Topic Area: Belief Systems

Research Question: To what extent are Islamic extremist groups affecting the attitudes of people towards Muslims?

Name:

Student Number:

School: Island School

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rise in terrorism around the world with an increase in injuries and fatalities as a result of terrorist attacks. Many of these events have been the responsibility of Islamic Extremists. This research report will be exploring to what extent are Islamic extremist groups affecting the attitudes of people towards Muslims? It is essential that this issue is explored further as past Islamic terror attacks have tainted the attitudes and behaviours people have towards Muslims. In order to fully understand the extent of this issue, case studies will be done both globally and nationally. These include, the United States of America, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong. Within the context of this issue globally and nationally, various viewpoints will be examined, such as those of the local Muslim community, government officials and police forces.

Global (United States of America)

There has been an anti-Muslim sentiment within the US caused by the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks lead by Osama bin Laden the founder of Islamic Extremist group Al-Qaeda, which is held as the worst terrorist attack on US ground. This sentiment has been fueled by attacks such as the Boston bombing, San Bernardino shooting, Orlando shooting and others.[1] The increased hate and discrimination of Muslims in 2016-present has undoubtedly been an effect of the new Trump Administration leading the US. Over the course of his presidential campaign, he insulted, attacked and defamed various groups of people such as LGBT, Latinos, African Americans, and especially people of Islam.[2]

In 2015, at the New Hampshire rally, Trump stated that he would remove all Syrian refugees out of the country (most being Muslim) as "They could be ISIS", this sort of assumption is what Trump supporters believe in and try to promote. He also published a statement calling for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States.", which he believes is how the

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[1] "What Are the Major Causes of Islamophobia in the ... - Huffington Post." 9 Nov. 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/quora/what-are-the-major-causes_b_12885808.html. Accessed 5 Feb. 2018.

[2] "Donald Trump has made it clear: in his America, Muslim citizens don't ...." 8 Nov. 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/08/donald-trump-america-muslim-citizens. Accessed 8 Feb. 2018.

US will be able to combat terrorism.[3] Despite the fact that Islamophobia seems to have risen due to the aftermath of 9/11, Muslims in America are actually more susceptible to bigotry as a consequence of remarks such as these, made by Trump.[4] A new report by the FBI shows that due to the Trump Administration, the total of hate crimes reported went up by almost 5% in 2016, resulting in over 6,100 reports. In comparison to 2015, there was widespread increases in hate crimes reported, and anti-Muslim hate crimes rose close to 20%.[5]

In Trump's mind, Muslims are not victims of discrimination or hate crimes, they are just the perpetrators. However, the biggest terror threat to the US isn't Muslims but far-right extremists, most of whom are white. They are witness to 300 violent attacks by these extremists each year. It was identified that almost a year after Trump's election, refugees/Muslims had caused 0 attacks, 0 deaths but has witnessed 4 travel bans and Americans have caused 14,335 deaths, 56,863 shootings, 326 mass shootings and 0 gun bans. This further proves that there is a bias amongst Trump and his supporters, they believe that Muslims are the cause of terror attacks and white Christian men will never be considered terrorists. This behaviour is not just endangering the Muslim community but it's starting to normalise anti-Muslim hate.[6]

Global (Saudi Arabia)
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, sometimes known as the 'home of Islam'[7], is led by an absolute monarchy and is governed under Wahhabism, a fundamentalist strand of Sunni Islam which has

[3] "I think Islam hates us': A timeline of Trump's ... - Washington Post." 20 May. 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

[4] "Islamophobia even worse under Trump than after 9/11 attacks, says ...." 27 Dec. 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-islam-muslim-islamophobia-worse-911-says-leader-a8113686.html. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

[5] "A new FBI report says hate crimes — especially against Muslims - Vox." 13 Nov. 2017, https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/11/13/16643448/fbi-hate-crimes-2016. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

[6] "As a Muslim American, I'm witnessing state ... - The Independent." 6 Dec. 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/travel-ban-donald-trump-far-right-extremism-islamophobia-fake-news-sessions-a8094731.html. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

[7] "Islam in Saudi Arabia - Wikipedia." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Saudi_Arabia. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

inspired Islam extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda.[8] The brutal behaviour and violent messages of terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda can be directly linked to the ideals of Wahhabism, as stated by Professor Bernard Haykel at Princeton University. Not only that, but ISIS believes the Saudi state is averting from the true beliefs of Wahhabism, and that they are the legitimate representatives of the Wahhabi message.[9]

The whole belief of Wahhabism emphasises on the absolute sovereignty of God and opposes innovation, advocating a return to what is believed was the purity of the first generation of Islam. Wahhabism has become progressively more influential; a confluence of Saudi money and the country's influence as the protector of Mecca. Modern Wahhabism is mixed with the advocacy of violence, promoted by ultra-Wahhabists like Al-Qaeda, ISIS or Boko Haram. The spreading of their beliefs has increased the recent number of activists outside of Saudi Arabia who are willing to commit terrorist atrocities such as those in Beirut, Brussels and Paris. [10]

The ultimate goal of Islamic State: An international caliphate acquired through global war. They want to take this war to Europe and USA, and push Muslims into battle against "disbelievers". ISIS cite the Quran for carving the group's vision, many of their messages and statements hold extensive references to the words of the Prophet. Although the Quran is open to interpretation, the majority of Muslims - including jihadists - see ISIS' interpretation as a distortion of the Muslim faith.[11] The violent actions they used to reach their goal causes terror and an environment where the Quran is blamed for these acts of terrorism when it should only be these Islamic extremists/terrorists that are to blame. The Quran permits self-defence under certain circumstances, it is stated that fighting is solely given to "those against whom war is waged.".

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[8] "This is Why Saudi Arabia Suddenly Wants to Fight Extremism." 25 Oct. 2017, http://www.newsweek.com/why-saudi-arabia-suddenly-wants-fight-extremism-692234. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

[9] "What is Wahhabism? Ultra-conservative form of Islam from Saudi - Metro." 5 Jun. 2017, http://metro.co.uk/2017/06/05/what-is-wahhabism-the-ultra-conservative-form-of-islam-from-saudi-arabia-6685583/. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

[10] "What is Wahhabism? The reactionary branch of Islam ... - The Telegraph." 19 May. 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/what-is-wahhabism-the-reactionary-branch-of-islam-said-to-be-the/. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

[11] "ISIS: What does it really want? - CNN." 11 Dec. 2015, https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/11/middleeast/isis-syria-iraq-caliphate/index.html. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

The fighting isn't specifically to protect Muslims but to protect everyone, "collateral damage" in Islam doesn't exist.[12]

The idea that all terrorists are from Islam is an inaccurate prejudice. Inside all religions, there lies a range of mindsets, and extremism isn't an exception to a singular belief system. Extremists are actually outnumbered within Islam and the greater part of Muslims renounce violence, however, the rise in attacks and threats has not only increased anti-Muslim rhetoric but has caused terrorism to be in a constant association with Muslim people, contributing to biased attitudes and stereotyping.[13]

Local (Hong Kong)
Hong Kong has never been a victim of Islamic terrorism, however, due to the numerous terrorist attacks around the world, there is a fear instilled in the city. Citizens of Hong Kong have religious freedom, however, discrimination facing Muslims in Hong Kong does exist, not due to their religious beliefs, rather their ethnicity which has been said to exist because of "a colonial hangover", in accordance to Chinese University anthropology lecturer Paul O'Connor.[14]

In 2016, the Hong Kong Police announced that they were watchful for danger from lone wolves motivated by Islamic State, reported by South China Morning Post. As terrorist groups such as Islamic State has taken advantage of technology and social media to promote their ideology, it makes Hong Kong more vulnerable. Since the city is technologically advanced where people can easily access information and promotional materials of terrorism through the internet.[15] The local Muslim population have been upset and even frustrated and annoyed by this news. This is

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[12] "Anyone who says the Quran advocates terrorism ... - The Independent." 10 Apr. 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/islam-muslim-terrorism-islamist-extremism-quran-teaching-violence-meaning-prophet-muhammed-a7676246.html. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.
[13] "Myths and Facts about Muslim People and Islam." https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/myths-and-facts-about-muslim-people-and-islam. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.
[14] "Muslims feel free in Hong Kong but left out | South China Morning Post." 30 Sep. 2012, http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1050474/muslims-feel-free-hong-kong-left-out. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.
[15] "Hong Kong police on alert for terror threat from lone wolves inspired ...." 4 May. 2017, http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2092621/hong-kong-police-alert-terror-threat-lone-wolves-inspired. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

because some of them feel as if Muslims are being victimised, as it's an ongoing global trend to connect terrorism to Islam.[16]

They were critical of this police report and the way it was articulated in the news. According to the Muslim Council chairman Adeel Malik, this sort of statement is disturbing and affects far beyond the Muslim community, but also ethnic minorities. He continued, Ethnic minorities face problems already and there's a great deal of passive racism. Such reports made by the police, government officials or the media incites unnecessary Islamophobia within the community.[17]

<u>Future Scenarios & Possible Solutions</u>

Saudi Arabia, has had a history of being linked to terrorism and the Crown Prince declared that they will eradicate extremism by returning his country to 'moderate Islam'.[18] The thought of shifting Saudi Arabia from being ruled by a fundamentalist idea of Islam to becoming 'moderate Islam' has many repercussions. If this happens younger generations can grow up with the idea of Islam being open to all religions and against terror attacks. This could cause less people to be pulled into extremist groups and depopularise terrorist actions. On the other hand, one of the main reasons groups like ISIS formed was their belief that they need to prevent their Saudi nation from diverting from their traditional Wahhabist ways. So, if this solution is fulfilled, it could cause extremist groups to act out and cause more terror to either their country or globally.

Another solution would be to implement more teachings of the Islamic faith in schools. The majority of Americans get most of their information on Muslims from the media and according to recent research conducted by MediaTenor, 90% of the media portrays Muslims and Islam

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[16] "Hong Kong Muslims deeply upset as fear of ISIS being instilled in the ...." http://muslimcouncil.org.hk/hong-kong-muslims-deeply-upset-as-fear-of-isis-being-instilled-in-the-city-without-any-solid-evidence/. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

[17] "Hong Kong Muslim community critical of police report warning of ...." 14 May. 2017, http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2094290/hong-kong-muslim-community-critical-police-report-warning. Accessed 10 Feb. 2018.

[18] "'Moderate Islam is open to the world': how will Saudi Arabia's modern ...." 29 Oct. 2017, http://www.scmp.com/news/world/middle-east/article/2117464/moderate-islam-open-world-how-will-saudi-arabias-modern-crown. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

negatively, proving that the media is disgustingly biased.[19] If Americans are receiving all their information from the media, they aren't getting a fair representation of what Muslims really are. Recognising this and educating others on this issue could help more people realise that majority of Muslims aren't 'extremists' or 'terrorists'. However, educating children or young adults on Islam could upset parents who come from different religious backgrounds or Muslims who are from different branches of the religion. It's quite difficult to make sure what they are teaching in schools is catered to each student's and their parents' individual needs, and introducing this into their curriculum could increase conflict amongst parents and teachers, therefore making this solution unlikely to be that effective.

Moreover, a final solution could be to encourage everyone to report any hate crimes they are witness to. Structures used to handle cases of hate in the police force are slowly improving[20] and by reporting hate, it can show authorities what a big problem this is. It can draw attention from authorities and the media. Proving that Muslims hate or discrimination has become normal can increase the number of people speaking out on this issue. Nevertheless, the police isn't always as efficient as they may seem and other 'more important' issues could arise that cause dealing with hate crimes less of a priority. This solution may also be more short term than long term because there's only so much a police force in a city or country can do.

Conclusion
Personally, I don't think this issue has a direct impact on me because I'm neither Muslim nor someone who discriminates against them. Through this research, I have learnt that although many people are aware of the prejudice and think it's unjust, there are also a majority of people who believe Muslims are the reason for terror threats due to a poor representation of them in the media. Knowing this has influenced the way I think about the media because I've always thought, what is published by an official news publication was always accurate and right since

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[19] "What Are the Major Causes of Islamophobia in the ... - Huffington Post." 9 Nov. 2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/quora/what-are-the-major-causes_b_12885808.html. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

[20] "How to stop anti-Muslim hatred: report, challenge and educate | Left ...." 13 Oct. 2015, https://leftfootforward.org/2015/10/how-to-stop-anti-muslim-hatred-report-challenge-and-educate/. Accessed 11 Feb. 2018.

they have resources to fully research their stories. However, I've realised now more than ever that there is always a sense of bias with what journalists write and this could be a subconscious act or due to the relations each publication has with different people of authority.

To conclude, Islamic extremist groups who have caused terror attacks around the world have instilled fear and paranoia amongst majority of the global population. In the US, Muslim hate crimes, travel bans and discrimination is astronomically high and this is due to a President who is affected by this fear. Saudi Arabia, home to some of these extremists, are under scrutiny for the way their government leads which has also caused hate towards Muslims of their country. Even Hong Kong, being a city so far from terrorist crimes is scared and the way they present terror threats seems to imply there's a need for precaution of Muslims. So to answer the question, the small population of Islamic extremists have caused negative views, discrimination, hate and bigotry of Muslims across the board which to an extent has made people reject the idea of peace and tolerance in the Islamic faith.