

Master Thesis for the

MSc in International Public Management and Policy

ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION IN EUROPE

A case-study of Finland, Denmark and Sweden

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Summary

In the past decade, Islamist terrorism has become one of the major threats afflicting European countries and attacks or foiled attempts carried out by jihadist groups are increasingly present in the news. More significantly, evidence shows that most perpetrators are born and raised in European societies, shedding light on the increasing appeal that radical Islam has on young European Muslims.

This thesis engages with the existing literature by providing an empirical study on the causes of radicalization. Several scholars have addressed the issue of Islamic radicalization in Europe, however, this topic still lacks empirical evidence at a macro-perspective. Although radicalization remains inevitably dependent on a wide variety of reasons that are mostly related to individual experiences, there are national socio-economic factors that can influence this process. Hence, patterns of Islamic radicalization in European countries present similarities that are worth addressing from an empirical perspective, in order to have a better understanding of this phenomenon and take better measures to prevent it.

The purpose of the thesis is to understand what factors are accountable for different levels of radicalization between European countries. The research has been conducted through a co-variational analysis aimed at testing the hypotheses on three countries – Finland, Denmark and Sweden – selected according to a most-similar case-study design. Then, a qualitative analysis of each country's situation regarding anti-Muslims discrimination and jihadist networks has been carried out. The results show that higher levels of discrimination perceived by Muslims are related to higher levels of radicalization; likewise, the extension of jihadist networks is positively related with Islamic radicalization. Both hypotheses of the study are therefore confirmed by the empirical findings.

LIST OF CONTENTS

Summary	i
LIST OF CONTENTS.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
1. Definition	4
2. Causes of radicalization	7
2.1 Micro-level.....	7
2.2 Meso-level	9
2.3 Macro-level.....	10
3. Final remarks	11
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	12
1. French Sociology	12
2. Social Movement Theories	13
3. Final considerations	15
METHODOLOGY	16
1. Cases selection	17
2. Data Sources	18
3. Dependent variable	18
4. Independent variables	20
4.1 Perceived Discrimination among Muslims	20
4.2 Jihadist Network.....	21
5. Control variables	22
6. External and internal validity	23
7. Limitations	23
COUNTRIES' OVERVIEW	25
1. Finland	25
1.1 Socio-Political Context.....	26
1.2 Islamic Radicalization.....	28
2. Denmark	29
2.1 Socio-Political Context.....	30
2.2 Islamic Radicalization.....	31
3. Sweden	33

3.1	Socio-Political Context.....	34
3.2	Islamic Radicalization.....	37
EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS.....		40
1.	H1: Perceived Discrimination and Islamic Radicalization.....	40
1.1	Discrimination in Finland.....	41
1.2	Discrimination in Denmark.....	42
1.3	Discrimination in Sweden.....	43
2.	H2: Jihadist Network and Islamic Radicalization.....	45
2.1	Jihadist Network in Finland.....	46
2.2	Jihadist Network in Denmark.....	46
2.3	Jihadist Network in Sweden.....	48
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....		51
CONCLUSIONS.....		53
1.	Policy implications.....	54
2.	Space for Further Research.....	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Definitions of Radicalization	5
Table 2 Levels of radicalization in the selected countries.....	39
Table 3 Impact of perceived discrimination on levels of radicalization.....	40
Table 4 Impact of Jihadist Network on levels of radicalization.....	45

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Foreign Fighters per million population.....	39
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INTRODUCTION

The use of political violence by certain groups to support their cause is not a new phenomenon in Western societies. In the 20th century, terrorism in Europe was mainly associated with separatist groups, such as ETA and the Irish Republican Army, as well as left-wing anarchists (Chaliand & Blin, 2007). However, in the last decade the occurrence of terrorist attacks has been directly related to the emergence of terrorist organizations with Islamist outlook. In fact, the unprecedented scale of the 9/11 attacks has shown the existence of well-organized jihadist groups that targeted western societies, and since then most European countries have been victims of Islamist terrorism.

However, the European experience with the jihad has shown that this phenomenon should not be addressed as an external threat. The evidence from recent attacks shows that in most cases the perpetrators, although with Muslim descendants, are born or have been raised in Europe. The emergence of the so-called *home-grown* terrorism sheds light on the attractiveness of radical Islam in young Europeans, raising concerns about the motivations behind the increasing radicalization of Muslims in Europe. To this extent, Islamic radicalism represents a threat that arises out of internal circumstances in European states. The literature on this issue illustrates that radicalization stems from socio-economic factors related to Muslims integration in European societies, as well as the way Islam is perceived in public opinion and addressed by institutions. However, not all Europe is equally subjected to this threat: while some countries show higher exposure to radicalization within Muslim communities, other nations are not as much affected.

The study aims at analyzing the patterns of Islamic radicalization among European Muslims in order to understand the socio-political circumstances leading to the adoption of Islamist views. Therefore, the thesis attempts to understand why Islamic radicalization is more widespread in certain countries, providing an answer the following research question:

RQ: What are the factors responsible for different levels of Islamic radicalization in European countries?

To do so, the research will adopt a qualitative approach and conduct a comparative analysis of three case-studies. Specifically, the empirical enquiry will look at Islamic radicalization in Finland, Denmark and Sweden in order to assess what factors are accountable for the different presence of Islamic radicalism.

The study relates radicalization with the French Sociology school and Social Movement theories, testing whether the discrimination perceived by Muslims is a determinant for engaging in radicalization processes and whether the presence of jihadist circles has an impact on levels of radicalization. In brief, the results show that Islamic radicalization is likely to be higher in countries where Muslims perceive more discrimination and jihadist networks are more extensive.

This thesis aims to provide an empirical support to the discourse about the causes of radicalization. Although this phenomenon itself remains highly dependent on individual circumstances and any attempt to generalize the findings must be taken cautiously, the research tries to contribute to the existing literature by approaching the subject from an innovative perspective and conduct a comparative study on a group of countries that has never been addressed before. The theoretical relevance lies in the attempt to evaluate the relationship between discrimination and Islamic radicalization, which has never been tested directly through a cross-countries analysis.

In addition, the topic of the research is socially relevant because it is the focus of a very sensitive debate in nowadays Europe and it addresses the major threat to national security of current times. The levels of radicalization in a certain country first of all affect the citizens, as their safety is compromised by the risk of being victims of terrorist attacks. This is also relevant for national governments, whose efforts to protect citizens face more difficulties under higher levels of radicalization. Secondly, radicalization is relevant even if it does not result in violent actions. In fact, it undermines social stability because it gives vent to extremist views that can result in social alienation and adverse feelings towards mainstream society. In this sense, radicalization represents a hindrance to social integration of Muslims into society because it epitomizes the incompatibility between Islam and secular Europe.

At a policy level, the findings are relevant to policy-makers as they provide an empirical analysis of the main determinants for radicalization. Although the study is carried out in a small selection of countries, it is safe to assume that the variables tested in the hypotheses can have an impact in any country. Therefore, the results can be used to update counter-radicalization plans and equip EU governments with a comprehensive scheme to properly prevent Islamic extremism. In this regard, although jihadist networks are already targeted in nearly all the action plans on radicalization, discrimination towards Muslim is not at all taken into account and its impact on national security has not been acknowledged yet. Therefore, the thesis aims at raising awareness about the wider picture of the socio-political context that is likely to foster radicalization within Muslim communities in Europe.

As regards the research structure, the thesis will first address the existing information by conducting a literature review of the main academic publications regarding Islamic radicalism and radicalization processes in Europe. After that, a theoretical framework will be outlined in order to expound the relevant theories from which the hypotheses of the study have been formulated. In the third chapter, the methodology of the research will be explained, including the reasons behind the selection of the case studies and the options to operationalize the variables. Fourthly, the study will present an overview of the three countries to outline the socio-political situation of Islamic communities in the selected cases, in order to contextualize the empirical analysis and provide background information about the main development of social policies targeting Muslim communities. The fifth chapter will then present the data analysis and test

the hypotheses based on the findings for each country. The empirical part will be divided into two separate sections, each one addressing one hypothesis at a time. Lastly, the main findings will be discussed in the conclusion, which will also tackle policy implications and the space for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first decade of the 21st century was marked by an increasing occurrence of Islamist terrorism in Western countries. Starting from 9/11 to the most recent events in Europe, the pattern of the attacks has revealed to the public that the main threat is to be found within national borders. In fact, most suspects involved in terrorist actions were born and bred in Europe (Murshed & Pavan, 2011), shedding light on the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization in European societies. Since then, much effort has been devoted by national governments and academia to understand the root causes of this process.

Although there is no single definition of radicalization, the terrorist attacks in Europe in the early 2000s have sparked off a major debate over the root causes of terrorism and the concept of radicalization has been inevitably linked to religious extremism and violence. This section will start by providing an overview of the different definitions attached to *radicalism*, to then look into the existing literature about the causes of radicalization in Western societies.

1. Definition

The term radicalization originates from the concept of *radical*. If something is radical, it is necessary implied that it deviates from what is perceived as moderate or mainstream (Sedgwick, 2010). It follows that radicalism is inherently a relative concept. History proves that over time there have been different conceptions of what "radical" meant. In the 19th century, it used to refer to a "political agenda advocating for social reforms" (Schmid 2013, p. 6); in the early 20th century, the radical label was attached to movements supporting ideas that nowadays are mainstream, i.e. voting rights for women (Schmid, 2013). Interesting enough, radicalism has been historically associated with liberalism and democracy, whereas nowadays the understanding of Islamic radicalism relates to opposite values.

After security studies began to focus on the root causes of terrorism, the term radicalization has been directly linked to Islamic extremism. The emergence of homegrown terrorism has led to the conceptualization of terrorism as the result of specific environmental circumstances generating radical ideas, ultimately aimed at violent acts (Della Porta & La Free, 2012). However, many scholars have questioned the mainstream understanding of radicalization as a major driver for violent extremism. Rik Coolsaet, for instance, highlights that radicalization has been used to discuss terrorism in a way that "seemingly differed from the anti-Islam rhetoric of right wings movements" (Coolsaet 2015, p. 6). As a result, radicalization became a "political container term" (Schmid 2013, p. 7), instrumentally exploited to express skepticism and concerns about Muslims' integration in Europe.

The ambiguity of the term has led to divergent definitions between academia and governments. One of the first official attempts to define radicalization was made by the European Union (EU). After Madrid and London attacks, the European Commission established an expert group on violent radicalization that came up with the definition of radicalization as "socialization to extremism that manifests itself in terrorism" ("Radicalization processes", 2008).

Several definitions of radicalization coexist. In fact, state agencies have developed different descriptions of what radicalism means to their perspective (tab. 1). However, these definitions present some deficiencies. First, most of them assume that radicalization is the prerequisite step to terrorism (Odorfer, 2015). Instead, radicalism "is not *per se* violent" and a radical attitude does not result in violent behavior (Schmid 2013, p. 8). Second of all, especially in regards of the definition by the EU Commission, it is not clear under what circumstances radical behaviors can result in violent acts. As highlighted by Murshed & Pavan (2011), this process is mistakenly believed to occur in a political and social vacuum. To clarify this misunderstanding, Borum (2011) distinguishes between radicalization as the process of adopting extremist ideologies from the process of engaging in violent actions. This distinction is also highlighted by McCauley & Moskalenko (2014), who separate radicalization of *opinion* from radicalization of *action*.

Danish Security and Intelligence Service	"A process by which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means [...] in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective" ("PET", 2009)
The Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service	"The active pursuit of support to far-reaching changes in society which may constitute a danger to the democratic legal order, which may involve the use of undemocratic methods that may harm the functioning of democratic legal order" (AIVD, 2004)
US Department of Homeland Security	"The process of adopting an extremist belief system including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence as a method to effect social change" (Homeland Security Institute, 2006)
Swedish Security Service	"A process that leads to ideological or religious activism to introduce radical change to society and a process that leads to an individual or group using, promoting or advocating violence for political aims" (Ranstorp, 2009)

Table 1: Definitions of Radicalization (retrieved from Schmid, 2013)

These definitions generate ambiguity over the actual nature of radicalism. However, regardless of its relationship with terrorism, radicalization is unanimously defined as a process. For instance, Della Porta & La Free define it as a "process leading towards the increased use of political violence" (2012). Likewise, Coolsaet underlines how radicalization is a "socialization process in which group dynamics are more important than

ideology” (2015, p.6). To sum up, Malthaner reviews the different definitions into “a process triggered by a personal crisis facilitated by personal ties and driven by dynamics within small groups of friends” (2014, p.382).

This process may eventually lead to extremism and terrorism, but by definition it does not imply *per se* violent purposes. In this regard, it is worth addressing the difference between *radicalism* and *extremism*. Although both concepts refer to a detachment from a mainstream position, extremism mostly implies violent actions directed at democratic societies as a whole; instead, radicalism “can be situated at the edges of democratic consensus” and make use of political violence on a “selective basis” (Bötticher, 2017). As for Islamic radicalism, although in its most violent expressions it might overlap with *extremism*, it also includes actions that do not target the whole society indistinctively. For instance, the decision to join the jihad – one of the main indicators used in this thesis – arises out of *radicalism* rather than *extremism* because it uses violence on a selective basis and it does not aim at disrupting democratic societies in general. However, these nuances are often difficult to grasp and therefore the two concepts are often hardly distinguishable as they may eventually lead to similar behaviors.

In terms of radicalization as a process, one of the major models was theorized by Wiktorowicz in 2004. His theory of “cognitive opening” describes the stages and the drivers of individual radicalization. Although this model is referred to in most of the studies, scholars disagree on the timespan of this process. Whilst earlier research holds that radicalization is a complex course that requires time to become evident (Boukhars, 2009), recent studies based on surveying foreign fighters have proved that radicalization is likely to happen within a short time (El Said & Barrett, 2017).

As regards the patterns of radicalization, there are different ways for individuals to radicalize. One major distinction can be made between those who radicalize through self-led processes (self-radicalization) and those who are recruited by a group. Odorfer (2015) considers these two paths separately, whereas Stemmann (2006) conceives radicalization as a stepwise approach whereby recruitment is only the last stage. Accordingly, Mastors & Siers (2014) define radicalization as a process consisting of three components: motivation, indoctrination and group membership.

In reality, different stages intertwine with each other and do not necessarily occur in chronological order. As noted by Malthaner, individual radicalization is likely to happen through “mobilization via pre-existing social ties” (2017, p.377). To sum up, the process of radicalization does not follow a linear path and even though it mainly consists in socialization and indoctrination of individuals by like-minded peers, the attractiveness of radicalized discourses is nevertheless related to personal motivation.

2. Causes of radicalization

Radicalization studies have addressed the root causes of radicalism from different perspectives. Although several factors are believed to play a role in the process, empirical evidence is unable to produce certain results. In fact, there is no set of explanations that can be considered as the main driver for radicalization. However, it is worth analyzing the main findings on this issue in order to understand what factors might be more relevant when evaluating Islamic radicalization in European societies.

Despite the heterogeneity of the studies, most literature involves three levels of explanation: micro, meso and macro (Schmid, 2013). The micro-level approach focuses on how vulnerable individuals are socialized into radical groups, and therefore analyzes the factors that explain people's detachment from society. The causes, therefore, include failed integration, marginalization, discrimination, relative deprivation and so on. The meso-level approach, instead, looks into the environment that leads to radicalization, focusing on the radical milieu that individuals are exposed to. The third approach analyzes radicalization at a macro-level by focusing on "government actions and society's relationship with members of minorities" (Schmid 2013, p.4). As a result, this approach looks at the public opinion about these groups, party politics and socio-economic opportunities at the national level, such as the lack of upwards mobility.

This categorization is helpful to provide a clear overview of the causes of radicalization found by different authors, and although some explanations can fit into multiple approaches, these three levels of analysis represent the main framework to classify the reasons behind this phenomenon.

2.1 Micro-level

Until recently, most studies about radicalization and terrorism have focused on the factors leading to radicalization at a micro level. Three aspects can be relevant to individuals' cognitive change to embrace radicalism: religion, economic factors and social disadvantage.

First and foremost, Islamic radicalization inevitably has to do with religion. Lorenzo Vidino's study (2014) shows that religion is one of the main explanation provided by foreign fighters when asked why they joined the jihad. Accordingly, mosques are considered the main site where radical networks develop (El-Said & Barrett, 2017). However, the religious factor does not seem to play a key role in the process. Surveys show that foreign fighters have poor knowledge of the Koran and religion is rather used as a moral justification for their behaviors (Coolsaet, 2015). Especially in Europe, those who decide to engage in terrorism or join the jihad are driven by personal reasons and do not act based on religious orthodoxy (Abdel-Samad, 2006). As stated by Boutin et al (2016), European foreign fighters are "more radical than Islamist". It follows that

although Islamic radicalization inherently refers to religious motivations, its root causes are not directly related to Islam.

Nevertheless, religion does play an indirect role in radicalism. Ganor (2011) focuses on the Muslim diaspora in Europe and analyzes the social pressure to which new generations are exposed. The process of Islamic radicalization stems from the identity crisis experienced by second and third generations European Muslims that are torn between their religious identity and the pressure to conform to western societies. This argument is shared by Fukuyama, according to which radical Islamism “arises in response to the resulting quest for identity” of young Muslims (2006, p.3).

Another set of explanations refers to the economic status that Muslims enjoy in the society. From a sociological perspective, radicalization processes are more likely to occur in individuals that are economically vulnerable (Malthaner, 2014; Mastors & Siers, 2014). However, this argument requires further considerations. By looking at the example provided by foreign fighters, it holds true that Muslims belonging to higher income groups are unlikely to engage in radical activities (Boutin et al, 2016). However, it does not necessary follow that only individuals with lower income are subject to Islamic radicalization. Evidence shows that most Belgian foreign fighters come from middle-income families (Boutin et al, 2016). Accordingly, other studies find no correlation between economic status and radicalization (Pedersen et al, 2017; Rink & Sharma, 2017).

Nevertheless, the relevance of economic factors should be understood on a relative basis rather than an absolute one. In this sense, Coolsaet (2015) states that radicalization is likely to occur when there is a perceived gap in economic opportunities between natives and migrants. This polarization of the society can stir frustration within minorities and pave the way to feelings of social exclusion. Hence, even though studies show different results about the relationship between economic welfare and radicalization, it cannot be excluded that certain factors are more likely to generate radical behaviors in Muslim communities.

Lastly, radicalization can be triggered by specific social circumstances. For instance, Ganor (2011) links radicalism with social integration and alienation; Schmid (2013), Bakker & De Bont (2016) and Mastors & Siers (2014) believe that social injustice, social exclusion, ethnic discrimination and marginalization play a significant role in increasing the frustration of young Muslims and push them to embrace extremism. More specifically, Abdel-Samad (2006) finds that isolation – deriving from discrimination – has a major impact on the willingness to disengage from society.

These factors altogether provide a valuable spectrum to understand the motivations driving radicalization processes at a micro-level. However, they represent a precondition for individuals to be attracted to radical discourse, but alone they cannot be held responsible for all the steps in the process of radicalization.

2.2 Meso-level

The second level of analysis regards the socialization of potential jihadists and the pressure exerted by peers within Islamist networks. Most studies agree that exposure to radical networks plays a key role in the process of radicalization. Stemmann (2006) argues that the presence of Salafist activism is a major determinant for the levels of radicalization within Islamic communities. This argument is reiterated by Coolsaet (2015) and Boutin et al (2016). In both studies, the authors underline the importance of jihadist groups like “Sharia4Belgium” or “Street Dawa” in the indoctrination and recruitment of foreign fighters. These groups help to cultivate a social identity so that vulnerable individuals finally feel to belong. The key role of these “facilitators” is also highlighted in Vidino’s research about Belgian foreign fighters (2014). As a result, the more exposed an individual is to a radical milieu, the more likely he/she is to engage in radical activities.

Besides the proximity to radical environment, recent research highlights the importance of social media in conveying radical messages and recruit young Muslims. The role of the internet is especially relevant in studies about foreign fighters. As noted by El-Said & Barrett, potential recruits “connect with Islamic State sympathizers via social media” (2017, p.39) and use it to interact with radical peers. Nevertheless, surveys show that the internet plays a significant role only at a later stage of the process, as the idea to radicalize is often developed “offline” (El-Said & Barrett, 2017).

In addition, social connections within Muslims communities are also related to levels of radicalization. In this sense, Coolsaet finds that most Belgian foreign fighters come from Moroccan families, as this community offers “less of a shelter” vis-à-vis other Muslims groups, thereby encouraging more feelings of exclusion (2015, p. 18).

Most of the literature looking at the meso-level stresses the importance of social ties in attracting young Muslims into embracing radical ideas. Malthaner argues that mobilization occurs through pre-existing social ties and cognitive radicalization is “intimately linked to social processes of dense interaction in radical networks and groups” (2014, p.377). His study refers to Della Porta’s results on radical activism (1992), which pointed out the importance of environmental conditions to make individuals receptive to a certain message – more specifically to the use of political violence.

The environmental context in which radicalization takes place has also been addressed by Neumann & Rogers (2007). These authors focus on the role of specific recruitment grounds for radical groups to spread their message, specifically underlining two options: places where Muslims meet and interact or places where individuals are vulnerable and potentially receptive to radical movements’ discourse. The first case considers

Mosques or Islamic bookshops as places where radical groups operate, whereas the latter looks at prisons or refugee centers. The study concludes that prisons provide the best radical milieu for jihadist recruitment.

However, the importance of environmental factors in radicalization processes should not be overestimated. Not all individuals are equally receptive to radical discourses and radical milieu plays a role only under the precondition that recruits have already initiated a cognitive opening, regardless of the extent of it (Coolsaet, 2015).

2.3 Macro-level

At a macro-level of analysis, the causes of Islamic radicalism are linked to government actions and broader national characteristics.

A first group of studies focuses on the impact of state capacity on radicalization. According to Ganor (2011) and Odorfer (2015), the lack of upward social mobility generated by weak state capacity is one of the key factors accounting for high levels of Islamic radicalization. Accordingly, states with poor attention to social integration are likely to be subjected to a higher threat of radicalization (Ganor, 2011).

Secondly, as stated by Murshed & Pavan, radicalization “does not happen in a political vacuum” (2011, p.260). Political underrepresentation of minorities (Boukhars, 2009), policies perceived as anti-Muslims (Murshed & Pavan, 2011) and the country’s foreign policy agenda (Boutin et al, 2016) are all factors that surveys found to play a role in individual radicalization. In general, radicalism is more likely to be found in societies with higher perceptions of Islamophobia and discrimination (Stemmann, 2006).

In addition, it is worth focusing on the findings in Benmelech & Klor’s study (2016). These authors provide an up-to-date cross-sectional analysis on the factors that shape the number of foreign fighters worldwide. The main contribution of the research is the positive correlation between the number of foreign fighters and ethnic homogeneity: the analysis finds that higher levels of radicalization are to be expected in countries that are less ethnically fractionalized, because higher homogeneity implies more difficulties in Muslims’ integration process.

Lastly, the literature about radicalization also points at explanations that – despite being not directly related to national features – still look at the phenomenon from a macro-level perspective. For instance, Buijs et al (2006) believe that Muslims radicalize because they are unable to address their grievances through legal and constitutional means. The distrust in legitimate ways to redress their social status stems from the

perception of a hostile social environment, evident in Islamophobic behaviors or – more generally – counter-terrorist policies that are often perceived as unjust and discriminatory.

In addition, an interesting perspective is provided by Coolsaet (2015), who sees Islamic radicalization as the outcome of a wider social phenomenon. He argues that radicalization arises out of youth angst against society, resulting in what he calls “anger with an Islamic dressing” (Coolsaet 2015, p.11). In this sense, the factors leading to radicalization have more to do with depression and pessimism rather than deprivation or religious faith, and the attraction to radical messages in young people is the result of social pressure and anxiety.

To conclude, explanations at the macro-level address Islamic radicalization from a public perspective, thereby providing an approach that takes into account the wider picture around this phenomenon.

3. Final remarks

The wide variety of findings implies that there is no unanimity about the causes of radicalization around the world. Despite the conflicting results, the three approaches provide useful insights on what research has found to be the major drivers for radicalization. The review of the literature has highlighted some common features of radicalization processes, such as the lack of social integration, the perceived discrimination, peer pressure and relative deprivation. These factors have been analyzed at three different levels; however, all of them are intertwined and relevant to radicalization in Europe.

Even though, as stated by Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010), empirical evidence is hard to find, it is worth evaluating whether EU member states share a certain pattern of radicalization within Muslim communities. For this reason, the causes outlined by previous research in this area will be used as variables to select the cases for the qualitative analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature about violent radicalization has developed within a framework that includes different theories, most of them related to sociological studies. This section will present a summary of the main theoretical approaches that will be utilized to formulate the research design. Specifically, the study will illustrate the theoretical framework provided by French sociology as well as theories related to the Social Movements approach, namely the Framing theory and the Social Network theory. These categories provide different perspectives and can be useful to illustrate the spectrum of Islamic radicalization in Europe.

The analysis will start with a summary of the theory and then will address its implications for Islamic radicalization. A series of researches based on the theory will be provided, as well as the main limitations in its explanatory power for radicalization. Lastly, expectations regarding radicalization will be formulated from theoretical assumptions.

1. French Sociology

A set of theories helpful to disentangle radicalization processes is provided by French Sociology (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). This term refers to classical sociological studies developed in France in the 19th century, from Durkheim's work onward.

Individual radicalization can be conceived as the outcome of dynamics that hinder social cohesion and integration. In this sense, the Theory of *Anomie* by Durkheim can provide a framework able to account for this phenomenon. The concept of *anomie* was introduced in Durkheim's *Division of Labor* (1893) and further developed in *Suicide* (1897). It refers to a "condition of instability resulting from a breakdown of standards and values" ("Anomie", 2002). This condition arises when there is a mismatch between personal and social standards, making individuals feel disengaged with the moral norms of a society and leading to feelings of alienation and purposelessness. In the end, social disconnection resulting from *anomie* is likely to foster deviant behaviors (Durkheim, 1897). Even though the concept of *anomie* was used to refer to social changes in 19th century industrial societies, its theoretical assumptions are relevant to radicalization and can be applied to the integration process of Muslims in Europe. According to this theory, the challenges faced by "an increasingly westernized generation of young Muslims" produce anomie and lead to social deviance (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, p.800).

Different authors have analyzed radicalization processes in terms of social integration of Islamic communities. One of the most prominent studies was conducted by Roy, who theorized the concept of "neo-ummah" to refer to the imaginary global community of Muslims that "facilitates the construction of a sense

of solidarity on the part of Muslims in Europe with Muslims in conflict areas” (Roy 2004, p.20). The neo-ummah is what hinders a full integration of second and third generation Muslims in European secular societies, as they experience a twofold frustration arising from being discriminated in the host society and, at the same time, not feeling part of their parents’ community in their home countries. In the attempt to reconstruct their lost identity, young Muslims join radical groups as they provide a “feeling of community and a vehicle for re-claiming the right to self-definition” (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, p.801).

This “double sense of non-belonging” is echoed by Khosrokhavar, who accordingly states that young Muslims radicalize as they are unable to define their self-identities in European societies (Khosrokhavar & Macey, 2005). These individuals feel the twofold pressure to converge to society’s “secular” expectations and to reconnect with their religious traditions. This struggle is exacerbated by recent counter-terrorism policies in European countries, which have increased the discrimination felt by European Muslims. This way, militant Islamism becomes a way to guard against the perceived social hostility and to give vent to personal frustration.

Similar conclusions are reached by Coolsaet (2015), who underlines the potential estrangement of Muslim migrants as one of the main drivers for radicalization. According to the author, second and third generation Muslims in Europe are still confronted with their origins, and the recent attitude of public authorities toward Islam risks to facilitate the cognitive process leading to radicalization. Although this approach is able to clarify why individuals that are not economically or socially deprived decide to radicalize, it fails to provide an explanation for the non-radicalization of people exposed to similar social structures.

The assumptions of this theoretical approach can be used to outline expectations regarding the levels of radicalization in European societies. According to this school, individuals are likely to radicalize when they feel alienated in the hosting society and strive to reconcile their Islamic and secular identities. As a consequence, it can be assumed that this task is more challenging in societies where Muslims perceive a hostile environment and feel discriminated. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the thesis holds that:

H1: Countries where discrimination towards Muslims is more widespread are likely to have higher levels of Islamic radicalization.

2. Social Movement Theories

Another theoretical approach to explain radicalization is provided by the Social Movement Theory. This theory aims at explaining why social mobilization occurs and it comprises several sub-categories. In general, according to the Social Movement theory, radicalization is “about who you know” (Dalgaard-Nielsen

2010, p.801) and it mainly occurs through peer pressure and group indoctrination. More specifically, two sub-categories – Framing and Social Network theories – will be analyzed to provide a better understanding of the differences within this macro-approach.

In the context of Social Movement theories, “framing” refers to the construction of meaning operated by movements devotees (Snow, 2013). The concept of framing is not new to social science and it was firstly addressed in *Frame Analysis* by Erving Goffman (1974). The main assumption of this theory is that meanings are not naturally attached to an object or an event, but they arise “through interpretive process mediated by culture” (Snow, 2013).

Especially relevant for radicalization processes is the concept of “frame alignment”, which consists in promoting a specific version of reality in order to make it resound with the “worldview of potential recruits” (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, p.804). According to this view, radicalization does not derive from an issue itself (such as deprivation or discrimination), but from how it is framed by social movements. This approach was adopted by Wiktorowicz (2004) in his case study about the UK branch of the *Al-Muhajiroun* group. According to the author, radicalization is a stepwise process: personal crisis triggers a “cognitive opening” in individuals that then seek contact with religious groups. After joining a religious movement, indoctrination takes place and radicalized ideologies are strengthened through group bounding and peer pressure.

Also, a study by the Change Institute (2008) analyzes how frame alignment is used to attract potential recruits. The research highlights how governments’ counter-terrorist policies might become sources of radicalization as they would help jihadist groups achieve frame alignment with potential recruits. Accordingly, Neumann & Rogers (2007) found that radical activists make use of Europe’s counter-terrorist efforts to facilitate the adaptation of extreme ideologies. To sum up, the Framing theory stresses the importance of recruiters’ narrative regarding certain events to attract vulnerable individuals.

Another strand related to Social Movements is the Social Network theory, formulated in studies by different authors (Milgram 1967; Granovetter 1973). This theory sees social relationships in terms of nodes and ties. The Social Network theory posits that rather than individual attributes, it is social ties and networks that determine individual behaviors.

One of the most important studies about social networks and radicalization has been conducted by Sageman (2004). In his analysis about individuals affiliated with Al-Qaeda, he highlights the existence of an “informal and horizontal global network of militant Islamists” that works through a bottom-up fashion (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). In contrast to the Framing theory, he argues that there is no active recruitment carried out by militant groups, but individuals approach radical ideologies through the social network available to them. This way, like-minded peers egg each other and become convinced to engage in violent actions. While mobilization follows personal experiences or feelings of discrimination felt by Muslims, the

pathway for joining is provided by pre-existing ties. This view is confirmed by Neumann & Rogers' findings (2007), which stress the importance of social bonding within small peer groups in the adaptation of extreme worldviews.

Limitations in this approach regard the limited size of the samples collected by major studies and the lack of empirical evidence about this process (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). In addition, the Social Movement theory in general does not address the issue about whether social processes can radicalize anybody. This approach fails to account for the cases of people disengaging with radical ideas, and it risks to overestimate the social component of the process vis-à-vis individual drivers.

In conclusion, the Social Movement approach focuses on the importance of networks in radicalization processes and infers that individuals are more likely to radicalize when they have higher exposure to radical discourses. Therefore, it can be expected that countries where jihadist circles are more extensive provide a wider network of Islamists and recruiters, thereby increasing the potential exposure of individuals to a radical milieu. Therefore, according to the second hypothesis:

H2: Countries where jihadist networks are more present are likely to have higher levels of Islamic radicalization.

3. Final considerations

The theoretical framework in this section provides different perspectives to analyze radicalization in Islamic communities. Although both theories focus on similar aspects, each approach looks at different analytic levels and it is worth highlighting how these differ.

One of the common factors addressed in the framework is the relevance of perceived discrimination. Although both theories believe that discrimination towards Muslims plays an important role in radical behaviors, the dynamics through which this happens have different explanation in each case. For instance, whilst French sociology analyzes it at a micro-level, Social Movement theories see discrimination as a discourse used by radical networks to support their cause. Likewise, counter-terrorism policies in European countries are held responsible for radicalization as – according to French sociology – they fuel the sense of non-belonging in second generation Muslims. However, from a Social Movement perspective, these policies are framed in an anti-Muslim narrative to attract potential recruits and acquaint them with radical views.

To sum up, even though different theories seem to point at similar outcomes, they describe different pathways of radicalization and attach different importance to the explanations provided by the literature.

METHODOLOGY

The thesis aims at analyzing the main factors responsible for different levels of Islamic radicalization in European countries. The theories addressed in the previous section allow to formulate a set of hypotheses to answer the following research question:

RQ: What are the factors responsible for different levels of Islamic radicalization in European countries?

According to the French Sociology approach, feelings of alienation and hostility can facilitate radicalization processes in individuals. On the contrary, the focus of Social Movement theories lies on the radical milieu and the network of peers and recruiters available to potential radicals.

The unit of analysis is represented by countries, as the objective of the study is to assess the different level of radicalization between European states. Therefore, the main indicators will refer to national characteristics and datasets.

In order to test the hypotheses, the thesis will adopt a case-study design as it represents the most appropriate option for this particular topic. Given the uncertainty of academia about the reasons behind Islamic radicalization, a qualitative approach is preferred over a quantitative as it can provide a more in-depth analysis of a specific selection of cases. In case of a quantitative design, the research would take into account non-Muslim countries and analyze the co-variation of selected variables in the sample group, consisting, for instance, of the EU-28 countries. However, previous empirical research has shown that there are no significant results in terms of what factors are the main determinants for this phenomenon on a large-N scale. Also, given that a quantitative design would only consider the 28 members of the EU, the study could not include too many variables because it would limit the internal validity, even though the potential causes of radicalization to test would be rather numerous. Lastly, a quantitative design would include countries with very low levels of radicalization, and this could undermine the validity of the results as the findings would be influenced by cases that are not relevant for this topic.

On the other hand, a qualitative approach could reduce the number of variables as these can be selected based on the specific features of the selected cases. Also, a case-study design allows for a more in-depth analysis of radicalization causes, and even though it lacks of external validity vis-a-vis the quantitative design, a small-N approach would provide a more accurate interpretation of the phenomenon.

1. Cases selection

In order to provide a valid answer to the research question, the study will conduct a comparative analysis of a selection of countries. To test the hypotheses, this thesis will look at the levels of radicalization in Nordic countries, namely Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

These countries have been chosen because they reflect the “most-similar cases method”. According to Lijphart’s definition of “comparative method” (1975), cases should be selected as to “maximize the variance of the independent variable and minimize the variance of the control variables” (Lijphart 1975, p.164). In fact, these three countries have similar scores for the control variables whilst differing on independent variables. The aim of the study is to test whether the variation of independent variables (X) produces different values for the dependent variable (Y). If control variables are similar, and co-variation is found between X and Y, it can be inferred that X has an impact on Y.

Besides control factors, these countries represent a valid selection for other reasons. For instance, they have similar levels of welfare compared to other European countries and they share the same secular approach to religious freedoms. In fact, they can be considered more culturally homogenous vis-à-vis other groups of European states, and this facilitates a cross-country analysis as it reduces the potential impact of other determinants that are not considered in the study.

Lastly, the study is not including Norway in the sample because it may weaken the validity of the results. First, Norway has by far the highest GDP per capita and Human Development Index (“World Bank Open Data”, n.d.) in the region, and these different socio-economic conditions could represent a hindrance to the comparison. In fact, the GDP per capita is one of the variables used to control for the internal validity of the study. However, the main problem arising from the inclusion of Norway is the availability of data. The main statistics used in the comparison are retrieved from EU-wide databases provided by the European Commission and therefore they do not include Norway. Some of the indicators are either not available or not up-to-date in the Norwegian case: for instance, the dataset about discrimination does not include Norway and neither does the indicator regarding the feeling of attachment to the country of residence.

For these reasons, the selection of Finland, Sweden and Denmark allows to retrieve more accurate data and produce more valid results vis-à-vis an analysis that would include Norway.

2. Data Sources

The case-study analysis will be carried out by collecting information from different kinds of sources. Data related to dependent and independent variables will be retrieved from official databases such as the World Bank Data or Eurostat. For the literature review and the overview on the three countries, the main sources are peer-reviewed academic publications and reports from research institutes. For instance, most of the studies providing up-to-date information about foreign fighters are conducted by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in the Hague, whose publications have been broadly used in this thesis.

In addition, the analysis will take into account articles published in international and local newspapers. More specifically, these sources will be used to provide a general outline of the public opinion about Muslims in the societies of the selected countries.

3. Dependent variable

The purpose of the study is to assess the levels of Islamic radicalization in European countries. Although this phenomenon is hardly quantifiable through numerical indicators, the consequences thereof can be measured in different ways. In this thesis, the levels of Islamic radicalization will be assessed by considering the number of people that reached the Middle East – more specifically Syria or Iraq – to join ISIS or other jihadist groups.

The choice of this indicator stems from the definitions of radicalism outlined by the literature. As it is not possible to look into individuals' minds, the only way to assess whether a radicalization process has occurred is to look at people's *behaviors*. Since radicalization to some extent tends to result in political violence, radicalized individuals are expected to engage in extreme actions. Although these include both violent and non-violent expressions, the measurement of radicalization in an empirical research is more likely to take into account the former case, as data regarding violent manifestations tend to be more easily available. In fact, some non-violent forms of radicalism are not in breach of any law nor do they produce effects of sociological relevance; therefore, these tend to be more difficult to assess through qualitative indicators.

In this research, the number of people fleeing to the Middle East is preferred over other indicators for different reasons. For instance, the number of suspects arrested for jihadi terrorism in EU member states could also provide an indication of Islamic radicalism within society. However, this option presents limitations that could mislead the interpretation of the results. Firstly, the number of people arrested depends on a

number of factors that are highly nation-specific. For instance, national legislations differ in terms of what offences are punishable by law (Boutin et al, 2016). Likewise, the number of arrests also depends on the quality of intelligence investigations as well as the terrorist threat perceived by public authorities. Both these factors undermine the validity of a comparative analysis. In addition, although radicalism can result in terrorist plans, the decision to attack one's country of birth or residence is definitely at the most extreme end of the spectrum and this risks to overlook all the other cases where individuals radicalize without terrorist intentions.

The number of foreign fighters represents a valid option to assess radicalization as the decision to go to Syria or Iraq and fight the jihad is less extreme and more widespread than engage in terrorist violence. For instance, when looking at the number of arrests for terrorism, countries like Finland that had zero arrests in 2016 (Europol, 2017) should be considered radicalism-free. However, the number of people that joined the jihad depicts the opposite picture, putting Finland among the countries with the highest rate of foreign fighters to Muslim population (Benmelech, 2016). Since the decision to flee to the Middle East is unquestionably related to radical behaviors, this indicator is likely to provide a more accurate image of the levels of radicalism vis-à-vis the number of terrorist suspects, as this action is not as extreme and in most cases it does not imply the violation of any national law.

However, the number of foreign fighters in different countries can be evaluated based either on the share to the total population or to the Muslim population. The former has been chosen over the latter for several reasons. First of all, there are no precise data about the number of Muslim citizens in European countries, and the latest statistics were retrieved in 2010 by the Pew Research Centre (Pew Research Center, 2017). Secondly, although the decision to join the jihad is inevitably related to religious beliefs, many foreign fighters have Muslims descendants but were not raised in conservative families; instead, they radicalized through a conversion from secular beliefs. For these reasons, foreign fighters can be found outside the demographic group consisting of individuals classified as Muslims. Third, the share of Muslim population in the three countries reflects different policies following the recent migrant crisis. For instance, Sweden has taken in more refugee per capita than any other European state (Hinde & Silberstein, 2017) and this has inevitably resulted in a sharper increase of the Muslim population vis-à-vis the other selected cases¹. However, this does not have an impact on the number of foreign fighters because refugees and migrants are hardly attracted to the idea of going to the Middle East. Therefore, considering the number of foreign fighters to the Muslim population tends to underestimate Islamic radicalization in countries that accepted more refugees. Last but not least, this option is in line with the existing literature, that almost unanimously

¹ The Muslim share of the population has almost doubled in Sweden from 2010 to 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017).

considers the number of foreign fighters to the total population as the most accurate indicator of radicalization.

The number of foreign fighters per million population will be calculated by looking at the average resulting from the number of foreign fighters provided by the Soufan Group (“Foreign Fighters”, 2015) and the ICCT (Boutin et al, 2016) and divide it by the population retrieved from World Bank Data for 2015.

Besides, the levels of radicalization will be estimated by taking into account the country’s exposure to Islamist terrorism. To do so the analysis will look at the number of terrorist attacks occurred in the country as well as the terrorist plots foiled by the authorities. However, the occurrence of terrorism depends on a wide array of factors that go beyond Islamic radicalization; therefore, the study will only take these numbers into consideration while basing the results on the foreign fighters contingent.

4. Independent variables

To test the hypotheses in a most-similar case-study design, the research needs to take into account a series of independent variables related to the factors held responsible for different levels of the Y among the selected cases.

4.1 Perceived Discrimination among Muslims

The first hypothesis links radicalization to the discrimination perceived by Muslims. In order to assess the levels of discrimination, the study will look at numerical indicators and socio-political features in the selected countries. The available data about discrimination in the EU are provided by the Special Eurobarometer 437 published in 2015 by the European Commission (“Discrimination in the EU”, 2015). The report includes a survey on the opinions of EU citizens about the levels of discrimination in their own countries based on different factors. To test the first hypothesis, the research will take into account two indexes: the percentage of people believing that discrimination is “widespread” on the basis of (i) ethnic origins and (ii) religious beliefs.

Besides, the qualitative analysis will assess the discrimination towards Muslims perceived at the political level. To do so, the results of right-wing nationalist parties in latest elections will be taken into account, as well as the general attitude that politicians adopt when discussing Islam in the public sphere. In addition, anti-Muslims discrimination will be evaluated by looking at the latest development of anti-immigration laws to prevent inflows from Muslim countries.

Lastly, the study will also analyze the predominant discourses in the public opinion related to the integration of Muslims in the society, as well as the extent to which Islam is perceived and framed as a threat to security and integrity of national values.

4.2 Jihadist Network

The second hypothesis points at the relation between jihadist networks and levels of radicalization. To assess the extensiveness of Islamist circles, the study will start by looking at the size of the Muslim community. Although the number of Muslims in a country is not *per se* related to the levels of radicalization, it can be indirectly responsible for higher levels as it might determine the extent to which individuals are exposed to potentially radical milieu. Data about Muslim population in the selected country will be retrieved from the Pew Research Center's report of 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017). This study provides an estimated number of Muslims in European countries for 2016, 2020 and 2050 based on data collected from national statistics of 2010. For the purpose of this research, the analysis will be based on the figures about European Muslims for 2010. First of all, these numbers were retrieved from national statistics, whereas latest ones are just estimated and therefore lack of scientific validity. In addition, this option allows for more accuracy because recent figures about Muslim population in Europe could mislead the interpretation of data. In fact, the numbers from 2016 are significantly higher than those from 2010 due to the increase in migrants inflows following the Syrian conflict. However, this rise in Muslim population is not relevant to radicalization because these "newcomers" are not likely to engage in radical processes (Boutin et a, 2016) and therefore they should not be taken into account when addressing the impact on Islamic radicalization.

Secondly, the jihadist network available in the country will be assessed by looking at the background information regarding foreign fighters and terrorist suspects. In fact, police investigations following terrorist attacks, as well as interviews conducted on foreign fighters returnees, provide useful material regarding the jihadist network and the modalities of radicalization. In addition, the analysis will also consider the evidence of active Islamist groups collected by the authorities and traces of recruitment activities carried out by jihadist factions.

5. Control variables

In order to test the causal relationship between the X and the Y, the research design needs to include a series of control variables that have similar results in the selected cases. These variables account for the main reasons for radicalization outlined by the literature.

First of all, the decision to engage in radical actions may result from an unfavorable comparison between one's social group and out-groups. Hence, the selected cases should share similar conditions in terms of social equality. Levels of inequalities can be assessed through the GINI index, that measures wealth distribution within society. The latest values for this coefficient were estimated by the World Bank in 2014. The Index goes from 0, which reflects a situation of perfect equality, to 1, being the maximum level of inequality.

In addition, the literature has pointed at socio-economic deprivation as one of the major drivers of the cognitive opening responsible for radicalization. To assess the welfare and the level of deprivation in the population, the research will consider three indicators: the GDP per capita, the material deprivation and the percentage of people at risk of social exclusion. The first indicator is provided by the World Bank; specifically the study will analyze the GDP per capita expressed in current international dollars and Purchasing Power Parity for 2015. The level of deprivation will be measured by the "severe material deprivation" rate in 2015 as percentage of the population, determined by Eurostat ("Material Deprivation Statistics", 2017). Eurostat also provides statistics to assess social exclusion through the "at-risk-of poverty and social exclusion" rate as percentage of the population in 2015 ("People at Risk", 2016).

Another factor to control for is the sense of belonging of Muslims descendants to the country of residence. As outlined in the literature review, radicalization process might arise out of feelings of non-belonging to European secular societies. Therefore, it is important to look at the degree of attachment of second and third generation migrants to the hosting country. In 2017, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published the *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Surveys*, whose findings were categorized based on the ethnic origin of respondents. The report provides an indicator for the "feeling of attachment to country of residence", where Muslim respondents were asked to rate from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("very strong attached") their feelings of attachment ("Second European Union", 2017).

6. External and internal validity

The research design outlined in this section will produce results whose validity can be assessed externally and internally. In comparison with quantitative methods, the qualitative design is relatively deficient in external validity. The case-study approach was preferred over quantitative analysis because it allows for a more in-depth analysis. However, the findings can hardly be extended to a larger group because they show a pattern of radicalization that is specific to countries that share a certain social and economic structure. The high degree of uncertainty about the causes of radicalization makes any attempt to generalize empirical results rather hazardous, therefore the low external validity is an issue with any research design, regardless of the cases selection. For instance, one of the studies that supposedly has the highest degree of external validity was carried out by Benmelech (2016), who conducted a quantitative analysis of foreign fighters worldwide. He found that the highest number of foreign fighters can be found in countries with higher ethnic homogeneity. However, by applying these results to the smaller sample of European countries, they do not seem very accurate. In fact, the country with the highest number of foreign fighter per capita in the EU is Belgium, which is also the one with the lowest degree of ethnic homogeneity. This example shows that generalization in the area of Islamic radicalization is hardly achievable anyway, therefore this thesis has preferred a small-N approach in order to provide a more thorough explanation of the phenomenon.

Thus, the low external validity is offset by the higher internal validity resulting from the case-study design. The small-N approach can increase the internal validity by strengthening the causal relationship between X and Y. In relation to the hurdles of causality defined by Kellstedt & Whitten (2013), the causal relationship between X and Y is credible because it is based on theoretical foundations and analyzed by recent literature. Accordingly, the direction of causality is rather clear, as it is unlikely that Islamic radicalization can be the cause of the factors considered as independent variables. Also, the causal link between X and Y is tested by adding a series of variables to control for the validity of the results. The similarity of the cases selected for this study allows to focus on a smaller number of variables deemed responsible for the variation of the Y, thereby increasing the chances that the X can be held accountable for it.

7. Limitations

In conclusion, it is worth addressing the aspects that could weaken the validity of the thesis findings. First and foremost, despite co-variation, the causal relationship between independent and dependent variables cannot be taken for granted. The patterns of Islamic radicalization are extremely case-specific and

it would be inaccurate to assume that a certain factor is able to explain the occurrence of radicalization process. The objective of the study is to analyze whether discrimination or jihadist networks are positively related to levels of radicalization, but there is no intention to prove that if the hypotheses are correct, these two factors are accountable for the whole process. Instead, the results should be read as an evidence of the influence of these indicators on the dependent variable.

Secondly, the data used to measure the levels of radicalization inevitably present some deficiencies. Although the number of foreign fighters can be an accurate indicator for radicalism within society, not all radicalized individuals want to join the jihad, and those who actually do are not necessarily listed in the available statistics. Therefore, the interpretation of the results must acknowledge that any conclusion is based on partial figures and radicalization cannot be fully measured by numerical indicators.

Besides, in order to outline the process of radicalization in the selected countries, the analysis refers to background information of single extremists – such as terrorists or foreign fighters. Although these cases give a valid example of radicalization processes, it must be acknowledged that the resulting assumptions cannot be generalized to the whole radicalized population. However, since it is not possible to know the background of each fighter, the study inevitably has to draw conclusions from evidence of single cases.

Lastly, the selection of the dependent variable raises the question about whether it is more radicalized a society with a higher number of foreign fighters to the total population or only to the Muslim share of it. This research considers the number of foreign fighters to the total population as a more accurate indicator for the levels of radicalization. However, one might also argue that radicalization within the Muslim community provides a better assessment of this threat. In fact, although foreign fighters also come from a non-Islamic background, they eventually convert to Islam and therefore identify themselves as Muslims. Yet, given the quick conversion process of these individuals, it is impossible to count the number of Muslims in a certain country at a specific moment in time. Therefore, most foreign fighters in 2015 are unlikely to be counted in recent figures about Muslim population. Consequently, this option results rather inaccurate and has been ruled out. This is also the reason why the existing literature has been considering the amount of foreign fighters per head rather than per Muslim population.

COUNTRIES' OVERVIEW

Before conducting the empirical analysis, the study will present an overview of the three selected countries. These summaries aim at outlining the features of Muslim communities in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, including the main developments in terms of social integration, immigration policies and public opinion. Lastly, the degree of Islam radicalization will be addressed, as well as the existing policy framework regarding counter-terrorism and Islamic extremism.

1. Finland

At a first glance, the religious beliefs of Finnish population look similar to other European states, with the largest group consisting of Christians and Muslims being the largest minority (Statistics Finland, 2017). However, official statistics show that within the “Christians” category there are larger minorities than the Muslims.

Officially, Finland has two National Churches: the *Evangelical Lutheran Protestant Christian Church of Finland* and the *Finnish Orthodox Church*. The former represents the most important religious group, with more than 70% of Finns as members (Statistics Finland, 2017). The latter, instead, only accounts for roughly 1% of the population. In addition to the National Churches, the Finnish Christians include other affiliations that in some cases are more numerous than Muslims. For instance, the Greek Orthodox Church counts four times as many members as the Islamic community (Statistics Finland, 2017). However, the number of Muslims assessed by national statistics only considers individuals registered in Islamic circles. As a matter of fact, Muslims in Finland are estimated to be around 150 000 (Pew Research, 2017), whereas the official statistics on religion only display 15 000 affiliates (Statistics Finland, 2017). Nevertheless, the largest group besides the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is still composed by people not affiliated with any religion, namely 26% of the population. Anyway, the importance of Islam in Finnish society is growing quickly, whereas the National Church has been showing the opposite trend, with its membership decreasing for more than a decade.

The settlement of Islamic communities in Finland dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, when Muslim soldiers from the Russian army were stationed in the country after the annexation by Russia (Martikainen, 2011). Then, in the 1870s, Tatar Muslims began to permanently settle in the region, becoming the first Nordic Muslim community (Martikainen, 2011). After Finland became independent, Muslims were given formal citizenship and in 1923 the *Freedom of Religion Act* allowed them to organize officially as a religious group (Kääriäinen, 2011).

Following the closure of the Soviet border, the migration wave ceased but Muslim population kept growing due to “marriage, work, study and international tourism in the post-World War II period” (Martikainen 2011, p.187). The inflow from Islamic countries started to grow again in the 90’s due to increasing numbers of asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa. Following the migrant crisis in 2015, the number of Muslims has more than doubled, as the amount of refugees taken in increased by ten times in just one year – from 2014 to 2015 (Forsell, 2016). As a result, the majority of Muslims currently consists of first generation migrants from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo (Statistics Finland, 2017). Good part of the share is also represented by second generation migrants, followed by converts and the remaining Tatars congregations (Martikainen, 2011). Like in other countries, the estimation of Muslim population is hindered by the lack of an official surveying and it is only based on the number of people registered in Muslim associations. Anyway, most Muslims live in the metropolitan area of Helsinki and other larger cities like Turku or Tampere. As for their socio-economic status, there is a strong divide between newcomers and earlier communities: while Tatars have been long integrated into society and are generally well-off, Muslims of refugee background tend to face more challenges in terms of unemployment and economic deprivation (Sakaranaho & Martikainen, 2015).

However, the experience of Tatars’ integration in Finnish society is relevant to nowadays issues with Islam as it proved “both to the Finnish public authorities and to later Muslim activists that it is possible to create strong and stable institutions to protect one’s cultural heritage” (Sakaranaho & Martikainen 2015, p.14). Currently, the major association representing Muslims is the *Islamic Council of Finland*, that serves as an umbrella organization for other smaller communities and mosques societies.

1.1 Socio-Political Context

In the past decades, Finland has been governed by coalitions formed by the country’s major parties. The current government was appointed after 2015 elections and is led by a coalition of the *Centre Party* with the *National Coalition Party* and the *Finns Party*. The inclusion of the *Finns Party* – second in the general elections – represents an important change in Finland politics as it is the first time that the right-wing populists participate in the government (“Sipila opts”, 2015). However, after the appointment of Jussi Halla-aho as party chairman in 2017, the Prime Minister announced that he would no longer cooperate in the coalition due to Halla-aho’s extreme-right views. As a result, Members of Parliaments defected from the *Finns* and formed the *Blue Reform* party, that replaced the *Finns Party* and allowed the coalition to maintain the majority.

The debate about Islam and migration is rather open in the political arena. Although conservatives like the *Finns Party* have a strong nationalist opinion, Finland leaders seem to maintain a positive stance towards refugees. In 2014, the government was willing to increase the number of refugees taken in by ten times. The current Prime Minister Juha Sipilä is determined to set an example for other European countries and he even offered one of his houses to host newcomer refugees (“Finland PM Sipilä”, 2015). Likewise, the Finance Minister said that “multiculturalism is an asset” and that immigration would develop Finland as an open country (“Migrant Crisis”, 2015).

Obviously, this attitude is not shared by all factions. For instance, right-wing politicians are concerned that Islam could soon take over other religious groups and impose its practices on Finnish society. However, Finland’s leadership has remained open to religious freedom and the decision to shut down the government due to Jussi Halla-aho’s election reflects the formal rejection of any discriminatory ideology. In fact, Halla-aho is renowned to have controversial views on many topics, among which Islam. In 2008, he wrote on his blog that prophet Muhammad was a pedophile (“Islamin yhdistäminen”, 2010) and that “robbing passersby [...] are possibly genetic characteristics of Somali” (Dunne 2012). The scission of the *Finns Party* after his election demonstrates that these views are not tolerated by the majority.

On the contrary, Finnish public opinion appears highly polarized on this issue. A survey carried out in 2015 by the Finnish Broadcasting Company reveals that most people prefer living next to an alcohol rehab clinic than a mosque (“Finns prefer”, 2015). The public debate about Islam is inevitably intertwined with immigration, which is increasingly viewed in a negative way by the Finns. Major concerns regard the effects of immigration policies on crime and on public finances, as reception centers are considered too expensive for Finland receding economy (Ercanbrak, 2015).

Concerns about the alleged unsafety of Finland cities due to refugees paved the way to more extreme reactions. In 2015, an anti-immigrant group under the name “Soldiers of Odin” was founded by a self-declared neo-Nazi with the purpose of guarding cities against “Islamic intruders” (“Finland: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018). After Cologne sexual-assaults on 2016 New Year’s eve celebrations, as well as other sex-related crimes in Helsinki, this far-right group begun to patrol the streets to “protect native Finns from immigrants” (Rosendahl & Forsell, 2016). This movement raised concerns among the authorities due to its racist and xenophobic ideas and it was regarded as “unsettling” by the Finnish Intelligence Service as well as condemned by politicians (Charlton, 2016). More importantly, the group started to emerge in many other countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Canada, the United States and Australia (“Soldiers of Odin”, n.d.).

Apart from these expressions of far-right extremism, the issue of Muslims integration in Finnish society is increasingly debated by the public. For instance, one recent issue that attracted media attention was the construction of a “mega-mosque” in Helsinki. Several authorities have underlined the lack of

sufficient praying spaces for Muslims residing in Helsinki, that mainly consist of private rooms and small-scales mosques (Bergman, 2017). However, the idea was criticized on different levels. First, the project was supervised by the *Islam Society of Finland*, whose Imam was officially appointed by the Muslims Brotherhood with all the relative concerns about radicalism (“Finnish Muslim”, 2015). Secondly, the mosque would have been financed by the Royal Family of Bahrain, whose involvement could pose a security risk according to Finnish Minister of Interior (McKernan, 2017). Helsinki’s mayor also opposed to the construction, and eventually the project has been cancelled (“Finland Shelves”, 2017).

Despite these divergences, the socio-political environment remains relatively open to Islam and the political leadership is committed to hear the concerns voiced by the population without engaging in any discriminatory practice.

1.2 Islamic Radicalization

According to Finland’s Ministry of the Interior, violent radicalization is defined as “using, threatening with, encouraging or justifying violence based on one’s own view of the world, or on ideological grounds [...] (that) may result in a person joining violent extremist groups or engaging in the related actions” (“Preventive Work”, 2017). In the past years, the threat level officially declared by the authorities has remained low vis-à-vis other European countries. However, the government has taken precautionary measures to prevent radicalization and acts of terrorism. As highlighted in the ICCT report, Finnish authorities stated that “as a consequence of the Syrian conflict and related phenomena, the threat posed by radical Islamist terrorism has risen and taken new forms” (Boutin et al 2016, p.20). Moreover, in 2017 the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO) reported that Finland was no longer viewed as a neutral country by ISIS (“Finland: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018).

In August 2017, a Moroccan asylum seeker killed two women and wounded other passersby in Turku (Rosendahl & Forsell, 2017). Although no foreign terror group claimed the action, this has been considered the first terrorism-related attack in Finland (Anderson, 2017). Besides, other terrorist plots have been foiled by the Police. For instance, in 2014, Finnish authorities arrested two young suspects found guilty of plotting a violent attack at the University of Helsinki, allegedly inspired by the Boston bombings (“Finland: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018). Similarly, in 2015 two asylum seekers were arrested after “shooting 11 unarmed prisoners” on behalf of ISIS during Tikrit massacre in 2014 (Bilefsky, 2015). Currently, according to SUPO, radical Islam pose the greatest threat to Finland national security (“Finland: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018).

Regarding the foreign fighters contingent, according to the ICCT the mobilization of people joining the jihad started as early as 2012 (Boutin et al, 2016). The majority of foreign fighters are home-grown and come from the metropolitan area of Helsinki. According to SUPO, jihadist recruitment is more likely to occur via online social media rather than Finland-based radical network, as these groups are only “loosely structured” in Finnish society (Kerkela et al, 2014).

Despite the relatively low threat-assessment, Finland has committed to fight terrorism since 2010, and currently the counter-radicalization framework consists of two main pillars: the *Counter-Terrorism (CT) Strategy* and the *National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Extremism*. The first CT strategy was implemented in 2010 drawing from the 2005 EU CT strategy. The plan has been updated in 2014 and mainly focuses on terrorism prevention with a “particular attention to social exclusion and discrimination” (Codexter 2014, p.1). However, the strategy does not include any measure related to foreign fighting.

Instead, this phenomenon was addressed in the *National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Extremism* formulated in 2012 by the Ministry of the Interior. The objectives of the plan consist in setting up an anti-radicalization network that includes the Police, social workers, NGOs and religious communities in order to fight radicalization at the grassroot levels (“Preventive Work”, 2017). Provisions about foreign fighters have been formally introduced in the 2017 Annual Review, which provided the Plan with specific targets about the identification of people returning from conflict zones. Currently, the Action Plan is under scrutiny of the Ministry of the Interior and will be updated in the second half of 2018 (“Preventive Work”, 2017).

Lastly, the prevention of radicalism goes through specific policies addressing warzones returnees. For instance, the Police in the town of Pasila developed the so-called “Anchor Model”, consisting in a small team investigating on people returning from Syria to provide re-integration programs and address their needs (“Finland looking”, 2014). This program has eventually been extended to all police districts in 2015 (Boutin et al, 2016). Overall, the counter-radicalization framework set up by Finnish Intelligence is rather advanced, especially in view of the low level of threat vis-à-vis other European countries.

2. Denmark

In order to understand radicalization patterns among Muslim communities, it is necessary to start by looking at how religion is addressed in the Danish public sphere. First and foremost, Article 4 of the Danish constitution states that the *Evangelical Lutheran Church* is the National Church and the state must support it (“Denmark-Constitution”, n.d.). Most citizens are affiliated with the National Church, which as of January

2018 counts 75.3% of the total population as members (Statistics Denmark, 2018). Although only the National Church is entitled to receive direct subsidies from public taxation, the government officially recognizes other religious groups. However, the *Evangelical Church* still “enjoys some privileges” that are not available to other groups (Jacobsen 2015, p.176).

The emergence of other religious beliefs in Denmark is the consequence of migration flows in the last fifty years. After 1960, Denmark saw an increasing number of immigrants from Ex-Yugoslavia, Northern Africa and the Middle-East. Although the government tried to stop the inflows from non-Western countries (Jacobsen, 2015), conflicts in the Middle-East have propelled waves of political refugees and asylum seekers that have eventually been taken in as Danish citizens. As a result, the society has gradually become more ethnically-diverse and new religious groups started to demand recognition and civil rights.

Today, despite the predominance of the Evangelicals, Islam represents the largest minority religion. Although there is no official census of affiliation outside the National Church, the number of Muslims residing in the country can be estimated by looking at nationality, ethnicity and religion (Jacobsen, 2015). In 2013, national statistics assessed 244.400 individuals who recognized themselves as Muslims (Statistics Denmark, 2013), accounting for the 4,4% of the total population. Nowadays there are several different Islamic organizations in Denmark, mostly associated with mosques. The largest umbrella organization is the *Muslimernes Fællesråd (The United Council of Muslims)*, formed in 2006 and including 35.000 members of 13 different Islamic associations (Jacobsen, 2015).

2.1 Socio-Political Context

The Danish government is currently ruled by a minority coalition led by *Venstre* – the major center-right party – with the parliamentary support of other right-wing groups. Except for the period from 2011 to 2015, when the country was governed by a center-left coalition led by the *Social Democrats*, in the last twenty years the Danish political establishment has been mostly controlled by conservative parties. This environment has produced a leadership that has not always adopted the most tolerant approach towards ethnic minorities, especially concerning Muslims.

Several issues regarding the integration of Muslims have been often depicted as a potential threat to traditional Danish values. One recent debate about Islam in the public sphere is related to the Halal meat. Despite being one of the major exporters of Halal food to the Arabic world (Jacobsen, 2015), Halal animal slaughtering has been fiercely contested by public opinion and politicians. This issue has been going on since the 80's and the main argument against such practice is that it is deemed “uncivilized and un-Danish”

(Jacobson 2015, p.178). The debate sparked off again in 2013, following complaints by consumers who wanted to be informed whether the meat on sale in supermarkets was halal or not. The unfriendly attitude towards Islam is also epitomized by the infamous controversy of Muhammad caricatures. In 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published a series of caricatures about the prophet Muhammad in response to the discussion about Islam self-censorship and aniconism. The caricatures were considered offensive and blasphemous by the Muslim community, leading to strong protests all over the world.

The unfavorable sentiment towards Islam is also evident in Denmark's policy towards refugees. In comparison to other European countries, Denmark has accepted fewer asylum requests, especially of people from Muslim countries ("Europe's Migrants acceptance rate", 2015). Denmark has one of the strictest policies on immigration in Europe and for eight years it did not accept resettlement refugees from camps in predominantly Muslim countries, policy that has been labelled by the media as a "Muslim ban" (Ruth Brown, 2017). Finally, in 2016, Denmark has suspended the participation in UNHCR program to receive resettlement refugees; the Integration Minister accounted for the decision as to "give the municipalities a little breathing space and room to better take care of those who have already come here" ("Denmark suspends", 2016).

The restrictions imposed on Muslim migrants are part of a wider political agenda focused on nationalism and conservative values. However, as the largest minority, Muslims in Denmark are confronted with the challenge of a full integration in a society that shows a mounting intolerance towards them. According to a study carried out by the ICRI project, among European countries Denmark has one of the lowest scores for cultural rights granted to immigrants, and results are only slightly better for religious rights (Michalowski & Burchardt, 2015).

As a consequence, the socio-political atmosphere remains skeptical towards a further integration of Muslims into society. As a matter of fact, the Islamic faith is perceived as incompatible with the Danish identity, which is inevitably associated with the Evangelic Church. Borrowing Jacobson's words, it is evident that "according to this logic, one cannot be a Muslim and a Dane at the same time. Because Islam is the religion of 'the other', the religion of the Danish majority – The Evangelical-Lutheran Church – becomes implicitly important as a central part of the articulation of *Danish identity*" (2015, p.184).

2.2 Islamic Radicalization

Danish Intelligence has been long aware of the domestic threat posed by Islam radicalization. The latest deadly attack happened in February 2015, when two victims were killed in three separate shootings in Copenhagen, executed by a Danish-Palestinian young Muslim (Johnston, 2015). However, in the last decade,

Danish authorities have thwarted several terror plots by Islamist groups: in 2007, the police arrested eight militants of Al Qaeda planning a bomb attack in Copenhagen (“Denmark Says”, 2007); in 2010, the police detained five men that were organizing an attack against *Jyllands-Posten*, responsible for publishing the Muhammad caricatures (Wienberg, 2010); again, in 2016, Danish intelligence arrested a 15 years old Danish girl who converted to Islam and planned to bomb a Jewish school in Copenhagen (Barrett, 2017). Latest data provided by EUROPOL show that Denmark arrested eight people in 2016 with jihadist terrorism charges, the highest number among Scandinavian countries (Europol, 2017).

As for the foreign fighters phenomenon, Denmark has one of the highest numbers per head in Europe after Belgium, Austria and Sweden. According to ICCT report, most fighters are Danish citizens, male and coming from Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense (Boutin et al, 2016). The report also shows that unlike other countries, half of foreign fighters have reportedly returned to Denmark after being in the warzone. This represents a major threat to national security as these individuals were radicalized and potentially part of a jihadi network. The extent of this threat has been fully acknowledged by Danish authorities, that have developed an efficient framework aimed at countering radicalization.

Firstly, Denmark has put much effort into preventing the potential radicalization of vulnerable individuals. The latest policy in this area is the *Action Plan on Prevention of Radicalization and Extremism*, developed in September 2014 and involving the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Immigration, the Danish Intelligence (PET) and Danish Social Services (Boutin et al, 2016). The objective of the Action Plan is to:

“improve the work done to prevent people from joining extremist groups; support those who are already part of these groups but want to leave; make it clear that extremist actions have consequences; and [...] minimise the influence exerted by key figures involved in attempts to radicalize and recruit” (“Prevention of Radicalisation”, 2014)

In addition, Danish authorities were among the first to develop a framework to facilitate the rehabilitation of returning fighters. The so-called “Aarhus model” – named after the Danish town of Aarhus – is one of the most advanced approaches as it focuses on helping these individuals “find their way back into society” (Crouch & Henley, 2015). This strategy has attracted criticism from conservative parties, which consider it too soft to treat *de-facto* criminals, as well as by part of the public, who complains about the benefits given to these people in terms of jobs opportunities and subsidies (Henley, 2014).

However, Denmark’s counter-radicalization policy has been widely hailed to be one of the most comprehensive and effective in Europe. Magnus Ranstorp, Head of the EU Radical Awareness Network, has publicly praised Denmark to be “top of the class for multi-agency interventions to stop extremism” (Crouch & Henley, 2015). Although this method inevitably presents some drawbacks – such as the risk to result in a self-fulfilling prophecy – the adoption of an inclusive approach rather than a punitive one prevents the

creation of a vicious circle whereby policies perceived as anti-Islam end up fueling public discontent among Muslims and triggering further radicalization.

3. Sweden

In its approach to religion, Sweden represents an exception among Nordic countries. In fact, in 2000 it stopped recognizing the *Evangelic Lutheran Church of Sweden* as the state church, becoming the only country without an official religious affiliation in the Nordic region (Sutherland, 2018). Currently, the *Church of Sweden* is followed by 62% of the population, even though only 29% of Swedes claims to be religious (Sutherland, 2018). The secularity of Swedish society is remarkable also at a global level. A world-wide survey in 2015 defines Sweden as the “least religious countries in the Western world”, and the 4th least religious in the global ranking, after China, Hong Kong and Japan (“Sweden least religious nation”, 2015).

Although the official secularity of the state did not prevent various religious groups from being recognized and represented in society, religious diversification is quite a new phenomenon in Sweden, especially in terms of Islamic presence. Even though there are no official records regarding religious affiliation, it is estimated that 90% of Swedish Muslims “either came to Sweden or were born there after 1985” (Otterbeck & Bevelander, 2006). This shows that Islam arrived rather late vis-à-vis other European countries, and Muslims represent a new component of Swedish society.

Before then, the Swedish Muslim community was small and scattered: the first registered Islamic congregation was established by Estonian refugees in 1949 and mainly consisted of Tatars (Cato, 2015). In the 80’s, the Muslim population started to grow due to the increasing number of refugees coming from the Middle-East. This has contributed to the settlement of permanent Islamic communities, which have been gradually growing due to family reunifications and generous immigration laws. During the migrant crisis in 2015, Sweden has taken in more refugee per capita than any other European country (Cerrotti, 2017), resulting in a sharp increase of the Muslim population – from 4.6% of the total in 2010 to 8.1% in 2016 (Pew Research, 2017). Today, Sweden is the European country with the second largest share of Muslim population, after France.

The Muslim community started to institutionalize within Sweden society as early as the 70’s, when immigrants “perceived their stay as permanent” (Cato 2015, p.269). According to Swedish law, religious congregations are entitled to receive state grants if they “are considered to uphold and strengthen the fundamental principles and values in Swedish society, like democracy and equality between the sexes” (Cato 2015, p.269). These grants are conceived for any kind of religion: today, 75% of Muslim organizations receive

state grants (Cato 2015, p.269). The first nation-wide Islamic congregation was established in 1974 under the name of *United Islamic Congregations in Sweden* (FIFS) and was entitled to public funding from the year after. Internal divisions in the FIFS led to the creation of a second association, the *Muslim Federation of Sweden* (SMF), set up in 1982. In 1984, the *Union for Islamic Cultural Centers* (IKUS) was founded and in 2002 the *Islamic Congregations in Sweden* (SIF) was established. In addition, these umbrella organizations have set up joint committees to coordinate their work and provide a wider platform to advocate for the rights of Swedish Muslims. In 1988, the Islamic Cooperation Council (IS) was established together by FIFS, SMF and IKUS. Likewise, FIFS and SMF founded the *Muslim Council of Sweden* (SMR) in 1990 with the specific objective of lobbying for the creation of new mosques and Islamic schools (Cato, 2015).

The variety of associationism reflects a specific approach to integration carried out by the Swedish government, which has focused on pluralism as a way to assimilate people from different ethnicities and religions into Swedish society.

3.1 Socio-Political Context

The government of Sweden is known for its generous welfare state and its attention to social equality. In fact, one of the major Swedish parties – the *Social Democrats* – has received most votes in every election for more than two decades, although this not always resulted in a victory. After ten years of government, the *Social Democrats* were eventually ousted in 2006 elections by a majority coalition formed by the *Moderate Party* and other center-right allies (Watt, 2006). In 2010, the so-called “Alliance” – composed of the *Moderate Party*, the *Center Party*, the *Liberal People’s Party* and the *Christian Democrats* – won the elections and formed a minority coalition government. In that round, the far-right party *Sweden Democrats* also won parliament seats for the first time (Pietras, 2010).

The current Swedish government was appointed in 2014 general elections, which saw the return of a center-left coalition in office. The *Social Democrats*, first in the polls, managed to form a minority coalition government with the support of the *Green Party* (Nardelli, 2014). However, the *Sweden Democrats* gained positions and became the third largest party in the country (Groll, 2014). The outstanding results of this anti-immigration group raised concerns about the rise of populism and xenophobia, and the latest party-polls show that it has actually surpassed the *Moderates* and become the second largest party (“Far Right Sweden Democrats”, 2016). As the general elections are approaching – they are scheduled for September 2018 – Sweden’s left-wing is afraid that the rise of nationalist sentiments might lead to unprecedented results for the far-right, thereby putting an end to the policy of inclusiveness promoted so far in a bipartisan fashion.

Historically, Sweden policies have been extremely attentive towards social integration and inclusion of newcomers. In 1975, the Social Democratic government decided to replace the former integration model based on assimilation with one built upon multiculturalism, which would pay attention to preserve immigrants' traditions (Runblom, 1994). However, the multicultural model failed to take into account issues related to unemployment and welfare of these communities, and was therefore replaced in the 90's by a new focus on *diversity* (Sainsbury, 2006). Since 2000, new measures were introduced to ensure the integration of immigrants into Swedish society. These policies were based on equal rights that individuals enjoy in Sweden, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or sex (Roald, 2002).

The attention to social integration has been historically coupled with a welcoming approach towards refugees. During WWII, Sweden took in Jews from Denmark and other refugees fleeing from the Nazis regime; in the past decades, the country has adopted an open-door policy towards asylum seekers from all over the world, granting them the same social welfare entitled to Swedish citizens (Traub, 2016). This attitude has been part of Swedish culture and it results from the "moral commitment" to provide shelter against wars and tyrannies (Traub, 2016). As a consequence, Sweden is the European country that received most asylum seekers per capita during the refugee crisis in 2015 ("Global Trends" 2016, p.18).

In the specific case of the Islamic minority, the rapid growth of the Muslim population, as well as its institutionalization in the society, has paved the way for the involvement of Islamic institutions in Swedish politics. The collaboration with Muslim communities was initiated by the *Social Democrats* through the *Religious Social Democrats of Sweden*, an organization within the party established in 1924 (Lundberg, 1988). In the 90's, this side organization reached out to Islamic associations – mainly the SMR – as a way to attract Muslim voters (Cato, 2015). The political endeavor to involve Muslims consisted in the publication of an Islamic magazine, called *Islam&Politics*, to voice the opinions of Islamic congregations on salient issues rather than the usual marginal matters treated in the mainstream news (Cato, 2011). The newspaper also published a *manifesto of Muslim Social Democrats*, a political affiliation within the largest party that combined Islamic values and Swedish socialist views (Cato, 2011).

Despite the attention paid to pluralism and multiculturalism by Swedish policy-makers, the public opinion has been often divided about issues related to the integration of Muslims. In the earlier stage of the institutionalization of Islam into society, one of the subjects that attracted criticism was the practice of religious slaughter. According to Swedish law, animals must be stunned before being slaughtered, and this is not in compliance with some Jewish and Islamic practices (Cato, 2015). Religious slaughtering was perceived as a symbol of incompatibility between these groups and Swedish society, as it diverged from the common values conceived as acceptable.

In the 90's, the focus shifted to more practical matters. The public debate was concerned about the increasing number of independent Islamic School, perceived as a threat to the unified Swedish school system. Criticism was directed towards the contingency that these schools could further marginalize an already-marginalized group, making it more difficult for Muslim children to integrate into Swedish society (Cato, 2015). Later on, the public discourse on Muslims' integration became a matter of how religious principles could fit into the society without threatening Swedish secular values. In 2000's, the possibility of a state-sponsored Imam education arose in the political debate, sponsored by all major parties. This proposal was viewed as a way to improve the integration of Islamic communities by selecting Imams that supported Swedish values and prevented the diffusion of fundamentalist teachings (Cato, 2012).

Another critical issue in that period was the condition of women in Muslim countries. A state-commissioned inquiry concluded that the situation of women was an obstacle to "Sweden's relations with the Muslim world" (Cato 2012, p.188), as it contradicted the "undisputed national value" of Sweden, which is equality between individuals (Cato 2015, p.280).

Recently, the continuous stream of immigrants has fueled public discontent and discrimination. Concerns about radicalism and safety have breed resentment in Swedish citizens, who look at newcomers with increasing suspicion (Eddy, 2015). The rise in illegal immigration and its alleged impact on crime rates have not only inspired nationalist feelings, but also escalated in violence against Muslim communities. In 2014, arson attacks were carried out in three different locations, and other violent actions were directed to Muslims in public spaces (Eddy, 2015). Accordingly, the rise of the *Sweden Democrats* has led to an increasing Islamophobic discourse in Swedish political environment. In November 2017, a *Sweden Democrat* politician stated that Muslims were the opposite of humans (Maza, 2017), but then resigned after receiving harsh criticism.

To sum up, the Swedish socio-political context is characterized by a twofold level of discussion about Islam and society. While at a political level the *Social Democrats* have adopted a pluralist approach that is keen on the inclusion of various religious groups, on the other hand public opinion is increasingly concerned about the capacity of Swedish welfare to handle the relentless stream of immigrants. This is especially relevant in the public attitude towards Muslims, who have become the main target of far-right movements that perceive Islam as a threat to national security and stability of Swedish society.

3.2 Islamic Radicalization

In comparison to neighboring countries, Sweden has the highest perception of threat coming from Islamic radicalization, owing to recent terrorist attacks as well as a larger Muslim population. Sweden suffered from the first Islamist attack in 2010, when an Iraqi-born Swedish citizen carried out two bombings in Stockholm killing himself and injuring two passersby (“I never knew”, 2010). One year later, an Al-Qaeda plot to murder Lars Vilks, the author of the Muhammad caricatures, was foiled in Gothenburg; the suspects planned to assassinate him during an art festival he was supposed to attend (“Vilks was target”, 2011). Likewise, an ISIS-inspired terrorist plot was discovered in 2016 when the authorities arrested a 20 years old Swedish citizen planning to conduct a suicide bomb attack (Moore, 2016). Lastly, the deadliest incident happened in 2017, when an asylum seeker from Uzbekistan drove a truck into the crowd in Stockholm and killed five people (Završnik, 2017). The man was a confirmed ISIS recruit and his asylum request had been previously rejected by Swedish authority (Auyezov, 2017).

The presence of radical Islam in Sweden has been growing in the past few years. A 2010 report identified around 200 extremists living in the country, but the number has risen to thousands according to the head of the Swedish Security Services (SAPO), even though “most of them do not have the ability to carry out a terrorist attack in Europe” (Oliphant, 2017). Accordingly, the threat assessment has been raised to “high” in 2015 and the current level is kept confidential by the Swedish government (Boutin et al, 2016).

The levels of radicalization within society are also evident in the high number of foreign fighters departing from Swedish soil. The ICCT report shows that Sweden has the third highest number of FF per capita in Europe, after Belgium and Austria. In particular, the area of Gothenburg is considered one of the most active hotspots of jihadi recruitment in Europe (Ranstorp et al, 2015).

As a response, Sweden has developed a counter-radicalization approach that includes legislative efforts to criminalize foreign fighting as well as prevention policies to fight home-grown radicalism. The latest Counter-Terrorism strategy was formulated in 2015 and consisted in three pillars: (i) Prevent, meant as “counter and reduce the intent to commit or support terrorist attacks”; (ii) Preempt, namely “combat and reduce the capabilities and opportunities to commit terrorist attacks” and (iii) Protect, that implies “creating and maintaining protection for individuals and reducing society’s vulnerability to terrorist attacks” (Löfven & Ygeman, 2015). In addition, the existing anti-terrorism legislation was extended in 2016 to make illegal not only the recruitment, but also the journey abroad for terrorist purposes or military training (“Sweden: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018).

As regards radicalism prevention, Swedish authorities have carried out different initiatives to curb extremism. One of the major actions was the establishment of the *National Coordinator against Violent*

Extremism in 2014, with the purpose of coordinating all actors involved in the process and raising awareness on violent extremism (Boutin et al, 2016). Additionally, activities targeting foreign fighting returnees were also implemented at the local level. For instance, the city of Lund launched a project to reintegrate returnees into society by providing housing, employment and financial assistance to prevent them from further radicalization (“Sweden: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018).

However, Sweden’s strategy to halt radicalization at home suffers from serious weaknesses. The main obstacle is that the issue is highly sensitive in the political arena. As a result, preventive measures attract fierce criticism for being too indulgent towards extremist and any comprehensive approach has to confront opposition from right-wing parties. Also, this issue fails to be treated as a national security threat (Ali Pour, 2016); for instance, the *National Coordinator against Violent Extremism* has been set up under the Ministry of Culture, even though other counter-radicalization initiatives were carried out under the guidance of the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, the appointing of Mona Sahlin, the former *Social Democrats* party leader, as the *National Coordinator against Violent Extremism* has been criticized by the media due to previous corruption allegations. These concerns proved to be legitimate as she resigned from office after caught hiring her bodyguard and his relatives to work in the agency and providing a false certificate to help him get a house-mortgage (“Mona Sahlin quits”, 2016).

To put it in Ranstorp’s words, Sweden “lags behind its neighbors in terms of formulating a response to hundreds of young Swedish fighters in the Middle East” (Crouch & Henley, 2015). In comparison to Denmark, Sweden’s approach is poorly coordinated and scarcely addressed in national plans, and although the threat has been formally acknowledged by the authorities, the current strategy risks to overlook the impact of potential incubators of extremists like, for instance, Gothenburg suburbs. As a result, the Nordic country with the highest number of foreign fighters per capita is also the only one without a counter-radicalism strategy that suits the actual level of threat.

The comparative analysis shows that the three countries are subjected to different levels of radicalization. By looking at the number of foreign fighters, as well as the terrorist threat assessed by the authorities, for the purpose of the empirical analysis the Islamic radicalization will be displayed on a scale consisting of four levels: low, medium, high and very high.

	Finland	Denmark	Sweden
<i>FF (Absolute Number)</i>	70	125	300
<i>FF (per million population)</i>	12.77	22	30.6
<i>Terrorist attacks (completed and foiled)</i>	3	4	4
<i>Overall level of radicalization</i>	Medium	High	Very High

Table 2: Levels of radicalization in the selected countries

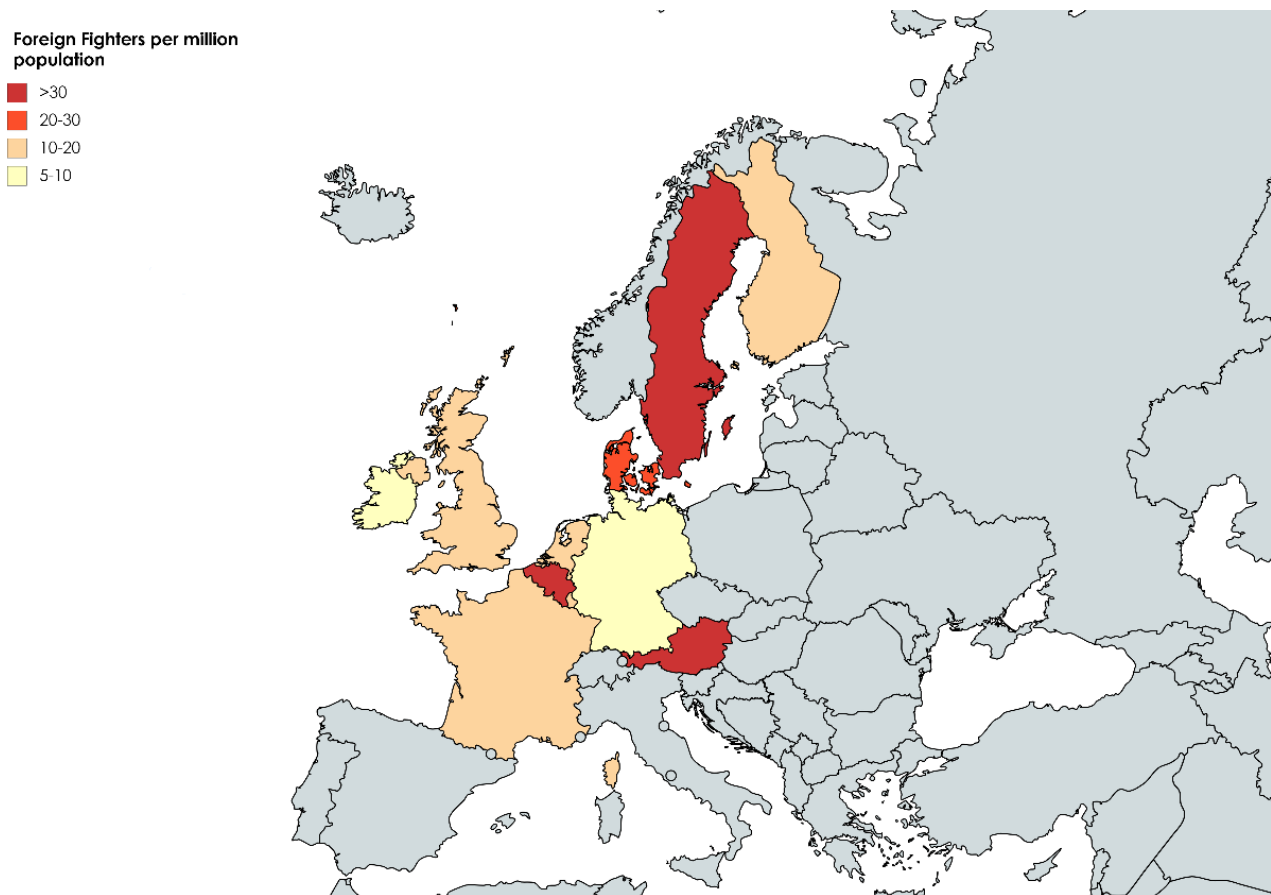


Figure 1 Foreign Fighters per million population (own elaboration based on data retrieved from Boutin et al, 2016)

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

This section will compare variables between the selected countries by focusing on one hypothesis at a time. The qualitative analysis will first relate the levels of perceived discrimination and provide an explanation for the different results in each country. The second comparison will then look at the jihadist network and its effect on Islam radicalization.

The empirical analysis will proceed by illustrating the two hypotheses in a table including the control factors and the selected independent variable. Then, the study will look into more details at the situation in each country, explaining the correlation between the data and Islamic radicalization.

1. H1: Perceived Discrimination and Islamic Radicalization

The first hypothesis holds that countries where discrimination is more widespread are likely to have higher levels of Islamic radicalization. The levels of discrimination perceived within society are displayed in the Table as X_1 .

		Finland	Denmark	Sweden
Control variables	GINI Index	<0.3	<0.3	<0.3
	GDP PPP*	\$ 42006 (20 th)	\$ 48674 (14 th)	\$ 47891 (15 th)
	Material Deprivation	Very Low**	Very Low**	Very Low**
	People at risk of Social Exclusion***	16.8%	17.7%	16%
	Feelings of Attachment	3.9/5	4.6/5	4.4/5
X_1	Perceived Discrimination	Medium	High	Very High
Y	Radicalization levels	Medium	High	Very High

Table 3: Impact of perceived discrimination on levels of radicalization

* position in the world ranking in brackets (Retrieved from World Bank Open Data for 2016)

**very low = < 5%

*** as percentage of total population

1.1 Discrimination in Finland

Finland shows the lowest levels of ethnic discrimination among the selected cases. This aspect is evident in different areas of the political and social context.

First of all, it is worth looking at numerical indicators able to assess how widespread is discrimination in Finland. A 2015 report by Eurobarometer shows that 67% of Finnish citizens believe that ethnic discrimination is widespread in their country (“Discrimination in the EU”, 2015). Compared to Denmark and Sweden, Finland has the lowest percentage. Accordingly, only 35% of the population believes that discrimination based on religious beliefs is widespread, also the lowest value among the selected cases (“Discrimination in the EU”, 2015).

Besides, Finnish political context seems to be adopting a favorable approach towards multiculturalism and religious diversity. Although the participation of the *Finns Party* in the coalition government might reflect a higher hostility towards people with non-Finnish ethnic background, the crisis in 2017 and the following split of the party show that the government is not responsive to anti-Muslims discourses. In fact, the electoral success of the right-wing party seems rather unlikely to continue, as latest polls show the percentage of people supporting the *Finns Party* plummeting to 8% (Raeste, 2018).

The declining appeal of discriminatory ideologies reflects a social environment that is comparatively more inclusive towards different ethnicities. One of the reasons can be found in the relatively small Muslim population residing in Finland. In fact, when analyzing the rhetoric behind ethnic discrimination in the public debate, it appears clear that the main concerns revolve around the fiscal burden related to hosting refugees and the alleged effects of immigration on public security. Despite some extreme reactions – such as the establishment of the “Soldiers of Odin” – most of the population is tolerant towards Islam as long as it does not pose a threat to national security, such as in the case of the mega-mosque project. This is inevitably related to the number of the Muslims in Finland, estimated to be 2.7% of the population in 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2017). Such a small share is unlikely to raise any concern about the incompatibility between Islam precepts and Finnish values, because the population does not perceive that Muslims are threatening the social institutions they are used to.

Also, lower levels of discrimination based on religious beliefs can be explained by the high religiosity of Finnish population. Finland has two national churches and according to the Gallup Poll in 2015, it is the most religious among the three selected cases (Smith, 2018).

Lower levels of discrimination should correspond to a lower degree of Islamic radicalization. In fact, Finland has the lowest number of foreign fighters per million population among the selected countries –

12.77 individuals in 2015. Accordingly, Finland has also been less exposed to Islamic terrorism vis-à-vis Denmark and Sweden, with the only attack being the stabbing in Turku occurred in 2017.

However, although ethnic discrimination is lower in comparison to other Nordic countries, anti-Islamic feelings are not inexistent, and episodes like the Soldiers of Odin patrolling the streets or protests in front of refugee centers are nonetheless symptoms of a society that is not completely resilient to xenophobic ideologies.

1.2 Discrimination in Denmark

The levels of discrimination within Danish society appear much higher compared to the Finnish case. First of all, when looking at numerical indicators, both ethnic and religion based discrimination have higher scores for Denmark. According to Eurobarometer, 78% of the population believes that discrimination based on ethnicity is widespread in the country, and 63% has the same opinion about discrimination based on religious beliefs (“Discrimination in the EU”, 2015). Both these values are higher than Finland, nearly twice as much for the second index.

Ethnic discrimination is also evident at the political level. The recent anti-immigration policies reveal an approach that tends to be particularly discriminatory towards Muslims. For years, Denmark has not selected refugees from camps in Muslim countries, even excluding them from the target group for resettlement purposes (Ruth Brown, 2017). In addition, a 2016 disposition by the EU Court of Justice ruled that Danish family reunification law was illegal since it limited the rights of Turkish workers to bring along their families (“Danish families reunification laws illegal”, 2016). As a consequence, Denmark appears to be one of the most anti-immigration countries in Europe. One episode that can best epitomize Denmark’s commitment to stop immigration happened in 2015, when the Ministry of Immigration placed an advert on Lebanese newspapers urging refugees “not to come to Denmark” (Taylor, 2015). More recently, political attacks were also directed at Muslim veils, which a recent proposal has banned from public spaces (Cockborn, 2018).

This particular environment reflects the conservative ideology that has dominated the political establishment for decades. In particular, the results of the last general elections in 2015 – where the anti-immigration far-right *Danish People Party* became the second largest party (Rose, 2015) – have further exacerbated the discrimination perceived by ethnic minorities. In fact, despite the far-right wing is losing votes according to the latest polls (“Politiske meningsmålinger”, 2018), public opinion maintains an unfriendly stance towards Islam.

The debate about Muslims and social integration revolves around the concern that Islam poses a threat to traditional Danish values. The ban of the full-face veil, the issue about halal meat as well as the recent call for immigrants to celebrate Christmas to prove their “Danishness” (Brygger, 2017) are all framed as a way to stop the perceived Islamization of the society. The episode of Muhammad caricatures exemplifies how Islam is deemed to be threatening basic values like, in this case, freedom of expression. The polarization of the debate risks to intensify the portrayal of Islam as a threat to democracy, and on the other hand the emphasis on freedom of expression is perceived by Islamic communities as an encouragement to blasphemy, thereby creating social anger and sense of alienation in Danish Muslims.

However, the anti-Muslims discourse is mostly conveyed at the political level, and even though ethnic discrimination is more widespread than in Finland, the majority of the population does not associate the increasing presence of Islam with safety concerns; as a matter of fact, Danish are among the people who feel safest in the world – unlike Sweden (“OECD Better Life Index”, 2018).

As regards Islamic radicalization, Denmark has one of the highest number of foreign fighters per head in Europe – 22 every million citizens, almost twice the number of Finland. Especially relevant is the problem of returnees from the Middle-East, which authorities have addressed through one of the most advanced policies in the world. In addition, several jihad-inspired terrorist plots have been foiled by the police, and in 2015 two people were killed by a militant Islamists. These figures reflect a high level of Islamic radicalization, which partly arises out of widespread discrimination.

1.3 Discrimination in Sweden

Among the countries selected in the study, Sweden shows the highest level of discrimination towards Muslims. This is evident in different areas.

First of all, the Eurobarometer report indicates Sweden as the country with the highest level of discrimination based on ethnicity in Europe – 84% of the population believes that is widespread – and with the third highest score for religion-based discrimination – 67% of the population (“Discrimination in the EU”, 2015). These results are significantly higher than Finland – almost by two times for the religion-based indicator – and slightly more than Denmark.

Yet, Swedish political approach to immigration and ethnic diversity seems to prove differently. Sweden has been one of the most welcoming countries to refugees from all-over the world and its approach to social integration values multiculturalism and diversity as an asset. As regards the attitude towards Islam,

Swedish politicians have followed an inclusive line attempting to involve Islamic congregations in the political arena, in order to publicly show that Islam faith is compatible with Swedish values. Accordingly, the proposal to grant public funds to Islamic schools reflected the political endeavor to reconcile the feelings of being Muslim and Swedish at the same time.

However, the results of the *Sweden Democrats* in last elections suggest that the public view on integration has significantly changed. The rise of far-right populism is rather exceptional for Swedes, who have always treasured tolerance and diversity as national values. This trend is even more alarming if compared to the other two countries in the study. Although Denmark and Finland also witnessed unprecedented results of right-wing parties, opinion polls show that these groups are currently losing public consent. Instead, *Sweden Democrats* have been gaining supporters and surveys show that it is overtaking the *Moderate Party* as the second largest political group (“In September 2018”, 2018).

These results reveal that the general public has become increasingly unsupportive of Sweden’s open doors and mounting concerns are questioning the actual capacity of Swedish society to absorb the large number of refugees fleeing from the Middle-East. As stated by the Stockholm district court, during the migrant crisis in 2015 “Government agencies were not prepared [...] because they didn’t know how many were going to come” (“How Sweden handled the refugee crisis”, 2017). The mishandling of the situation was evident, for instance, in the shortage of housing for refugees, resulted in geographical segregation of the newcomers in metropolitan suburbs. In addition, the increasing size of Muslim population is perceived as a threat to Swedish values. This concern is epitomized by the huge public attention on, for instance, the role of women in Muslim countries. Besides, the occurrence of Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe – and more recently in Sweden – has raised concerns about the acceptance of refugees coming from areas subjected to radicalization, thereby fueling skepticism and anti-Muslims sentiments.

As a result, the increasing Islamophobic episodes made Swedish Muslims perceive higher levels of discrimination. As an example, after cases of harassment and vandalization of their centers, the Somali community in the town of Forserum turned to the UN’s *Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* to accuse the Swedish government of not combatting discrimination (Törnkvist, 2013). In addition, mosques have become the target for anti-Muslims militants: in 2014, mosques in Uppsala, Eskilstuna and Eskov were vandalized and fire-attacked (Eddy, 2015).

To sum up, the situation seems specular to the Danish case, where Islamophobic rhetoric is mainly conveyed by the political establishment. In Sweden, instead, politicians maintain moderate views – except for the *Sweden Democrats* – whereas public opinion seems to have adopted far more extremist stances. The discrimination perceived by Islamic communities has exacerbated the quest for identity in Swedish Muslims and increased the appeal of radical discourses. In fact, Swedish suburbs represent one of the major hotbeds

for jihadist recruitment in Europe, with an average of 30,6 individuals per million population joining the jihad in the Middle-East.

The qualitative analysis of the three cases shows that different levels of discrimination towards Muslims correspond to different levels of Islamic radicalism. Specifically, countries where discrimination is more widespread also have higher degrees of radicalization in the society, resulting in more individuals joining the jihad. The positive correlation between discrimination and the Islamic radicalization confirms the first hypothesis of the research.

2. H2: Jihadist Network and Islamic Radicalization

In the second hypothesis, it is expected that individuals in countries with wider jihadist networks are more likely to undergo a radicalization process, since they are more exposed to radical milieu and recruitment carried out by Islamist groups. Therefore, different extensions of jihadist networks in the selected countries are expected to produce differing levels of radicalization.

		Finland	Denmark	Sweden
<i>Control variables</i>	GINI Index	<0.3	<0.3	<0.3
	GDP PPP*	\$ 42006 (20 th)	\$ 48674 (14 th)	\$ 47891 (15 th)
	Material Deprivation	Very Low**	Very Low**	Very Low**
	People at risk of Social Exclusion***	16.8%	17.7%	16%
	Feelings of Attachment	3.9/5	4.6/5	4.4/5
X ₂	Jihadist Network	Limited	Present	Extensive
Y	Radicalization levels	Medium	High	Very High

Table 4: Impact of Jihadist Network on levels of radicalization

* position in the world ranking in brackets (Retrieved from World Bank Open Data for 2016)

**very low = < 5%

*** as percentage of total population

2.1 Jihadist Network in Finland

Despite the increase in jihadism-inspired groups, authorities report that the Islamist network is “loosely organized” in Finland (Kerkela et al, 2014). Firstly, the Muslim community is significantly smaller vis-à-vis other European countries. In 2010, Muslims accounted for 1.09% of the total population, compared to 3.87% in Denmark and 4.38% in Sweden (Pew Research Center, 2017). Even though recent studies estimate the number to have more than doubled in the last 5 years, the Islamic community remains significantly smaller compared to neighboring countries and other European states (Pew Research Center, 2017). Although recruitment systems can wholly develop even within a small community, it is safe to assume that the larger it is, the more likely it will be for Islamist groups to establish deeper social connections and develop more extensive networks.

In addition, Muslims in Finland result rather resilient to radical rhetoric. As noted by Juha Saarinen (2013), Finnish Muslims are few and moderate. Radicalized groups are not very active in Finnish society and individuals that undergo radicalization processes are likely to join small-scale radical groups with local agendas rather than engage in the “global jihad” (Saarinen, 2013). For instance, the “Sharia4” movement – present in most European countries – has not developed any Finnish counterpart.

Indeed, the recruitment network has not really rooted well in Finland. The largest Islamist group is deemed to be *Al-Shabaab*, owing to the consistent Somali diaspora in the country. However, the recruitment efforts carried out by this cell proved unsuccessful thanks to the *Finnish Somali League*, which organized campaigns to prevent radicalization and underline the un-Islamic principles conveyed by *Al-Shabaab* (Saarinen, 2013). Accordingly, Finnish fighters reportedly have little pre-existing connections to jihadist groups in their home-countries (Saarinen, 2013), and the decision to reach the Middle-East mostly arises from self-radicalization processes.

Hence, low levels of Islamic radicalization can be attributed to the loose structure of the Islamist recruitment net. As a result, despite the emergence of a “nascent jihadist underworld” (Teivainen, 2017), Finnish society does not result as much permeated by jihadist circles as Denmark or Sweden.

2.2 Jihadist Network in Denmark

The Danish radical milieu is characterized by a more organized structure compared to Finland. According to the Danish Intelligence (PET), groups with a “militant Islamist outlook” represent the main threat to Danish security (“Denmark: Extremism & Counter-Extremism”, 2018).

Indeed, the first traces of Islamist groups active in Denmark can be found in the early 90's, when Said Mansour, a Danish citizen with linked to the Egyptian-based jihadist organization *al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*, funded a publishing house with extremist indoctrination purposes (Hemmingsen, 2016). As jihadism was not treated as a national security threat prior to 9/11, members of this group were relatively free to propagandize and convey their message via media outlets. Later on, the jihadist circle started to develop in a more structured way thanks to Shiraz Tariq, considered as "the most prominent jihad figure in Denmark" ("Denmark's Foreign Fighters", 2017).

Drawing inspiration from the Salafist network in the UK, Tariq founded the *Kaldet til Islam* (Call for Islam) group in 2004, through which he advocated for the *jihad* and the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate in Denmark. His activities included sending letters to Muslim inmates and proselytizing on the streets in favor of the implementation of the *Sharia* (Skjoldager, 2016). In 2011, this group even created *Sharia zones* in northern Copenhagen to patrol against behaviors deemed contrary to Islam precepts (Isherwood, 2011). After the outburst of the Syrian conflict, Tariq and his network turned up to recruit potential fighters to send to the Middle-East. Interviews with Danish foreign fighters show that the group has been the main recruitment platform for radicalized individuals and today it still represents the major hotbed of Danish fighters (Hemmingsen, 2016).

However, the jihadist network in Denmark is not limited to Tariq's affiliates. In some cases, mosques have been proved to serve as recruitment hotspots for potential jihadis. In 2013, an Islamist preacher from the Qubo Mosque in the outskirt of Copenhagen was believed to have provided "spiritual guidance to aspiring Danish terrorists [...] and solicited funds for the Al-Nusra Front" (Lundquist, 2013). Similarly, among the Danish contingent of foreign fighters, at least 22 individuals attended the Grimhojvej Mosque, who did not condemn ISIS and whose former preacher had been listed among US suspected terrorists (Wheeler, 2015). Besides, Danish authorities have stressed the importance of online platforms for jihadist recruitment, which currently contributes as much as physical connections. In this regard, the movement "Sharia4Denmark" is considered one of the most prominent in Europe, alongside "Sharia4Belgium" and "Sharia4UK" (Musharbash, 2015).

Most importantly, the high number of returnees – one of the highest in Europe – represents a challenge for national authorities as these individuals are likely to have strong connections with Islamist groups; therefore, if not de-radicalized, their pre-existing ties could help enlarge the jihadist circle already available in Denmark. Last but not least, the larger Muslim population vis-à-vis Finland implies that the audience exposed to potential radicalization is wider, resulting in more chances for jihadists to succeed in recruitment.

The existence of a densely-structured jihadist net can partly account for higher levels of radicalization in Danish society. In fact, Dane foreign fighters are “mainly affiliated with Islamist circles in cities such as Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense, and half of the returnees are part of Islamist circles” (Boutin et al, 2016, p.15).

2.3 Jihadist Network in Sweden

Sweden has arguably one of the most extensive jihadist networks in Europe. In the last decade, the country has become a hotbed for Islamist recruitment for conflicts around the world (Cheng, 2012). This phenomenon is particularly evident in the so-called *exposed areas*, namely “socially deprived areas hit by high criminality and low socio-economic status” (Gustafsson & Ranstorp 2017, p.5). These areas have witnessed the development of parallel societies marked by high crime-rate, fundamentalism and recruitment of foreign fighters (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017).

The extension of Swedish jihadist circle has been verified in different circumstances. A recent report by Swedish Intelligence confirmed that the number of Islamist sympathizers has increased over the years, and the thousands of people documented by the police also include terrorist recruiters and fundraisers (“From Hundreds to Thousands”, 2017). Also, many of the jihadists involved in terrorist activities worldwide are Swedish nationals or have been based in Sweden in the past decade. For instance, Osama Krayem – suspected to have taken part in both Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016 – is a Swedish citizen from Malmo; likewise, Mohamed Belkaid – one of the terrorists involved in 2015 Paris attacks – lived in Northern Stockholm for several years (Cheng, 2012). Lastly, evidence from social media shows that Swedish foreign fighters tend to cluster together in Syria, proving that they are part of the same jihadist circle recruiting them in the first place (Gustafsson, 2012).

The Islamist milieu in Sweden operates through a wide-ranging network of organizations. Firstly, recruitment activities have reportedly taken place in different mosques across the country. Bellevue Mosque, in Gothenburg, is supposed to have connections with terrorist organizations and in 2009 it was visited by the spiritual leader of *Al-Shabaab* (Hakim, 2016). Likewise, jihadist recruitment also occurred in Örebro and Eskilstuna’s Mosques; in the latter, Salafists have tried to take over the Board of the Mosque after a donation from Qatari residents (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). Also, money collection took place in the Gävle Mosque to finance terrorist attacks in Iraq, and on another occasion the Imam of the mosque set up a donation event to help the families of suicide bombers (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). However, jihadist recruitment also

generates “quietly in small apartments [...] or unofficial places of worship, that make little or no effort to conceal their activities” (Boutin et al 2016, p.47).

In addition to mosques, Muslim civil society is also part of the radical network in Sweden. For instance, the *Islamic Association of Sweden* (IFIS) is an open sympathizer of the Muslim Brotherhood and has been listed as Terrorist Organization by the United Arab Emirates (Ali Pour, 2016). Another civil organization involved in the jihadist network is the *Eid Charity*, which has allegedly financed *Al-Qaeda* affiliated groups in the Middle-East (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). Moreover, according to Ulf Boström – Sweden’s Integration Policy Inspector – the strong presence of Wahhabi centers, especially in some areas of Gothenburg, has contributed to radicalization by working as “religious engines” for jihadism (Smith, 2016).

Lastly, extremist propaganda is also present on social media. Besides Facebook, where foreign fighters share their videos, several forums in Swedish language have been set up to report news from the Islamic State and spread the jihad (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). The importance of social media was confirmed in the 2017 Stockholm attacks, where the perpetrator Rakhmat Akilov was found to have access to Uzbek jihadist propaganda via the Russian social media *Odnoklassniki* (“Stockholm terror suspect”, 2017).

These episodes show that Muslims in Sweden are exposed to a dense network of jihadists, which has made the country one of the major bases for recruitment in Europe. In some areas, such as Gothenburg, the network is so embedded in the community that “recruiters work 24 hours a day, seven days a week at many places where refugees stay and live”, looking for youngsters to indoctrinate and send to Syria (Smith, 2016). Fundamentalism is so widespread that in some areas religious enforcers started to carry out Sharia patrols to intimidate Muslims who do not show a proper compliance with Islamic precepts (Hakim,2016).

There are several factors that account for the pervasiveness of jihadism in Sweden’s Islamic community. The first aspect to take into account is the size of the Muslim population compared to the other countries selected in the study. In 2010, the share of Muslim population in Sweden was nearly four times the share of Finland, and 0.6% higher than Denmark (Pew Research Center, 2017). In addition, Sweden has one of the highest percentage of returnees, and these individuals are likely to support the pre-existing network through propaganda activities and social connections. For instance, in 2015 former ISIS fighters have openly propagated for the Islamic State during local meetings aimed at preventing radicalization (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017).

In addition, Sweden has the highest crime rate in Northern Europe (“Northern Europe”, n.d.), and this has a negative effect on Islamic radicalization. Evidence shows that jihadist networks tend to be more dense in areas with high concentration of crimes (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017). Likewise, many foreign fighters have petty crimes background and have undergone radicalization process while in prison (El Said & Barrett, 2017).

However, the main factors accounting for such an extensive radical milieu have been addressed in Peter Hyllengren's study. First of all, Hyllengren underlines how Sweden has only recently updated its anti-terror legislation, and this allowed Islamist groups to operate relatively freely in the country (Cheng, 2012). Most importantly, the reason why the jihadist network was able to develop so extensively is that fighting jihadism in Sweden has been kept out of the political agenda because too controversial. Whereas in other countries jihadism was treated in the same way as neo-Nazism and other extremist movements, in Sweden the risk to "be called out as a racist" has prevented politicians from addressing the issue (Cheng, 2012). This hindered the action of the Swedish Intelligence and, as a result, Islamist groups were able to work rather openly in the society.

Hence, the higher number of foreign fighters vis-à-vis Finland and Denmark can be attributed to the more extensive recruitment network available in Sweden.

The cross-country analysis indicates that the presence of jihadist networks has an impact on the levels of radicalization. In fact, countries where such networks are more extensive are subjected to higher degree of Islamic radicalization. Therefore, the second hypothesis is also confirmed.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The cross-country analysis shows that both perceived discrimination and the presence of jihadist networks are relevant determinants for levels of Islamic radicalization. In fact, the empirical results prove that co-variation between the independent and dependent variables can be found in the selected cases, thereby confirming the validity of both hypotheses.

The qualitative analysis highlighted that the three countries present different situations in terms of discrimination towards Muslims, with Sweden showing the most discriminatory attitudes, followed by Denmark and Finland. According to the French Sociology theory, being discriminated becomes a potential driver for radicalization as it makes Muslims perceive that their religious belief is not compatible with the society they live in, thereby increasing their sense of “non-belonging”. The consequential identity crisis and disengagement with standard values are likely to result in deviant behaviors, among which radicalism. This expectation is confirmed by the empirical analysis, which underlines how Sweden – where anti-Muslim sentiments are more widespread – is also the country with the highest levels of radicalization among the case-studies. On the contrary, the lower degree of discrimination perceived by Danish and Finnish Muslims makes them less likely to be attracted by radical discourses.

Likewise, the study finds that higher levels of radicalization can be found in countries with a more extensive network of jihadists. In fact, the presence of Islamist groups as well as organized networks of recruitment allows for more individuals to be exposed to radical propaganda and become attracted to extreme discourses. The empirical analysis underlines how radical circles clustered together in a specific area are particularly dangerous for radicalization – such as the suburbs of Gothenburg – as they become radical hot beds for recruitment and sometimes see the emergence of a parallel society based on Islamic precepts. These findings are in line with the Social Movement theory, as they prove that contact with radical peers and the active recruitment carried out by Islamist cells are indeed a determinant for higher levels of radicalization.

The cross-country analysis shows that both independent variables have an effect on Islamic radicalization; however, the qualitative design is not able to assess the difference between the effect of single variables and the potential combinations of the two of them. While it can be assumed that if both discrimination and jihadist networks are widespread in the country, radicalization is likely to increase, it cannot be measured whether X_1 or X_2 are singularly more relevant. However, according to earlier research, the influence of radical peers is determinant for radicalization processes only under the condition that individuals have already undergone a cognitive opening towards certain ideas (Coolsaet, 2015). As a result, top-down recruitment and peer-to-peer propaganda tend to be less effective if individuals are not likely to internalize radical discourses. Hence, despite jihadist networks are fundamental to finalize radicalization, the

frustration arising from perceived discrimination is the precondition for such networks to make inroads in potentially radical individuals.

In conclusion, it is worth addressing the association between the size of Muslim population and radicalization. At a first glance, the data show that countries with more Muslim residents are also subjected to higher levels of radicalization. Although the size of the Muslim community is relevant to the development of jihadist networks, the number itself does not have an impact on Islamic extremism. However, evidence shows that the size of Muslim population may have an indirect effect on perceived discrimination. For instance, the high levels of discrimination in Sweden are related to the incapacity of the government to handle the huge number of asylum seekers during the migrant crisis. The approach of the Swedish government made the country accept more refugees per capita than other European states; however, the authorities did not take into account the implication of this policy on social stability. The huge inflow of refugees put under considerable stress the Swedish generous welfare and at some point it was clear than they took in more migrants than they could handle. The mishandling of the newcomers resulted in social discontent and urban segregation, and this inevitably affected public opinion. However, the discontent about refugees – most of them from Muslim countries – ended up being directed towards *all* Muslims, even those already settled in Swedish society.

Hence, although the debate about Islam and society was already existing before 2015, following the refugee crisis issues related with management of migration flows have resulted in a general anti-Muslim sentiment that indistinctively targeted any person related to Islam. As a result, the size of Muslim population appears to have a relation with Islamic radicalization because the way national administrations managed the inflows of newcomers seems to affect the public view about Islam.

This has a twofold implication. First of all, it shows that the positive/negative perception of newcomer refugees has an impact on the whole debate about Islam and society, and therefore it is likely to affect perceived discrimination. This correlation implies that public bodies are responsible for the discrimination perceived by Muslims, and indirectly for higher levels of radicalization. Secondly, the findings on discrimination show that extremism does not arise out of a social vacuum, but is highly dependent on individual experiences of young European Muslims. Therefore, people's behaviors and expressions have a significant impact on radicalization, and discriminatory practices towards Muslims are likely to backfire in the long run and channel the frustration felt by Muslims into radical views. Therefore, the whole society is to some extent accountable for Islamic radicalization because ideas that misrepresent Muslims or support discriminatory practices are likely to trigger a cognitive opening in potential jihadists, and this includes media outlets, social networks, as well as minor actions in the everyday life.

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of Islamic radicalization has been increasingly addressed by the literature, which has provided several explanations for individuals to undergo such process and engage in radical actions. Given the wide array of reasons outlined by previous research, this study has narrowed down the analysis by focusing on a set of variables suitable for an empirical approach and based on theoretical assumptions.

As a result, the thesis finds that the discrimination perceived by Muslims and the extension of jihadist networks are both accountable for different degrees of Islamic radicalization in European countries. Consequently, discriminatory narratives towards Islam are likely to result in higher levels of radicalization; likewise, the presence of jihadist circles contributes as much to radicalization as it increases the exposure of vulnerable individuals to radical discourses, providing a purpose into which frustration and anger can be channeled.

Although the importance of these variables has already been acknowledged by the literature, the thesis provides empirical insights to confirm the effect thereof on Islamic radicalism. In addition, the analysis has outlined other factors that, despite not being directly related to radicalization, play a significant role in the process. Firstly, discrimination towards Muslims is found to be partly driven by concerns related to increasing inflows of migrants after the refugee crisis. Secondly, the size of Muslim population itself might have an impact on both anti-Muslim discrimination and jihadist networks. However, the refugee crisis has only been mentioned to provide a further explanation for different levels of discrimination in Finland, Denmark and Sweden. In fact, the extent to which this event has triggered further discrimination is highly unpredictable and depends on a variety of factors that make it unsuitable for being taken as an independent variable. As a result, the thesis holds that both migration patterns and the size of Muslim population are relevant to radicalization only as long as they have an impact on discrimination and jihadist circles.

As regards the external validity, the study has been conducted on a sample of Nordic countries that comply with a most-similar case study design. The findings are thereby applicable to non-Muslim countries that share similar values for the control factors selected in the research. In fact, the main reason behind the selection of such sample has been the similar degree of material deprivation combined with a rather generous welfare present in these countries. By doing this, the study has deliberately dismissed material deprivation as a potential driver for radicalization, since its relevance has not been addressed unanimously by the literature. Nevertheless, the findings provide an understanding of Islamic radicalization that is valid in any case – regardless of their similarity to the selected countries. In fact, although an empirical research conducted on another sample might produce different results, it is safe to assume that discrimination and jihadist networks have to some extent a significant impact on Islamic radicalization in any European country.

Therefore, the results can be used to inform European policy makers and provide an empirical basis to shape a better understanding of the radicalization of European Muslims.

1. Policy implications

The findings of the study raise relevant questions regarding how Islamic radicalization can be further prevented in European societies.

First, the relevance of perceived discrimination as a driver for radicalization in young Muslims should be taken into account in counter-extremism plans. In fact, the increasing anti-Muslim rhetoric in the public sphere is likely to fuel the identity crisis that many second generation migrants are facing, as they see Islamic faith incompatible with mainstream values. However, often times discriminatory discourses are conveyed by the political leadership in the first place, giving vent to nationalist and Islamophobic expressions among the society. Instead, the government should avoid any narrative that represents Islam as something “alien” to European societies. Therefore, rather than framing it as a threat to acceptable values, political leaders should transmit the idea that being Muslim can be part of the European identity, just like other religions. Likewise, when discussing the issue of social integration of Muslim communities, the media should adopt a pluralist approach and give voice to exponents from Muslim civil society. As a policy option, governments should take a stricter position towards xenophobic messages and expressions of extreme nationalism – like in the case of the “Soldiers of Odin”.

As regards the impact of jihadist networks, counter-terrorism programs in European countries highly focus on the identification of jihadists and the dismantling of radical circles. Both national Intelligence Agencies and the EUROPOL target recruiters and informal networking with Islamist outlook. However, the example of Gothenburg shows that radical milieu is more likely to develop in areas with high concentration of crimes and ethnic segregation. Therefore, counter-radicalism should also take into account the circumstances that facilitate the expansion of jihadist circles. In Sweden, for instance, the lack of affordable housing for newcomers resulted in urban segregation and no-go zones (“So... are they no-go zones?”, 2017). For these reasons, preventing radicalism begins by ensuring a proper administration of housing policies and suburban isolation. Although urban planning is already part of the political agenda, this policy area should also be addressed from a national-security perspective.

Although these policies will undoubtedly address some of the reasons behind Islamic radicalization – and therefore contribute to decrease its levels – the outcome of these measures remains rather unpredictable. In fact, the countries selected for the empirical research share similarities in regard of integration policies and welfare of second generation Muslims. Hence, they would be expected to show

similar results in terms of Islamic radicalization. However, this is not the case. In fact, the existence of a policy does not guarantee *per se* a certain outcome, but several other factors play a significant role in determining the results. For instance, similar policies can be implemented in different ways and more or less efficiently.

Nevertheless, the findings can be used to prioritize certain policy areas and pay more attention to the factors underpinning Islamic radicalization. The results of the empirical analysis show that higher levels of radicalization are partly related to the poor integration of Muslims, that could potentially lead to social isolation and feeling of non-belonging among young individuals. Likewise, the results are also helpful to inform policy-makers about the effects that other policies might have on radicalism. For instance, from a purely counter-radicalism perspective, legislation banning the full-veil – which has been recently adopted in Denmark and the Netherlands – is potentially harmful as it exacerbates the feeling of incompatibility between Islam and European societies, contributing to the identity crisis of many young European Muslims. Therefore, policies targeting social integration of minorities are likely to have positive effects on counter-radicalization and they are to be preferred over repressive rules aimed at restricting the religious rights of Muslim population.

2. Space for Further Research

There is still much ground for research about radicalization patterns in Europe. Although the academic literature about this subject has been growing in the last decade, owing to the increasing perception of the threat posed by Islamist terrorism, the knowledge of radicalization processes is still dominated by uncertainty. As a result, there are still many nuances of this phenomenon that call for empirical investigation.

First of all, it would be interesting to conduct the same qualitative analysis about radicalization using a most-dissimilar instead of a most-similar case study design. Such research could select cases that are maximally different on all but the levels of radicalization. For instance, such design could select Belgium, Austria and Sweden – the three countries with the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Europe – and look into the socio-political characteristics that they share and that could be held responsible for such high levels of radicalization.

Secondly, it would be worth considering how urban segregation contributes to different levels of radicalization. The analysis shows that the emergence of jihadist hotbeds in the suburbs of metropolitan areas is also due to ethnic segregation in those neighborhoods. For this reason, further research could take into account the degree of residential segregation of Muslim communities and link it to Islamic radicalization. Currently, there are no consistent data to assess and compare the levels of urban segregation in European

countries. In fact, the academic literature focuses on specific cases, such as certain European cities (Musterd et al, 2017; van Ham et al, 2016) or groups of countries. Currently, a three-years project on residential segregation in Europe is being carried out by different academics in Northern Europe, with the objective of mapping ethnic segregation in the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Norway (“About Us”, n.d.). Although some findings are already available for specific areas, the information is not sufficient to carry out a comparative analysis of these countries.

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