

# The same psychological mechanism explains violence among Muslim and Western extremists

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Why do some Westerners attack Muslim minorities and asylum seekers and why do some Muslims support and engage in terror against the West? New research suggests that the reasons for such extreme behaviour might be the same in both groups. The results have now been published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

In five studies among three groups and seven cultural contexts, researchers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the US show that the same [psychological processes](#) explain mutual outgroup [hostility](#) between non-Muslim Westerners, Muslim minorities living in the West, and Muslims living in the Middle East.

The researchers asked a total of 705 Muslims and 522 non-Muslim Westerners about their attitudes toward the other group. This is the first comparative study that explores whether similar threat perceptions predict outgroup hostility and violence across Muslims living in Europe and the Middle East as well as among non-Muslims in Europe and in the US.

Results showed that the more individuals in each group felt that the other group threatened their culture, traditions, norms, values and way of life, the higher were their intentions to attack and show hostility towards them. The findings held regardless of whether the respondents were Westerners living in the US or Scandinavia or whether they were

Muslims living in Europe or the Middle East (e.g., Turkey and Afghanistan).

Interestingly, a fear of terror, war and occupation or a loss of economic and physical well-being made little difference. In other words, non-Muslim Westerners and Muslims alike do not seem to show hostility towards each other because they perceive their physical safety to be threatened, but because they perceive their cultures, values, norms, morals, philosophy and identity as incompatible. The results of the research can explain why Westerners join anti-Muslim organisations such as Pegida and sometimes are even personally willing to violently persecute Muslims. At the same time, it also sheds light on why some Muslims support London bombings and the 9/11 attacks, and personally engage in terror against the West or even go abroad to fight for other Muslims.

"An imagined or perceived 'Clash of Cultures' may indeed underlie violence and hostility between some Muslims and non-Muslims," says Dr. Milan Obaidi, researcher at the Department of Psychology at Uppsala University.

**More information:** Milan Obaidi et al, Living Under Threat: Mutual Threat Perception Drives Anti-Muslim and Anti-Western Hostility in the Age of Terrorism, *European Journal of Social Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2362](https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2362)

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