

ISLAMIST EXTREMISM



A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION

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1. Introduction

This factbook provides an overview of the fundamental elements of violent Islamist extremism to enable recognition of its symbols, vocabulary, recruitment tactics and narratives used in various settings, including online, in our schools, local communities, or prisons.

There are multiple manifestations of violent Islamist extremism across the EU. Because of the national and local variations, it is impossible to provide an all-including in-depth study of the phenomenon. This factbook focuses specifically on Salafi-jihadism.



2. Definition

“Violent Islamist extremism” is an **umbrella concept** for different forms of violence-promoting extremist groups within both Sunni and Shia Islam. There is great variation and manifestation across different EU states. Groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS ⁽¹⁾ adhere to the Salafi-jihadi school of ideological thought⁽²⁾, which is part of the Sunni manifestation, while there are also violent Shia manifestations. Violent Islamist extremists are united in their rejection of democratic rule of law and the expression of individual human rights. ⁽³⁾

This report focuses primarily on the **Salafi-jihadi dimensions** given that a majority of terrorists and foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who left for Iraq and Syria originate from this ideological strand. It is important to recognise that not all Salafists are jihadists.

⁽¹⁾ ISIS is used in this text but it is also referred to as ISIL and Daesh.

⁽²⁾ Wagemakers, J. (2016). Salafism. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion; Wagemakers, J. (2009). A purist Jihadi-Salafi: the ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi. British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 36(2), 281-297; Meijer, R. (2009). Global Salafism. London: Hurst and Company; Wiktorowicz, Q. (2006). Anatomy of the Salafi movement. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 29(3), 207-239.

⁽³⁾ Westenberger, K., & Stehlik, J. (2018). [Islamic extremism in Germany](#). Hans Seidel Foundation - Office in the Czech Republic and European Values Think-Tank.

This factbook provides an overview of the fundamental elements of violent Islamist extremism to enable recognition of its symbols, vocabulary, recruitment tactics and narratives used in various settings, including online, in our schools, local communities, or prisons.

3. Salafi ideology

(⁴) A useful introduction is 'Ideology and strategy of Jihadism' (National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, December 2009). '*Salafism in the Netherlands: Diversity and dynamics*' (AIVD & NCTV, September 2015).

(⁵) Deol, J., & Kazmi, Z. (2013). Contextualizing jihadi thought. London: Hurst Publishers. Mozaffari, M., & Khosrokhavar, F. (2011). Jihadist ideology. The anthropological perspective. Aarhus: Aarhus University. Abbas, T. (Ed.) (2007). Islamic political radicalism. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Ranstorp, M., Ahlin, F., Hyllengren, P., & Normark, M. (2018). *Between Salafism and Salafi-jihadism. Influence and challenges for Swedish society*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence University.

(⁶) Kelvington, M. R. (2019). *Global Salafi-jihadism ideology: The "soft power" of the enemy*. Herzliya, Israel: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

Salafi and Salafi-jihadism

Both Salafist and Salafi-jihadism are **literalist interpretation** that follows *al-salaf al-salih* (the first three generations of Muslims). It focuses on *tawheed* (monotheism and God's absolute authority), the principle of sanctity with a clear binary distinction between "us" and "them" that rejects non-Muslims (in many cases everyone and everything that is non-Salafi). This ideology also rejects secular democracy as full-fledged tyranny while it applies a clear moral framework governing relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. As such, it embodies the ideal of creating a Salafi vanguard. A group of forerunners that propagates, protects and defends the straight path of the Prophet and where *da'wah* plays an important role in the conversion of non-Muslims into Muslims. A forefront as a defence against Western secular norms and values. (⁴) Salafi-jihadism follows the same ideology as Salafists, but views violence as a necessary instrument to change the present world order.

Key ideological concepts (⁵)

Salafism is a minority interpretation within Sunni Islam that views itself as practising the true Islam as it was practiced by **the first three generations** after the Prophet Mohammed. Salafists do not recognise the four legal schools within Sunni Islam: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. Salafists claim authenticity and exclusivity, referring to being mentioned in a hadith as *al-ta'ifa al-mansura* (the victorious group) and *al-firqa al-najiya* (the saved sect — from Hellfire). (⁶)

As such, Salafists are dogmatic and literalist in relation to the Quran and *sunnah* (teachings, deeds and behaviour of the Prophet Muhammed whom they view as the perfect Muslim), which they view as sufficient to guide the lives of all Muslims. Therefore, Salafists **reject any subsequent interpretation of the Quran (*bid'ah*)** and modern Muslim views and practices.

Salafists have a strict view on an indivisible God (***tawheed***) and total submission to God's rule and regulations through a return to a pure past. For Salafists, ***hakimiyya*** (sovereignty) **means that God is the only legislator** and that everyone is obliged to literally follow *sharia* to the letter. All forms of change, deviation or renewal are deemed sinful and a denial of truth that requires fighting ***shirk* (polytheism)** and ***kuffar* (non-believers)**. For Salafists, this means absolute authority and submission to God. Salafists **reject parliamentary democracy** as they argue such a system gives precedence to human, man-made laws before God's rule. Democracy is often equated with *shirk*.

Salafists make a **binary distinction between believers and unbelievers**, between Salafism's rightly guided Muslims and all other interpretations. For example, the principle of sanctity is central to uphold as it **categorises all behaviour as *haram* (forbidden) or *halal* (allowed)**. To follow this moral framework to the letter shows

loyalty as it regulates all behaviour and social relations and deviation requires correction measures. The practice of monitoring that religious and moral rules are strictly followed is called **hisbah** (balance). ⁽⁷⁾

Salafism is not a homogeneous tradition of interpretation but has several different orientations that have emerged historically. Quintan Wiktorowicz and other researchers usually speak about different categories of Salafism: **purist Salafism**, **activist Salafism** and **militant Salafism**.

Purist

The **puritan Salafists** (*al-Salafiyya al-'ilmiyya*) avoid "political activism and violence in the pursuit of building an Islamist State. Often their position is closely aligned with the Saudi religious elite and these emphasise that there is a duty to obey the political ruler of the Saudi state". ⁽⁸⁾ Instead, the puritan Salafists focus on cleansing the religion from renewal or reinterpretation through education (*tarbiya*), cleansing (*tazkiyya*) and *da'wah* among other Muslims and promote segregation vis-à-vis non-Muslims. ⁽⁹⁾ Here, Salafists strive not only for separation between Muslims and non-Muslims but also strict separation of men and women in different spheres. This subset of Salafists is sometimes referred to as **Madkhali-Salafis**.

Activist

Activist Salafism (also known as "politicos") does not only distance itself from democracy, which these Salafists see as irreconcilable with Muslim faith and doctrine, it also actively seeks out Muslims to divorce them from democratic processes such as voting in elections or participating in political parties. These activist Salafists participate actively on local societal issues, they point out un-Islamic behaviour and, at times, try to exercise social control in certain areas. Activist Salafists are often focused on global and local conditions and take a strong stance against rulers whom they seek to undermine. They have a strong enemy picture and rhetoric focusing on Western regimes (the far enemy), while Arab or godless nation states represent the near enemy, which hinders the establishment of an Islamic State. They lobby and campaign for change according to Islamist precepts. This subset of Salafists is known as **Harakis** (activists).

Militant / Salafi-Jihadi

Militant Salafism or Salafi-jihadism (*al-Salafiyya al-jihadiyya*) views violence as a necessary instrument to change the present world order where Pax Americana with the USA and other allied states are seen as the spearhead in an all-out war against Islam and Muslims. It rejects liberalism, democracy and the nation state, which have to be fought. There is also an individual duty of every Muslim to involve themselves in an armed struggle against their near enemies (godless regimes) and far enemies (Western states). This for militant Salafism considers that **armed jihad** (*qital*) must be waged to defend Muslims and to expand **dar al-Islam** (Abode of Islam) and that there is an individual duty for every Muslim to fight unbeliever regimes. ⁽¹⁰⁾ These Salafi-jihadists consider Europe to be **dar al-harb** (Abode of War). ⁽¹¹⁾ For Salafi-Jihadists, **martyrdom** through jihad is the ultimate struggle and sacrifice that promises special rewards in **paradise** (*Jannah*).

The **belief system** (*aqidah*) for Salafists remains the same across the three different orientations within Salafism. What differentiates these different schools within Salafism is **manhaj** – the actions or methods that legitimate whether one remains a purist, activist or Salafi-jihadist. There is a spectrum between different forms of Salafism which means one can move from one form to another.

⁽⁷⁾ Meijer, R. (2009). *Global Salafism: Islam's new religious movement*. London: Hurst Publishers, p. 11.

⁽⁸⁾ Lagervall, R., & Stenberg, L. (2016). *Muslimska församlingar och föreningar i Malmö och Lund – en ögonblicksbild*. Lund, Sweden: Centrum för Mellanösternstudier.

⁽⁹⁾ Svenska Dagbladet. (2015). *Islamologer: Jihadisterna är i minoritet bland Salafisterna*. Svenska Dagbladet, 8 September.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Alshech, E. (2014). *The doctrinal crisis within the Salafi-jihadi ranks and the emergence of neo-takfirism*. *Islamic Law and Society*, 21(2014), 419–452.

⁽¹¹⁾ Lagervall, R., & Stenberg, L. (2016). *Muslimska församlingar och föreningar i Malmö och Lund – en ögonblicksbild*. Lund, Sweden: Centrum för Mellanösternstudier, p. 15.

Salafism

Necessary elements of ideology:



Tawheed
Monotheism and God's
absolute authority

Hakimiyya

God is only legislator and
Sharia must be followed
to the letter



Activism

Violence

Purist Salafism

Avoid political activism
and reject violence
Cannot rebel against Muslim
leader/head of state

Actions allowed:
Tarbiyya: education
Tazkiyya: cleansing
Da'wah: proselytising



NO VIOLENCE

Activist Salafism

Involvement in democratic
processes is forbidden and
oppose leaders/heads of state
whom they seek to undermine,
even if they are Muslim

Actively engage in
local societal issues and
point out un-Islamic behaviour

Strong rhetoric about
far enemy (Western regimes)
and near enemy
(Arab & godless nations)



Militant/Jihadi Salafism

3 additional necessary elements:

1

(Offensive) Jihad:

armed combat as religious
duty of every Muslim

2

Al Wala' wa-l-bara':

determines lines of loyalty
& disavowal

3

Takfir:

denunciation or
excommunication
of non-Salafis.
Violence is
justified.



According to Shiraz Maher, there are five essential elements of Salafi-jihadi ideology: *tawheed*, *hakimiyya*, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, *jihad* and *takfir*. These five characteristics describe how the “doctrine of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* establishes lines of loyalty and disavowal; *takfir* delineates Islam against everything else and protects it against insidious corruption from within; *tawhid* and *hakimiyya* explain what legitimate authority looks like and whom it should serve; and *jihad* prescribes the method for this particular revolution” ⁽¹²⁾. **These ideological ingredients are “principally concerned with two things — protection and promotion.** Protection of the faith comes from *jihad*, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, and *takfir*; while its promotion is linked to *tawhid* and *hakimiyya*”. ⁽¹³⁾

⁽¹²⁾ Maher, S. (2016). *Salafi-jihadism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 15–16.

⁽¹³⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁴⁾ The word comes from a hadith: “Islam began as a something strange and it will return to being strange, so blessed are the strangers.”

Why are key ideological concepts attractive?

A literal interpretation of the religion provides followers with a sense of authenticity, sense of belonging, and a powerful identity as it transcends everyday boundaries with a **dual message of salvation and redemption**. Salafists see themselves as those who emulate the pious predecessors, which sets them apart from others. Hence, Salafists often label themselves as “strangers” (*ghuraba*) ⁽¹⁴⁾ in a positive sense as a sign of exclusiveness.

Essentially, the concepts of *tawheed* and *hakimiyya* emphasise that all Muslims must submit to God’s divine authority without exception as it is the only entity that may prescribe laws and regulations. There is a duty to reject secular legislative authority and democracy.

The doctrine of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* provides lines of loyalty and disavowal as those who are not Salafists are regarded as non-religious, disloyal, and should be denounced or excommunicated (*takfir*), justifying violence against other non-Salafi Muslims. This worldview and categorisation of enemies extends to entities that are considered un-Islamic and must be fought to preserve Islam: *kuffar* (infidels); *tawaghit* (apostate rulers); *rawafidh* (derogatory term for Shia); *nusayris* (derogatory term for Alawites); *munafiqin* (hypocrites — a derogatory term for non-Salafi Muslims); *murtaddin* (apostates); *mushrikin* (polytheists); and *salibiyyin* (crusaders — a reference to Western countries).

According to *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (loyalty and enmity), Muslims must show loyalty to fellow believers and turn away from “unbelievers”. The binary distinction between believers and unbelievers provides group cohesion and solidarity among Salafi Muslims. It also provides a strict framework for behaviour when living in a non-Muslim context such as Western societies. Salafists believe that if they cannot live as fully-fledged believers in their home countries, they should — like the Prophet himself is said to have done when he fled from Mecca to Medina in 622 — make *hijrah* (emigration) to a lands under Islamic control.

Creation of enemy categories are used in relation to (offensive) *jihad*, which is considered to be a **duty for the Salafi-jihadi vanguard** of the Muslim community **until Judgement Day**. Jihad as armed combat (*qital*) is venerated among Salafi-jihadists as it is a divine assignment and religious duty of each Muslim. Becoming a **martyr** (*shahid*) is not only self-sacrificing heroic duty but also part of spiritual fulfilment as the key to heaven and paradise.

There is also an eschatological element as **perpetual armed jihad is obligatory** for Salafi-jihadists **until Judgement Day**, when the final confrontation will take place between the forces of belief and unbelief, between good and evil. Salafi-jihadists seek to hasten this coming inevitable apocalypse. As such, they see themselves as the enlightened, elite spearhead of the broader Muslim community.

4. Key Salafi-jihadi narratives

⁽¹⁵⁾ David Snow and Scott Byrd (2007) *Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements. Mobilization: An International Quarterly*: June 2007, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 119-136; Snow, David A. "Framing processes, ideology, and discursive fields." *The Blackwell companion to social movements* 1 (2004): 380-412; Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). *Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. Annual review of sociology*, 26(1), 611-639.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Jeffrey Cozzens and Magnus Ranstorp, "Does al-Qaeda still pose the more significant threat? YES: the enduring al-Qaeda threat: a network perspective" (Routledge, Second Edition 2018).

The narratives of Salafi-jihadi groups follow collective action frames that are grounded in meta-narratives. These frames (meta-narratives) draw on familiar religious stories and events throughout history that are familiar to all Muslims. They are used across three interrelated dimensions: **diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing**. ⁽¹⁵⁾ The diagnostic frames highlight the threats while the prognostic frames offer prescriptions for confronting those threats alongside motivational frames designed to mobilise active support for action on multiple fronts. The force of the narrative revolves around these three distinctive but mutually reinforcing elements, explaining its widespread appeal.

Diagnostic frame

The **diagnostic frames** are designed to highlight the threats that exist to Islam and Muslims. This frame can be labelled as the "victim" frame or "oppression" frame as it revolves around the central theme that the West is at war with Islam and Muslims. This narrative centres on a real and perceived sense of injustice and the humiliation of Muslims by the West.

Victim/Humiliation/Injustice/Oppression narrative

This narrative appeals strongly to emotions as it is a **narrative of humiliation** and one that is painted in primary colours. The core of this is that the West is at war with Islam: "daily evidence is barraging us of the West's aggressive design from conflict zones: Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Somalia". ⁽¹⁶⁾ Reinforcing these are the metaphorical wars: disputes over the headscarf, cartoons of the Prophet, discrimination, Islamophobia and countless other controversies. All these conflicts and controversies, big and small, act like streams feeding a single river.

This narrative **appeals to a strong sense of collective injustice** against Muslims that is principally framed around the West's foreign policies and aggressive designs to divide, weaken and subjugate Muslims. Salafi-jihadists point to the creation of Israel, the Sykes-Picot agreement, colonialism, and Western military intervention in the Greater Middle East and elsewhere. Simultaneously, Salafi-jihadists project a moral narrative about the hypocrisy of the West. It projects the inherent contradictions within liberal democracies as their core value of freedom is considered a major driver of society's moral decay. This **narrative of hypocrisy** also holds that the West upholds liberal democracy at home while the "crusader" West wages war abroad and commits atrocities around the world directed at Muslims. In this worldview the West represent aggression, oppression and occupation. This victim narrative is also reinforced by a **conspiratorial view** that the West and non-Salafists seeks to subjugate all Muslims.

Particularly Jewish conspiracies have become a common feature of Salafi-jihadi narratives that peddle anti-Semitism as a core idea.

All these conflicts and controversies are **simultaneously cast on the individual and collective levels**. On the individual level the victim narrative projects that as a Muslim they will never be accepted and will not be able to practise their faith. On the collective level, a homogeneous block of Muslims is created, so suppression of one religious practice is framed as suppression of *all Muslims*. This narrative is reinforced by negative media portrayal of Muslims since the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Almost on a daily basis, Muslims in the West must relate to committed atrocities that they are asked to publicly denounce.

Prognostic frame

The prognostic frames offer prescriptions for confronting the threats that exist to Islam and Muslims. Emotionally powerful imagery **provides compelling moral shock to take direct action**. It is reinforced by religious hymns (*anasheed*) providing religious and historical authenticity. In this narrative, **redemptive violence** offers to transform humiliation into inevitable victory, suffering into self-sacrifice, and shame into honour. This feeling of victimhood, powerlessness, grievance and humiliation is transformed into a sense of belonging and empowerment.

"Jihad is an individual duty" narrative

In this narrative, armed jihad is not voluntary but considered an individual obligation (*fard ayn*) incumbent on all Muslims, rather than a collective obligation carried out by legitimate representatives of the Muslim community (*fard kifaya*). It also depends if it is offensive (*jihad al-talab*) or defensive jihad (*jihad al-daf'*) as women are also required to take part in defensive jihad

This narrative legitimises violent struggle to defend Islam against the crusader West. It also requires Muslims to engage in jihad to maintain their faith and for the community of believers (*ummah*) to survive. Those incapable of participating in armed struggle are encouraged to contribute with other means such as financing or supporting propaganda.

As such, there is a relationship between jihad and *hijrah* (migration) to Muslim lands to contribute to the establishment of an Islamic State. The focus on *hijrah* reinforces the division between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-kufr (the abode of unbelief)* as Muslims who want to live in accordance with Islamic rules are denied this possibility and lose their dignity. As such there is a religious obligation to perform *hijrah* and abandon *dar al-kufr* as remaining there will end in apostasy. Performing *hijrah* also provides a disposition that believers should imitate the Prophet's life.

"This is a just war" narrative

The narrative of defending Muslim communities under siege while providing justice through protection and vengeance is powerful. In this narrative the believers are urged to liberate themselves from bondage of slavery and their condition of subordination to *kafir* nations.

The narrative revolves around fury and strength and a humiliated enemy. It provides them with the opportunity to project themselves as invincible and steadfast in the face of corrupt and hypocritical Western regimes and their pawns. A narrative of religious righteousness and piety is present to show they are operating under God's will for a sacred cause.

(¹⁷) Khatab, S. (2002). Hakimiyyah and jahiliyyah in the thought of Sayyid Qutb. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 38(3), 145-170.

(¹⁸) Wagemakers, J. (2008). Framing the 'Threat to Islam: Al-Wala'wa al-Bara' in Salafi Discourse. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 1-22.

"We need you and anyone can contribute" narrative

In this narrative, ordinary individuals are meant to feel they can contribute and play a major role in something significant. Those who are not committed right away to violence can incrementally become involved and gradually assume greater roles and responsibilities. This narrative also stresses that the defeat of a Salafi-jihadist is not due to the strength of the enemy but rather the weakness of people embracing their faith and the call for support.

For some groups, the narrative theme that anyone can contribute is a direct and specific call for Muslims to engage in lone-actor violent operations. These calls to sympathisers and supporters transform subordinated masculinity to "warrior" masculinity that bestows agency and great power over their own trajectory. Self-sacrifice is an important value for the believers who are depicted as heroes and vanguard. The martyr becomes a figure who facilitates revolutionary change.

Motivational frame

The **motivational frames** are designed to mobilise active support for action.

Double salvation narrative

This narrative is at the **core of Salafi-jihadi ideology** that promises belonging to the real community of believers who are the enlightened, saved sect (from Hellfire) and ultimately victorious on Judgement Day. Victory is guaranteed for those who are steadfast in their beliefs and actions. This message creates a transboundary promise of utopia and the belief that they will be cleansed of all their sins. It also promises entry into paradise before all other believers and the lionisation of their martyrdom.

The caliphate narrative

This narrative projects that the establishment of the caliphate is the realisation of a perfect society according to Islamic principles. This romanticised idea of the caliphate is deeply embedded in Islamic history. In this narrative, *jahiliyya* (¹⁷) (state of pre-Islamic ignorance), which is characterised by ignorance of God's will and injustice, is often juxtaposed against the implementation of sharia law. Living according to the strict rules of sharia law is a guarantee for entry into paradise in the afterlife.

Loss of the caliphate (in the case of ISIS) does not mean it has failed, it is only a temporary setback and a test by God to test the community of true believers. The application of sharia as the model of governance is more important than the physical caliphate itself.

"We are the vanguard of Islam and the only defender against oppression" narrative

In this narrative, the Salafi-jihadist provides empowerment that encourages individuals to take control over their destiny. It projects a sense of belonging to the community of believers. Every action is justified by the approval of God due to the strict interpretation of the Quran.

***Al-wala' wa-l-bara' narrative* (loyalty and enmity) (¹⁸)**

This narrative reinforces the binary nature of the struggle between religious loyalty to God and animosity and hatred of the enemies of Islam. This loyalty also juxtaposes loyalty and sacrifice of those who are committed to the cause. To this extent, Salafi-jihadists argue that the Covenant of Security is broken, which legitimises attacking *kuffar* (infidels).



*"We are the
vanguard
of Islam and
the only
defender
against
oppression"*

5. Symbols and vocabulary of violent IE groups

⁽¹⁹⁾ Lohlker, R. (2013). Jihadism: Online discourses and representations. Vienna: Vienna University Press. For an excellent overview of meanings of different symbols, see: 'The Islamic Imagery Project' (West Point Combating Terrorism Center, March 2006).

⁽²⁰⁾ Digital Jihad – propaganda from the Islamic State (Swedish Defence Research Agency 2018)

⁽²¹⁾ SITE provides an overview: <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/jihadist-groups-2.html>

Media groups: <https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/mediagroups.html>

Violent groups employ different symbols and vocabulary. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Often, these symbols are used by radical ideologues, terrorist organisations and propagandists to project their presence. They can be detected in literature or on social media sites. ⁽²⁰⁾ This provides an entry point for first-line practitioners to gauge involvement in IE. There is extensive jihadi literature where there are several versions of symbols and logos. ⁽²¹⁾

Vocabulary

The religious vocabulary used by Salafi-jihadists is both general to Muslims and in some cases very specific to this orientation. The terms represent an important cue to understand certain emphasis in conversations. It is important to be aware of this vocabulary when dealing with radicalised individuals.

al-wala' wa-l-bara'	loyalty and enmity	kafir	The singular form of unbeliever
aqidah	belief system	kuffar	the plural form of unbelievers
bid'a	innovation	kufr	unbelief
dar al-harb	Abode of War	manhaj	action/methods
dar al-Islam	Abode of Islam	munafiqin	hypocrites – a derogatory term for non-Salafi Muslims
dawla	state (often it refers to ISIS and Khalifa)	murtaddin	apostates
da'wah	proselytising	mushrikin	polytheists
fard ayn	individual obligation for Muslims	qital	armed jihad (Qital does not have to have a religious connotation)
fard kifaya	collective obligation for Muslims	rawafidh	derogatory term for Shia
ghuraba	strangers	istishhaad	martyrdom
halal	permitted	shuhada	the plural form of martyrs
haram	forbidden	shahid	martyr
hijrah	migration	tawaghit	plural form of tyrants or apostate rulers
jahiliyya	state of pre-Islamic ignorance	taghut	tyrant
jannah	paradise	tarbiya	education
jihad	effort or struggle.	tawheed	oneness of God
	In this context, militant and not spiritual struggle	tazkiyya	cleansing

الإسلام لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله

The Black Standard used by Islamist organisations such as al-Qaeda since late 1990s consists of white-on-black shahada (declaration of faith).



Flag of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.



A lion invokes qualities of bravery, strength and honour in Islamist culture. The lion is with Hamza, the prophet's uncle (asad allah, the lion of God).

النبا

ISIS media weekly newspaper "al-Naba".

لا اله الا الله
رسول الله محمد

The flag of ISIS with a seal of the Prophet Muhammed.



Logo of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

السحاب

Al-Qaeda's Al-Sahab Media.

أعماق
الإخبارية

ISIS news agency "Amaq".

Symbols



6. Groups advocating violent Islamist extremism

Violent Islamist extremism has various representations such as militant jihadi movements (ISIS, al-Qaeda, etc.) that are classed as terror organisations, militant Islamist gateway groups (Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Sharia4Belgium, etc.), street da'wah groups (Die Wahre Religion), and other groups such as Muslim advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations that do not engage in violence themselves but advocate violent Islamist extremism.

Militant jihadi movements

Individuals who join militant jihadi movements are radicalised, indoctrinated and socialised into these organisations that demand **strict discipline, loyalty and allegiance**. These organisations conduct security checks on committed recruits and operate clandestinely in Europe and more openly in conflict zones abroad. Some organisations take any recruits, while others are more selective and cautious. Often there are facilitators and financiers who vouch for the character of recruits. There are entire structures (Salafi-jihadi ecosystems) established in cities with key leadership, preachers, facilitators, financiers and recruiters. Surrounding these **command structures** are supporters who are radicalised and recruited in certain mosques, informal mosques, study circles, lectures, sports clubs, schools, etc.

Militant Islamist gateway groups

These so-called gateway groups have extremist positions in relation to democracy but **are generally non-violent**. Often, these groups are **transnational**. Some argue that they absorb the militancy of prospective jihadists who receive an outlet for their grievances and frustrations. Others argue that they are a gateway for more militant involvement in other groups and that supporters pass through these organisations. These groups organise for example public demonstrations under the slogan "establishing sharia law".

Group solidarity is strengthened by the reaction to their provocative stands.



Street da'wah groups

The street da'wah (proselytising) techniques are used to distribute Qurans and other religious materials. It is also sometimes used by Salafists to convert and talent-spot individuals who can be further brought into the network's fold. This is a common technique to advocate involvement and personal contact. The persuasion is subtle, gradual and relentless.

Once recruiters feel they can make headway, they never stop. They also often organise football matches and other social events to reinforce a sense of belonging and their ideology.

False-Muslim advocacy groups

Some Muslim advocacy groups have been established as a counter-reaction to 9/11 and the war on terrorism. These groups have adopted a human rights approach to counter real human rights transgressions such as unlawful arrests, imprisonment and internment (such as Guantanamo, etc.). Under the guise of human rights advocacy, these groups also seek to undermine prevention, community policing and counterterrorism efforts. These groups influence the local communities and cultivate a "resistance" narrative to counterterrorism efforts.

False-Humanitarian organisations

Legitimate humanitarian activities have an important role in Muslim life as they fulfil legitimate charitable needs of Muslim brothers and sisters around the world. Muslims are naturally susceptible to the call to donate for people who are in need as *zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam. This is also exploited by Salafi-jihadists who disguise their fundraising activities. It is incredibly difficult to discern this type of illegal fundraising activity especially as it is often distributed across borders and outside the EU.

Crime-terror nexus

Criminal gangs can form a pathway to Salafi-jihadi activities. Research has shown that involvement in criminality is prevalent in jihadi circles. For some this becomes absolution for a regrettable past, for others it becomes protection and a way to escape problems. Salafi-jihadists recruit from criminal gang networks in local neighbourhoods. Similarly, they recruit within prisons to gather supporters and members.



7. Locations of recruitment ⁽²²⁾

The Salafi-jihadi ideology and its interlocking narratives contribute to its popularity among youths. For some it provides a new identity for alienated individuals who discover (or rediscover) their religiosity, providing them with a sense of dignity and belonging. It is also attractive for many as the worldview of believers is binary and uncompromising, dividing everything into good and evil. For some it represents a protest ideology against the established order. For others it provides a utopia and promise of heavenly rewards in the afterlife.

Whatever the underlying reasons for joining Salafi-jihadi groups, recruitment remains essential. There are multiple arenas that the Salafi-jihadi ecosystem exploit in their recruitment efforts to the cause. It is often a combination of making initial contact through online activity that is continued offline through social events, religious meetings or demonstrations.

Online⁽²³⁾

Websites, gaming platforms and social media channels are useful propaganda and networking platforms where recruiters can actively identify potential recruits among those posting or showing support for propaganda. Social media and digital footprints provide **important insights** to the degree of extremist support and level of connectivity within social networks. Often, those supporting an Islamist extremist group provide important clues that are possible to gauge from their selection of avatar (providing instantaneous participation and signalling symbolic support for Islamist extremism), news items that are shared and other extremist propaganda material. Social media *kunya* ⁽²⁴⁾ (nom de guerre) names often begin with “Abu” (father) and “Umm” (mother).

Recruiters often **contact individuals online and channel them toward private and encrypted social media platforms**. These can be found by social media searches using specific Salafi-jihadi terminology. Encrypted social media channels (e.g. Telegram) are used to communicate more freely with supporters and potential recruits. Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals use multiple publications, platforms and means. Salafi-jihadists often organise, advertise and use humanitarian causes as a way to generate funding and come into contact with supporters. Another tactic is to organise support for the release of Muslim prisoners with letter writing campaigns and accompanying social events. Often, women are engaged in these campaigns.

⁽²²⁾ Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam rising: Muslim extremism in the West*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

⁽²³⁾ Winter, C. (2015). *The virtual ‘caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s propaganda strategy*. London: Quilliam Foundation.

⁽²⁴⁾ https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kunya-SIM_4526?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=kunya

Mosques and underground study circles

Mosques are **usually not recruitment grounds**, but extremists may gather in mosques informally to identify potential recruits and supporters. These potential recruits are asked to meet elsewhere and then **groomed in more informal settings** such as cafés, study circles in apartments (underground “mosques”) and civil society organisations. There are groomers operating in specific mosque settings, but usually a detectable red flag involves controversies surrounding foreign funding (known for sponsoring Salafism) or controversial radical preachers. Identifying individuals is important; they are groomed by radicalisers and then peeled off to be indoctrinated and radicalised in small study circles.

Radical feeder groups (²⁵)

There are radical “feeder groups” that operate openly but are non-violent in nature that provide an **entry point for new recruits**. Often, they protest provocatively against foreign policy or the prevailing order, advocating for strict implementation of Islamic law, which in turn strengthens the in-group solidarity. Some of these groups are transnational in nature, **organised around charismatic preachers** who travel to advise strategy and tactics of these groups. Recruitment occurs as the level of public reaction and confrontation can be fierce from counterdemonstrators. Sometimes these feeder groups operate through street da’wah activities designed to identify vulnerable youths who can be radicalised further and recruited into activities.

Other feeder groups operate **under the guise of human rights** in relation to counterterrorism or prevention strategies. These groups organise events and vocally protest community policing and prevention efforts, charging these as state-organised spying on minority communities. Often, social and charitable events are organised to raise awareness around Muslim prisoners or specific cases that are related to counterterrorism.

Prisons

Recruitment in prisons can be prevalent **depending on how the prisons are organised** or who is placed in the prisons. Some prisons are veritable incubators for extremism as radicalisers groom criminals into the fold. Being sentenced to prison can alter a person’s social–spiritual bearings and they can become vulnerable to radical groomers. Sometimes, **the release process from prison is a critical period** for recidivism and radical individuals can exploit this period for their recruitment ends.

Schools and higher education

Schools with a religious orientation can become vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment in some cases. Often, in these cases there are controversial issues surrounding gender segregation or intolerance toward sex education or minority groups. In some circumstances there have been activist groups that have pursued advocacy for extremism in higher education settings.



8. Role of women

The role of women within Salafi-jihadi contexts has become more noticeable over time. In the past, gender stereotyping has cast women as passive bystanders and victims rather than having an active supporting role. Often, this **mischaracterisation** stems from the fact that women are seldom the perpetrators of violence. Women have and can gain martyrdom status via these attacks. But, women often have **a more supporting role** that enables and facilitates jihad.

Extremist leaders have emphasised the important role of women as mothers and wives. There are instances where women played an important role in **propagating and spreading the ideology**. Women have reached out to other women to support the Salafi-jihadi cause, providing moral support and **peer pressure** to stay within the extremist fold. Women have also played an active operational role **raising funds and smuggling weapons, money and messages**.

Women have also played a crucial role in the radicalisation and **recruitment of other women**. This activity has often taken place online through social media and through social events. This mobilisation activity has often been less visible. Women are also seen as crucial because of their role in **raising children according to the ideology**. Women often keep close-knit social circles and travel together. Some have suggested that becoming extremist can be emancipatory as women are more able to break free from their family's clan structure and honour-related behaviour.



9. Trends and challenges

Practitioners in schools, prisons, local communities etc. dealing with violent Islamist extremism can encounter multiple challenges when confronted with Salafi-jihadi groups or individuals.

Access to communities

Approaching organisations or extremist individuals is difficult as outsiders and non-Muslims are met with suspicion and, at times, hostility. It often requires **establishing good local community relationships** that are built on trust and goodwill rather than over security concerns. Violent Islamist extremism is embedded within communities involving notable preachers, facilitators, financiers and gatekeepers, and considerable **peer pressure** is exerted against letting in outsiders. On social media, the communities use closed and encrypted channels, making it more difficult to monitor or to reach specific individuals.

Challenging the binary worldview and conspiracy theories of violent Islamist extremists

Salafi-jihadi groups adopt a very binary worldview that divides the world into good and evil, permissible and forbidden. It also has **strong elements of hatred** toward other groups within society, including anti-Shia and anti-Semitic views, and elements of hatred toward Western secular democracy and society, particularly Western foreign policy and intervention in the Muslim world. Often, these communities or individuals will display hostility toward the out-group, which is reinforced by conspiratorial thinking. This **hostility complicates first-line practitioners' interactions**. For example, often, they use the false narrative that authorities will seize children from families, or, that the government is spying on the Muslim community via first-line practitioners. Overcoming these barriers for practitioners requires patience and perseverance.

Interlocking the complexity of Salafi ideology

Understanding the ideology requires a **contextual understanding** of Islam and different schools of interpretation, the conflict fault lines between different interpretations, communal tensions and conflicts, as well as cultural and linguistic dimensions. Mastering these issues takes considerable professional and personal effort. It is also important to have knowledge about how **regional developments** in the Arab and Muslim world impact local dynamics also in western society.

Legal and illegal organisations

Dealing with Islamist extremism is a **balancing act** due to the fine line between legal and illegal organisations. Even though legal organisations might not incite violent action, their messages are aimed at causing polarisation and mistrust within society. Handling this complexity is difficult as some argue that these legal organisations actually **absorb** extremist elements while others see them as **gateway** organisations into extremism.

Shift in the landscape following emergence and subsequent decline of ISIS

Despite the rollback of ISIS and the so-called caliphate, **youths continue to be attracted to Salafi-jihadism**. Support is morphing over social media and becoming more decentralised with multiple centres of gravity across geographical regions. Some have forcefully argued that the retreat is only temporary. The continued call for action against the enemy has inspired **lone actor terrorist attacks**, and the **possible return of FTFs** affiliated with ISIS and other jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria may adversely affect the local extremist milieu.

The **first prisoners convicted for terrorism** related crimes, are due to be released **back into society**, which may adversely affect further radicalisation in several EU states. However, as many of the Islamist feeder groups have disappeared, as their members have left for jihadi conflict zones, **new small organisations** are now taking their place, which are also harder to detect. In some EU countries, **schools and companies** have been established that provide the ability to ideologically influence youngsters and vulnerable youths. At the same time, presence on **social media is moving from open social media to more closed, encrypted websites**, which makes it harder to track activities. Due to social media and technological developments, many of the Islamist groups are becoming **more transnational and interlinked**.



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