

THE SEMANTICS OF RADICAL ISLAM

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Abstract. This paper critically examines the use of the terms 'Radical Islam' or 'Islamic Radicalism' and presents several arguments on the subject. The appropriateness of using these terms varies depending on an individual's perspective, but the central issue lies in the inconclusive and often misunderstood meaning and description of the concept. The focus here is on the problematic aspects associated with 'Radical Islam'. Incorrect usage leads to a significant misinterpretation of Islam, unjustly tarnishing the reputation of this sacred religion by wrongly suggesting that Islam is inherently radical. It must be emphasised that Islam is not a radical religion and promotes principles of peace, harmony, and non-violence, teaching its followers kindness, love, tolerance, and virtuous values. Furthermore, Islam should not be held accountable for the irresponsible actions of individuals engaging in radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. The paper investigates several reasons to question this terminology, including the motivations behind radical groups, the effects of embracing the ambiguous notion on Muslim communities, and the political implications tied to its use. It is vital to exercise prudence and caution when employing this term to prevent misconceptions and misrepresentations, and to identify credible alternatives to the concept of 'radical Islam'.

Keywords: *radical Islam, Islam, radicalism, Salafi Jihadi, Salafi Takfiri*

Introduction

Radical Islam, or Islamic radicalism, is a connotation that has been widely used among politicians, scholars, media, and the public. The connotation also creates great confusion in some quarters, including Muslims and non-Muslims. This also brings a huge advantage to the other quarters-some Western media and anti-Muslim organisations in particular-allowing them to manipulate the truth about Islam or to prove that Islam is a radical religion. Some media, for instance, use the term "radical Islam" by frequently linking it with "terrorism," a correlation that can contribute to the rise of Islamophobia (Olsson, 2021). This association between the terms "radical Islam" and "terrorism" has the potential to reinforce existing stereotypes about Muslim individuals involved in acts of terrorism, fostering Islamophobic attitudes towards Muslims and garnering support for discriminatory policies targeting religious groups (Hoewe and Bowe, 2018). Islam is one of the oldest religions in the world. As the religion that calls for believing in the oneness of God, Islam by its name means peace. It perpetually advocates for the preservation of peace, friendship, and compassion (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) (Rusli et al., 2019). The teaching of Islam has been well blended into some of its believers' traditions and customs. But Islam does not call its believers to be radicals, let alone extremists and terrorists. Islam vehemently opposes all forms of tyranny. As a religion characterised by mercy, Islam abhors the shedding of both Muslim and non-Muslim blood due to political defamation and disruptions in security (Rusli et al., 2019).

Radical has multiple meanings or definitions, depending on which framework that one has been researching. Macmillan dictionary defines radical as 'a radical change or way of doing something is new and very different from the usual way' (Merriam Webster Web Portal, 2025). It seems to refer to an action that diverts from its base or foundation. Similar to some other definitions given by the Macmillan dictionary, Merriam Webster defines radical as 'of or relating to the origin' (Merriam Webster Web Portal, 2025). It means something, perhaps action, that has a connection to its root. Linking the two words, 'radical' and 'Islam' in a single reference or concept, one may perceive that there is an action that has been shifted away from and linked to Islam. But, it needs to constantly remind that Islam is not a radical or extreme religion. The meaning of radical Islam is broad enough, lack of focus and details; a new perception on this concept is more than welcome. On top of this, it brings no good to any. Will McCants, a former of Brookings scholar, has his words on this reference-radical Islam. He says, "every bit of that phrase is analytically unhelpful" because of its lack of specificity (Fisher, 2016). He posts several questions, wondering the meaning of radical Islam. Some of those questions include: 'The court Islam of the caliph? What kind of Islam are you even talking about?' (Fisher, 2016). The reference, therefore, requires clear, comprehensive and credible explanation.

The concept 'radical Islam' also has many names: 'fundamentalist, militant Islam and Islamist (Hadiz, 2008). Not only the name, radical Islam has acquired an improper understanding and is hardly agreeable. Some scholars even view this concept by referring to Islamic State (IS). Radical Islam refers to the people whose aim was to build an Islamic state or caliphate. While working on its establishment, these people, at least, use two approaches: the law and fighting. The IS considered Sharia as a basis for all laws, while the fighting could be 'with or without outright violence' (Hadiz, 2008). In brief, radicalism is always viewed negatively. In politics, it is typically referred to as a specific perspective that is so militant and extreme. It also results in the emergence of a political movement or radical groups using religion as an ideological foundation. Regrettably, some of these organisations use violent tactics to change existing social and political structures that are inconsistent with their religious beliefs (Gumiandari and Nafi'a, 2020). In Indonesia, for instance, several incidents of church burning, assaults, and the damage of religious properties and historical artefacts associated with non-Muslims have been documented (Al Qurtuby, 2020). Thus, the central aim of this academic article is to present cogent and persuasive arguments that counter the underlying logic behind the utilisation of the term "radical Islam." It also puts forth several recommendations regarding the appropriate use of the term.

Review of literature

The literature on Islamist radicalisation highlights a dynamic interaction of ideological, socio-political, and psychological factors that drive individuals and movements toward extremism, often appearing to be on the rise in various global regions (Kruglanski et al., 2014). Islamic radicalism itself is conceptualised as an extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism, frequently emerging as a negative response to modernisation (Kurniawan, 2025) or as an activist and belligerent response to perceived threats from modernity and globalisation (Litvak, 2015). Scholars examining this phenomenon have utilised theoretical frameworks, such as the 'root cause model', to

analyse the causal factors responsible for radicalisation among Muslims (Veldhuis and Staun, 2009). A significant focus of the literature is on the specific theological underpinnings that provide justification for violence. Modern radical Islamism is viewed as a recent development resulting from a fusion of radical beliefs, with Wahhabism identified as the ideological bedrock of rising global jihad (Ibrahim, 2017). These movements often draw upon puritan theological traditions historically known for their extreme hostility toward opponents (Fadl, 2001). For instance, the intellectual history of Salafi-Jihadism, defined by core elements like jihād and takfīr, traces its development through contemporary insurgencies (Zimmerman, 2018). Furthermore, groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) rely on the theology of violence-oriented Takfirism, operating as transnational religiously violent networks with apocalyptic worldviews (Poljarevic, 2021). These ideologies provide a distorted worldview and specific textual interpretations that contribute to the acceptance of violence (Ghadbian, 2000).

Alongside theological arguments, political and socioeconomic crises are repeatedly cited as primary drivers of contemporary extremism (Esposito, 2015; Litvak, 2015). Radical Islamism is often seen as a product of failed modernisation programmes, corrupt governments, and failed developmentalism (Rahnema, 2008). At the macro-level, factors like globalisation and international events nurture radicalisation (Magariño and Cabrera, 2019). For Muslim communities in Europe, socioeconomic deprivation, political disaffection, and perceived injustice contribute significantly to radicalisation pathways (Koomen and Van Der Pligt, 2015; Awan, 2008). This sense of alienation is exacerbated by factors such as rapid demographic growth, high unemployment, and educational changes, which alienate large sectors of Muslim youth (Richards, 2003). Moreover, the perception among some Muslims of a global attack on Islam is instrumentalised by leaders of violent extremist groups to encourage support for radical action (Allan et al., 2015). A crucial finding is that the radicalisation process is not tied to a single characteristic or specific personality profile (Ohls et al., 2023). Instead, research suggests that the process accelerates through the accumulation of various risk factors combined with a lack of protective factors (Ohls et al., 2023). The overall process is multifaceted, involving psychological and meso-sociological factors alongside macro-sociological influences (Magariño and Cabrera, 2019). Given the effectiveness of distorted narratives used by radicals, the development and effective deployment of strong theological counter-narratives, championed by influential leadership, is viewed as critical in combating extremism (Mansouri and Keskin, 2019).

Materials and Methods

The methodology for writing this article is a combination of desk research and thematic analysis. Desk research involves systematically collecting and synthesising information from existing sources, rather than gathering new data. Thematic analysis then allows authors to find and articulate important patterns within this qualitative information, which is valuable in political science. The authors begin the desk research by developing a precise research question to ensure clarity on the specific information sought and the study's objectives. Second, the authors develop a robust search strategy. This step involves identifying appropriate sources and selecting keywords, as well as establishing inclusion and exclusion rules for filtering the relevant literature. Third, the authors conduct the literature review. This requires systematically reviewing the

selected literature to gather data and insights related to the initial research question. It is important to rigorously annotate the data and track progress during this phase. Fourth, the collected sources move into the data extraction and analysis phase. The authors combine different reports that can provide a richer context for understanding the topic. Thematic analysis is employed to synthesise this information and identify gaps or key themes. Finally, the authors collate and summarise the results, ensuring that the findings gained from the analysis effectively align with the original research question.

Thematic analysis provides a structured way to analyse the textual data gathered. It begins with familiarisation with the data, requiring repeated reading of documents or speeches to note preliminary insights. The authors generate initial codes by dividing the data into meaningful segments related to the research objectives. These codes are then categorised to search for themes, a process that involves searching for clear patterns and connections among the codes. The resulting themes are then reviewed to ensure they accurately represent the data and support the study's conclusions. The authors then define and name themes, explaining what each theme means and its importance to answering the research. The last step is producing the final report, detailing the discovered themes, supported by analytical explanations and specific data excerpts. This methodical approach guarantees a thorough analysis of political phenomena.

Results and Discussion

Islam is a religion of peace, not radical

Many may have had some knowledge about Islam, but going back to the basic understanding of Islam is worthwhile. Islam is a monolithic religion, believing in the Oneness of God-the Almighty God (Allah)-even no other creatures are equal to Him. Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH), is the messenger of the Almighty God to deliver His message to the mankind. The revelation of His message, among other things, is to call for peace and unity. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the only Prophet of Islam, and the Quran is the only Holy Book of Islam. The Quran is not a book of multiple versions and editions. Although there are many interpretations of the Quran, they are not counted or considered as Al Quran (Mohamad, 1997). Islam, by the root of its name, salaam, means peace. It is a religion of peace that constitutes its identity. While advocating peace, Islam shows how peace could be created, preserved and restored among the people. To begin with, one needs to see how Islam places a strong emphasis on the criteria and commitment of the Muslim community. In the Quran, the Almighty God calls for ummatan wasatan, literally translated as a community of the middle way. The community also needs to know the way it has to interact with others. Among those that the Almighty God has mentioned in the Quran is ta'aruf. This means the community has to mutually recognise other communities and nations. It also should serve as a representative and facilitator of peace (Kamali, 2016).

Islam sets out a framework for a peaceful solution to the conflict. There are at least four interconnected approaches: counselling (nasihah), conciliation (sulh, islah), arbitration (tahkim) and granting amnesty and forgiveness ('afwa) (Kamali, 2016). Most of these approaches, however, are known to some of the negotiators and peacemakers of our time. Islam is a religion that emphasises tolerance. This is not just a statement. Plenty of evidence is found in the Quran and Muslim history. In the Quran, the Almighty God states that He has created different nations and people. Not all of them

are Muslims, but Islam welcomes them to be its believers. However, as mentioned in the Quran, there is no compulsion for them to do so (Esposito, 2011). Reconsidering the history of Islam during its expansion and conquest, the Muslim community was free from imposing its religion on others. They did not use force against non-Muslims to embrace Islam. Rather, they allowed them to practise their religion. Jewish and Christian communities, or 'the people of the Book', of this era enjoyed such freedom. Their status in the Muslim community was dhimmi or protected people. The only thing they required to do was to pay jizyah, a sort of tax, to the ruler. The ruler offered them protection in return (Esposito, 2011). Another notable instance can be observed during the Second Crusade, when Saladin exemplified an ethos of tolerance and benevolence by granting explicit permission for Guy of Lusignan and the hostages to be reunited with their wives (Naseri, 2014).

Islam does not preach radical indoctrination, so do the other religions. The purpose of its revelation is to bring peace and mercy to all human beings. Muslims are directed to consistently engage in acts of kindness and goodness towards all individuals, irrespective of their religious affiliations, with the objective of fostering peaceful coexistence (Rusli et al., 2019). Allah's guidance on this matter is explicitly expressed in Surah Al Mumtahanah verses 8 and 9, "Allah does not forbid you to do well and just towards those who do not fight you in religion and do not drive you out of your villages because Allah is pleased with those who are fair. Allah only forbids you to be friends with those who fight you in religion and expel you from your villages and help each other to expel you, whoever befriends them they are wrongdoers". But, the thought that Islam does not preach radical indoctrination has hardly changed the belief of some people that see Islam as a radical religion, as well as those who deliberately or thoughtlessly use the reference of radical Islam. Things are getting worse when the behaviour of extremist groups has tarnished the image of Islam, and by implication validates Western perception of radical Islam (Shamsuddin, 2018).

Obama, in some ways, stood for Islam when he spoke about AlQaeda and ISIL. He also tried to disentangle the sacred religion with the criminal activities and behaviour of these groups. For him, these groups use Islam to justify their wrongdoings. Obama made his points by saying AlQaeda and ISIL '...tried to claim the mantle of Islam for an excuse for basically barbarism and death,' (Diaz, 2016). Also, by referring to the followers of these groups, he said, "These are people who've killed children, killed Muslims, take sex slaves, there's no religious rationale that would justify in any way any of the things that they do,' (Diaz, 2016). On the whole, AlQaeda and ISIL do not fit into the teaching of Islam for all horrendous acts that they have committed. This account should be upheld. Obama went on to argue that any religion should not be tainted with the misconducts of its believers, let alone to be associated with their crimes and violence. This time he tried to replicate the above-said situation to his religion, Christianity. As he said during the CNN presidential town hall in September 2016, "If you had an organization that was going around killing and blowing people up and said, 'We're on the vanguard of Christianity.' As a Christian, I'm not going to let them claim my religion and say, 'you're killing for Christ.' I would say, that's ridiculous," (Diaz, 2016). Obama staunchly defended not only the sacredness of his religion, but also other religions. The correct name to address these group members, as Obama suggested, was '...killers and terrorists,' reflecting their violent conducts (Diaz, 2016).

A senior fellow at Brookings Institute, Shadi Hamid, offered his feedback on the concept of 'radical Islam'. Being highlighted in Max Fisher's work that was published in New York Times back in 2016, Hamid saw the two combined words were 'worrisome and darker connotations'. This would have a direct impact on the targets; Islam and Muslims tend to be abused by this reference. For him, there should be a new meaning for 'radical Islam'. A Middle East scholar at the Council of Foreign Relations, Steven Cook, sees how religion has been a victim of ambiguous reference. The concept 'radical Islam' is not precise and therefore, it opens for diverse interpretation. On one side, the concept does not reveal a key connection between Islam and terrorism. But, on the other, it does stress that religion-Islam-is the main issue. This would also generate a new meaning of Islam; Islam with the absence of perspective that counters violent extremism (Fisher, 2016). The phrase is not sure about its target or unclear to which group of people it is directed to.

Ill-judgement against Islam harasses Muslim community

Muslim community across the globe has no absolute consensus when associating Islam with unfriendly words like radicalism and extremism. For some Muslims who think that such linkage would harm their faith, they are reluctant and even defensive on using the term 'radical Islam'. For others, they accept this term and call ISIS as Islamic extremists. They are those who claim that they know the differences between Islam and Islamism. For them, however, westerners are less welcome on these differences (Taylor, 2015). Because of Islam is relatively incoherent with the Western cultural practices, it highly exposes to negative perception of the people in the West. Probably, a lack of consistency between Islam and these practices has caused adverse reaction of the Western societies. However, such a reaction is not limited to negative perception. They always misunderstand and find wrong about Islam. This trend exacerbates when some Muslims commit heinous actions which spark their outrage and anger. To a majority of Muslims, these actions clearly clash with the teaching of Islam. The result of 2014 Pew poll said that most Americans had a limited knowledge about Islam (Fisher, 2016). For them, ISIS' brutal campaign in a large swath of Iraqi and Syrian land was outrageous. This brought them to comprehend the way the religion worked in ISIS' ideology. In the end, this leads to misunderstanding and shapes negative perceptions about Islam and its believers. Also, it may heighten Islamophobia in American society and risk social integration and harmony.

According to one study, the average American has more negative feelings towards Muslims compared to their sentiments towards other religious adherents, racial, socioeconomic, and political groups. The Western world's antagonism to Islam and Muslims, such as racism and xenophobia, is described as anti-muslimins (Halliday, 1995). Their negative sentiments against Muslims, including prejudice and discrimination, appear to be increasing in number. The West has an unfavourable impression of Islamic societies. In comparison to Western societies, which are competent and governed by secular democrats, it sees the latter as backward, badly regulated, and dominated by religion (Mazrui, 1997). However, this viewpoint looks to be overly simplistic. Obama argued that the use of the concept 'radical Islam' tended to disunite Americans. It was a form of discrimination against American Muslims in the country. Perhaps, more had been bothering him when the Republican presidential

candidate relentlessly called for blocking Muslim foreigners from reaching and settling down in the US. Obama had substantive reasons to counter unfavourable depictions of Islam. Beyond his duty, Obama aimed to foster unity among the American population by advocating for an encompassing civil religion that transcends individual religious affiliations (Marsden, 2011; Zeleny and Cowell, 2009). Additionally, he sought to rejuvenate America's global reputation by forging a more expansive coalition comprising various religious and secular groups (Marsden, 2011). This drive toward social cohesion and a positive national image elucidates Obama's endeavour to mitigate any adverse sentiment directed towards Islam.

Obama's thought that opposed the linkage of religion with mischievous acts of its believers has been also extended to communal context. He was very meticulous, but arduous. He roundly disagreed on converging or assimilating killers with Muslim people across the globe. Even for Muslim community in the US, as he further argued, they were peaceful and responsible people. More importantly, some of them had served their country in various positions and social roles like police officers, teachers and troops. Hence, Muslims should not be blindly equated with AlQaeda, ISIL group members and terrorists. The Muslim community in the US exercises their role during the election, though they had to make hard choices. More than one million American Muslims participated in the 2020 US election, which was quite a large number for non-Christian voters in the United States. A survey conducted before the election by the Arab American Institute (AAI) revealed that fifty-nine percent of Arab Americans supported Biden while thirty-five percent supported Trump (Arab News, 2020). They faced dilemmas, such as deciding which party would protect their rights and, indirectly accepting Islam as a non-radical religion as a whole. The situation in making choices became more complicated when the issue of the Democratic Party providing support to the LGBTQ group, which was very contrary to Islam's position, and the issue of banning people from six Muslim-majority countries from entering the US (Ozalp, 2020). Therefore, should their vote, in the end, be squandered just on the basis of misjudgement or even on the action of futile deeds? Muslim Americans, like everyone else, expect to be treated with dignity and to be accepted as citizens of the United States.

The use of radical Islam could hurt and frustrate American Muslims. They were, as Obama reminded, the citizens of the United States. Therefore, they should be respected and treasured, not discriminated against. In his words, Obama said, 'young Muslims in this country and around the world feel like no matter what they do, they're going to be under suspicion and under attack' (Chappell, 2016). If the rhetoric 'radical Islam' continued to pound them, especially those young Muslims, national security could be at risk of radical acts. The former American President, Donald Trump, expressed his disapproval at Muslims in many ways. For example, while talking to MSNBC on 30 November 2015, he made a statement, revealing his baseless and unfair judgement towards Muslims. He simply said, 'We are not loved by many Muslims'. Then, he continued to propagate his irrational assessment when he said to CNN on March 9, 2016 that 'I think Islam hates us,' (Johnson, 2017). Trump continued to reinforce his negative perceptions through rhetoric. He made a simple generalisation by referring Muslims as criminals. This appeared on his tweet commenting on a killing incident in France. Trump also tended to make a clear distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims when he sought to promote the "us versus them" norm which potentially could cause discrimination and marginalisation of Muslims (Khan et al., 2021). He furthered his

negative narrative towards Muslims, aiming to justify and seek the world's support for his agenda of closing borders to Muslims.

Circulating suspicious comments that Muslim people are always violent and do not know how to express love, does not help Muslim community to break free from the stereotype that Islam is violent or radical. As such, is it true that Islam teaches its believers to hate other religions' followers, or does Islam do not teach what it means to love others? The answer is found in the Holy book of Al-Quran, surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 8, which says, 'God does not forbid you from being good to those who have not fought you in religion or driven you from your homes, or from being just to them. God adores those who are righteous,' a codified paraphrase.

Historical, sociological and ideological causes of radicalism

The influence of the Ottoman Empire waned over time as it faced a succession of defeats, surrenders, and occupations (Lewis, 1980). Since the fall of the Ottoman Empire a century ago, a majority of Muslims across the world reels backward. The underdeveloped situation became more critical when the wave of secularism penetrated the Muslim societies, along with years of oppression. Some of them, to some extent, were fragile and powerless. They even lived in perpetual conflict and disunity. Consequently, the darkness era imposed intense pressure on some of them, leading to the emergence of several movement groups. The groups fought for *islah* and *tajdid* (Shamsuddin, 2018). Some people mixed Islam with their political interests and radical move. On the development of radicalism, the external power intervention was a cause. The colonial powers made significant changes to their colonies, introducing a secular system and Western-style education. They enforced the secular laws through the foreign state apparatus, administration method and social institution (Tan, 2018). The impact of colonisation was tremendous. In some Muslim territories, military, political and intellectual spheres were completely declined and transformed (Panjwani, 2004).

Local opposition to external powers was evidenced. The people of the colonies did not welcome the colonial's values and systems. Malaysia's experience with colonial power in the past and radicalism is an example. Some locals resisted the 'modern value' and new bureaucratic system introduced by the colonial power. What they had been fighting for was a preservation of the structural status quo, and that was a 'traditional authority structure'. The local fighters protested against the colonial power and linked their struggle to Islam (Yusoff, 2010). Social aspect is also a factor that triggers radicalism. Several individuals in the Muslim society found their social order is weak, confusing and conflicting. They also discover a discrepancy between values and experience. But, sadly they are incapable of resolving these questions. Finally, they resort to radicalism (Yusoff, 2010). The development of radical ideology was closely associated with the emergence of Islamic movements in the 18th century. Some key radical ideologies were Wahabi Ideology introduced by Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab in the Peninsular Arab and Sayyid Qutb's ideology when he joined Muslim Brotherhood (Shamsuddin, 2018). One of the many aims of these ideologies was to revive Islamic caliphate and restore the strength of Islamic governance.

Radical global ideologies emerged in the era of globalization and divided into two big groups: salafi jihadi and salafi takfir. Salafi Jihadi was influenced by Salafi understanding, originating from Ibn Taimiyah and the Wahabi ideological movement. Such understanding was backed by Jihad qital, a concept that Sayyid Qutb had

introduced. A radical movement headed by Abdus Salam Faraj, adopted this idea. Then it went through a process of adaptation to meet the radical movement's struggle. Salafi Jihadi embraced another concept - *Al wala' wal barra'*, making a pledge to the Almighty God (Allah) and impeding themselves from any belief and deeds that contradicting Shariah. With this concept, the radical movement could identify their enemies, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Thus it could exercise *jihad qital* (Shamsuddin, 2018). Salafi takfiri is a group that adopts Salafi Jihadi's ideology. At the same time, it applies the elements of takfiri introduced by Abu Muhammad al Maqdisi. It has a cardinal principle and seems to draw a thick line with outsiders; any groups which are not parallel to them are considered as kafir or infidel. ISIS which is an offshoot of al Qaeda in Iraq, is an example. It fights for the establishment of an Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. While embracing the teaching of Sayyid Qutb, ISIS adheres to some other formulas, including *tauhid hakimiyah*, *al wala' wal bara'* and *jihad qital*. Out of these formulas, *darul harb* and *darul Islam* deem ambitious, yet alarming (Shamsuddin, 2018).

Radical groups mistreat Islam

The connotations of radical Islamic group and radical Islamist group have a slight contrast when one attributes them to ISIS. This is a matter of semantic debate, but such contrast takes on a very different meaning. Soner Cagaptay, a Turkish Political Scientist at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argued that using a 'radical Islamic group' to cite ISIS was incorrect because ISIS was not an Islamic group and Muslims' representative. The word 'Islamic' in this phrase was an adjective, describing the religion of Islam and its believers. Whereas 'radical Islamist group' denotes Islamism which drives for member recruitment. The connotation 'radical Islamic group' has been associated with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). If ISIS has been referring to this connotation, this justifies ISIS' assertion of standing for and representing of Islam. To note, ISIS and Al-Qaeda consider themselves as the 'true leaders' of Islam and Muslims across the globe. In order to validate its perceived authority, Al-Qaeda employs the concept of oppression as a legitimising tool. This strategy enables Al-Qaeda to rationalise the presence of shared grievances among Muslim communities worldwide, predominantly revolving around the sentiments of humiliation and a perceived existential peril (Lia, 2008). Moreover, Al-Qaeda endeavours to justify the underlying motives of its actions by framing them as responsive measures. This approach is designed to invoke empathy among Americans, Jews, and Christians by highlighting the historical struggles and enduring suffering endured by Muslims over the course of time (Lia, 2008).

ISIS also attempts to speak on behalf of the Muslims. It asserts its identity by referring itself as an exclusive and genuine representation of Islam. But, almost all Muslims rule out ISIS and its ideology ISIS does not represent a voice of Islam. The worst-case scenario is that ISIS marks Muslims as their victims and enemies. ISIS' claim as the 'true leader' is a sort of manipulation and lie, and Obama terms this as propaganda. The claim is meant to recruit its members. Talking about how ISIS uses the religion for a misleading purpose is important. The Press Secretary of the Obama administration, Josh Earnest, classifies terrorists as "individuals, who would like to cloak themselves in the veil of a particular religion," (Fisher, 2016). One could also

learn that ISIS tends to seek refuge in religion or use religion for a trick to hide their violent acts. Earnest might refer this explanation to the incident of the Orlando massacre. ISIS considers their wars as fighting between two camps: Islam and America or between Islam and the West. Obama disagreed with this notion. As he argued, "We are not at war with Islam, We are at war with people who have perverted Islam" (Naylor, 2016). Adding to this, Obama's unwillingness to use radical Islam is one of the many strategies to thwart extremism.

For the US, the use of concept 'radical Islam' implicitly grants a particular advantage to ISIS. Such use, as Obama contended, shows that the US had waged war against all Muslims. At the same time, the US helped ISIS to do terrorist works, even indirectly authenticating ISIS. It also consolidated anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world and expanded the perception that the US had launched war against Islam (Fisher, 2016). Such leverage needs to be denied and stifled. Hence, it is erroneous to assume that the actions of ISIS and comparable groups are divinely sanctioned (Taylor, 2015). The characterization of ISIS as radical Islamic terrorism or radical Islam should also be rejected. Rather, it is more appropriate to designate them as a radical or terrorist group exclusively. The Islamic State has employed ruthless tactics including suicide attacks, mass killings, sexual violence, crucifixions, beheadings, and immolations (Nanninga, 2019). Thus, the radical groups, ranging from the Tamil Tigers, IRA, Al-Qaeda, FARC, to ETA, share a fundamental characteristic: their willingness to employ violence as a means to attain their objectives. They perpetrate a series of violent attacks, targeting innocent individuals and purposefully instilling fear and terror within society (Doosje et al., 2013).

A matter of politics

The argument over the use of this concept is more about a political debate between Trump, on one side, and Obama and Clinton on the other. Simply put, the presidential candidate and Trump used language to shape the political debate that worked in their favour (Naylor, 2016). During the presidential campaign, Trump preferred to use the term 'radical Islamic terrorism' when he stressed on the cause of the Orlando shooting in June 2016. To his perspective, Islam and Muslims can be indiscriminately linked to criminality and social issues (Khan et al., 2021). Trump went further during the campaign when he sold an idea of preventing Muslims abroad from immigrating to the US. For Muslim individuals residing in the United States, Trump appeared to perceive them as outsiders, dismissing their American identity and categorising them as the "Arab population." In his efforts to validate his white supremacist ideology, Trump further stigmatised Muslims by labelling them as terrorists and pejoratively associating them with "sickly snakes." He persistently maintains the belief that Muslims harbour feelings of animosity and represent a significant threat to the Western world (Jalalian Daghig and Rahim, 2020). After all, this could embolden his confidence that he was correct in using radical Islamic terrorism. Trump also disparaged both Obama and Clinton for their reluctance to use the term. Trump, who was a republican presidential candidate, was decried by his opponents over his stance on 'radical Islamic terrorism'. He was criticised by Democratic National Committee, saying that he was wrong and over-simplistic when using this term. Obama offered a competing interpretation on the term 'radical Islam' and 'radical Islamist'. He sounded extremely meticulous and cautious about the meaning of this term. Referring to these terms as threats, Obama

contended that terms were used for 'a political distraction' or just served as 'political talking point' (Chappell, 2016). Obama questioned the outcome of using these terms. To him, such use would not eliminate the threat, let alone ISIS threat to the American people.

Conclusion

To conclude, the use of concept radical Islam or Islamic radicalism tends to tarnish the image of Islam, in particular when referring to the radical groups like AlQaeda and ISIS. Islam brings peace to human beings and it is entirely not a radical religion. Islam also advocates the principle of coexistence, which acknowledges and respects religious diversity in society. It gives non-Muslims the freedom to choose, practise, and promote their religions (Alabdulhadi, 2019). The emergence of radicalism has no origin in the revelations of Islam, rather it stems from historical, sociological and ideological factors. Radical groups ill-use the teaching of Islam for their own struggles, let alone some parties that conceive Islam as radical because of political agenda. Thus, the paper proposes some initiatives in which the reference 'radical Islam' and 'Islamic radicalism' should be cautiously understand and interpret. (1) There is a need to comprehend the roots or the events that lead to the emergence of radicalism. Past colonial history and domestic policy, in the case of Malaysia, are examples of those events. Knowing these causes, one may comprehend that Islam is not the source of radicalism. In effect, external elements have contributed to the breeding of radicalism in the Muslim society. (2) A connection between Islam (a religion) and IS/ ISIS/ ISIL should be carefully evaluated because there is no room for the terrorist in this religion. The notion that these groups have represented the religion of Islam should be dispelled.

(3) Scholars need to offer a revised and better interpretation of the concept 'radical Islam'. This could address a wrong judgement and misperception about Islam. In reality, there is already a trend of linking radical Islam with terrorism (Olsson, 2021). This simplistic narrative tends to generalise that Islam is connected to extreme characteristics, and that any Muslim may be involved in terrorism (Olsson, 2021). Subsequently, this builds to a stereotype that the Muslim community is predisposed to acts of terrorism. (4) An alternative concept to 'radical Islam' is 'religious radicalism'. It is free from pointing to any specific religion. It also prevents any religion from falling into the trap and being a subject of propaganda. (5) Preventing misconception of Islam is feasible and necessary. It is suggested that those non-Muslims should develop a profound understanding on Islam, most importantly on the concept of Jihad and war in Islam from the Quran. Furthermore, being guided by credible Muslim scholars, one could escape from misinterpreting Islam and its teaching. The relevant Islamic institutions that teach Islam to the public should help non-Muslims, clarifying that Islam is not a radical religion.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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