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Religious extremism in Western Europe: The pivotal role of disproportionate secularism

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Abstract

Rising numbers of religious extremism are an increasing concern in Western Europe. As Western Europe is secular, and secular ideology seeks to diminish the influence of religion on society, this rise is peculiar. It raises the question why religious extremism is on the rise in Western Europe despite its secular environment. Evidence suggests there is a causal link between religious extremism and secularism. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate such a causal relation between secularism and religious extremism in Western Europe. To rule out other explanations, this study identified two rival explanations: A cultural disconnect and geopolitical factors. The validity of all three explanations was tested through a case study analysis of France, the Netherlands and Belgium. The results concluded that the cultural disconnect and the geopolitical explanation are not correct. However, the study concluded that certain forms of secularism lead to a rise of religious extremism in Western Europe. The cases demonstrate the mechanism behind this: States enforce disproportionately strict secular policies through a strict separation between the public sphere and the private sphere, and a positive bias towards the pre-existing dominant religion. These two factors trigger reactive religiosity, leading to religious extremism. Conclusively, disproportionate secularism plays a pivotal role in the rise of religious extremism in Western Europe.

Table of contents

List of Terms and Abbreviations

Terms

Depillarisation - A Dutch concept describing a society moving away from religious-based segregation through a process of individualism and secularism.

Ummah - A Quranic concept describing a global Muslim community, transcending individual characteristics.

Salafism - A fundamentalist variation of Sunni Islam.

Abbreviations

MENA - The geographical region encompassing the Middle East and North Africa.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"*Egalité, Fraternité, Liberté… Laïcité*?" (Dodman 2020). After the shocking beheading of French history teacher Samuel Paty by an Islamic terrorist in Paris, many French politicians call for laïcité (French secularism) to be officially added to the French Republican motto (Ibid; Téchené 2020). This plea is part of the rekindlement of the heated debate on French values and their application in a pluralistic society (Dodman 2020). For many citizens, scholars, and lawmakers laïcité is *the* representation of French values. By proclaiming this so explicitly, many feel that it would be a strong stance against those who are supposedly opposed to French values, such as religious extremists (Brett 2020, van den Berg 2019).

While this is the case in France, religious violence and societal tensions are not an exception in Western Europe. Throughout the continent, extremist groups are among the fastest growing religious groups (Nicholson 2019, 14; Ismail 2018; VOA 2009; Kaufmann 2010). Within Western European societies, this trend has led to a heated public debate surrounding national values, immigration, and freedom of speech and religion (Niblett 2006, 2). Meanwhile, the actions of these European fundamentalist believers continue to cause conflict in societies by harming innocent targets and inciting fear in citizens (Ibid). Whereas the stereotypical image of an extremist believer might be that of an Islamic terrorist, the actions of extremist believers occur in multiple religions and range from non-violent to violent, high-profile to hidden from the public eye. Examples of this range from the infamous Salafi jihadi's committing terror attacks (like the aforementioned example) to the closed-door practices of fundamentalist Christians performing exorcisms on children (Bakker and Donker 2006, 9; Van Tilburg 2020).

The rise in religious extremism in Western Europe is a peculiar trend, as Europe prides itself on being a pioneer of secularism (Perchoc 2017). The underlying idea behind the secularisation of European states was that with the rise of logic and science, the role of religion would diminish (Ibid; Casanova 2006, 3-4). This process would be accelerated by the implementation of an official secular system, and by promoting the Enlightenment values of reason and democracy (Berger, Davie, and Fokas 2008, 2; Van den Berg 2019). However, despite the promotion of these values, religious extremism is on the rise; this raises the questions as to why this is happening. Often the question is asked whether a religion, usually Islam, is compatible with European secularism (Roy 2013, 6). But what if this question is reversed: Is European

secularism compatible with religion, and specifically, a multi-religious society? In order to critically assess this perspective, this thesis aims to answer the following question: *'Why is extremist religion in Western Europe on the rise despite its secular environment?'*

I will do so through the following chapters: Chapter 1 has introduced the peculiar relation between secularism and religious extremism. Chapter 2 will explore the stances, limits and gaps of the existing academic debate on the rise of religious extremism through a conceptual debate and a literature review. In the literature review, I shall identify the three possible explanations for the rise of religious extremism in Western Europe: The cultural disconnect theory, the geopolitical theory and the secularism theory. Chapter 3 shall introduce the research methods and the observable implications of each explanation. Furthermore, the choice for Berlinerblau's six secular models and the case study selection shall be discussed. Chapter 4, 5 and 6 are the case studies on France, the Netherlands and Belgium. These chapters explore the cultural disconnect theory, the geopolitical theory and the secularism theory in relation to each case. In chapter 7, the case study findings are compared and discussed; the findings demonstrate that the secularism theory is the only explanation that complies with the observed implications. Therefore, this study concludes that disproportionately strict secular policies play a pivotal role in the rise of religious extremism in Western Europe. The case studies demonstrate the mechanism behind this: A strict separation of the public and private sphere and the privileges of a pre-existing dominant religion cause religious extremism through reactive religiosity.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Conceptual debate

It is important to critically evaluate the concepts that are central to this research, as they are commonly used, studied and/or defined in problematic ways throughout academia.

The first concept is religious extremism: Religious extremism being a contested concept, there is no one definition of religious extremism that is generally accepted amongst scholars (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 798). Religious extremism is harder to define than other '-isms', such as terrorism, sexism or colonialism (Trebin 2018, 141). This is because in order to define religious extremism, one must also decide on what religious normalcy is - what is a socially acceptable way for an individual to believe in (a) divine power(s)? Is it the most average way of believing, or can certain norms be established as to what is normal and what is not? Definitions of religious extremism range from "*A process, by which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective*", which focuses on the violent actions resulting from religious extremist thinking, to th*e* broad understanding of religious extremism as *"a manifestation of intolerant attitudes towards representatives of other denominations or confrontation within a confession* (PET 2009 1; Trebin 2018, 143). Such differences between scholarly definitions will be factored in during the comparison of the academic literature. Commonly, definitions do incorporate a description of an ideal, superior society that religious extremists are supporting. This ideal is usually inspired by a set of ideals and lifestyle guidelines believed to be superior to the contemporary standard, and that are rooted in religion.

However, I argue that most scholars employ a definition that is too narrow and too focused on violent results, which therefore causes a large group to go understudied in academia (Wibisono, Louis, and Jetten 2019, 1). This is because many scholarly definitions equate religious extremism with violence, even though most religious extremists are not violent (Ibid). Moreover, they often equate religious extremism with the process of radicalisation with terrorism as an 'endpoint'. This approach to defining and studying religious extremism is evidently a mistake when trying to understand the complexity of religious communities (Sparke 2019, 83).

While these non-violent fundamentalists are perhaps perceived as a less direct threat than their violent counterparts, excluding them from the label religious extremists would therefore be a mistake. They form a large group of fundamentalists who incentivise certain members to become violent extremists, they can actively work on expanding, converting, and attracting new members and they have the potential to support violent extremists (e.g. through accommodation or finances) (Bhui, Warfa and Jones 2014, 2). Consequently, I argue that equating religious extremism with violent religious extremists wrongfully neglects the largest part of their religious group. Moreover, a less narrow definition could also broaden the public's perspective of religious extremism: Presenting religious extremists as inherently violent has been linked to an overall negative stereotype of followers of certain groups as being violent or terrorists; specifically in regard to Muslims (Wibisono, Louis and Jetten 2019, 1). In order to avoid these three issues, this thesis will incorporate the following definition by the following three interrelated attitudes, established by sociologist Ruud Koopmans:

> - *"that believers should return to the eternal and unchangeable rules laid down in the past;*
> - *that these rules allow only one interpretation that is binding for all believers;*
> - *that religious rules should have priority over secular laws."* (Koopmans 2015, 35).

While keeping the essential themes commonly found in definitions of extremist religious groups, this definition will encompass fanatic religious groups that hold and promote orthodox and/or fundamentalist understandings of how one should live life (Ibid). The definition as presented in this conceptual debate will be used throughout this thesis.

When studying religious extremism, the scope of many scholars is limited to studying violent Islamists. This is unfortunate, as this results in a lack of knowledge on religious extremism in other religions, most notably Christianity. Within Christianity, fundamentalist schools of religion are among the fastest growing religious movements in the West. Moreover, there is strong evidence to suggest that there is direct relation between fundamentalist Christianity and right-wing extremism and terrorism (Mudde 2005, 180; Strømmen 2017). In secular Europe, every religion has the potential to develop an extremist faction; neglecting the study of the extremism amongst the world's largest religion is therefore highly questionable (Van Dijk 2015). Therefore, the aforementioned definition also allows for extremist Christianity to be incorporated into the analysis.

2.2 Explaining the rise of religious extremism in Western Europe

As indicated in the introduction, secularism and religious extremism have a dichotomous relationship. In order to explore the likelihood of a causal relation between secularism and religious extremism, a larger underlying question can be raised; what causes religious extremism? This section of the literature review will represent the academic debate on the possible reasons behind the rise of religious extremism in secular Europe. Only after critically assessing and comparing the secular explanation to rival explanations, we can answer the research question.
Four explanations can be identified: Cultural disconnect, group dynamic, geopolitics, and secularism. I will analyse these explanations, discuss the work of scholars who advocate them, list the observable implications and offer a critical outlook.

Cultural Disconnect Explanation

The cultural disconnect explanation seeks to explain religious extremism as an identity clash commonly seen in second generation immigrants in Western societies. Scholars who are advocates for this theory, argue that these youngsters (often young men) are caught in between the cultural identity of their parents and the 'Western identity' around them. This argument appears to be in line with Huntingtonian ideas concerning growing cultural identity clashes between Islam and the West (Huntington 213). For Muslims, politics and religiosity are inherently united through the Islamic lifestyle, while Christianity allowed the separation of church and state; God and Caesar (Huntington 210). Throughout history, the Muslim is the Other of the west (Huntington 209-210). When Muslims and Christians are living with one another, their cultural differences become apparent, which would in turn strengthen their identity.

The reason for a rise of religious extremism *now*, by second generation immigrants as opposed to their parents is supposedly due to multiple factors. Scholars argue that these youngsters are growing up in a Western country that is supposed to be their home, whereas the generations before them grew up abroad or did not always mean to permanently stay in Europe (Pick, Speckhard and Jacuch 2009, 5). Scholars argue that this difference between first generation immigrants and their descendants leads to entirely different experiences.

Related to this is the concept of a *cultural time capsule* caused by the parents of these individuals (Yean 2019). Within a society, norms and values change organically; nowadays we can witness young people in traditional societies bringing forth more progressive ideas. Such cultural changes eventually reach most layers within society, ultimately shifting the average value perception of a society. However, when someone migrates to a different country, their cultural value system will usually not change anymore (Ibid). For example, if a Moroccan couple migrates in the 1970's from a rural mountain village to Marseille while not keeping up with the mainstream Moroccan culture, their cultural mindset will continue to be that of a 1970's rural village. Their children, although born in Marseille, will also be brought up with this 1970's rural Moroccan culture. However, if these children were to go to Morocco, they would not encounter the culture of their parents, because Moroccan society has changed since the 1970's. Therefore, their parents have formed their own cultural time capsule. In Marseille they would also not encounter their parents' culture, because it is dominated by mainstream urban French culture. Consequently, the children would feel culturally disconnected from both France and Morocco.

Certain scholars who do support the cultural disconnect theory, argue that this entire process is deliberately done by the first generation of Muslim immigrants moving to Western Europe. Niblett, attributes the rise of religious extremism to the stream of immigrants and refugees entering Europe in the 20th century (Niblett 2008, 3). These individuals did not agree with the progressive courses of their home-countries, and immigrated to Europe with the intention of starting fundamentalist Islamic communities there (Niblett 2008, 3 - 4). This would lead to a competition of different extremist Islamic schools of faith in Europe (Ibid). While both of these narratives support the cultural disconnect theory, scholars like Niblett attribute causality to the parents' intentions.

Advocates of the cultural disconnect theory argue that these second generation immigrants cannot unite their Western identity with their parents' cultural identity. They describe a process in which children of immigrants experience a continuous internal identity conflict while growing up. Their first generation immigrant parents are often ambivalent about the two conflicting cultures their children grow up with, and are unable to provide adequate support for their children to create a stable and structured cultural identity of their own (Belarouci 2009, 8). Consequently, their children are left to deal with this emotional pain and internal struggle

without any help from their families, as their parents have never experienced it themselves. This internal identity conflict is projected onto their surroundings, and leads to poor academic results, criminal activity and tensions within nuclear families (Ibid, 5; 9). Under the influence of their internal struggle and the strained relation with their parents, these children turn to the adults in their immigrant communities that do have a strong and stable sense of identity: Muslims (Ibid, 9). Belarouci argues that Islam gives these youngsters a sense of stability and inner peace, as they finally find an identity they can fully embrace, and a community that accepts them regardless of their background.

While this explanation makes seemingly plausible claims by describing observable phenomena, it does have its limitations and is subject to critiques.
Firstly, this explanation only covers immigrants turning to extremist Islam - Why wouldn't the same process cause immigrants to turn to e.g. extremist Hinduism?

Furthermore, this identity discussion of *the West versus Islam* can quickly turn essentialist. Examples of this include the argument that Islam is an inherently violent religion, which is therefore simply prone to intolerance and violence. Such statements can be addressed rather swiftly by citing the many Quran passages which dictate peace and tolerance (Murshed, Mansoob and Pavan 2011, 265). The cultural disconnect explanation is arguably part of the much criticised phenomenon of *culture talk* which entails "*Turn[ing] religion into a political category*" (Mamdani 2004, 24 - 26).

Other scholars who oppose this cultural disconnect theory argue that this perspective often wrongly assumes that the Western society the immigrant lives in, is a homogenous society with a united religious identity (Murshed, Mansoob and Pavan 2011, 255 - 265). Moreover, it assumes the same of the immigrants, who are supposedly homogenous, and unable to have more than one cultural identity (Ibid).

Group Dynamic Explanation

Group dynamic theory explains religious extremism through a psychological group process that could eventually drive group members to become radicalised and even commit terrorist acts.

Within a group setting, seemingly ordinary individuals can be driven to extreme actions under the pressures of their peers and their leader. (Moghaddam 2018, 11). This is because individuals supposedly base their norms and values on the average norms and values of their peers. If one of these peers has extreme ideas, the group's moral radar shifts towards a more radical stance (Ibid, 12). This shift in norms creates a micro-culture within the group (Sparke 2019, 87). What supposedly follows is a process of 'moral disengagement', during which members of a group become radicalised through the enforcement of the groups behavioural rules, judgement and strict social expectations (Ibid). By the erasement of one's previous moral compass and the changes in lifestyle, it would allow members to commit extremist acts (such as terrorist attacks) without feeling responsible, through a so-called 'displacement of responsibility (Ibid).

At the same time *symmetric mutual radicalisation* could occur; this is a destructive process in which multiple social groups compete with one another and are consequently driven to undertake more extreme measures (Ibid, 6; 14). This can result in two increasingly radicalised groups on different sides of a conflict, or a stalemate could occur between them. *Asymmetric mutual radicalisation* is the process in which groups on the same side of a conflict are influenced by one radical group. All of the groups that are under the influence of the radical group shift their stances to become increasingly radical (Sparke 109, 14). Proponents of the theory argue that these are the meso level risks.

Incorporating the group dynamic explanation into research is troubled. First of all, this is not an explanation which would explain a rise in religious extremism, as this theory explains a social process which supposedly is a constant factor in group settings. Furthermore, it does not really explain the initial phase of why such a religious group was formed. In fact, following the logic of this theory, the process itself is not linked to religious content, therefore the process could hypothetically take place in any social group. Thirdly, this theory only explains the path to religious extremism within an already existing group setting. It does not explain the path to extremist religious beliefs for individuals (such as lone wolves).

Fourthly, the measurement of this theory will prove to be challenging because of two aspects: It is a theory that assumes the individuals involved are irrational throughout the process (Moghaddam 2018). However, a rational theory is applied to their behaviour at the same time, one can question how valid this is. Moreover, this explanation can only be measured when one conducts an in-depth analysis on specific, organised groups. Only this way can one actually assess the motivations and psychological state of the individuals concerned. Conclusively, it is an interesting theory with plausible elements, but it is far too limited an explanation to offer any concrete results in this study.

Geopolitical Explanation

There is a group of scholars who point to geopolitical factors as a leading cause for growing religious extremism in Western Europe. This explanation usually solely focuses on Muslim extremists. It encompasses both the influence of foreign sources on believers in Europe and the foreign policies of European states. The first point is mainly referring to the radicalisation of European Muslims due to the funding of fundamentalist institutions by countries such as Saudi Arabia (Cesari, 2005, 6). Supposedly, different foreign Islamist groups are treating Western Europe as a proxy theological battleground for religious hegemony and political influence (Ibid; Parliamentary Assembly 2018).

Some scholars argue that the geopolitical explanation is a catalyst for religious extremism and religious terrorism. This is because they define extremism and terrorism as inherently political acts, as opposed to religious acts (Santos Bravo and Mendes Dias 2006, 332). Issues that involve religion and politics become increasingly weaponised under the guise of just religion. An illustration of this is the supposed Islamisation of the fight for Palestine in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ibid, 330).

Moreover, scholars claim that such conflicts are increasingly connected to other conflicts and to international involvement in such conflicts. This plays in on the narrative that the ummah is being humiliated and that Islam as a whole is under attack (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 798). This is done by the Western powers, corrupt governments and Israel (Ibid; Huntington 214). Consequently, Muslims should rise up and defend their religion from these foreign, corrupting

forces (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 798). Islamist extremists supposedly defend themselves by committing terrorist attacks on the citizens of these governments, as taking on their military forces would be unfeasible (Ibid).

Secularist Explanation

Lastly, there is a group of scholars who make claims that support the hypothesis of secularism as the explanation for the rise of religious extremism in Western Europe. This group describes a reactive phenomenon in which different groups of people respond to the insecure situations secularist systems and policies have placed them in, by turning to religious extremism (Van Tubergen and Sindradóttir 2011, 274). This phenomenon is also known as reactive religiosity, in which individuals faced with societal rejection and exclusion turn to religion in their efforts to completely oppose the system which initially rejected them (Koopmans 2015, 37). Religious extremism is the polar opposite of secularism, therefore this is a common refuge. *"Demand for the supernatural can be viewed as a reasonable response to inescapable scarcity, insatiable wants, and irrepressible hope*." (Iannaccone and Berman 2006, 112). This explanation accounts for both immigrants and natives, and all faiths with an organised fundamentalist presence in Europe. Rather than being an identity-based explanation such as the cultural disconnect theory, the secularist explanation sees the position individuals find themselves in as a result of secularist policies as the reason for religious extremism (Hörnqvist and Flughed 2012, 319).

Within the larger academic debate on the application of secularism we can observe a group of scholars that argues that secularism exists, but that its current forms do not work in contemporary Western societies. These scholars argue that secularism as a system is inherently unable to adequately deal with, or prevent religious extremism (Nicholson 2019, 13). Nicholson argues that the secular ideals of universal human rights or Enlightenment values such as democracy do not appeal to those individuals who uphold religious extremist ideologies (Ibid). This is especially true for those whose beliefs are based on feelings of being treated unjustly by society (Ibid). Regarding the rise of extremist religion, he argues that secularism has led to societies that are intolerant, ridden with social cleavages, and that contain a large degree of religious division (Nicholson 2019, 13). He attributes the rise of extremist religious groups to these competing cultural and religious ideologies within contemporary secular

society; there is a lack of unity. Moreover, he argues that the constitutive strong role of the state in modern societies provokes the rise in religious violence (Nicholson 2019, 11). Conclusively, Nicholson argues that the current secular systems play a role in causing religious extremism, and they are not equipped to deal with the consequences.

This idea of secularist ideology 'pushing' people into religious extremism is shared by others. Certain scholars argue that in a secular country such as France, there is one mainstream ideology. They describe a process in which certain (young) people feel marginalised and unaccepted by the mainstream culture, and in turn actively revolt against the mainstream and the secular institutions (Kepel and Jardin 2017, 138). They equate leaving their marginalised and often poverty ridden situations with rejecting the institutions and mainstream secular values of their country. Extremist religious groups offer young people an ideology and a community that embody this rejection of secular society (Kepel and Jardin 2017, 2; 138). Such extremist religious groups appeal to these youngsters as they offer an alternate system that seems more natural and give the impression that they will treat its members more justly (ibid, 5; 138). Scholars attribute the recent rise in extremist religious groups in part to the growing number of young people without religious background converting as well (Ibid, 5). Moreover, European secularism is accused of enabling discrimination of religious groups and forcing individual expressions of religion into the private sphere (Kepel and Jardin 2017, 141). This dual working of secularism as a discriminator and a restrictor of religious expression works as an irritant that places people in an underprivileged position, and a source that deepens social cleavages (ibid, 141).

Critics might argue that this cannot explain the rise of religious extremism in Europe, because secularism had been in place in Western Europe many decades before we could actually witness this rise and its consequent effects. After all, how could one explain a change occurring at the hand of a constant? This would be a valid critique, if it was not for the fact that secularism is not a constant. While certain values will continue to form the foundation of secularism as a political philosophy, such as separation of church and state principle, many other ideas and practices are subject to change (NCERT 2015, 113).

Many political scientists therefore prefer to see secularism as a process (Ahdar 2013; Chelini-Pont 2013, 290). Secular points and policies are constantly changing and evolving under the influence of the zeitgeist and political ideologies. Scholars are therefore arguing that secularism

in its essence is not a cause of religious extremism, but the application of secularism in contemporary Western societies is. At this point in the secularism process, current secular policies are not (yet) able to effectively govern pluralistic societies.

2.3 Literature Review Conclusion

We have identified four possible approaches to explain the rise in religious extremism in Western Europe: One identity-based theory, one psychological theory, one political theory and one socio-economic theory.

The second explanation, the group dynamic theory, shall not be used in this research. This theory only explained a psychological process that caused extremism through social ties. It is something that is always present in a group setting, so it would not explain a rise. Moreover, proving this psychological effect would only be verifiable if it was done through in-depth research, into specific groups and the psychology of their members. Consequently, no observable implications relevant to the research at hand can be noted, and this theory will not be included in the case study research.

The conceptual debate and the literature review have displayed the current gaps in the literature. There is an overall lack of studies done on non-Islamic extremism in Europe. Instead, the majority of studies on this subject often focus on violent Islamists in Europe, as discussed in the conceptual debate. Moreover, there is a lack of detailed analysis of, and comparison between multiple European secular states. By conducting a study that compares multiple explanations for the rise in religious extremism in Europe, and comparing multiple secular models, this thesis will bridge the existing gap in academic literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In order to determine which of these three explanations play a pivotal role in the rise of religious extremism in Western Europe, I shall establish and discuss observable implications for each. The observable implications are derived from the theories as laid out in the literature review. They list occurrences we can expect to see in a case study if the theory is correct.

- Observable implication 1: *The higher the amount of second generation immigrants in a country, the higher the amount of religious extremism.*

The cultural disconnect theory argues that religious extremism is on the rise because of the cultural identity crisis that descendants of immigrants experience. Advocates of this theory argue that the identity crisis causes these youngsters to join religious extremist groups in search of their own identity. This approach is the opposite of socio-economic explanations (such as the secularist explanation), as it assumes an identity-based conflict. If this theory is correct, we would expect to see the case with the highest amount of religious extremism to have the highest percentage of second generation immigrants.

- *Observable implication 2. A country that has a growing amount of foreign-funded extremist organisations, military presence in Muslim-majority countries, and continuous pro-Israel policies, is likely to experience higher levels of religious extremism*

The geopolitical explanation attributes the rise in religious extremism to Muslims supposedly feeling like the ummah is increasingly under (figurative and literal) attack. If this theory is correct, we would expect to see the case with the highest military presence in Muslim-majority countries, continuous support and with the largest amount of foreign-funded extremist organisations to have the highest amount of religious extremism.

- *Observable implication 3: A secular system that restricts expression of religiosity disproportionately will lead to an increase of religious extremism.*

If the secular theory is correct, we would expect to see the case with the highest amount of religious extremism to have the strictest secular system. Strict here means how often a person's religious expression and/or lifestyle are demanded to be adjusted. Disproportionate relates to the implementation of policies that do not target members of society equally. These two aspects would cause reactive religiosity, leading to individuals becoming religious extremists.

The dependent variable here is religious extremism, while the independent variables are cultural disconnect, geopolitics and secularism. I will be conducting macro-level case study research by analysing three dimensions of different states, in relation to religious extremism and comparing the results. This thesis will make use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. It will critically assess secondary sources in the form of academic literature as well as primary sources in the form of statistics, legislature, reports, and newspapers. The time period that will be researched is 2010 until 2020. It is in this decade that many Western European nations have experienced the aforementioned rise of religious extremism (Statista 2020). Furthermore, especially the most recent five years (2015-2020) have not been the subject of many studies yet.

3.2 Measurement and Case Study Selection

To reach a conclusion on which factors determine the outcome (amount of religious extremism) we must select cases that differ on each of these dimensions. Ideally, we need three cases that have differences in amount of religious extremism, amount of second generation immigrants, differing relevant geopolitical relations and different systems of secularism. These case studies differ in type of secularism, amount of secularism and attitude towards religion in general. The case studies shall be compared based on three dimensions: Cultural disconnect, geopolitics and secularism.

In this research, I will measure four different elements: Religious extremism, descendants of immigrants, geopolitical relations and secularism. These will be measured using the following methods:

To measure the cultural disconnect theory I shall establish the amount of second generation immigrants per case. To do so, I will make use of national reports and statistics. Third generation immigrants shall not be incorporated into the analysis, because most countries do not keep statistics of them.

To measure the geopolitical theory, I will describe the flows of foreign funds of religious extremist organisations by foreign governments. In order to measure the military presence in Muslim-majority countries, the amount of military missions over the past decade in the MENA region will be counted. To measure the pro-Israel policies, the bilateral relations between Israel and the case will be analysed. National security reports, information from the national defence ministry and news articles shall be used to do so.

When measuring religious extremism, there are some hindrances due to limited resources (Bhui, Warfa and Jones 2014, 2). This is especially true in regard to any other religion than Islam, because the issues as discussed in the conceptual debate have led to a lower amount of quantitative research on other religions. The resources used in researching Christianity are limited, but the ones that are available on Christianity will be taken into account when measuring the amount of religious extremism and the effects of the dimensions. Besides Christianity and Islam, no other religious groups in Europe (Jews, Hindus etc.) will be taken incorporated into this study, due to the lack of sources and the small size of their followings in Europe.

Measuring religious extremism therefore has its challenges but can be done in multiple ways. Not all of these measures will give a clear representation of religious extremism in Europe though. For example, measuring just religiosity levels can give a skewed representation of religion across Europe, because Muslims are known to identify with religion more than European Christians (Koopmans 2015, 36). Another approach would be to measure terrorist attacks, but this would give a skewed representation Until more quantitative research is done into religious extremism in Europe, the options are limited. Instead, this research shall establish which case has the most religious extremism, which case has the least and what case is in between. This order shall be established by consulting multiple measurement manners, and comparing these results in order to establish which case experiences the greatest amount of religious extremism. The combination of measurements I will be using are the following:

National reports on religious extremism, a research into religious extremism amongst Muslims and Christians in different European Countries and international statistics on terrorism. These reports and researches all cover the selected time period, 2010 - 2020. This combined research approach will offer a solid overview of which cases experience most religious extremism.

Just as measuring religious extremism poses its challenges, measuring/categorising secularism is not simple either. While secularism will never be theocratic and will always be centred around the separation of church and state, there are a number of differences between the ways states implement secularist ideology in their policies (NCERT 2015, 113). I will briefly discuss why the choice was made to use the model of Jacques Berlinerblau as the theoretical base for selecting the case studies.

Four different approaches to the classification of differences in secularism can be identified:

- The area-centric method
- The binary method
- Baubérot's model
- Berlinerblau's model

After having conducted analysis, I have found that the first three methods had clear limitations:

The area-centric method is characterised by the grouping together of regions with similar policies; e.g. 'The Western Model' etc. (NCERT 2015, 115-120). It is not a detailed analysis, but rather a generalised description of the presence or absence of religion in the public sphere of a specific area. And even when cultural characteristics are incorporated in the analysis, it can give an essentialist impression.

The binary method considers secularist systems to be either one type or another; there are only two options (Rodell 2019). Secularist systems are e.g. classified as *'open'*/*'procedural'* secularism when states offer religious organisations room in the public sphere. The opposite of this is classified as '*closed'*/'*programmatic'* (Taylor 2007, 551; Taylor and Smith 2014; Williams 2006). These distinctions are clear but very broad. Furthermore, they are limited to

using the presence or absence of religion in the public sphere as the sole representation of the states' attitude towards religion.
Baubérot's model uses the categories of *Freedom*, *Separation* and *Equality* to measure the degree of separation between religious organisations and the state, the degree of freedom of and from religion, and the degree of discriminatory treatment of individuals by the state (Copson 2017, 2). While this approach allows for much more nuance and variety than the binary method, it will likely lead to a less comparable analysis.

This has brought me to use the theoretical framework of Berlinerblau's six secular models in order to select the three most prominent forms of secularism in Western Europe. There are a multitude of ways in which secularist governing systems can be classified, but after careful consideration, Berlinerblau's classification is more fitting to this research. Berlinerblau's theory contains the detailed classification of six types that is not limited to describing the level of freedom from/of religion. Instead, Berlinerblau's models allow for a less generalised classification which encompasses state ideology and relevant policies. The six types are *Separationism, Disestablishmentarianism, Laïcité, Accommodationism, Non-cognisance and State Sponsored Atheism* (Berlinerblau 2012).

As aforementioned, I will be making use of case study analysis. This research technique lends itself well for in-depth analysis of complex affairs. When proving the truth of such theories one would ideally conduct a comparative case study analysis amongst 6+ cases, as this would simply give the most results. Due to limitations such as containments in word count, time, and resources, this is not feasible. However, it is possible to use fewer case studies to demonstrate how the mechanism functions that these observable implications describe. This is why I will be selecting three case studies to analyse the observable implications of the three explanations.

In order to achieve the best results by comparing the effects of different factors, the ideal cases would differ on amount of religious extremism, number of descendants of immigrants, geopolitical factors and secular model. Upon conducting research, these qualities can all be found in the following three cases: France, the Netherlands and Belgium. These cases are geographically close, but varying on a number of factors as representative for the rest of the region. Therefore, the results of this study can be used as representative for Western Europe.

I will use the laïcité model, the separationist model and the non-cognisance model as case studies for this thesis. These types are prominent in Europe, and they differ on specific aspects of secularism. Therefore, they serve as good cases to study and to compare the effects of differences in type and amount of secularism on religious extremism in Europe. The analysis of the secular dimension will be lengthier in order to demonstrate the mechanism of the secular models. The secular dimension will demonstrate each cases relation between secularism and religion. This will be done by discussing restrictions on religious expression, secularism and the constitution, religion and education, religious rights, and other noteworthy aspects.

Furthermore, as this is an underdeveloped academic field, the options of building upon past research are limited. While the French secular system is the most researched within this limited field due to its prominence, no comparative case study research has been conducted before. By conducting this case study research it will therefore allow for a unique research into the application and theological consequences of secularism in Europe and as measured up to other explanations.

Chapter 4: Case Study France

Over the past decade, France has experienced a significant rise of religious extremism. This has consequently developed into an increase of religiously radicalised individuals and religiously motivated terrorist attacks over the most recent decade. Out of the case studies, France has experienced the highest number of religious extremism (Koopmans 2014, Europol 2010; Europol 2015; Europol 2020). This entire situation has led to societal tensions, a call for stricter emphasis of secularism and the implementation of state-of-emergency-laws into regular law (Human Rights Watch 2020).

In order to analyse whether the observable implications for either explanation occur in our case studies, we shall analyse these dimension-by-dimension. The first dimension shall cover the supposed cultural clash between natives and immigrant descendants. The second dimension shall cover geopolitics. Lastly, the third dimension shall cover the case's secular model and the (religious) implications of its policies.

4.1 Dimension 1: Cultural Disconnect

In order to study the observed implications of the cultural disconnect explanation, we shall identify the number of second generation immigrants in France. Second generation immigrants are individuals with at least one parent of who was not born in France. The French Ministry of Immigration has estimated there are over 11,7 million immigrants in France (19% of the population), of which 4.3 million are descendants of immigrants over 15 years old, and 1,85 million younger than 15 in 2010 (Breem 2010). Consequently, second generation immigrants make up 9% of the French population.

Apart from the numbers, the socio-economic position of French second generation immigrants differs greatly depending on gender and ethnicity. In education, women would perform better than men (INSEE 2012). Furthermore, over 50% of the second generation in France officially classify as a descendant of immigrants, but have one native-born parent and one foreign-born parent (Eurostat 2011, 123).

4.2 Dimension 2: Geopolitics

In order to study the observed implications of the geopolitics explanation, we shall analyse both the foreign funding of extremist religious in France as well as relevant French foreign policy over the last decade (2010-2020).

Concerning foreign financial intervention, we see that most foreign funding of religious institutions in Europe goes into Salafi institutions such as schools and mosques. Despite the issue being a highly debated topic in France, many question whether this is simply caused by France's strict laws surrounding the financing of religious organisations (McAuley 2016). Because of France's secular system, religious institutions in France do not receive state subsidies. Therefore, these institutions are entirely dependent on donations (Sénat 2016, 1). The foreign donations often come from countries with ties to France and its immigrant population, such as Morocco, Algeria and Turkey (Ibid, 1-2). Despite not having found evidence of dubious donations, the French state instilled an increase of measures to regulate religious institutions in France as a whole, and to ensure the financial transparency of foreign donations to Islamic institutions in order to maintain respect for the secular system (Sénat 2016, 2 - 4).

In the last decade, France has been militarily active in the MENA region. France has been involved in military missions in the following states over the past decade: Libya (1), Iraq (1) Lebanon (UN, 1) (France 24 2016; ABC News 2020)[1].

French-Israeli relations are dynamic and varying in quality. While France is currently a good trading partner of Israel and recognises the political legitimacy of the state, there have been disagreements between the two states. In 2016, France called an ultimatum for Israel to finish peace agreements with Palestine, otherwise France would recognise Palestine as a state (Staff 2020). Despite the fact that France has not (yet) officially recognised Palestine, this affair did not benefit their relations.

[1] The numbers represent the amount of missions.

4.3 Dimension 3: Secularism

Laïcité is the secular system as employed in France (ES 2018). France's laïcité system is self-described as a "*strict and intangible framework*" (Sénat 2016, 1)[2].Out of the three case studies, France is the 'most' secular because of its type of secularism, and because it grants specific religious organisations the least rights and freedom (Berlinerblau 2012; Koopmans 2015, 37). Its strict policies and pro-Catholic bias have led to disproportionately strict policies in the name of secularism.

The French government describes laïcité as a system without an ideology, and a neutral attitude towards religions (MEFA 2020). However, after analysing the secular policies and their effects it can be concluded that this is not true. Apart from state-sponsored atheism, the laïcité model is the most restrictive and assertive form of secularism (ES 2018).
This is put in practice in the following ways:

France assertively uses its secular policies to institutionally deny individuals the possibility to express their religion in the public sphere (Kuru 2009, 134). This is due to a strict separation of the public sphere and the private sphere. Secular policies support the view that believing in God is the right to 'personal religiosity' instead of the right to lead a faithful lifestyle; the public spheres can be regarded as true '*No God Zones*' (France 24 2016). In order to remain neutral and maintain the separation of church and state, there is no room for religious practices and/or religious attire in certain settings (Alouane 2020). This concerns schools and any person working for the government, (e.g. teachers, day-care workers, government officials and law-enforcement (Kuru 2009, 134). Furthermore, no marriage officiants are allowed to refuse to officiate same-sex weddings, regardless of religious beliefs (VOA 2013).

Furthermore, specific rights such as religious slaughtering, and the construction of mosques are restricted (Koopmans 2015, 37; France 24 2015). As aforementioned, religious institutions do not receive public funding and are therefore dependent on donations. However, due to the implementation of the religious funding framework as discussed in 4.2, donations by foreign states are not allowed. This has made it even more difficult to construct mosques as these were largely depending on such donations.

[2] Translated by author.

Religious schools do not receive public funding either. While this measure might seem minor, French secular policies arguably attempt to discourage the practice of religious lifestyles through schools. This is significant, as schools are the places where the minds of future generations are formed.

Because of these assertive and restrictive measures, many religious followers feel like they are being targeted and disadvantaged. While the secular policies demand a strict separation between the public and the private sphere in regard to religiosity, one can wonder whether life can be lived in such categories. After all, many religions require a certain lifestyle, physical characteristics and a belief that an individual cannot put on or take off as if it was a coat. As this is not relevant to the question at hand, the entire philosophical debate on this topic will not be discussed in this paper. However, it is peculiar that the French state takes such a radical stance within this debate without addressing or justifying their position on this to the public.

Furthermore, the attitude and policies of the French government regarding secularism are arguably not in line with the constitution (Beswick 2020). The French constitution declares that "*No one shall be disquieted on account of his opinions, including his religious views, provided their manifestation does not disturb the public order established by law."* (Custos 2004, 346)[3]. Many religious followers argue that demanding the removal of religious attire and enforcing strict secular laws is in direct contradiction with the constitutional law. They are irritated by the enforcement of these measures, because they believe that their expression of religion does not disturb the public order (Beswick 2020).

Moreover, France is actively prosecuting and banning religious groups under the guise of protecting the secular state (Hadden 2014). The government can declare any religious group a cult, due to the states' very broad definition of what a cult is (Ibid; Palmer 2008, 106). This has led to frustration amongst religious believers, as they are unsure which religious groups can be prosecuted. Certain protestant churches fear that the label 'evangelical' could lead to investigation by authorities or other measures that could obstruct their teachings (Goodenough 2008). Other groups under investigation include the Church of Scientology and the Jehovah's Witnesses (Palmer 2008, 119; Haden 2014). The attitude of the government has left some

[3] Art. 10 of the Declaration of Man and Citizen.

French Protestants feeling as if their communities are specifically being targeted, and that Muslims are receiving privileges (Ternisien and Dumay 2014).

Despite the fact that many Christians are disgruntled at increasingly strict secular regulations, Catholics are in a privileged position amongst religious followers. Laïcité has strong historical ties to Catholicism, and the results of this are still very visible (Chelini-Pont 2013, 282). This can be seen in two aspects. Firstly, France's laws are influenced by Catholic values. Secondly, Catholic traditions are the default for religious freedom; religions that have different traditions are seen as requesting privileges and exceptions/extensions of the laws around religious freedom (Ibid). This has led to secular policies that disproportionately strict to non-Catholic religions.

Next to evangelical Protestants, Muslims also feel like they are particularly disadvantaged by France's secular policies. As aforementioned, halal slaughtering and the construction of Mosques are restricted. Furthermore, the 2004 law that banned religious attire (hijabs, crosses, turbans and kippot) from schools became known as the 'headscarf ban', meant to disproportionately target Muslims. (Alouane 2020). Along with occurrences such as the burkini ban of 2016, these strict measures have left French Muslims feeling as if they are not accepted by France and French society (Ibid).

Chapter 5: Case Study the Netherlands

The Netherlands has experienced a comparatively limited rise of religious extremism which has consequently developed into an increase of religious radicalisation and a limited amount of religiously motivated terrorist attacks over the most recent decade. The Netherlands is not in a state of emergency, but it is on threat level three (out of five) (NCTV 2020). Out of the case studies, the Netherlands has experienced the lowest number of religious extremism (Koopmans 2014, Europol 2010; Europol 2015; Europol 2020).

5.1 Dimension 1: Cultural Disconnect

In order to study the observed implications of the cultural disconnect explanation, we shall identify the amount of second generation immigrants in the Netherlands. Descendants of immigrants are individuals with at least one parent who was not born in the Netherlands.

The Dutch population consists of 24,2% of immigrants (4.3 million).There are 2 million second generation immigrants in the Netherlands, and they form approx. 12% of the total population (CBS 2020). Second generation immigrants form the largest immigrant group in the Netherlands, covering about half of the total. Moreover, the statistics on the descendants of non-Western immigrants in the Netherlands paints a much different picture than the cultural disconnect theory does. Descendants of first generation immigrants have higher paying jobs, better education and identify as Dutch over three times as much as their parents (CBS 2010, 9 - 12). Furthermore, just over 60% of the second generation in the Netherlands officially classify as a descendant of immigrants, but have one native-born parent and one foreign-born parent (Eurostat 2011, 123).

5.2 Dimension 2: Geopolitics

In order to study the observed implications of the geopolitics explanation, we shall analyse both the foreign funding of extremist religious in the Netherlands as well as relevant Dutch foreign policy over the last decade (2010-2020).

In terms of foreign funding, we can observe a rise in Saudi investments in Salafi institutions (e.g. schools and mosques) in the Netherlands (Esman 2010, 51). However, these investments were made from the late 1990's until the early 2000's (ibid). In the recent decade, there is evidence to suggest that 20-30 mosques have preached Salafism under the influence of foreign states (WODC 2017). However, whether these mosques have received financial support from foreign states has not been proven or confirmed by authorities.

In the last decade, the Netherlands has been militarily active in the MENA region. The Netherlands has been involved in military missions in the following states over the past decade: Israel (EU & UN, 3), Syria (UN, 2), Lebanon (UN, 1), Iraq (1), Bahrain (1), UAE (1) (Ministerie van Defensie 2020)[4].

Furthermore, the Netherlands has been a continuous supporter of Israel, by supporting Zionism, being one of the main trading partners, making donations to the state of Israel, supplying the Israeli army with weapons, and explicitly stating their support in the press (Snel 2020; Hellema, Wiebes and Witte 2004, 27-30). More recently, the Dutch policies towards Israel have been more aligned with the policies of the EU and the UN. This more passive course has caused conservative parties to submit a motion to publicly denounce the anti-Israel attitude of member states, which was accepted by a large majority of the parliament (Tweede Kamer Der Staten-Generaal 2017).

5.3 Dimension 3: Secularism

Separationism is the secular model as employed in the Netherlands (ES 2018). Out of the three case studies, the Netherlands has the 'least' amount of secularism because of its type of secularism, and because it grants religious organisations the most rights and freedom (Berlinerblau 2012; Koopmans 2015, 37). Whereas France is very assertive in the relation between state and church, the Netherlands maintains a more neutral position. This means that the Dutch state is secular, but it usually will not interfere into the affairs of religious communities.

[4] The numbers represent the amount of missions.

A recent example that can illustrate this relation between the Dutch state and religious communities very well, is the controversy surrounding Dutch education minister Arie Slob (Christian Union party) in October 2020. Minister Slob intended to pass regulation which would allow for any school to officially denounce homosexuality in their school regulations, most often done by orthodox Christian schools (Valk 2020). Despite contradicting constitutional law article 1 which forbids discrimination, minister Slob's regulation was supported by constitutional law article 23. Article 23 describes the freedom of schools to freely decide on the content of their teachings, allowing religious communities to teach students a curriculum centred on their religious beliefs (Nederlandse Grondwet 2018). Only after receiving heaps of criticism from the Dutch public, the law did not pass (Valk 2020). The response from the representative of a protestant reformed community about the criticism was one of surprise; they had expected such a debate to cover the relationship between national values and Dutch Muslim communities instead (De Jager 2020). Conclusively, both the minister Slob and the protestant reformed communities had not expected backlash over this new law (Ibid). This brief example illustrates how the separationist secular model works in practice; the Dutch state tends not meddle in the affairs of religious communities.

A common critique for the Dutch separationist system is that religious communities are treated as if they exist in blocks; separated from other (religious) communities. It can discourage mingling of different communities, and the cooperation between religious organisations and the government or amongst each other. This aspect of the Dutch secular model can cause conflicts and societal tensions, as it denies the dynamic nature of society (Zucca 2015, 83 - 84).

In terms of education, the Dutch state finances both public and 'special' schools. Over 70% of the youth attends a special school; nearly all of these are religious schools (CBS 2017). The public schools teach a standardised secular curriculum, the religious schools are free to determine their own curriculum (granted it meets quality requirements). Consequently, their entire curriculum can be influenced by their religious preferences, such as teaching biblical creationism to teaching sex education based on the Quran. Any (religious) attire is allowed in public schools, except for clothing that covers the face. Religious schools are free to decide their own policies regarding attire and expression of religion. For example, Christian schools can refuse to hire teachers or accept students wearing a hijab, and Islamic schools can require girls to dress modestly. The only law limiting these schools in their religious freedom states that no teacher can be denied or fired because of their sexual orientation (OCW 2020).

The Dutch government limits religious expression in certain settings to maintain the neutrality of the state, or to harbour safety. Therefore, it is not allowed to wear religious attire as a judge, police officer or as a court clerk (NOS 2017) Furthermore, it is not allowed to wear face coverings in certain public settings (Ibid). In other governmental positions there is freedom of religious attire and religious expression. For example, certain wedding officiants are allowed to refuse officiating same sex marriage for religious reasons (Van Wijk 2011).

Compared to the previous case, there is much more freedom for believers to express their religion in the public sphere. In the private sphere, there is also a lot of freedom to form religious communities. There is no institution that specifically works with sects, despite the fact that reports of sect-like religious groups are on the rise (Breur 2016). Since the depillarisation of the Netherlands in the 60's, orthodox religious communities have been growing as well (Regterschot 2016). Because of the government's laissez faire attitude towards religious groups/communities, religious figures can have more power in such communities (Van den Bos 2019). Recently it came to light that within the closed Jehovah's Witnesses communities (sexual) abuse of children went unreported to authorities. Due to the culture of silence victims were afraid to come forward. When they did come forward, religious figures 'solved' these problems within their communities themselves (Ibid, 63-66). Within Islam, we can see such communities forming to a smaller degree; mostly within Salafism (AIVD 2015, 13). The attitude of the Dutch government will not make such communities more extreme in terms of religious beliefs, but their values and isolationist tendencies can lead to an increasingly segregated society (Regterschot 2016).

Chapter 6: Case Study Belgium

Belgium has experienced a rise of religious extremism which has consequently developed into an increase of religious radicalisation and multiple religiously motivated terrorist attacks over the last decade. Belgium has experienced more religious extremism than the Netherlands, but less than France, and it is on threat level two (out of four) (Koopmans 2014; Europol 2010; Europol 2015; Europol 2020; Crisiscentrum). Having been historically influenced by both the French and the Dutch, the secular system of Belgium is in between the laïcité and separationist models. On many aspects, Belgium finds itself in between the two previous cases.

6.1 Dimension 1: Cultural Disconnect

In order to study the observed implications of the cultural disconnect explanation, we shall identify the amount of second generation immigrants in Belgium. Descendants of immigrants are individuals with at least one parent who was not born in Belgium. In 2016, second generation immigrants accounted for 13,7% of the entire Belgian population (Baeyens et al. 2020, 2). This converts to approximately 1,55 million people.

In Belgium, the second generation immigrants have considerably lower academic scores and employment levels than their peers with native-born parents and second generation immigrants from other EU countries (Eurostat 2011, 130 - 133; BNDB 2020). Furthermore, over 50% of the second generation in Belgium officially classify as a descendant of immigrants, but have one native-born parent and one foreign-born parent (Eurostat 2011, 123).

6.2 Dimension 2: Geopolitics

In order to study the observed implications of the geopolitics explanation, we shall analyse both the foreign funding of extremist religious in Belgium as well as relevant Belgian foreign policy over the last decade (2010-2020).

There is some evidence to suggest that certain Belgian religious institutions received dubious foreign funding by organisations with expansionist aims (Sûreté de L'Etat 2018, 13). However, it is unclear to what extent, as most foreign religious influence was not in the form of donations

(Bajart 2019). Only the Grand Mosque in Brussels had been proven to have received dubious donations, as this mosque was leased to Saudi Arabia by the Belgian government (Groen 2018). Apart from this, Belgium has not been able to identify which religious institutions received dubious donations, due to a lack of transparency (Bajart 2019). Consequently, the Belgian parliament did implement a new financial framework for religious organisations of all faiths to increase the transparency of their foreign donations (Geens 2019).

In the last decade, Belgium has not had a very active military presence in the MENA region. Belgium has been involved in military missions in the following states over the past decade: Libya (1), Syria/Iraq (1) (Defensie 2020)[5].

Furthermore, Belgium and Israel have continuously good diplomatic ties (BII 2016). Throughout the 50 years of amical bilateral relations, the only 'hiccups' between the two have occurred in 2020. The most notable occurrence was the intention of the Belgian parliament to impose sanctions on Israel in case of further annexation of Palestinian territory (Ahren 2020). However, the sanctions were never imposed.

6.3 Dimension 3: Secularism

Belgium's secular system is best classified as non-cognisance. The Belgian constitution does not contain any mention of secularism, or even implicit references to the separation of church and state (Vannieuwenburg 2019, 13). This has, fully in line with the non-cognisance category, led to a disproportionate implementation of secularist policies (ES 2018).

The Belgian government tries to enforce secularism by treating every religion in a similar manner. This means that the government officially recognises religions, and together with the parliament they pay the wages and pensions of all the preachers of these recognised religions (De Kluis 2018). Other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism are not officially recognised; the Belgian government does not have a clear definition when/if a religion is to be recognised (DOS 2019).

[5] The numbers represent the amount of missions.

In terms of schooling, there is a difference between public schooling and free schooling (religious schooling). Public schools are completely funded by the state, whereas religious schooling is only partially funded. This is because regional institutions prefer to give funding to public schools. Despite this, most Belgian children attend Catholic schools (Lievens 2019, 8). There is an equally low number of Protestant and Islamic schools in Belgium. Moreover, it has proven nearly impossible to start new Islamic schools due to financial limitations (Ibid, 9). The schools that did open all emphasised their support for a pluralistic society and education system. However, the Belgian government closed one of these schools recently for suspicion of religious extremist teachings (Ibid, 10).

Belgium mostly restricts freedom of religious expression in the form of forbidding religious attire in the public sphere. In the recent decade, the Flemish government has passed a law that forbids the wearing of any religious attire in public schools. Following a law-suit by two Muslims against a hijab prohibition at their university, the federal court ruled that any institute for higher education is allowed to ban hijabs and other religious attire (Van der Speck 2020). It is also forbidden to wear any face coverings (such as a niqab) on the streets, parks, and any public buildings (Al Jazeera 2010). Moreover, it is forbidden to wear religious attire in a number of private businesses, such as supermarket and restaurant chains (Radio1 2017). Next to the hijab-ban in public schools, religious slaughtering has also been outlawed in the recent decade (DOS 2019, 1). Despite these far-reaching measures, the Belgian state does grant some freedom of religion within public function. For example, certain wedding officiants are allowed to refuse officiating same sex marriage for religious reasons (Ahdar 2014).

These measures restrict religious expression in the public sphere under the guise of secularism and state neutrality. They have left Muslims feeling singled out due to the increased scrutiny on their institutions and their religious traditions. Moreover, the ban of religious attire particularly affects Muslim women, as they face this in schools, businesses and public places. They feel as if Belgium is actively trying to visually erase Islam from the view of non-Muslims (Al Jazeera 2010).

In line with the non-cognisance model, we can see in Belgium the Catholic influence on secular policies. These policies are still modelled on the structure and teachings of the Catholic church, which is seen as the standard religion. For example, the Belgian government recognises the diversity within Christianity, and cooperates with one religious representative of a

denomination per district (modelled on the Catholic structure of bishops). In Islam there is also religious diversity, but this is not recognised. Consequently, the Belgian government makes one Imam represent all Muslims within a district (Vannieuwenburg 2019, 346; 371). The number of practicing Muslims is very close to the number of practicing Catholics, there are little institutions being built for Muslims due to restrictions (Ibid 344). This institutional discrimination is illustrative of the biased attitude of the Belgian government, which operates under the guise of secularism.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

In this section, the observed implications shall be restated and discussed per dimension

The observed implications of the cultural disconnect explanation: *The higher the amount of second generation immigrants in a country, the higher the amount of religious extremism.*

Belgium has the highest percentage of second generation immigrants (13,7%), followed by the Netherlands (12%) and lastly France (9%). If the theory had been correct, we would have seen most second generation immigrants in France, and the least in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, the characteristics and situation of these individuals often do not match the description of the theory. According to the theory, these people are socially segregated, and deliver poor academic results. Yet this does not always match the reality of these people, as their socio-economic position is highly diverse but often better than the first generation immigrants. Furthermore, all of the case studies have shown that more than half of these descendants of immigrants have one native-born parent. The cultural disconnect theory does not apply to them as the cultural identity of the native-born parent is likely to be the same as the mainstream culture. Moreover, children from 'mixed' couples even have better academic scores compared to children born from native couples (Eurostat 2011, 128). Based on this case study analysis, it can be concluded that the cultural disconnect theory is not correct.

The observed implications of the geopolitical explanation: *A country that has a growing amount of foreign-funded extremist organisations, military presence in Muslim-majority countries, and pro-Israel policies, is likely to experience higher levels of religious extremism.*

We can see clear differences between the cases: The Netherlands had limited evidence of foreign-funded religious extremist organisations, the best relations with Israel, and the highest military presence in the MENA region over the past decade with nine missions. Belgium had limited evidence of foreign-funded religious extremist organisations, overall positive but varying relations with Israel, and a limited military presence in the MENA region with two missions over the last decade. France has had no concrete evidence of foreign-funded religious

extremist organisations, neutral relations with Israel and a limited military presence in the MENA region with three missions over the last decade.

If the theory had been correct, France should have been the country with most evidence of foreign-funded extremist organisations, closest ties to Israel and highest military presence in the MENA region. We would have seen these factors to a lesser degree in Belgium and the Netherlands. As this was not the case, we can conclude from this case study analysis that the geopolitical theory is not correct.

The observed implications of the secularist explanation: *A secular system that restricts expression of religiosity disproportionately will lead to an increase of religious extremism.*

France employs the laïcité model, which has led to disproportionate secular policies. This is shown through two aspects: The strict separation of the public and private sphere which asks believers to 'give up' their religious identity in certain spaces and roles. Secondly, the system has very strict policies in place to restrict the influence of religions, but it grants Catholics privileges. This has left non-Catholic believers feeling discriminated against, and frustrated at governmental institutions and believers of other religions.

Belgium employs the non-cognisance model. Despite the fact that Belgian secularism is less assertive, we can see that the same ideas as that of France form the foundation for their secular policies. This is shown in the fact that religious expression is being restricted in public spaces and private business. Moreover, Catholics have a more privileged than other religious groups in Belgium, leading to similar effects as in France.

The Netherlands employs the separationist model, which has led to different secular policies than France and Belgium. There is a less strict separation of the private and public sphere. Religious expression is only restricted in certain professions that are directly representing the state. Overall, the Dutch government tends not to meddle in the affairs of religious communities.

If the theory is true, France restricts expression of religiosity disproportionately to the highest degree. As this is the case; we can conclude that the secularist theory is correct. From the arguments as presented in the literature review and the evidence gathered in the case study

comparison, I conclude that certain forms of secularism lead to a rise of religious extremism in Western Europe.

The cases demonstrate the mechanism behind this and an answer to the research question: A strict separation between the public sphere and the private sphere causes a lot of frustration and resentment towards society and secular institutions. This is because for many people, religion is part of their identity; when they cannot practice their religion they feel like they cannot be themselves in public. Secondly, there is a positive bias towards the pre-existing dominant religion. Under the guise of secularism, states enforce disproportionately strict secular policies on other religions/religious streams. These two factors cause those who are negatively affected to resent secular institutions and to trigger reactive religiosity, leading to religious extremism.

One note is important to make: This thesis does not claim that secularism is the one and only reason for the rise of religious extremism in Europe; such a claim would be nothing short of naïve. Instead, it was my intention to show the reader the mechanism behind the pivotal role secularism plays in causing religious extremism. A good analogy of it would be to regard strict and disproportionate secularism as the powder keg, and external irritating factors such as geopolitics could be the burning matches being thrown into the powder keg. Whereas a large number of scholars only focus on those matches, it was my intention to show the reader the risks of the powder keg.

This thesis is also not to be regarded as some anti-secularist paper. I argue that secularism should not become weaponised as a response to the challenges that come with a multicultural and multi-religious society (Dodman 2020). Instead, it would be important that believers and non-believers alike should take religion seriously. This is a conclusion shared by certain scholars, yet it is something that is not done adequately by many policymakers (Berlinerblau 2005). This includes viewing religious extremists as rational decision makers, instead of depicting them as crazy or ignoring the factors that influence them (Iannaccone and Berman 2006, 111). Instead, I implore bureaucrats and politicians to engage in a conversation *with* believers rather than just talking *about* them (Dodman 2020). By doing so and being aware of the effects disproportionately strict secularism has on a pluralistic society, would be a step in the direction towards lower religious extremism in Western Europe.

Future research on religious extremism should not just cover violent Islamists, as explained in the conceptual debate. I would recommend conducting in-depth comparative research on religious extremism amongst a multitude of religious groups in Europe, as this is lacking (Van Dijk 2015). Currently, the only criticism of European secularism comes from the academics who concern themselves with this narrow field. And even in these debates, the criticisms are usually limited to legal aspects (Chelini-Pont 2013, 288). In order to continue expanding our understanding of the causal relationship between secularism and religious extremism, I implore researchers to conduct more comparative case-study analysis with different cases.

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