40m (Gardner, 2015).

In the fall 2016, the government launched the *Building a Strong Britain Together* program; a four-year initiative designed to deliver on policies outlined in the Counter-Extremism Strategy. In the first wave of the program, it offered grants up to £50,000 to “support civil society and community organisations who [...] stand up to extremism in all its forms” (Home Office, 2016, p. 2). Two years later, the government established Commission for Countering Extremism, whose objective is to “support[] the society to fight all forms of extremism” (UK Government, 2018). Once again, this objective highlights the philosophy that society is responsible for tackling extremism and co-producing security together with the government.

This brief overview shows that despite changes in the government, the idea of mobilizing citizens, particularly Muslims, for active cooperation in delivering counter-terrorism policies, is not just some relic of Labour’s third-way communitarianism (Dinham & Lowndes, 2008; Thomas, 2014). It is a core element of the soft approach to counter-terrorism, pioneered in Britain and increasingly copied by other Western countries (Cherney & Murphy, 2017).

In parallel with these efforts to mobilize Muslim communities against Islamist extremism, we witness the appearance of a number of counter-extremism projects run by Muslim organizations or individuals (e.g. Radical Middle Way, Inspire, STREET, Women against radicalization, Unity Initiative, Engage Dewsbury, Ramadhan Foundation). Some of them precede the milestone year of 2005, but most started their activities after. Some shun government funding; some are open to it. Existing Muslim associations (e.g., Islamic Society of Britain) have started to run counter-extremism projects, often with the help of independent religious scholars, activists, and community leaders. Other Muslim-led or Muslim-staffed organizations with focus on issues like criminality or drug abuse, especially among Muslim youth, have adopted the issue of extremism as an important part of their portfolio (e.g., Active Change



Foundation, Kikit). Yet others have decided to tackle the issue of extremism primarily through work on integration, social cohesion, and inter-faith dialogue (e.g., Media Cultured, Faith Matters, or City Circle). Many British Muslims have become state employees or contractors in the framework of Prevent. Others have joined counter-extremism think tanks that were founded, led, or staffed by Muslims and that would often run projects outside the traditional work of a think tank (e.g., Quilliam, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, or Institute for Global Change). In addition, some Muslim communities or groups like the Shia Muslims, Ahmadi Muslims, or Minhaj-ul-Quran have come up with or intensified their own counter-extremism efforts. Finally, some British Muslims have set up Facebook groups like “Muslims against ISIS” (over 100,000 likes) or participated in various demonstrative actions with the goal of denouncing Islamist extremism (BBC, 2017; Kamouni & Fox, 2017).

However, research on the impact of counter-terrorism policies on British Muslims, which also parallels this development, has continuously argued that British Muslims have become alienated members of “suspect communities” – stigmatized, afraid, angry and filled with resentment towards the authorities (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Awan, 2012a; Breen-Smyth, 2014; Mythen, 2012; Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009). British counter-terrorism policies are described as Islamophobic and racist, stifling Muslim political and social engagement (Qurashi, 2018). Some studies further suggest that this alienation translates into reduced willingness to cooperate in counter-extremism. This line of argumentation is supported by press releases and statements issued by some Muslim associations in Britain, such as Muslim Council of Britain, Muslim Association of Britain, Muslim Public Affairs Committee, Cage, Mend and others. There have been also reports of Muslim-based mobilization *against* British counter-terrorism policies. One example is the campaign “Together against Prevent”, whose website includes links to reports and statements by state actors who are critical of the Prevent strategy. Other examples include the petition against the state’s counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies signed by over 60 Muslim groups and leaders (Topping et al., 2015) and a similar petition spearheaded by East London religious leaders (Ramesh, 2015).

These observations suggest that British Muslims’ reactions to counter-terrorism policies have been very diverse. For some, state-driven mobilization and discrimination depicted in Figure 1 are essentially synonymous. Others have reacted positively to political opportunities and resources provided by the state for counter-extremism engagement. However, to measure Muslims’ motivation to engage in counter-extremism and the impact of state-driven mobilization and discrimination on their intended or actual counter-extrem-

ism behavior, we need more systematic and rigorous research. Chapter 3 describes the theoretical framework of the study of Muslim counter-extremism engagement.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter starts with a discussion of extremism – the target of Muslim mobilization and engagement – and how it is defined in the dissertation. It discusses what counter-extremism, as a phenomenon, is a case of, and argues that it can be regarded as a specific form of mobilization and activism. Finally, it presents the theoretical framework of my investigation of Muslim counter-extremism engagement.

## Extremism

Like *radicalization* and *terrorism*, *extremism* can be characterized as an *essentially contested concept*. That is, as an abstract, qualitative and evaluative notion, whose constituent elements are prioritized and described differently, based to a large degree on the political and social context (Gallie, 1955). It is therefore not surprising that there is no consensus on the definition of extremism (Borum, 2011; Schmid, 2013). In his review of the conceptual thinking about extremism, Schmid (2013) argues that unlike radicals, who can be open-minded and democratic, extremists are close-minded and undemocratic. Extremism, writes Schmid, “positively accepts violence in politics and can lead to terrorism” (2013, p. 10). However, he admits that radicalism can lead to political violence as well. On the other hand, Awan and Blakemore concluded in the book on extremism they edited that extremism does not “explicitly imply violence” (Awan & Blakemore, 2016, p. 154).

My research shows that British Muslims share the conceptual uncertainty surrounding the term extremism. In a survey that I administered to a nationally representative sample of British Muslims (n = 825), only about one fifth of the respondents indicated that they knew the government’s definition of extremism, and less than half of these respondents agreed that this definition corresponds to their own understanding of the term. In the same survey, I included an open-ended question asking the respondents to define “Islamist extremism” in their own words. I have grouped the responses into categories based on similarity. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Two things are worth noting. First, the responses reflect the pressure put on Muslim communities with regard to Islamist extremism in the way that many respondents, instead of providing a definition, either defensively distanced Muslims and Islam from the term (18%) or directly took issue with it (6%). Second, the table shows that some Muslims think of extremism in terms

of behavior (acts of crime, violence, or terrorism – 18%); others in terms of cognition (holding extreme views – 7%), confirming Neumann’s argument that the definitional disagreement is driven by different emphases on the cognitive or behavioral side of the issue (2013).

Table 1: Categorization of answers to the following survey question: How would you define “Islamist extremism”?

Category of answers	Frequency	Percentage
Respondents expressed negative evaluation/rejection of Islamist extremism	152	18
Islamist extremists are not proper Muslims	152	18
People engaged in acts of crime/violence/terrorism	150	18
People holding extreme/radical views	57	7
Don’t know	60	7
Respondents criticized the use of the term “Islamist extremism”	52	6
Extreme practice of or involvement in Islam	33	4
People extreme in both views and actions	28	3
Islamist extremism is a positive thing	17	2
Islamist extremists are the creation of the West/Israel/somebody else	14	2
Islamist extremists are ISIS/Wahhabis/Bin Laden	14	2
Islamist extremism is about being beyond what is considered normal	12	1
Other (including nonsensical answers)	84	10
Total	825	100

The individual papers comprising this dissertation do not attempt to resolve this definitional conundrum (which would probably be a futile endeavor). For the purpose of designing survey questions, I accepted the British government’s current definition of extremism, which encompasses both extreme views and extreme behavior.

Extremism is vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas. (Home Office, 2015, p. 9)

This definition was reflected in the construction of dependent measures in both surveys commissioned within my research project (see Chapter 4 for details about the surveys). In *Survey 1*, the respondents reacted to a terrorist attack that was clearly an act of extremism. In *Survey 2*, the respondents were

confronted with a two-stage scenario. In the first stage, they had to react to a Muslim speaker holding a public lecture about the need to reject democracy and punish homosexuals. In the second stage, they had to react to an individual who, after attending the lecture, actively agitated for physically attacking homosexuals. Both individuals in the *Survey 2* scenario fulfilled the government's definition of extremism because they vocally and actively opposed democracy, rule of law and individual liberties.

As demonstrated with the inclusion of the open-ended survey question discussed above, I was also interested in how British Muslims understand extremism and how that affects their attitudes and behavior with respect to counter-extremism. This matter was explicitly discussed in my interviews with Muslim organizational representatives and counter-extremism activists. The findings are not part of the individual papers, but I return to the topic of the definition of extremism in Chapter 6, when I offer my thoughts about the non-existence of a genuine Muslim counter-extremism movement.

## Studying counter-extremism engagement as mobilization and activism

Having established that the working definition of extremism in this dissertation corresponds to the British government's current definition of extremism, it should be relatively easy to look for the definition of *counter*-extremism in British policy documents. Unfortunately, there is no explicit definition.

The latest British Counter-Terrorism Strategy notes that the objective of counter-extremism is “to protect our communities from the wider social harms beyond terrorism caused by extremism. This includes tackling the promotion of hatred, the erosion of women's rights, the spread of intolerance, and the isolation of communities” (Home Office, 2018, p. 23). According to the Strategy, counter-extremism thus addresses “all the broader harms that extremism can cause, not just where it may lead to terrorism” (p. 23). This understanding of counter-extremism is much broader than a similar term “countering violent extremism” (CVE), which is defined by the US Department of Homeland Security as “proactive actions to counter efforts by extremists to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers to violence” (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.).

Since the process by which one becomes an extremist is called “radicalization” in British policy documents (Home Office, 2011, p. 108), we can also use the official definition of counter-radicalization as a hint of what counter-extremism is about. Counter-radicalization, according to the British government, is an “activity aimed at a group of people intended to dissuade them from engaging in terrorism-related activity” (Home Office, 2011, p. 107).

What all definitions above have in common is the emphasis on action (*dissuading, protecting, countering*) – an active intervention in the political and social sphere. I therefore understand counter-extremism as an active intervention against extremism (as defined by the British government) and processes leading to it. The object of study in the dissertation is active intervention by British Muslims. I argue that counter-extremism intervention can be studied as activism, i.e., acts that “transform social relations in ways that have the potential to foster social change [i.e., to reduce social harms from extremism in the society]” (Martin et al., 2007, p. 79) and performed “for the benefit of other people, their communities, and society at large” (Snyder, 2009, p. 227). The efforts to persuade other people to engage in counter-extremism, whether by the state, civil society organizations, or individuals, can therefore be studied as a form of mobilization.

The most elaborate theories for the study of activism and mobilization can be found in the social movement scholarship. This field encompasses many disciplines and approaches that investigate a variety of research questions. The important question in my research project, however, concerns factors that facilitate and hinder activism in the specific context of Muslim counter-extremism engagement. For this purpose, I compiled a theoretical framework that combines established social movement theories as well as insights from other literatures that are helpful in investigating the context-specific elements depicted in Figure 1, namely anti-Muslim discrimination and state-driven mobilization.

The theoretical framework divides facilitating and hindering factors into three categories: macro-, meso-, and individual-level factors. Although my papers predominantly focus on individual-level factors, I return to other levels in the conclusion of this summary (Chapter 6).

## Theoretical factors that facilitate and hinder Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement

### Macro-level factors

This category of factors corresponds to the “state-driven mobilization” box in Figure 1, which depicts the specific context of Muslim counter-extremism engagement. The political and financial support offered by successive British governments to Muslims for engaging in counter-extremism should intuitively have a facilitating effect on Muslims’ mobilization. The social movement literature offers at least two reasons why this should be the case.

First, the concept of *political opportunity structure* holds that mobilization is more likely if conducive structural elements are in place. Tarrow (1996,

p. 54) defined them as “consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements”. McAdam (1996) proposed limiting the concept to four variables: access to the political system, level of repression, existence of divisions among political elites, and availability of elite allies. Clearly, these variables are more appropriate to the study of classic social movements that challenge the status quo, but the essential logic applies to our case too. There have been formal, more or less permanent, signals to British Muslims to mobilize as an ally of political elites against Islamist extremism. Formal British strategies and frequent appeals of politicians form “windows of opportunities” that invite Muslims to become active. *Discursive opportunities*, which refer to the alignment of prospective activism with the prevailing discourse in society (McCammon, 2013), favor such engagement too. Large sections of society think that Muslims have a responsibility to tackle extremism within their communities (Survation, 2015) and hardly anyone would oppose Muslims’ mobilization against it.

Over the past two decades, scholars have scrutinized the concept of political opportunity structure thoroughly (e.g., Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Goodwin & Jasper, 1999), which has led to some nuancing (for a brief overview see Giugni, 2009). One important caveat that became attached to the concept is that regardless whether political opportunities exist “objectively”, what really counts in the mobilization process is how they are perceived (Banaszak, 1996; Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Kurzman, 1996; McAdam, 1996). Prospective activists might acknowledge the opportunities but decide not to act on them, or they might simply be unaware of them. Accordingly, some Muslims can be aware of political opportunities and resources offered by the state for counter-extremism engagement, but they might turn them down due to fundamental disagreement with counter-extremism policies.

The second reason why governments’ efforts to nudge Muslims into actively challenging Islamist extremism should facilitate Muslims’ mobilization is that historically, the involvement of state actors in supporting activism has been a rather successful, if understudied phenomenon.

State facilitation of activism has been overlooked because the social movement literature has traditionally dealt with the state as a unitary actor, which is either a target of demands by challenging activists, an arbiter between groups of activists, an active suppressor of a particular activist movement, or a mix of all three (e.g., Jenkins, 1995; McAdam et al., 1988; Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978). Although some studies suggest that government policies might contribute to the emergence of movements by creating grievances or entitlements to be acted upon (e.g., Meyer et al., 2005; Sawyers & Meyer, 1999), this

outcome is treated more as an unintended consequence than deliberate facilitation of activism.

However, some scholars have later pointed out a high level of activism on the side of state actors and problematized the rigid border between institutional “insiders” and activists “outsiders” (Duyvendak & Jasper, 2015; Pettinicchio, 2012). For example, Pettinicchio uses the term *institutional activism* to denote “insiders with access to resources and power – who proactively take up causes that overlap with those of grassroots challengers” (2012, p. 499). He also notes that this kind of activism has been studied by other researchers under different labels, including *sympathetic elites* (Tarrow, 2011), *institutional entrepreneurs* (Rao et al., 2000), *elite mobilization* (McCarthy, 2005), or *state-movement coalitions* (Stearns & Almeida, 2004).

State-driven mobilization of civil society for the purpose of achieving policy objectives is no longer a rare phenomenon, if it ever was. The state increasingly tends to regard *community mobilization* as an effective solution to public health issues (e.g., Forster et al., 1998; Howard-Grabman, 2007; Plough & Olafson, 1994) and crime, including extremism, as a public health issue (e.g., Bhui et al., 2012; Bownes & Ingersoll, 1997; Griffith et al., 2008; Weine et al., 2017). Globalization, modernization and decentralization have forced many state actors to realize their limits in pursuing policy objectives and seek to recruit citizens in their co-production.

We now know that state actors provided crucial foundational support to several social movements in the US, such as the anti-drunk-driving movement (McCarthy & Zald, 2002), the anti-tobacco movement (Wolfson, 2001), or the anti-drug movement (McCarthy, 2005). All these movements were successful in mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people, influencing social behavior and changing legislation.

McCarthy attributes the success of the anti-drug mobilization to mainly two factors. First, the state-coordinated creation and dissemination of the “community coalition” blueprint, which provided a practical guide for civil society to organize and draw on state support. Second, wide community support and consensus around the issue increased and diversified membership of the community coalitions (McCarthy, 2005). McCarthy also highlights the state’s provision of material, moral, informational, and human resources as facilitating factors that enabled grassroots activism.

On a smaller scale in Europe, Verhoeven and Duyvendak (2017) document how one level of government in The Netherlands mobilized civil society against another level of government. They introduced the term “governmental activism”, defined as “politicians, civil servants and governmental players engaging with citizens, SMOs/NGOs and sometimes businesses in contentious claim-making to alter or redress policies proposed by other governmental



players” (p. 565). Government backing in the form of information dissemination and material support proved successful in mobilizing people into action in the Dutch case as well.

Although the examples above mainly concern activism facilitated by some state actors (e.g. a government agency or a local government) against other state actors (e.g. the legislators or another level of government), the mobilized movements carried an agenda of challenging and changing social norms and behavior, whether it was smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs. In principle, attempts to facilitate activism aimed at challenging extremism do not differ from these examples. Therefore, the provision of material and symbolic resources by the state, so instrumental in the successful mobilizations mentioned above, should also significantly stimulate the engagement of British Muslims in counter-extremism.

## Meso-level factors

Meso-level factors that influence mobilization and activism mainly include resources and strategic communication (framing) of the *supply side* of mobilization (Klandermans, 2004), which is typically one or more social movement organizations. Even when the state is involved in facilitating activism, as in the case of the anti-tobacco movement, there is usually one or more preexisting civil society organizations or a more or less developed movement with the same agenda that serves as the epicenter of the mobilization effort. In the context of Muslim counter-extremism engagement, the supply side of mobilization would be theoretically located in both Muslim civil society organizations and the state.

The focus on resources gave rise to the *resource mobilization approach* within the social movement literature. Scholars using this approach investigate social movement organizations and their access to resources as well as the way these resources are used to mobilize prospective activists (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Edwards and McCarthy (2007) have classified resources into moral, cultural, human, material and social-organizational. Moral resources include legitimacy and integrity. They can be provided by outsiders such as celebrities or politicians who throw their support behind the organization. Cultural resources pertain to the knowhow of organizing, protesting, mobilizing and producing or accessing resources. Human resources are about the skills and experience of the organizational leadership, the organizational staff, members and followers. Material resources are primarily financial resources but also physical capital that can be used by activists. Finally, social-organizational resources can be described as mobilizing structures that

are available for activism, most often pre-existing or newly established networks or organizations.

At first sight, Muslim organizations in the UK (and in many other Western countries) possess many of the resources that would facilitate mobilization for counter-extremism. There is an extensive network of Muslim organizations on the national, regional and local level, which can serve as a mobilizing structure for counter-extremism engagement. Although most of them are not particularly wealthy, they usually possess some basic material resources and can arguably access more for the purpose of counter-extremism from the state or non-state sources. Some UK Muslim organizations enjoy highly educated and skilled leadership and membership Muslims (human resources), many with the collective action knowhow (cultural resources) from organizing volunteers (e.g., for regularly occurring religious events), charitable projects, election campaigns (e.g., the Respect Party), or political protests (e.g., anti-war protests). Lastly, although no Muslim organization can legitimately claim to represent all Muslims or Islam, the existing organizations collectively would have high legitimacy and so would their goal of challenging extremist distortions of the faith. In addition, there is no shortage of influential Muslim scholars who have demonstrated their opposition to extremism and could increase moral resources of Muslim organizations by backing their mobilization efforts.

As noted earlier, the state *as a mobilizer* does not lack in resources. However, in the case of Muslim counter-extremism engagement, some resources of the state can be problematized. For example, given the Muslim alienation narrative in the academic literature as well as some Muslim mobilization against counter-terrorism policies documented in Chapter 2, it can be argued that the state might lack moral resources. This is especially acute for countries that actively participated in the so-called *War on Terror*, such as the UK, as they are criticized by many Muslims for aggravating, if not outright creating, the problem of extremism, which they now want Muslims to solve.

Still, the state can be very effective in providing most of the crucial resources to Muslim organizations. It can increase their material resources by providing grants or office space, human resources by providing capacity building and training to prospective activists, social-organizational resources by helping to set up new organizations, discussion fora, networks and alliances. It can also improve Muslim organizations' cultural resources by providing technical as well as theoretical knowhow pertaining to fundraising, recruitment, campaigning or the use of IT. In combination, the existing resources of British Muslim organizations and the potential boost provided by the state should have a facilitative effect on counter-extremism mobilization.

The second meso-level factor that can facilitate or hinder mobilization is embodied in the *framing approach*, i.e., the way that meanings and understandings of reality are constructed for the purpose of mobilizing people into action. Three “core framing tasks” have been identified as serving this purpose: diagnostic framing, prognostic framing and motivational framing (Snow et al., 1986). Diagnostic framing is used to identify a problem, construct it as a major grievance and attribute the blame for it to a specific actor or actors. Prognostic framing suggests a way to deal with a problem. Motivational framing articulates why one should become active. These three tasks make up what is called a collective action frame, which is a “set of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities” (Gamson, 1992, p. 7). Successful framing results in frame alignment, where prospective activists link their view of reality, interests and goals to those of the one who tries to mobilize them. However, if the collective action frame does not *resonate* with those who are supposed to be mobilized, we will see little or no action (Snow & Benford, 1988).

Benford and Snow (2000) argue that the degree to which the collective action frame resonates with the target population depends on two factors: the credibility of the frame and its relative salience. The credibility of the frame is influenced by the credibility of the articulator of the frame, the consistency of the frame, and the empirical credibility of the frame. The relative salience of the frame also consists of three dimensions: centrality (of proposed beliefs, values, and ideas to the target of mobilization), experiential commensurability (congruence with the everyday life experience of the target population), and narrative fidelity (cultural resonance).

It should be noted that, as in the case of resource mobilization, the framing approach has been mostly applied to social movement organizations. The lack of a genuine Muslim counter-extremism movement, and therefore the lack of Muslim counter-extremism movement organizations per se, restricts the possible study of framing to the examination of frames put forward by state actors with the aim of mobilizing Muslims for counter-extremism and frames articulated by Muslim actors in response to that. This is partially done in Paper 1, which analyzes the main frames articulated by British Muslims in response to the entire issue of Islamist terrorism and extremism, but apart from that, the individual papers in the dissertation do not focus on framing. Nevertheless, I offer some thoughts about state actors’ framing as a factor that hinders Muslims’ mobilization in Chapter 6.

## Individual-level factors

Individual-level factors influencing the prospect of mobilization and engagement in activism have been the domain of the social psychological approach to social movement studies, more specifically of the study of social psychological motivations for collective action. These factors, the *demand side* of mobilizations (Klandermans & Stekelenburg, 2013), were synthesized by van Zomeren (2013) into four *core motivations* for participating in collective action. These motivations form the springboard for Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism, as depicted in Figure 1 by the arrow from "individual motivations" to "counter-extremism engagement". However, given the specific context of the double pressure that Muslims face, I add two individual-level factors that can affect Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism: perceived and experienced discrimination and perceived trust in the mobilizer. I start with the review of the four core motivations.

The first motivation for collective action is identity in terms of the strength of identification with a group whose status or identity needs to be enhanced or protected. Melucci, finding inspiration in the social identity theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), pioneered the importance of identity in the process of mobilization to collective action. Essentially, the idea is that our own sense of who we are (personal identity) depends heavily on how we see ourselves (and how we are seen by other) in terms of belonging to particular social groups and categories. A bond is developed between an individual and various social groups, so that when a group with which we feel a strong bond is involved in a struggle, we feel obliged to act on behalf of and for the sake of this group.

In the case of British Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism, the complication is that the line of the struggle does not run between clear in-group and out-group, but within the in-group. Nor is it self-evident whether engagement in counter-extremism is done on behalf of and for the sake of all Muslims, as there is evidence of strong grievances among Muslims concerning the effects of counter-terrorism policies.

Therefore, studies that further refine the identity motivation can be more relevant to our case. One such line of work introduced the concept *politicized collective identity* (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Politicization of collective identity is a slow process catalyzed by a power struggle in which group members develop shared grievances, attribute blame to a common "enemy" and come to believe that they have to collectively address the problem that affects their group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Scholars usually measure politicized identity as membership of or sympathy with a specific social movement or social movement organizations. In the case of Muslims' engagement in

counter-extremism, this would translate into an expectation that the more Muslims identify with certain Muslim organizations or individuals that counter Islamist extremism, the more willing they should be to mobilize for this type of collective action.

Another concept that pushes the understanding of identity motivation beyond simple identification with broad social categories or specific pre-existing movements and organizations is *opinion-based group identity*. The focus on the strength of identification with a group of people who “share a common understanding and stance on a certain issue” (McGarty et al., 2009, p. 849) is particularly useful for the case of Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement. This is because the strength of identification with a broad social category (Muslims) is unlikely to predict counter-extremism action and because there is no movement to speak of that could be used to measure the effect of politicized identity.

The second motivation for engaging in collective action is *group efficacy*. It is rooted in the instrumental perspective of collective action, which emphasizes that expected benefits affect individuals’ decisions whether to infer the cost of participation. Van Zomeren, drawing on earlier research (Bandura, 1997; Mummendey et al., 1999), defines group efficacy as “individuals’ beliefs that the group is able to achieve group goals through joint effort” (2013, p. 380). In other words, the more individuals believe that together, as a group, they can effectively address the source of their grievances, the more likely they are to engage in collective action. Hence, individuals’ assessment of the probability of achieving desired results with collective action is of a great importance.

Hornsey et al. (2006) elaborate on this idea by showing that the assessment of effectiveness of collective action is not just linked to the ultimate objective of the action. People can be motivated by the vision of reaching different goals regardless whether the main goal materializes, for example influencing the attitude of a third party to the conflict or attracting more participants for future actions and thereby giving the movement critical momentum. In our case, Muslims can be more likely to take collective action against Islamist extremism if they believe they can reduce extremism, but also if they think they could influence the state or the public in a particular way (e.g., demonstrating that Muslims are not to be feared), or inspire more Muslims to join them in challenging extremism.

The third motivation is *morality*, sometimes labelled as an ideologically driven *inner moral obligation* to act (Klandermans, 2004; Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009). It occurs when people perceive their strongly held moral convictions to be violated, which forces them to react. The more absolute or sacred

these values, principles and norms are, the less it is possible to let their violation pass. Interestingly, the need to react to the violation of moral convictions can be based upon as well as lead to increased identification with a particular group. In other words, moral obligation to act can be based on a preexisting identification with a certain group, which previously established these values as important and can construct them as being violated. For example, identifying as a Muslim leads to the adoption of Islamic values, which can be subjectively evaluated (or externally by Islamic authorities) as being under attack by Islamist extremism. Alternatively, without a strong Muslim identity and a sense of Islamic values, one can feel strongly about the violation of universal human values and norms by Islamist extremism and come to identify with any group that reacts against such violation.

The final motivation is *emotions*. Contemporary psychological research considers emotions as a coping reaction following cognitive appraisal of a certain situation, similar to “states of action readiness that prepare individuals for adaptive action” (Van Zomeren, 2013, p. 381). One such adaptive action can be participation in collective action. Anger in particular is seen as a strong predictor of collective action, because it is as an “approach oriented emotion” (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), unlike for example fear, which is an “avoidance oriented emotion”. Anger seems to be magnified by strong identification with a group that shares common grievances, by feeling of efficacy and by violation of strongly held moral values (Van Zomeren, 2013). Among other emotions, shame can predict engagement in collective action (Gausel & Leach, 2011), and guilt, a more passive emotion, can predict a readiness, on an abstract level, to take collective action (Leach et al., 2006).

Beyond the four core motivations for undertaking collective action, I add *trust* as a factor that can effect mobilization and activism. By trust, I mean *subjective* or *perceived* trust in the “mobilizer”, i.e. the organization, institution or other entity that puts forward a mobilization appeal for action. The effect of trust has only been studied indirectly in the literature on social movements and collective action through moral resources and credibility of the frame articulator. Both can be seen as either influencing or forming part of the *trustworthiness* of the mobilizer. Yet, studies of mobilization and activism have not examined the relationship between reported levels of trust in a specific mobilizer and the willingness to engage in collective action following an appeal from that mobilizer. Most research designs in the social movement and collective action literature simply do not problematize the identity of the mobilizer, partially because of the tendency to study cases of successful mobilizations, where trust is less of an issue. Studies that differentiate between mobilizers are typically interested in other variables than trust (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009).

However, the importance of trust for socio-political behavior is underscored by research in the field of persuasive communication as well as studies concerning trust and governance. The literature has established that trust largely stems from perceived trustworthiness, which in turn makes up the core component of credibility (McCroskey & Young, 1981; Ohanian, 1990; Sternthal et al., 1978). Credibility is then one of the main reasons people conform to behavioral demands communicated to them by others (Perloff, 1993; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). The latter area of research has shown that trust in government or its institutions increases the likelihood that citizens comply with their requests and demands (Levi, 1998; Peel, 1998; Scholz & Lubell, 1998; Tyler, 1998; Tyler & Huo, 2002).

All these insights point to the conclusion that subjectively felt trust in the source of a mobilization appeal (be it an organization or the government) is an important factor that can influence whether such an appeal is complied with or ignored. Given that various sources target Muslims with appeals to take action against Islamist extremism, the identity of these sources in terms of the level of trust they elicit should facilitate or hinder Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism.

Finally, the last individual-level factor examined in this dissertation is perceived or experienced *discrimination*. This factor is particularly pertinent to the context of Muslims' counter-extremism engagement, because of documented high levels of anti-Muslim discrimination in many Western countries, including the UK (Allen, 2017; Bozorgmehr & Kasinitz, 2018). Intuitively, we would expect that a Muslim who frequently encounters anti-Muslim discrimination or has a strong feeling that Muslims are unfairly discriminated against, would be less willing to help majority society in the fight against Islamist extremism. The logic can be summed up as follows: "If you don't like me, why should I care about your problems?" The dominant narrative in the literature on the effect of counter-terrorism policies on Muslim minorities reflects this logic. Here, the story is one of alienation caused by discriminatory and harmful policies that treat the entire Muslim population as a source of security risk (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Awan, 2012b; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Hickman et al., 2011; Mythen et al., 2013; Ragazzi, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Alienation is then associated with "deep resentment" (Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009, p. 660), political disengagement (Breen-Smyth, 2014), loss of trust in authorities (Awan, 2012b; Bullock & Johnson, 2018; Mythen, 2012; Taylor, 2018) and even radicalization (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Ingram, 2019; Parker et al., 2017). Resentment, disengagement and loss of trust imply passivity and reluctance to participate in the affairs of the majority. Radicalization implies potential for anti-majority behavior. Both translate into barriers for Muslims' counter-extremism engagement.

However, researchers studying the effects of discrimination on socio-political behavior come to mixed conclusions. There is evidence that supports the alienation narrative in that discrimination leads to political and social disengagement (Sanders et al., 2014; Schildkraut, 2005), anti-social behavior (Kang & Burton, 2014; Park et al., 2013), or radicalization into terrorism (Piazza, 2011, 2012; Victoroff et al., 2012). Other studies show that discrimination leads to increased political and civic participation (Oskooii, 2016; Sanchez, 2006), community-focused pro-social behavior (Mattis et al., 2004; White-Johnson, 2012), and adherence to mainstream norms espoused by the majority in an effort to blend in (Lamont & Mizrachi, 2013; Steele et al., 2002).

Of course, the two findings are not mutually exclusive. One can adopt negative attitudes towards the majority and still engage in pro-social behavior that benefits the in-group minority as well as political protests and activism aimed against the sources of discrimination within the majority. Still, it is conceivable that anti-Muslim discrimination can also have facilitative effects on Muslim mobilization for counter-extremism. The reason is that some Muslims can regard countering Islamist extremism as a pro-social action, which benefits Muslim communities both directly and indirectly. Directly, because most direct victims of Islamist extremism are Muslims; indirectly, because countering Islamist extremism also addresses an important source of anti-Muslim discrimination.

As mentioned earlier, the four papers making up this dissertation predominantly focus on individual-level factors thought to have an impact on Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism. *Paper 1* touches on the discrimination factor by reassessing the dominant narrative of Muslim alienation and implied unwillingness to engage in counter-extremism. It also finds evidence that perceived unfair responsabilization is a hindering factor specific to the case of Muslim counter-extremism engagement. *Paper 2* investigates the relationship between direct action appeals, trust in the source of the appeal and mobilization. *Paper 3* tests the importance of the four core motivations for collective action in the case of Muslim counter-extremism engagement. *Paper 4* explores the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism.



# Chapter 4: Research design

Although each of the four papers forming this dissertation has its own research question and associated methods, they are tied together by the overarching research question, which is useful to recapitulate here: *To what extent are Muslims willing to engage in counter-extremism, and what facilitates or hinder such engagement?*

The question consists of two parts. The first part concerning the extent of Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism was addressed by an exploratory research approach using both quantitative and qualitative data (Paper 1). The second part of the question was addressed with a more deductive approach, using cross-sectional (Paper 3) and experimental (Paper 2 and Paper 4) designs, at times complemented by qualitative data (Paper 3).

The mixed methods approach is thus the major feature of the overall research design. I discuss this approach below along with data collection, research designs and analytical strategies. The overview of the individual papers with respect to research questions, data sources and methods is displayed in Table 2.

## Mixed methods approach

The mixed methods approach – a combination of qualitative and quantitative research – has gained considerable popularity among social scientists in the last two decades (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Three advantages that made the approach particularly suitable for answering the main research question of this dissertation are highlighted below.

First, the mixed methods approach allows for both theory-testing and theory-building. This is important for my research topic, since counter-extremism engagement, Muslim or otherwise, has not been systematically theorized and empirically studied. Although I approached it as a study of mobilization and activism, which enabled me to construct and test hypotheses using extant literature, I also needed to keep a door open to new theoretical insights, i.e. previously un-theorized factors facilitating or hindering mobilization in this particular case. Theory-building is often the domain of qualitative research and, indeed, it was my interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists that shed new light on the role of identity motivation for collective action in the case of “in-group infighting”. It was also the interviews that inspired me to

investigate the effect of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination on the willingness to engage in counter-extremism, which led to the finding of a potential curvilinear relationship between the two. And it was the inclusion of open-ended survey questions that illuminated possible hindering factors to counter-extremism engagement beyond those that can be deduced from the social movement and collective action theories.

The second, and related, advantage of the mixed methods approach is that it may paint a more complete picture of the issue under investigation. The quantitative methods I used made it possible to establish relationships between hypothesized facilitating and hindering factors and Muslim counter-extremism engagement. In some cases, when experimental designs were used, I could evaluate these relationships in terms of cause and effect. Thanks to quantitative methods, I could also make a more rigorous assessment of the extent to which British Muslims are willing to engage in counter-extremism. However, the analysis of the qualitative data gave the emerging picture more depth and nuance, and constituted an important reality check. Taking the time to listen or read (in case of open-ended questions in surveys) how Muslims make meaning of the social reality surrounding them and how they understand different constructs (e.g. extremism) gave me a better understanding of the complexity of the cross-cutting pressures they face with respect to the issue of counter-extremism (Figure 1). By talking to individual Muslims, whether organizational representatives or counter-extremism activists, I gained insights into the underlying mechanisms of different motivations for counter-extremism engagement and how they differ between “non-activists” and Muslims who are engaged in the long term. Importantly, these discussions led me to reflect more thoroughly on why there is no genuine Muslim movement, in the classical sense, against Islamist extremism, despite “objective” favorable conditions for its emergence.

Third, the mixed methods approach allows for more valid inferences. If results from quantitative analyses converge with results from qualitative analyses, it increases the validity and reliability of findings. For example, I found the four motivations for collective action (identity, efficacy, emotions, morality), which are typically studied quantitatively, reflected in the survey data, the interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists, and in the responses to the open-ended survey question. This contributes to the reliability and validity of these motivating factors in explaining mobilization, and to their external validity by extension to the case of counter-extremism engagement. However, data “triangulation” enabled by mixed methods can also uncover the source of bias in studies that rely predominantly on one method. For example, I discovered that the dominant narrative of Muslim alienation, typically formulated on the basis of interview data, does not fully correspond to the findings from

nationally representative surveys of British Muslims or from interviews conducted with Muslim organization representatives and counter-extremism activists. The variety of empirical data collected by different methods strengthens the validity of this finding and the subsequent suggestion that the alienation narrative should be reassessed in its light.

## Data collection

One of the biggest challenges, but also motivations, at the start of this research project was the lack of empirical data and theoretical literature concerning citizens' engagement in counter-extremism in general and that of Muslims in particular. To remedy the lack of empirical data, I first set out to map what Muslims have said and done in response to Islamist extremism in the UK. The place to start was the media as the chroniclers of everyday events. I conducted a *political claims analysis*, which is a method to extract and quantify actors and their "claims" (statements or actions) linked to a particular issue from qualitative sources, such as the media. I based the analysis on *The Guardian* and *The Times* for the period 1986 to mid-2016 (see Paper 1 for more details).

This initial step in data collection yielded several benefits. For starters, it provided me with a list of the most vocal Muslim actors on the issue of Islamist extremism, who could be approached for further data collection. It also gave me an overview of how the public debate on the issue developed over time, what were its most frequent and contested frames promoted by what actors. Finally, it revealed some of the appeals made to Muslim communities to become more active against Islamist extremism and some reactions to these appeals.

However, there are obvious limitations in relying solely on media data. Not all that is said or done is reported. This applies especially to counter-extremism actions that do not necessarily have the form of a mass collective action easily spotted by reporters (e.g. a demonstration).<sup>1</sup>

The next step was therefore to visit the UK and contact representatives of the largest and/or most vocal Muslim organizations, most of whom were identified in the media claims analysis. I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with representatives of organizations from the entire spectrum from those who are more understanding of the government's counter-extremism efforts (e.g., Quilliam, Association of British Muslims, Islamic Society of Britain or Minhaj-al Quran) to the more reserved (e.g., Muslim Council of Britain)

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, anything to do with Islamist extremism is a highly sought for topic. Hence, the analysis detected a few reports (mainly in *The Guardian*) concerning Muslim individuals active in counter-extremism.

and the most critical (Muslim Association of Britain, Muslim Public Affairs Committee). The interviews were relatively easy to arrange and lasted about an hour on average. I was mainly interested in reactions to the government's mobilization appeals, understandings of extremism as a concept, and perceptions of the level of counter-extremism activities among Muslim communities (including reasons why this level was perceived as low/high) (see Paper 1 for more details).

One of the most important themes that came out of the interviews was the problematization of the state-led mobilization of British Muslims. Although not all interviewees were negative towards the state's involvement in activating Muslims for counter-extremism, it was a potential hindering factor. The next step was to integrate this and other insights generated by the political claims analysis and the interviews with Muslim organizational representatives in a new round of data collection, this time oriented towards "regular" Muslims living in the UK and Muslim counter-extremism activists. The former were targeted by a nationally representative on-line survey experiment (*Survey 1*), which investigated the potential hindering factor of the government's involvement in mobilization and collected data on the four motivations for collective action. The survey also included two open-ended questions. One asked respondents to provide their own definition of Islamist extremism; the other asked them to state a reason why they were likely/unlikely to attend a demonstration against Islamist extremism (as indicated earlier in the survey).

Some Muslim counter-extremism activists were identified in the political claims analysis, but mostly by additional media research. Several individuals were then contacted based on recommendations from other activists (snowball method).

The survey experiment was conducted with 825 British Muslims, and 30 British Muslim counter-extremism activists were interviewed. Survey and interviews took place concurrently. The interviews followed a semi-structured guide, which mainly focused on the activists' motivations for counter-extremism engagement, including probes touching on the four core motivations for collective action identified in the literature and measured in the survey experiment. Paper 2 and Paper 3 report the details of the data collection procedures and the sample characteristics.

The final stage of the data collection was largely inspired by the findings from the interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists. Many activists, unprompted, talked about their experiences with discrimination while discussing their motivations for counter-extremism engagement. At first, a positive relationship between discrimination and counter-extremism engagement seemed counter-intuitive to me. Discrimination has been linked to the opposite, i.e., the development of extreme views (Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Piazza,

2011; Victoroff et al., 2012). However, the activists' accounts made sense. Countering Islamist extremism could mean tackling anti-Muslim discrimination, as the latter is compounded by the former. It can also mean protecting fellow Muslims who might fall prey to it, driven by negative experiences of discrimination, and have their lives ruined because of their involvement with extremist circles.

In order to investigate the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on Muslims' counter-extremism engagement, I conducted a second nationally representative on-line survey experiment with 917 British Muslim participants (*Survey 2*). I negotiated access to the restricted *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011*, which includes a nationally representative sample of 3491 Muslims and a battery of questions concerning discrimination as well as past counter-extremism engagement (see Paper 4 for more details on both surveys).

It should be noted here that studies using large-N designs are particularly rare in the field of terrorism and counter-terrorism research, for various reasons (Schuurman, 2018). I was fortunate to be able to commission two entirely new large-N surveys of British Muslims (nationally representative with respect to gender and age) even though polling minorities is very costly. This was made possible by the generous support from the Aarhus University Research Foundation and the Department of Political Science. Being able to draw on these quantitative data was crucial to move this research beyond the state-of-art, for example by including experimental components in both surveys.

## Research designs and strategies of data analysis

The previous section described the collection of data used in this dissertation. This section summarizes how the data was used in terms of research designs and analytical strategies in the individual papers.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, *Paper 1* addresses the first part of the overall research question, i.e., the extent of Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism. It takes its point of departure in the dominant narrative of Muslim alienation, which suggests that Muslims hold negative attitudes towards counter-terrorism policies and are reluctant to engage in counter-extremism. The research approach of the paper is explorative and descriptive. It presents a rich collection of data collected throughout my project in order to assess the extent to which the Muslim alienation narrative reflects the reality for British Muslims.

The strategies of data analysis in the paper are varied and reflect the multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data. I use quantitative content analysis (political claims analysis) to describe the most frequent frames artic-

ulated by Muslim actors in reaction to Islamist extremism. It shows the frequencies of the main issues that Muslim actors raise in connection with Islamist extremism and the types of solutions to extremism that they propose. The data is also used to count the frequency with which Muslim actors made claims critical of Islamist extremism and the government's counter-terrorism policies. The data is then visualized on a time-line to give an overview of the public articulation of Muslim actors' negative attitude to Islamist extremism and the government's counter-terrorism policies. Combined, the data provides a foundation of *reported* Muslims' attitudes to counter-terrorism and their willingness to make active claims against Islamist extremism.

Another analytical strategy used in the paper is qualitative content analysis of interviews conducted with Muslim organizational representatives and counter-extremism activists. The interviews were coded in two rounds. The first round used the open-coding method, where snippets of the transcript were coded according to their general meaning. In the second round, the open codes were grouped based on shared patterns. The content of the interviews is contrasted to the data from the political claims analysis in order to a) evaluate the extent to which Muslims' reported attitudes to counter-extremism correspond to those expressed by a range of Muslim organizational representatives; b) provide more in-depth reasoning to these attitudes; and c) inductively uncover additional factors that support or contradict the alienation narrative.

In the effort to uncover factors that support the alienation narrative, I conducted another quantitative content analysis based on responses to an open-ended question in *Survey 1*, which asked the respondents to explain why they would not be likely to participate in a demonstration against Islamist extremism.

Finally, the paper uses descriptive statistics to analyze data from *Survey 1*, *Survey 2* and the *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011*. These statistics, based on nationally representative samples, provide a good overview of British Muslims' attitudes to counter-terrorism policies and the extent to which they are willing to engage in counter-extremism. The *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011* was used as a unique data source of the *actual* counter-extremism engagement, as opposed to *intentions*, which were measured in *Survey 1* and *Survey 2*. Contrasting the descriptive statistics with the results of the quantitative and qualitative content analyses added an important layer of verification of findings, which is usually missing in classic interview-based studies, which form the foundation of the Muslim alienation narrative.

*Paper 2* draws on data from *Survey 1* and uses both cross-sectional and experimental design to investigate the effect of the identity of and trust in the

mobilizer on Muslims' counter-extremism mobilization. The analytical approach is deductive in that it formulates five hypotheses derived from the social movement and collective action literature as well as the persuasive communication and the trust and governance literatures. The experimental component consists of two treatment groups (provided a mobilization appeal from the government or from the Muslim Council of Britain) and a control group (the source of the mobilization appeal is not specified). Participants were randomly assigned to the three conditions. The experimental design made it possible to vary the identity of the mobilizer while theoretically holding other variables influencing mobilization constant. This made it possible to ascribe the changes in the likelihood of Muslims' counter-extremism engagement to the identity of the mobilizer.

In addition to the casual analysis of the role of the mobilizer's identity, a correlational analysis investigated the relationship between perceived trust in the mobilizer and the likelihood of counter-extremism engagement as well as the interaction between trust and the identity of the mobilizer.

*Paper 3* uses a cross-sectional research design and combines a deductive and inductive analytical approach to examine Muslims' motivations for engaging in counter-extremism. For the deductive part, it uses cross-sectional data from *Survey 1* to conduct a correlational test of five hypotheses derived from the social movement and collective action literature concerning the four core motivations for participating in collective action.

The inductive part consists of quantitative content analysis of an open-ended survey question and qualitative content analysis of interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists. These analyses use open-coding to generate motivations for counter-extremism as expressed by, respectively, the survey respondents and the interviewees. The survey respondents were asked to explain why they indicated that they were likely to participate in a counter-extremism action (a demonstration against Islamist extremism), while the interviewees were asked directly to describe their motivation for counter-extremism activism.

As in *Paper 1*, the analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data are presented next to each other under thematic topics (different types of motivation). First, multiple regressions were used to determine correlations between hypothesized motivations and different types of counter-extremism actions measured in *Survey 1*. The results for each motivation were then compared to the results from the quantitative and qualitative data analyses and discussed. In case of the open-ended survey question, the data was presented in the form of frequencies of reasons (grouped by constructed categories) for indicating likelihood to participate in a demonstration against Islamist extremism. The interview data was presented in the form of four major themes that emerged

from the coding procedure as the main motivations for counter-extremism activism.

*Paper 4* is based on a combination of cross-sectional and experimental designs. Its analytical approach is deductive. It formulates two opposing hypotheses as to the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism. The paper consists of two studies. *Study 1* draws on the *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011* and uses a correlational analysis to establish the relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and perceived anti-Muslim prejudice (as a proxy to perceived anti-Muslim discrimination) and the actual past counter-extremism behavior. *Study 2* makes use of the data from *Survey 2*, which includes an experimental component. The experiment consists of two conditions to which the respondents were randomly assigned. In the treatment condition, they were primed with high perceived anti-Muslim discrimination; in the control condition they did not receive a prime. The dependent variable was the likelihood of taking various counter-extremism actions in a short fictional scenario comprising two stages (low threat/high threat). The purpose of the experimental design was to uncover the cause-effect relationship between perceived discrimination and counter-extremism engagement, since, theoretically, being politically and socially active (as in counter-extremism activism) can result in higher perceptions of anti-Muslim discrimination.

In addition to the causal analysis described above, *Study 2* used a correlational analysis of the relationship between (experienced or perceived) anti-Muslim discrimination and the likelihood of counter-extremism engagement. Experienced and perceived anti-Muslim discrimination was measured before the discrimination prime in the treatment condition, and since the causal analysis showed no effect of the prime on counter-extremism engagement, the correlational analysis could be performed on the entire sample as well as on the sample from the control condition. The main aim of the correlational analysis, as in *Study 1*, was to determine whether there is a statistical positive or negative correlation between anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslims' willingness to take action against Islamist extremism.



Table 2: Overview of data and methods of the individual papers

Paper title	Research question	Data sources	Research design	Analytical strategy
“Alienation or cooperation? British Muslims’ reactions to counter-terrorism mobilization” (Paper 1)	What is the attitude of Muslims to counter-terrorism policies and their willingness to engage in countering Islamist extremism?	Political claims by Muslim actors (n = 412) Survey 1 (n = 825) Survey 2 (n = 917) Interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists (n = 30) Interviews with Muslim organizational representatives (n = 12) UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011 (n = 3491)	Explorative & descriptive Cross-sectional Cross-case Mixed methods	Quantitative content analysis (political claims analysis; open-ended survey question) Qualitative content analysis (interviews) Descriptive statistics
49 “Standing up and Speaking out? British Muslims’ Collective Action against Islamist Extremism” (Paper 2)	How does the identity of the actor putting out an action appeal in the area of counter-extremism affect the success of the mobilization?	Survey 1 (n = 825)	Experimental Cross-sectional	Causal analysis Correlational analysis
“What motivates Muslims to engage in counter-extremism? The role of identity, efficacy, emotions and morality” (Paper 3)	What motivates Muslims to engage in counter-extremism?	Online survey (n = 825) Interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists (n = 30)	Cross-sectional Cross-case Mixed methods	Correlational analysis Quantitative content analysis (open-ended survey question) Qualitative content analysis (interviews)
“Demobilizing or activating? The effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement” (Paper 4)	What is the effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on the willingness of Muslims to engage in countering Islamist extremism?	Survey 2 (n = 917) UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011	Experimental Cross-sectional	Causal analysis Correlational analysis



# Chapter 5: Central findings

This chapter presents central findings from the individual papers, structured along the two main parts of the overall research question: a) the extent of Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism and b) the factors that facilitate and hinder this engagement.

## The extent of Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism

One of the most important findings of my project is that the willingness among British Muslims to take action against Islamist extremism appears to be higher than the popular as well as academic and policy discourse would have it. The high extent of British Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism became apparent especially after I analyzed quantitative data from both the newly commissioned *Survey 1* and *Survey 2* and the older *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011*.

Arguably, it would be very difficult to make judgements about the extent to which Muslims are willing to engage in counter-extremism if one had to rely only on qualitative data based on non-representative samples. Yet, this is usually the case when it comes to studies that touch on this subject. Such studies typically present Muslims as deeply alienated by counter-terrorism policies and, consequently, reluctant to take an active role in addressing Islamist extremism (e.g., Abbas & Awan, 2015; Innes et al., 2007; Taylor, 2018).

Paper 1 made use of all data collected throughout the research project to reassess this dominant "alienation narrative". It first reviews the narrative and identifies its two core arguments: the first suggests that Muslims hold negative attitudes to counter-terrorism policies, and the second links this negative attitude, implicitly or explicitly, to Muslims' limited willingness to engage in counter-extremism.

The qualitative data collected from interviews with Muslim organizational representatives and from the media (through political claims analysis) partially supported the first core argument of the alienation narrative. This is not surprising, since most studies about Muslim alienation rely on similar sources of data. However, even at this stage of analysis one could clearly detect Muslim voices that contradicted the tenets of Muslim alienation. These voices were less visible in the media, but they represented a considerable section, if not the majority, of Muslim organizational representatives. Although still critical of

some aspects of counter-terrorism policies, they expressed general understanding and acceptance of the necessity to tackle Islamist extremism. Many of them even wished that the government would step up its support of Muslim-based counter-extremism efforts and defended its policies more assertively vis-à-vis Muslim organizations that were apologetic for extremists. This was echoed in the interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists, who often felt isolated and under heavy criticism from some vocal Muslim organizations. Muslim counter-extremism activists, like the more “accepting” organizational representatives, were also well aware of the alienation narrative, and most of them actually believed that it accurately reflected reality. In addition to “objective” and justified grievances about counter-terrorism discourse and policies, they blamed the perceived Muslim alienation on activist “loud voices”, which spread and feed the narrative in Muslim communities. These loud voices would be the same Muslim organizations that heavily criticize counter-extremism activists for being sell-outs.

The analysis of the nationally representative surveys revealed that the majority of British Muslims do not appear to be alienated by counter-terrorism policies. According to the data from the three surveys, 53% of British Muslims trust the government in the area of counter-terrorism policy (27% do not); 44% are satisfied with the policy (30% are not); 44% trust the government (39% do not); 83% trust the police (17% do not); 45% identify with Muslims who actively counter Islamist extremism (27% do not); and 78% think that these activists do an important job for the sake of Muslim communities (8% do not).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, when it comes to trust in the government and the police, Muslims appear more or equally trusting, respectively, compared to the non-Muslim population. Admittedly, a relatively large section of British Muslims seem to show signs of alienation, but they are still a minority.

When it comes to British Muslims’ willingness to engage in counter-extremism, both qualitative and quantitative data point in the same direction. The political claims analysis showed that Muslim actors make frequent claims (largely driven by terrorism incidents) against Islamist extremism, albeit mostly in the form of verbal or written condemnation. High readiness to take action against Islamist extremism was not disputed even by interviewees who were most antagonistic toward the government’s counter-terrorism policies. In fact, they insisted that Muslims were already doing a lot to address the

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents’ answers were measured on at least a four-point scale, usually on a seven-point scale. The figures therefore represent combinations of answers pointing in the same direction. For a detailed breakdown of response categories see Paper 1.

problem. However, most counter-extremism activists did not think that Muslim communities were particularly active on this issue and rather talked about communities' denial, suspicion, traditionalism and sectarianism.

The survey data confirmed British Muslims' high level of willingness to take action against Islamist extremism, as was suggested by the interviewees. In *Survey 1*, respondents were asked about the likelihood of taking six different actions against Islamist extremism in the aftermath of a hypothetical Islamist terrorist attack in the UK: signing a petition against Islamist extremism, donating to counter-extremism organizations, joining a march against Islamist extremism, opposing Islamist extremists on social media, opposing Islamist extremists in face-to-face discussions and physically opposing Islamist extremists from staging events. The vast majority of respondents, about 90%, indicated that they were slightly, moderately or extremely likely to take at least one of these six actions, and around 30% indicated that they were slightly, moderately or extremely likely to take all of them. Only 5% were not likely (extremely, moderately or slightly) to take any of the six actions (see Table 3 for a detailed breakdown).

Table 3: Means and frequencies of the likelihood to engage in six types of action against Islamist extremism (7-point Likert scale)

	Petition against extremism	Donation to counter- extremism	Opposing extremists on social media	Marching against extremism	Discussing extremists face to face	Physically confronting extremists
Mean	5.7	4.9	5.2	4.8	5.1	4.4
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Extremely/moderately unlikely	5 (43)	10 (83)	9 (76)	11 (91)	10 (76)	18 (146)
Slightly unlikely	2 (15)	6 (51)	4 (34)	6 (46)	5 (38)	8 (66)
Neither likely nor unlikely	13 (109)	23 (188)	20 (165)	25 (203)	19 (160)	30 (245)
Slightly likely	15 (120)	17 (142)	16 (129)	20 (166)	18 (150)	12 (97)
Moderately/extremely likely	65 (538)	44 (361)	51 (421)	38 (319)	48 (401)	33 (271)
Total	100 (825)	100 (825)	100 (825)	100 (825)	100 (825)	100 (825)

Source: Shanaah, 2019.

The survey also contained an experimental component where respondents indicated their likelihood of taking part in a demonstration against Islamist extremism following the hypothetical terrorist attack (see page 56 for more details about the experiment). In total, 63% of the respondents were slightly, moderately or extremely likely to participate in the demonstration, while 24% were not.

*Survey 2* showed similarly high levels of willingness to take action against Islamist extremism. In the survey, the respondents read a two-stage scenario, each stage presenting a different level of threat posed by the hypothetical events. In the first stage, which presented a relatively low threat to public security, a Muslim speaker was about to deliver a public talk in the local area about Muslims' duty to reject democracy and punish homosexuals. The survey respondents were then asked to indicate the likelihood of taking five different actions in the run-up to the public talk: signing a petition against the event, participating in a demonstration against the event, opposing the speaker on social media, opposing the speaker in a face-to-face discussion and physically obstructing the event. 69% said they were slightly, moderately or extremely likely to take at least one action.

The second stage of the scenario presented a higher level of threat, and the respondents were asked to imagine that following the public talk (which proceeded as planned), an individual from their neighborhood had suddenly become vocal about the need to attack homosexuals physically and encouraged other Muslims to do so. Again, the respondents were asked to indicate the likelihood of taking five different actions in response to the agitation by this individual: reporting the individual to the authorities such as the police, contacting local Muslim community leaders, contacting family or friends of the individual, contacting an NGO dealing with extremism and confronting the individual personally. An overwhelming majority of 91% of the respondents said they were slightly, moderately or extremely likely to take at least one of these actions. The most preferred action was contacting the authorities; 64% of the respondents indicated they were slightly, moderately or extremely likely to do so.

Finally, the *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011* made it possible to gauge British Muslims' actual, as opposed to intended, counter-extremism engagement. The data showed that approximately one third of British Muslims took action against violent religious extremism in the five years leading up to the survey interview. By far the most frequent type of action was to disagree with extremist beliefs in private conversations, indicated by about 80% of the respondents. In comparison, around 23% of non-Muslim respondents said they took some action against religious extremism. Importantly, almost all Muslim respondents who did not take action indicated that it was not because they didn't care, but simply because they were not faced with a situation requiring action, were afraid or had doubts an intervention would have any effect. It should also be noted that the survey was conducted five years before the emergence of ISIS, which was joined by hundreds of British Muslims, many of them teenagers who subsequently died in suicide attacks in Syria or Iraq. The fear

of losing children or relatives to ISIS likely made the issue of Islamist extremism even more salient, which means that the estimates of the actual counter-extremism behavior based on the *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011* is probably conservative.

Taken together, these and other results reported in the individual papers suggest that the extent to which Muslims are willing to take action against Islamist extremism is higher than normally anticipated. I would argue that this applies even if we discount for the possible social desirability bias of the surveys, which can arise either from fear that the surveys are monitored by the secret service or a desire to portray oneself or the Muslim communities in a positive light.

One reason to think that the social desirability bias played a less important role is that the anonymity provided by on-line surveys should encourage honesty and that the options given to respondents were graded enough to enable the expression of unwillingness with respect to counter-extremism engagement without necessarily fearing negative repercussions (for example by choosing “moderately” or “slightly” unlikely, instead of the more resolute “extremely” unlikely). That respondents tended to reply honestly is supported by the substantial variance in responses. For example, the low threat scenario of the first stage in *Survey 2*, which was controversial from a freedom of speech perspective, elicited much lower willingness to engage in counter-extremism action than the second stage of the scenario when the threat of violence increased substantially. Finally, respondents’ honesty could also be assessed in the way they replied to the open-ended survey questions, especially in *Survey 1*, when they were asked to give reasons for their engagement (or the lack thereof) in counter-extremism. These responses are presented in the next section, which discusses factors that facilitate or hinder Muslims’ engagement in counter-extremism.

## Factors that facilitate or hinder Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement

In this section, I report the main findings of the individual papers concerning the factors that facilitate or hinder Muslims’ counter-extremism engagement. I list the factors one by one, without dividing them into “facilitating” and “hindering”, since many of them could be assigned to either, depending on their values.

## Trust in and identity of the mobilizer

People do not usually engage in collective action spontaneously, but they react to appeals to action. Klandermans (1988) calls this “action mobilization” and identifies four steps that lead from the issuing of an appeal to participation, each step reducing the number of people progressing to the next one. How many people take action at the end of this process depends on whether they sympathize with the goals of the action, whether those who sympathize receive the appeal and whether those who receive it are motivated enough to comply with it. However, studies of the action mobilization phase have not paid much attention to the effect on participation caused by the identity of the source of the appeal (i.e. the mobilizer), especially when it comes to the level of trust it commands. Yet, the literature on persuasive communication has long highlighted that the characteristics of the “communicator”, including perceived trustworthiness, greatly affects the reception of the appeal (Perloff, 1993; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Similarly, the literature on governance and trust argues that trust in government translates into a higher likelihood of compliance with its demands (Braithwaite & Levi, 2003; Levi, 1998; Peel, 1998; Scholz & Lubell, 1998; Tyler, 1998; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Finally, the framing literature within social movement studies mentions that the credibility of the articulator of a particular frame affects how the frame resonates with the audience (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988).

Paper 2 tested the effect of trust in and identity of the mobilizer on British Muslims’ participation in collective action against Islamist extremism (*Survey 1*). The respondents read a short hypothetical scenario about a terrorist attack in the UK perpetrated by British Muslims. Subsequently, the respondents were randomly assigned to three different conditions. In the first condition, the government called on British Muslims to participate in a demonstration against Islamist extremism “the following Saturday”. In the second condition, the mobilizer was Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the largest Muslim association in the UK. In the third (control) condition, the respondents were merely informed about the demonstration (i.e., there was no action appeal). The expectation was that Muslims would react most favorably to the appeal from MCB due to the “similarity” argument formulated in the persuasive communication literature and the alleged deep Muslim resentment of the government’s counter-terrorism policies suggested by the alienation narrative.

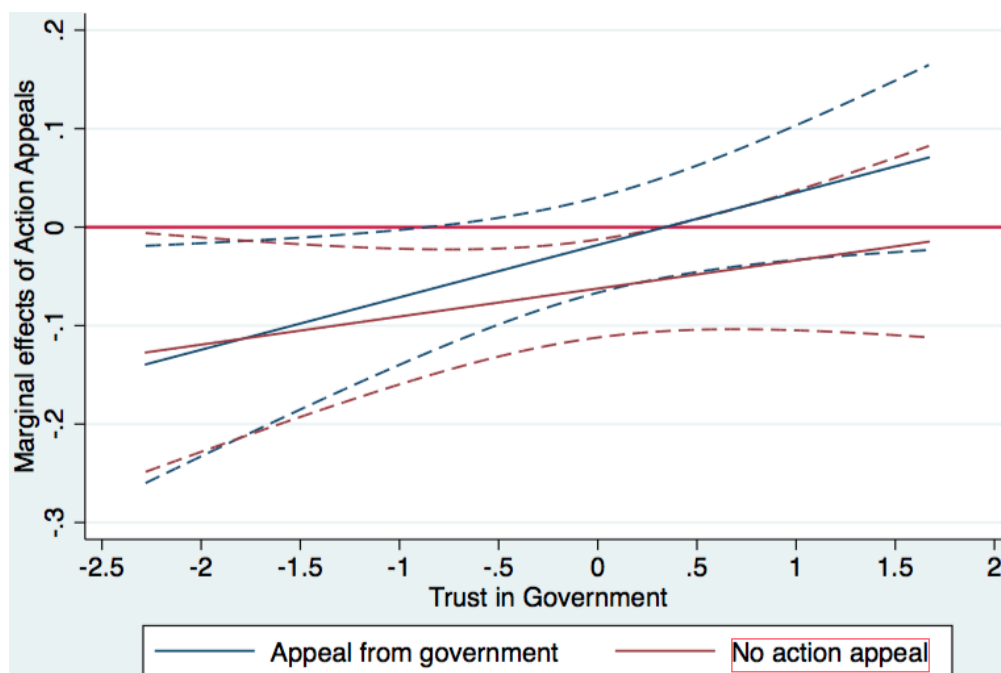
However, the result did not support this expectation, as Muslims’ willingness to participate in the demonstration did not differ significantly between the government and MCB conditions. The only statistical difference appeared to be between the control condition and the two other conditions, which shows



the importance of mobilization appeals in making people take collective action.

Further analysis revealed that the identity of the mobilizer mattered if considered together with levels of trust in the government and MCB. A multilevel regression model found statistically significant interaction effects between the identity of the mobilizer and trust levels, so that with increasing trust in the government Muslims responded more positively to the appeal from the government than to the appeal from MCB. Conversely, Muslims with little trust in the government were more likely to take action if the appeal came from the MCB rather than from the government. The interaction effect is visualized in Figure 2, which shows that an appeal issued by the government (blue line) to Muslims with low levels of trust in the government has negative marginal effects on their willingness to participate in a demonstration against Islamist extremism as opposed to the same group of Muslims receiving the appeal from MCB.

Figure 2: Marginal effects of action appeals on mobilization, conditioned by trust in government



Note: The effect of an appeal from MCB is held constant (o).

Source: Shanaah & Lindekilde, 2019.

The analysis also confirmed the important role that trust plays in action mobilization, beyond the usual individual-level explanation of why people take part in collective action. Table 4 displays multiple regression of participation in the demonstration against Islamist extremism and trust, separately for each experimental condition. It shows that trust in the government is positively and

significantly associated with taking part in the demonstration when the government issues the appeal. The same applies for trust in MCB when MCB is the source of the appeal. Therefore, having trust in a specific mobilizer seems to move people into action if that mobilizer makes the mobilization call.

Table 4: Direct effects of trust levels on mobilization by action appeal condition, controlled for standard explanations of collective action.

	(1) Government condition	(2) MCB condition	(3) Control condition
Efficacy	.34*** (.09)	-.01 (.09)	.20 (.11)
Moral obligation	.21* (.09)	.31*** (.08)	.38** (.11)
Identity	-.07 (.07)	-.04 (.07)	-.10 (.09)
Grievance	.01 (.06)	.18** (.06)	.03 (.07)
Emotion: guilt	.15** (.05)	.14** (.05)	-.01 (.06)
Past protest	.00 (.01)	.03* (.01)	.04** (.01)
Trust in government	.07*** (.02)	.01 (.02)	.06** (.02)
Trust in MCB	.12 (.07)	.27*** (.07)	.07 (.08)
N	282	291	252
r2	.31	.29	.23

Note: Coefficients reported as regression coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses.

†  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Source: Shanaah & Lindekilde, 2019.

## Identity

Table 4 already revealed that identity, measured as the strength of identification with Muslims, had no significant correlation with Muslims' willingness to participate in the demonstration against Islamist extremism. Table 5 below shows the same insignificant correlation regarding other types of counter-extremism actions that were measured in the same survey (*Survey 1*). This is not surprising, given that it is not immediately clear why one should feel more inclined to take action against Islamist extremism just because one strongly identifies as a Muslim. We would expect that identification with Muslims probably has more predictive power of collective action engagement in case of a clear in-group versus out-group conflict, say a Muslim protest against the caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed.

However, in the case of counter-extremism engagement that is directed at a part of the in-group, we need to go beyond a simple categorization based on "objective" social categories (e.g. Muslims). Table 5 shows that a better predictor of counter-extremism engagement is the strength of identification with "Muslims who are actively countering Islamist extremism". This is in line with

the literature on politicized identity (Klandermans, 2014; Simon & Klandermans, 2001) and opinion-based group identification (Baysu & Phalet, 2017; Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009), which holds that the strength of identification with activists and people sharing opinions on a given issue is a better predictor of taking collective action than a broad social category based on “objective” classifications such as gender, ethnicity, religion or class.

My interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists also indicate that certain types of identification facilitate counter-extremism engagement. I identified two categories of activists whose motivation for counter-extremism engagement was fueled by strong feelings of shared identity with certain groups of Muslims. The first category were female activists who were motivated by the need to protect Muslim women and girls. This motivation stemmed from the activists’ own life experiences growing up in a strict traditionalist Muslim family or environment, against which they gradually revolted. Now, they feel an *inner social obligation* to prevent other Muslim women and girls from experiencing the same. The other category comprised male activists who felt a need to protect marginalized young Muslims, also largely due to their own youth experiences, which often led them to flirt with groups and lifestyles that could be described as anti-social. Witnessing how young people ruined their lives because of criminality, gangs, drugs or extremism, these activists are motivated to safeguard young Muslims from choosing potentially deadly paths, including Islamist extremism.

Finally, the analysis of responses to an open-ended question in *Survey 1* suggests that Muslim identity plays an important role in facilitating counter-extremism engagement, even though it does not predict it in the quantitative analysis. Survey respondents were asked to explain why they indicated that they were likely to participate in a demonstration against Islamist extremism in the aftermath of a terrorist attack in the UK committed by British Muslims.

Table 5: Direct effect of motivational factors on the likelihood to engage in six different types of action against Islamist extremism, controlled for age, education, place of birth and past protest experience.

	Petition against extremism	Donation to counter- extremism	Opposing extremists on social media	Marching against extremism	Discussing extremists face to face	Physically confronting extremists
Age (base=18-24)						
25-34	-.008 (.021)	-.008 (.024)	-.063*** (.024)	-.036 (.025)	-.041* (.025)	-.060** (.026)
35-44	.023 (.023)	-.030 (.025)	-.084*** (.025)	-.016 (.026)	-.062** (.026)	-.048* (.027)
45-84	.009 (.028)	-.059* (.031)	-.079** (.031)	-.006 (.032)	-.026 (.032)	-.071** (.033)
Education (base=no or secondary)						
Post-secondary/vocational	-.003 (.025)	-.071*** (.027)	-.032 (.028)	-.055* (.029)	-.028 (.029)	-.076** (.030)
University degree	-.009 (.023)	-.052** (.026)	-.023 (.026)	-.040 (.027)	.016 (.027)	-.051* (.028)
Place of birth (base = born in the UK)						
Not born in the UK	.009 (.018)	.012 (.020)	.028 (.020)	.033 (.021)	.013 (.021)	.058*** (.022)
Past protest experience	.008 (.005)	.014** (.006)	.026*** (.006)	.032*** (.006)	.014** (.006)	.027*** (.006)
Grievances	.080*** (.029)	.003 (.032)	.077** (.033)	-.004 (.034)	-.027 (.034)	.029 (.035)
Identity (Muslim)	-.027 (.035)	.016 (.039)	-.021 (.039)	.006 (.040)	-.000 (.041)	-.009 (.042)
Identity (Muslim C-E activists)	.023 (.026)	.101*** (.029)	.029 (.029)	.030 (.030)	.069** (.030)	-.044 (.031)
Group efficacy	.196*** (.046)	.082 (.051)	.210*** (.052)	.123** (.053)	.037 (.054)	.108* (.056)
Anger	.212*** (.039)	.275*** (.043)	.097** (.043)	.024 (.045)	.193*** (.045)	-.023 (.047)
Guilt	-.007 (.027)	.096*** (.030)	.085*** (.030)	.102*** (.031)	.043 (.031)	.241*** (.033)

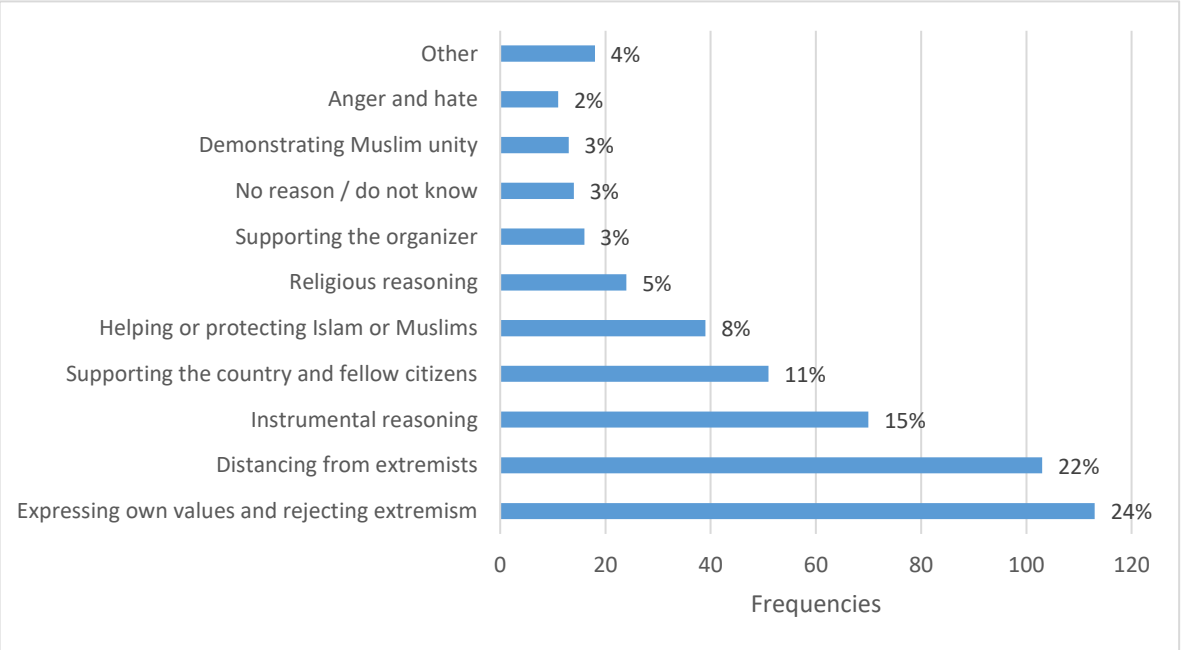
Fear	.101 <sup>***</sup> (.032)	.045 (.035)	.136 <sup>***</sup> (.035)	.079 <sup>**</sup> (.036)	.037 (.037)	-.040 (.038)
Moral obligation	.155 <sup>***</sup> (.044)	.281 <sup>***</sup> (.049)	.163 <sup>***</sup> (.049)	.315 <sup>***</sup> (.051)	.306 <sup>***</sup> (.051)	.379 <sup>***</sup> (.053)
Constant	.241 <sup>***</sup> (.048)	.114 <sup>**</sup> (.053)	.157 <sup>***</sup> (.053)	.181 <sup>***</sup> (.055)	.229 <sup>***</sup> (.055)	.190 <sup>***</sup> (.057)
Observations	825	825	825	825	825	825
Adjusted $R^2$	.216	.261	.224	.197	.167	.224

Standard errors in parentheses \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Source: Shanaah, 2019.

Figure 3 shows the answers summed up in different categories. Some of these categories are related to Muslim identity: “Distancing from extremists”, “Helping or protecting Islam or Muslims”, and “Demonstrating Muslim unity”. Judging from these categories and from studies on the role of identity in collective action (Klandermans, 2014; Steele et al., 2002; Stürmer & Simon, 2004), it is likely that the mechanism that moves Muslims to counter-extremism action is the need to protect or enhance the status of their psychological group (Muslims), which became salient following the survey scenario. The reason the strength of Muslim identity was not statistically predictive of counter-extremism action in the correlational analysis is probably that a) some weak Muslim identifiers could have been moved to action for other reasons, including identifying with the “country and fellow citizens” or simply to express moral outrage; and b) some strong Muslim identifiers were not likely to take action because of factors such as fear, low perceived efficacy, or feeling of being unfairly responsabilized for the attacks. These hindering factors are further elaborated below.

Figure 3: Reasons given for participation in a demonstration against Islamist extremism (n = 472), after eliminating 47 nonsensical answers



Note: Some respondents gave two or three reasons in one answer.

Source: Shanaah, 2019.

### Efficacy

The result in Paper 3 confirmed that group (collective) efficacy (Bandura, 2000; Van Zomeren et al., 2004), the belief that Muslims as a group can achieve positive goals with respect to extremism, is positively and significantly

associated with collective types of counter-extremism actions (see Table 6). The analysis of the qualitative data also reflects the facilitative effect of efficacy. Figure 3 shows that the third most frequent category of reasons to participate in the demonstration against Islamist extremism, given by *Survey 1* respondents, was to achieve specific goals, such as reducing terrorism or sending a message to extremists or the rest of the society (“Instrumental reasoning”). This type of reason implies a certain faith in the accomplishment of the goal.

In Paper 3, one of the four major motivational themes I identified from the interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists was clearly linked to efficacy. In this theme, activists (often ex-extremists) would stress their unique knowledge and skills pertaining to the issue of extremism and counter-extremism, which in their eyes had to be put into use. These activists would tend to perceive counter-extremism engagement (or at least the “harder” end of it) as a delicate craft for professionals who knew what they were doing. Other activists, who did not fall into this category, also expressed high feelings of efficacy, although not in the same guild-like type. Rather, they achieved efficacy by focusing on small, realistic and incremental goals, such as creating ideological change in a concrete individual.

The lack of efficacy can be a major hindering factor. This is demonstrated in Paper 1, where I present a mirror figure to Figure 3 – a categorization of reasons given by those respondents who indicated they were not likely to participate in the demonstration against Islamist extremism. The third most frequent type of reason (14%) revolved around the notion that such a demonstration would not achieve anything. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the analysis of the *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011* showed that low efficacy was an important reason why British Muslims did not take action against violent religious extremism. Around 32% either did not know what to do or doubted that their action would make a difference (Paper 1).

## Emotions

Table 4 replicates the findings of many studies about anger as a significant predictor of engagement in collective action. Angry comments as the only reason for taking action in the demonstration against Islamist extremism were also recorded in the open-ended survey question analyzed in Figure 3.

Interestingly, Table 4 also shows that both guilt and fear are positively and significantly associated with participating in the demonstration against Islamist extremism. Especially the finding concerning fear is surprising as this “flight” emotion is thought to inhibit action (Klandermans & Stekelenburg,

2014). However, a second look at the table reveals that anger is positively correlated mainly with types of counter-extremism actions where one does not come into physical contact with the extremists (e.g., signing a petition or opposing extremism on-line). Paper 1 provides results that are in line with the dominant thinking about the effect of fear, as this emotion is the most frequent reason cited by *Survey 1* respondents for being unlikely to attend the demonstration against Islamist extremism.

In the interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists, anger is not a prominent motivating factor for their activism. Certainly, the activists would feel angry in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, but the dominant emotion they felt when confronted with Islamist extremism was deep sadness, sometimes guilt or shame (some of the ex-extremists). Some activists reported feeling “numb”. This would suggest that anger is a short-lived emotion, which is rather re-active and stimulates collective action in the aftermath of exposure to collective action, but it does not drive the long-term, sustained activism.

## Morality

One of the most important findings of my research was that the strongest motivation for Muslims to take action against Islamist extremism is moral obligation to act, stemming from the need to react against the violation of strongly held values, norms and principles. Table 4 shows that this is the only motivation that positively and significantly correlates with counter-extremism engagement across all six types of action. In addition, it has the strongest effect (in terms of standardized coefficients) of all the motivations (see Paper 3).

This finding is corroborated by the result of the analyses of the qualitative data. At least a third of the *Survey 1* respondents invoked values and morality in some form when they gave reasons for being likely to participate in the demonstration against Islamist extremism (referring to the categories “Expressing own values and rejecting extremism” and “religious reasoning” in Figure 3).

Similarly, by far the most frequent motivational theme expressed by Muslim counter-extremism activists had to do with *inner moral obligation* to act. This was expressed either in religious (Islamic) terms or in secular language replete with references to universal human rights and justice. Religious motivation was clearly dominant and many activists referred directly to Islamic sources when they talked about the need to stand up against evil. It was clear that love of Islam and the Prophet and the need to protect the main Islamic values (considered universal by the religiously motivated activists) was a powerful motor behind the sustained activism of the majority of the activists.



## Discrimination

The effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism was examined in Paper 4. As mentioned in Chapter 3, one would intuitively think that anti-Muslim discrimination would have a hindering effect on Muslims' willingness to counter Islamist extremism, but the literature on discrimination (and some of my interviews with counter-extremism activists) points to both facilitating and hindering effects on socio-political engagement. Paper 4 thus tested hypotheses expecting both a demobilizing and an activating effect of anti-Muslim discrimination on counter-extremism engagement. This was done in two studies, where Study 1 drew on data from the *UK Citizenship Survey 2010-2011* and Study 2 on a survey experiment (*Survey 2*).

Study 1 revealed a positive and significant correlation between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination as well as perceived anti-Muslim prejudice and past counter-extremism engagement. In the experimental Study 2, the respondents were randomly assigned to two conditions and primed with high perceived anti-Muslim discrimination in one of them (treatment condition). The experiment showed no significant effect of perceived anti-Muslim discrimination on the willingness to engage in counter-extremism. A multiple regression analysis supported the experimental findings in that perceived anti-Muslim discrimination had no significant correlation with counter-extremism engagement. Importantly, however, the analysis indicated that the relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism engagement is likely curvilinear. Muslims with no experience of anti-Muslim discrimination and those who experienced it frequently were significantly less likely to engage in counter-extremism than those who had experienced anti-Muslim discrimination a few times. If we take no experience with anti-Muslim discrimination as a baseline, the findings from both studies in Paper 4 suggest that "medium" experiences with anti-Muslim discrimination have a facilitating effect on counter-extremism engagement.

The curvilinear relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism engagement is reminiscent of the inverted U-shaped curve posited to characterize the relationship between the level of regime repression and protest mobilization (Muller & Weede, 1990; Opp, 1994; Tilly, 1978). Conceiving of discrimination as a form of "soft" repression could explain why frequent experiences of anti-Muslim discrimination stifle counter-extremism activism. Experiencing "medium" levels of anti-Muslim discrimination can set some Muslims on the path of value-based activism, which would make them likely to counter any extremism, including Islamist. Conversely, Muslims who do not experience discrimination might have less reason to become involved in political and social activism.

## Responsibilization

Both qualitative and quantitative data analyzed across the individual papers suggests that putting the responsibility to challenge Islamist extremism on Muslims, especially in an explicit and exclusivist way, has a hindering effect on their willingness to engage in counter-extremism. Paper 1 shows that the third most frequent reason (after fear and low efficacy) that respondents in *Survey 1* indicate they were not likely to participate in the demonstration against Islamist extremism was the feeling that they are made unfairly responsible for the acts of the extremists. In addition, recall that *Survey 1* randomly assigned the respondents to three conditions, two of which included a call (by the government or MCB) on *Muslims* to participate in a demonstration against Islamist extremism in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. In the third (control) condition, the respondents were merely informed about a *public* demonstration. Therefore, the respondents in the control condition probably felt less responsabilized to participate, so that those who indicated they were not likely to attend mostly chose other reasons for their non-participation. As a result, only 3% of Muslims in the control condition who were not likely to participate said that it was due to unfair responsabilization (only eighth most frequent reason) in contrast to 20% in the government condition (the most frequent reason) and 14% in the MCB condition (the second most frequent reason).

This also suggests, in partial support of the Muslim alienation narrative, that it is especially the combination of the mobilization appeal from the government and the notion of special Muslim responsibility that has the most deterring effect for Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism.

The interviews with Muslim organizational representatives and counter-extremism activists pointed to the hindering effect of responsabilization. Although the latter group was especially keen on arguing for Muslims' responsibility to tackle Islamist extremism *as a part of a wider societal effort*, they simultaneously resented exclusive responsabilization coming from outside Muslim communities (e.g., the media or the government) and found it unfair, stigmatizing, insulting and counter-productive.

In addition to hindering some Muslims from counter-extremism engagement, the notion of special responsibility is clearly a divisive issue among Muslim communities. According to *Survey 2* presented in Paper 4, about 37% of British Muslims somewhat agree, agree or strongly agree that it is necessary for Muslims in the UK to counter Islamist extremism, while 42% are of the opposite opinion. In comparison, 74% agree with the argument that without active help from Muslims, the government cannot effectively counter Islamist extremism (7% disagree).

# Chapter 6: General discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the main contributions of the dissertation stemming from the individual papers and the project as a whole. I also discuss the limitations of my research and its implications for further studies.

## Theoretical contribution

I structure the theoretical contributions of my dissertation by returning to Figure 1 in the introduction, which depicts the context of Muslim counter-extremism engagement. I start by discussing the findings concerning the extent of Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism (right side of the figure), then proceed to individual motivations to counter-extremism (left side of the figure), state-driven mobilization (upper part of the figure) and anti-Muslim discrimination (lower part of the figure). I finish with a comment to the study of movement emergence and offer some thoughts on the unfulfilled mobilization potential with respect to a Muslim counter-extremism "non-movement."

Starting with the right box in Figure 1, the first theoretical contribution of this dissertation is to the literature that investigates the impact of counter-terrorism policies on Muslim communities. Existing studies in this area tend to portray Muslim communities, especially in the UK, as deeply alienated by counter-terrorism policies (e.g., Abbas & Awan, 2015; Awan, 2012; Cherney & Murphy, 2016; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Hickman et al., 2011; Mythen et al., 2013; Pantazis & Pemberton, 2009; Ragazzi, 2016; Taylor, 2018) and therefore less willing to cooperate in counter-extremism (e.g., Abbas & Awan, 2015; Innes et al., 2007; Taylor, 2018). However, both arguments (negative attitude to counter-terrorism policies and limited willingness to cooperate) largely rest on interview data from non-representative samples of Muslims. The findings in this dissertation provide a more nuanced and accurate assessment of the extent of Muslim alienation and Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism. Based on the findings, it appears that the majority of British Muslims do not show signs of alienation, and the vast majority of British Muslims are in principle willing to take action against Islamist extremism. The dissertation thus demonstrates the usefulness of studying this issue with nationally representative large-N designs and the utility of broadening interview samples to encompass a larger range of Muslim voices beyond small convenient samples recruited in particular localities in the country.

Moving to the left box in Figure 1, the second theoretical contribution of this dissertation is to social movement studies that focus on motivations for collective action. Especially Paper 3, which demonstrates how the existing social psychological approaches to motivations for collective action (e.g., Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Van Stekelenburg et al., 2011; Van Zomeren, 2013, 2016) can be applied to counter-extremism participation, extends the scope conditions of the theories from protest and other similar types of collective action to the new area of counter-extremism. This is helpful to scholars who want to examine people's motivations for challenging extremist groups, i.e. groups that "positively accept[] violence in politics" (Schmid, 2013, p. 10).

My findings show that in the area of counter-extremism, the inner moral obligation to act is the strongest driver of participation. Paper 3 also suggests that guilt is an emotion that has predictive power for engagement in counter-extremism and that fear, despite being a flight emotion (Klandermans & Stekelenburg, 2014), can increase the likelihood of participation in actions where one does not risk confronting "the enemy" directly.

The findings in Paper 3 also support the argument that the strength of identification with a broad social category (e.g., workers, women or students) is a relatively weak predictor of taking action on behalf or for the sake of that category (McGarty et al., 2009; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). This applies especially in case of contestations within the same social category, such as Muslims' counter-extremism engagement, where such measure ceased to predict action. In this case, an alternative measure of identification with "Muslims activists who counter Islamist extremism" proved to be a better predictor. This measure comes close to the concept of *politicized identity* (Klandermans, 2014; Simon & Klandermans, 2001) and *opinion-based group identification* (Baysu & Phalet, 2017; Bliuc et al., 2007; McGarty et al., 2009), lending credence to their claims of being more useful as predictors of collective action.

The analysis of interviews with Muslim counter-extremism activists also suggests that a sustained form of activism can be motivated by strong identification with particular sub-groups within a larger group, to which individuals "objectively" belong. Muslim counter-extremism activists who, thanks to their own life experience, strongly identified with Muslim girls and women or with young marginalized Muslim men, were strongly motivated to engage in counter-extremism in order to protect these categories of people. In principle, the same mechanism is at work in the classic (broad) measure of identity, where, for example, those who identify strongly with students are expected to be more likely to act against a source of threat to students (e.g. increasing tuition fees). However, the findings in Paper 3 indicate a better way to use identity as a predictor of collective action when the threat emanates from inside the in-group.

It consists of determining the categories of in-group members who are most vulnerable to the threat and use the strength of identification with these categories as a predictor of action against this threat.

The third theoretical contribution of the dissertation, related to the top box in Figure 1, is the investigation of the state-driven mobilization of Muslim counter-extremism. The experimental variation of the identity of the mobilization appeal in Paper 2 revealed that the identity of and trust in the mobilizer affects the success of mobilization. Paper 2 showed that different levels of trust in the mobilizer combined with different identity of the mobilizer result in varying levels of likelihood of engaging in a collective action.

This finding is significant especially to the study of *micromobilization* (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McAdam, 1986; Ward, 2015), which is mainly preoccupied with what distinguishes people who do and people who do not participate in collective action following a mobilization appeal. The explanations usually revolve around one or more steps, which select people in or out. These steps can be about filtering people who are sympathizers/non-sympathizers, targeted by an appeal/not targeted, motivated/not motivated, and physically able/not able to participate. The finding that the identity of the mobilizer affects individuals' willingness to participate means that something important happens in the phase where those targeted by an appeal progress to the next step (motivated/not motivated). It seems that people, depending on their subjective trust in the mobilizer, can select themselves out of participation.

Moreover, trust is probably not the only factor that interacts with the mobilizer's identity. Table 4 suggests that depending on the source of an action appeal, different motivations for action become "activated". It is possible, for example, that in the case depicted by Table 4, the mobilization call from the government de-selects Muslims with low perceived efficacy, whereas this same group of individuals would react differently if the call comes from a Muslim organization. This conclusion is supported by a rare natural experiment study conducted by van Stekelenburg and colleagues (2009), where two different mobilizers called for a protest about the same issue on the same day. Protesters who turned up at one site differed from the protesters at the second site in terms of which motivation provided the strongest impetus to participate.

The fourth theoretical contribution, related to the bottom box in Figure 1, is to the literature on the effect of discrimination on socio-political behavior. Paper 4 extends this scholarship to the case of counter-extremism, which has not been studied in terms of the impact of discrimination. The results indicate that anti-Muslim discrimination has an activating rather than a de-mobilizing effect on Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism. More precisely, the

findings indicate a curvilinear relationship between experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism. One way how to make sense of this finding is to think of discrimination as a form of a repressive structure, which can stimulate activism unless it becomes too overwhelming. A similar curvilinear relationship has been proposed to exist between regime repression and mobilization (Muller & Weede, 1990; Opp, 1994; Tilly, 1978), possibly based on the same underlying mechanism. The finding of the curvilinear relationship can also potentially reconcile the broader literature on the effect of discrimination on socio-political behavior, which reports mixed results in terms of engagement (Mattis et al., 2004; Page, 2018; Peucker, 2019; Ramírez, 2007; Sanchez, 2006; White-Johnson, 2012) or disengagement (Kang & Burton, 2014; Park et al., 2013; Piazza, 2011; Sanders et al., 2014; Schildkraut, 2005; Victoroff et al., 2012) in mainstream social and political behavior.

The final contribution is to the study of movement emergence. Recently, social movement scholars have called for investigations of mobilization potentials, fulfilled or not, to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of movement emergence and the necessary conditions for successful mobilization (Bell, 2016; McAdam & Boudet, 2012). One such rare study of unfulfilled mobilization potential is Goss' (2010) *Disarmed: The missing movement for gun control in America*. In her book, Goss tries to determine why there has not been a full-fledged movement for gun control in the US even though the usual "critical movement ingredients" have been in place (p. 191), i.e., political opportunities, organizational infrastructure and sympathetic public opinion, which approximates the macro-, meso- and individual-level factors outlined in Chapter 3. Goss sees three reasons why the movement has not materialized: (1) the emerging movement was not able to secure sufficient institutional patronage (mainly in terms of funding); (2) the gun issue was framed as a crime control problem for experts, which discouraged mass participation; (3) gun control advocates tried and failed to push through big national legislative changes, instead of building on small incremental local victories, which would enhance people's feeling of efficacy.

Goss' study has some important parallels to the case of Muslim counter-extremism mobilization. The crucial movement ingredients also seem to be in place, at least in the UK. Political and discursive opportunities favor Muslims' engagement; there is sufficiently developed Muslim organizational infrastructure; and the findings of this dissertation show that there is sufficiently large mobilization potential among ordinary Muslims. Yet, despite various activities of some Muslim organizations and individuals, we do not see an organized, sustained, visible and locally rooted (Goss, 2010, p. 11) Muslim counter-extremism movement.

Building on insights that I gained during my research project, I believe that part of the explanation is related to the last two reasons given by Goss (2006) for the failure of the gun-control mobilization, namely problems surrounding the framing and the attainability of goals.

While it is true that the size of financial patronage, the first reason Goss argued hindered the gun-control mobilization, might potentially play a role too,<sup>3</sup> it can be argued that the modest public and private funding for counter-extremism activism corresponds to the level of interest among Muslim organizations. In fact, what distinguishes the counter-extremism movement potential from both the realized potential of anti-tobacco movement and unrealized potential of the gun control movement, is the notable absence of a conscious and sustained mobilization drive by Muslim organizations, including those that are engaged in counter-extremism. The lack of *supply* in the process of mobilization is likely caused by: (1) the way the issue of extremism is framed and (2) the extent to which the supposed goal of the mobilization can be attained.

Concerning the framing of extremism and counter-extremism, I have already pointed out the contested nature of the concept of extremism (see Chapter 2). I demonstrated, in Table 1, the lack of consensus on the definition of extremism among ordinary Muslims. My interviews with British Muslim organizational representatives and counter-extremism activists revealed that the ambiguities surrounding the term extremism and its changing understanding by successive governments can be a stumbling block for a more focused and united Muslim front. There was no contestation about the need to counter ISIS- or al-Qaida-like groups, about challenging those who turn to or advocate violence, but there was a lot of uncertainty and disagreement about the demarcation of the lower boundary of extremism. This is the area sometimes labelled “non-violent extremism”, which often blurs the line between terrorism and other issues such as integration, theology or culture. Countering extremism then might imply to some Muslims an effort to reshape religious, political, or social attitudes of Muslim communities. Framing the issue of extremism in such broad way, while insisting that counter-terrorism policies only aim at few “rotten apples”, is inconsistent and likely remote from Muslims’ everyday experiences and beliefs. This reduces the credibility of the frame as well as its relative salience (Benford & Snow, 2000). In addition, the ambiguities of the term *Islamist extremist* complicate the diagnostic frame of

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<sup>3</sup> Despite the political rhetoric, the financial support generated by state institutions and private benefactors for Muslim counter-extremism activists is nowhere near the levels that the anti-tobacco or anti-drug movements (or even the gun control advocates) have drawn on.

any potential mobilizer of a Muslim counter-extremism movement: the clear articulation of shared grievances and the attribution of blame for these grievances (Javeline, 2003; Snow & Benford, 1992).

This is of course related to the question of the attainability of the goal of any prospective Muslim counter-extremism movement. Fighting extremism is not the same as fighting smoking, poverty or even climate change. All movements related to the issues from the latter category allow for some kind of tangible victories that extra-institutional pressure can achieve, at least on a local level. As a result of the movement's pressure, states can increase taxes on cigarettes, invest more in social housing, or commit to greenhouse gas reduction. There is no need to persuade state institutions or parliaments to take steps to reduce extremism. While we can measure the level of smoking-related deaths, the number of homeless people, or increases in average temperatures, it is much more difficult to measure victories over extremism, especially when it is not clear what extremism even means. Moreover, most Muslims probably feel that Islamist extremism is destined to be defeated anyway, without them having to organize in a movement, commit resources and take risks in order to tackle it. Scholars writing about counter-movements argue that they are more likely to emerge if the movement they oppose has some chances, but yet no guarantee, of success (Mottl, 1980; Zald & Useem, 2017). If we regard Islamist extremism as a movement (Brachman, 2008; Sutton & Vertigans, 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2006), we could argue that its success in militarily defeating Western countries or imposing Islam on the West is so negligible that it does not inspire a counter-movement. However, with its increasing chances to turn the non-Muslim majority against Muslim minorities, for example in the aftermath of major and/or repeated terrorist attacks, we can see a higher level of mobilization among Muslims. After all, the goal of expressing moral disassociation from extremism is more attainable than defeating it. This is reflected in the fact that this dissertation showed that moral obligation is the strongest driver for Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism.

## Contribution to policy and public discourse

This dissertation holds several valuable insights for policy makers. The first important point is that the apparent large mobilization potential among Muslims could translate into action against Islamist extremism. Paper 1 showed that contrary to the dominant academic narrative of Muslim alienation, which likely informs policy making in the area of counter-extremism, there is little indication that the majority of Muslims resent counter-terrorism policies and distrust the authorities. In fact, the vast majority of Muslims are willing to challenge Islamist extremism.



However, as demonstrated by Paper 2, the mobilization potential needs to be triggered by a specific action appeal from a trustworthy source. Again, the dominant alienation narrative would expect the government to have limited success as a source of such an appeal. Nevertheless, Paper 2 showed that the government is not necessarily less effective in mobilizing Muslims against Islamism extremism than a Muslim organization, which often criticizes the government's counter-terrorism policy and portrays itself as a champion of Muslim victims of this policy. In this respect, the dissertation suggests that the government can be more self-confident in its abilities to move Muslims into action.

How this can be done more effectively is primarily suggested in Paper 3. Based on the analysis of Muslims' motivations for counter-extremism, the government can increase the likelihood of Muslim mobilization by highlighting how Islamist extremism violates Islamic and universal human values and how it negatively affects Muslim women and youth. The government should also highlight what specific type of actions can be taken, how and the positive impact they can have, in order to increase the perceived efficacy of Muslims' collective action against Islamist extremism.

Having said this, there are some very important factors that need to be tackled by policy makers prior to any mobilization efforts. First, as outlined in the previous section, "the enemy" must be clearly demarcated. The government must be explicit and clear about what constitutes the problem and who to blame for it. Without a sharp diagnostic frame, neither consensus mobilization nor action mobilization can be successful (Klandermans, 1984).

Second, policy makers (and the media) should avoid giving the impression that Muslims have an exclusive or special responsibility to challenge Islamist extremism. Paper 1 identified perceived unfair responsabilization as a major obstacle to Muslims' counter-extremism engagement and a controversial topic even among Muslim counter-extremism activists. The consensus on the side of Muslims seems to be that counter-extremism should be framed as a collective effort of the entire society. Insinuating that Muslims are not doing enough or that they are unwilling to live up to their responsibility was widely perceived as insulting and frustrating by Muslim organizational representatives and counter-extremism activists that I interviewed.

Third, building on the results of Paper 4, the government should step up its efforts to reduce anti-Muslim discrimination in society. Reducing discrimination in society should be done for its intrinsic benefit, but Paper 4 also showed that frequent experience of anti-Muslim discrimination likely reduces the willingness to engage in counter-extremism for some groups of Muslims. The positive association between anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-ex-

tremism engagement reported in the paper is probably rooted in discrimination victims' need to react actively against *any* social evil. Such positive engagement should be stimulated by enhancing the political and social participation of Muslims and obviously not by relying on an indirect effect of discrimination.

When it comes to public discourse, the dissertation brings new and much needed empirical data, which can inform and nuance the way the topic of Muslims and extremism is discussed in the public. The data show that Muslims are very willing to take action against Islamist extremism, even if the situation does not involve a direct threat to public security and could be considered as an exercise of free speech (Paper 4). The data also show that Muslims who are less likely to take action have other reasons than mistrusting the government or endorsing extremism. The most frequent reasons for not taking action are fear, doubts about efficacy, biographical unavailability (e.g., high age, sickness, other responsibilities), or the feeling that ordinary Muslims have nothing to do with (or should not be linked to) extremists. The last point – that putting exclusive responsibility on Muslims for countering Islamist extremism is likely counter-productive – has implications for the general public, policy makers and the media.

The broader society can encourage Muslim mobilization against Islamist extremism by making it a collective effort, without questioning Muslim loyalties and in a way that removes Muslims' (especially women's) fear of participating in collective action and their doubts about the efficacy of such actions. This could be a task especially for non-Muslim civil society organizations and activists that are highly experienced in the process of mobilization and might be in a good position to find ways to minimize obstacles to counter-extremism engagement identified in this research.

## Limitations and further research

At least three issues should be discussed with respect to the limitations of this dissertation. The first issue concerns the generalizability of the results. It can be said with a high degree of confidence that the findings can be generalized to the United Kingdom and British Muslims as the research draws heavily on survey data collected from nationally representative samples of British Muslims. Hence, the causal and correlational analyses of these data have strong external validity. So do the findings from the quantitative content analyses, as they are based on these surveys (the open-ended survey questions) or approximate the data from the entire population (the political claims analysis, which includes every political claim reported by the two largest mainstream media sources in the UK). I also purposively sampled a broad range of British Muslim

voices among organizational representatives and used a snowball sampling procedure to reach the highest possible number of interviewees among British Muslim counter-extremism activists, which by itself cannot guarantee high external validity, but when triangulated with the survey data, it increases the confidence that the findings apply to the contemporary UK setting.

To what extent they also apply beyond the UK is more debatable. I would argue, based on the logic of system resonance (Steinberg, 2015), that the findings are reasonably generalizable to other Western countries that share certain key characteristics with the UK, i.e., the presence of a large Muslim minority, a history of home-grown Islamist terrorism incidents, a policy emphasis on mobilizing and supporting communities for the fight against extremism and high perceived or actual levels of anti-Muslim discrimination. Some candidate countries would be Australia, Canada, the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden. Obviously, these countries differ with respect to the demographics of the local Muslim populations or the degree of state-driven mobilization, but the basic context of the double-pressure depicted in Figure 1 applies to all of them. It is reasonable to argue that the psychological profiles of Muslim minorities in these countries do not differ to a degree that would completely change the results regarding, for example, their motivations for counter-extremism.

The second potential limitation is possible social desirability bias. Islamist extremism is one of the most salient issues linked to Muslim minorities in the West, and it has arguably become a major perspective through which Muslims are consciously or subconsciously identified by the members of the non-Muslim majority. This probably affects how Muslims think of themselves and their communities and how they behave, especially when the issue of extremism is made salient through a survey or an interview. One consequence could be that Muslim respondents inflate their willingness to counter Islamist extremism and downplay their negative attitude to the state or counter-terrorism policies.

One reason to worry less about this sort of bias is the fact that Muslims do not seem to be afraid to criticize the state and its counter-terrorism policies. In fact, the dominant academic narrative of Muslim alienation is built on interviews with Muslims who are quite explicit in their condemnation of counter-extremism policies (Mythen, 2012; Mythen et al., 2013; Parmar, 2011) and description of Islamist extremism as a secondary problem (Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011). If these and some other vocal Muslim critics of counter-terrorism policies do not succumb to the social desirability bias, chances are that the anonymous environment of an on-line survey, such as the two surveys commissioned in this project, encourages Muslim respondents to be honest in their replies. Also, as noted earlier, the fact that most survey questions were scored on a 7-point Likert scale should have made it easier to choose options

closer to the true value even in case a respondent wished to avoid giving the “extreme” value. The results also reflect that the respondents were not opting for the most socially acceptable answers. For example, while the vast majority of Muslims were willing to take action in the high threat stage of the *Survey 2* scenario, much fewer Muslims were willing to do the same in the low threat stage of the scenario.

The third limitation concerns the level of Muslim heterogeneity. Muslims, in the UK and other Western countries, have diverse ethnic backgrounds, have different forms and intensity of religiosity and hold different political and social views. The individual papers forming this dissertation avoid the reductionist use of “Muslim community” in the singular and prefer to hint at this diversity by using the plural “Muslim communities”. Admittedly, even this latter phrase is simplifying, but some level of simplification is necessary for a research project that has an ambition to make generalizable claims, although it then risks overlooking potentially important outliers in the form of certain sub-groups of the population. A partial remedy to this risk was the use of surveys with nationally representative samples and the purposive attempt to diversify the number of Muslim voices in the interviews (e.g., to include the Shias, Ahmadis and other minorities within Islam). Yet, it is possible that some segments of the UK Muslim population with distinct attitudes and behavior were left out, for example the most secluded Salafi Muslims.

In light of these limitations and the overall findings of the dissertation, there are several implications for future studies. First, there is a need for more systematic studies of Muslim counter-extremism, especially using cross-national research design. This would help to further confirm the findings in this dissertation, ascertain their generalization across countries and isolate aspects that do not travel from the UK to other settings. The next step would be to extend these insights to the general case of citizens-based activism against violence that emanates from the same in-group. Basque-based activism against ETA or Sikh-based activism against Sikh extremists in India are just two examples that approximate the Muslim counter-extremism context, because Basques and Sikhs are minorities who face relatively high levels of discrimination as well as pressure from the state aimed at mobilizing the “moderates” (Chowdhury & Krebs, 2009).

Second, future studies interested in the impact of counter-terrorism policies on Muslim minorities should make use of research methods and sampling techniques that maximize the accuracy of their findings. The same applies to scholars who want to investigate the level of Muslims’ willingness to cooperate in counter-extremism. This dissertation shows that analyzing data from a small convenient sample of interviewees can lead to conclusions that are less generalizable to Muslim communities than analyses based on a mixed method

approach, which include samples that are more representative of the population.

Third, the relationship between anti-Muslim discrimination and Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism requires more attention. Future studies should confirm whether there is a curvilinear relationship between (experienced) anti-Muslim discrimination and counter-extremism engagement and determine the mechanisms through which the former can facilitate or hinder the latter. It is also likely that the relationship is moderated by a number of psychological or socio-political factors, which should be teased out.

Fourth and finally, this dissertation demonstrates how experimental and large-N cross-sectional designs can be employed to fruitfully study (Muslim) counter-extremism engagement and how they can be combined with more inductive cross-case qualitative research in a mixed methods approach. Future studies on counter-extremism (and other topics) should consider the benefits of data triangulation, which increases the validity and reliability of the findings.



## Short summary

In recent years, many Western countries have designed counter-extremism policies in response to the growing threat from especially Islamist terrorism. One shared feature of these policies is the effort to mobilize and support Muslim communities' action against Islamist extremism. The idea is that Muslims are in an advantageous position to identify, dissuade, or report potential Islamist terrorists and prevent other social harms caused by extremism. Both the media and the majority society also put pressure on Muslims to "do something" about Islamist extremism. At the same time, Muslims in the West have been increasingly viewed with suspicion, anxiety, and even hostility, which is reflected in high levels of anti-Muslim discrimination. Many scholars have portrayed Muslims as deeply alienated by the combined effect of counter-terrorism policies and social discrimination. Some have even argued that because of alienation, Muslims are disinclined to take action against Islamist extremism. On the backdrop of the double-pressure from state-driven mobilization and anti-Muslim discrimination, this dissertation examines the extent of Muslims' willingness to engage in counter-extremism and factors that facilitate or hinder this engagement.

It does so by employing a mixed methods research approach, focusing on the United Kingdom, where these pressures are most pronounced. Based on the analysis of rich and new empirical data, collected from three nationally representative surveys, mainstream British newspapers, and forty-two interviews with Muslim organizational representatives and counter-extremism activists, I conclude that the majority of British Muslims do not show signs of alienation with respect to counter-terrorism policies and are willing to take action against Islamist extremism.

Building on social movement research, I theorize macro-, meso-, and individual-level factors that facilitate or hinder Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism. In general, I find that social movement theories can be successfully applied to the study of citizen-based counter-extremism participation. More specifically, I argue that factors facilitating Muslims' engagement in counter-extremism are: trust in the source of action appeal, inner moral obligation to protect strongly held values, perception of group efficacy, anger at Islamist extremists, identification with those sub-groups of Muslim communities that suffer the worst consequences of Islamist extremism and, with caveats, exposure to anti-Muslim discrimination. Hindering factors include the feeling of unfair responsabilization, high frequency of experienced anti-Muslim discrimination, fear of potentially threatening situations, perceived low group efficacy and distrust of the source of action appeal.

This dissertation primarily contributes to the literatures on counter-terrorism and social movements, but it also offers insights to scholars who are interested in the effect of discrimination on socio-political behavior. It gives recommendations to policy makers regarding the mobilization of Muslim communities against Islamist extremism. Finally, it contributes to improving the quality of the public discourse on Muslims and terrorism via its rigorous assessment of Muslims' attitudes and behavior vis-à-vis Islamist extremism.



## Dansk resumé

En række vestlige lande har de seneste år udviklet politik til terrorbekæmpelse som et modsvar til den stigende trussel fra særligt islamistisk terror. Denne politik har det fællestræk, at den forsøger at mobilisere og støtte lokale muslimske grupperes egen aktivisme mod islamistisk ekstremisme. Ideen er, at muslimer i forvejen indtager en privilegeret position i forhold til at identificere, forhindre eller rapportere potentielle terrorister og derved forebygge andre potentielle negative konsekvenser af ekstremisme. Samtidig lægger medierne og det omkringliggende samfund pres på muslimer til aktivt at modsætte sig islamistisk ekstremisme.

Parallelt med denne udvikling har muslimer i Vesten oplevet øget mistænkeliggørelse, frygt og fjendtlighed fra det omkringliggende samfund, der blandt andet er kommet til udtryk i øget diskrimination. Mange forskere har beskrevet hvordan muslimer har reageret på denne kombination af antiterrorpolitik og diskrimination ved at kappe forbindelsen til det omkringliggende samfund. Flere forskere har endda argumenteret for, at denne fremmedgørelse har gjort, at muslimer i dag er mindre villige til aktivt at modsætte sig islamistisk ekstremisme. Dette efterlader muslimer i et krydspres mellem statsdrevet mobilisering og anti-muslimsk diskrimination. På baggrund af dette krydspres undersøger jeg i denne afhandling muslimers villighed til at deltage i tiltag mod ekstremisme, og jeg undersøger hvilke faktorer der fordrer og hindrer denne deltagelse.

Afhandlingen gør dette gennem både kvalitative og kvantitative forskningsmetoder. Afhandlingens fokus er på Storbritannien, fordi der her er et særligt stærkt krydspres. På baggrund af en analyse af nyt empirisk materiale indsamlet gennem tre nationalt repræsentative spørgeskemaundersøgelser, britiske avisartikler og 42 interviews med repræsentanter for muslimske organisationer og muslimske aktivister konkluderer jeg, at størstedelen af britiske muslimer ikke viser tegn på fremmedgørelse i relation til antiterroriltag. Jeg konkluderer derudover, at størstedelen er villige til at deltage aktivt i tiltag mod islamistisk ekstremisme.

Ud fra litteraturen om sociale bevægelser udvikler jeg en teori om, hvilke faktorer der på makro-, meso-, og mikroniveau fordrer eller hindrer muslimers deltagelse i antiterroriltag. På et overordnet niveau finder jeg, at teorier om sociale bevægelser er værdifulde i studiet af borgernes deltagelse i tiltag mod ekstremisme. Konkret argumenterer jeg for, at faktorer, der fordrer muslimers aktive deltagelse er følgende: Tillid til den kilde, der opfordrer til handling; en oplevelse af moralsk pligt til at beskytte sine kerneværdier; en ople-

velse af at være i en ressourcestærk gruppe; vrede mod islamistiske ekstremister; et oplevet gruppertilhørsforhold med de muslimske fælleskaber, der lider mest under islamistisk ekstremisme. I visse tilfælde lader det til, at anti-muslimsk diskrimination kan fordre aktivisme. Faktorer, der hindrer deltagelse er: oplevelsen af at blive stillet til ansvar for andres handlinger; høj grad af diskrimination; frygt for potentielt truende situationer; oplevelsen af at være i en resourcesvag gruppe; mistillid til de personer, der opfordrer til handling.

Afhandlingen bidrager primært til forskningslitteraturen om bekæmpelse af terrorisme og litteraturen om sociale bevægelser, men er også værdifuld for forskere, der beskæftiger sig med effekterne af diskrimination på socio-politisk adfærd. Afhandlingen kommer med konkrete anbefalinger rettet mod politikere og embedsmænd, der forsøger at mobilisere muslimske lokalsamfund mod islamistisk ekstremisme. Afhandlingen bidrager yderligere til at forbedre kvaliteten af den offentlige debat om muslimer og terrorisme ved at give konkrete og empirisk baserede vurderinger af muslimers holdninger og adfærd i forhold til at modsætte sig islamistisk ekstremisme.

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