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Risk or Contra-Political Correctness with Distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. Military

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Abstract

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By

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MA, American Military University, 2008

BA, University of Nigeria Nsukka, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Muslims are viewed by many in the United States with great anxiety and distrust. This mistrust encompasses Muslims in the U.S. military, especially since 9/11. The trust deficit has implications to U.S. security and military readiness in a global threat environment. Whereas the notion of Islamophobia has generated significant literature in modern public policy, there is a dearth of research on public perception towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perspectives of non-Muslim U.S. military personnel on the mistrust towards Muslim military personnel in the post-9/11 era. Theories of social identity, integrated threat, and social contact hypothesis were used in this phenomenological study to explore attitudes and perceptions towards Muslims in the U.S. military. The study used a sample size of 17 participants drawn from U.S. Army veterans who participated in the Global War on Terrorism. Data were collected through interviews and analyzed by manual coding. The study findings revealed that the overwhelming majority of participants indicated a positive perception of Muslim military personnel and viewed their interaction with Muslim service members as a positive influence. The majority of the participants also acknowledged significant and consequential public mistrust of Muslims serving in the military in the post 9/11 era. The study findings supported the social contact hypothesis that predicted a positive correlation between intergroup contact and prejudice reduction toward outgroups. These findings have positive social change implications in amplifying public policy that supports diversity and inclusivity as a strategic imperative, not just limited to U.S. military readiness but also broader national settings.

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Dedication

In memory of Mama, and Ada who left way too early

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Overview

Muslims in the United States are viewed with suspicion and distrust by some Americans (Shams, 2018; Selod, 2018). The public sentiment has been linked to the perceived connection of Islam to violent extremism (Abrams et al., 2018) and perceived cultural incompatibility (Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012) encased in the "clash of civilization" thesis (Huntington, 2011, n.p.). As a consequence, Muslims are stereotyped as exotic, barbaric, and violent (Abrams et al., 2018; Alibeli & Yaghi, 2012; Saleem et al., 2015,).

The association of Muslims with violent extremism was amplified by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent acts of radical Islam-inspired terrorism, especially the lethal insider acts of terror by a few radicalized Muslims in the U.S. military. The perceived Muslim-terrorism threat nexus kindled distrust and discrimination towards the Muslim American community (Doosje et al., 2009). The consequence was significant public backlash (Aizpurua et al., 2017; Gould & Klor, 2016).

The suspicion cast on the Muslim faith community encompassed Muslims serving in the U.S. military and security agencies (Abu-Ras & Hosein, 2014). This perception of a Muslim threat instigated strong views about Islam's place in America and its perceived incompatibility with liberal democratic values (Casey, 2018). The strong views assumed a prominent position in conservative political discourse and public policy debates on national security, immigration, and human rights (Kurzman et al., 2017; Selod, 2015).

Anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, which manifests as anxiety and distrust of Muslims by the significant non-Muslim U.S. population carries with it

potential for risk(s) to U.S. security. The risks are realized in the form of group-level alienation and mutual distrust that impede national cohesion. These factors impact the active citizenship and national security shared responsibility amongst marginalized groups. Specifically, the distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. constitutes an impediment to vital collaboration between the U.S. Muslim community and law enforcement in countering radicalization (Bjelopera, 2014). Therefore, the problem of suspicion and distrust towards Muslims has significant implications for both the United States and its Muslim American community, which include Muslim military and national security personnel. This problematic situation informs both the rationale and motivation for this study.

Chapter 1 of the study presents the study background, problem statement, study purpose, research questions, and theoretical frameworks. I also discuss the nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and study significance.

Background of Study

Muslims in the United States constitute an estimated 3.45 million people, or roughly 1.1% of the total U.S. population (Mohamed, 2018). Muslims in the United States have a checkered history with mainstream America. The relationship has been marked by varying degrees of distrust, tension, and hostility based on the mainstream population's perceived threat of Muslims who are viewed as an outgroup (Obaidi et al., 2018). The watershed 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent acts of radical Islamic extremism in the United States raised the specter of public anxiety and created a backlash against Muslims (Aizpurua et al., 2017; Gould & Klor, 2016).

The distrust and suspicion of Muslims in the U.S. instigated the notion of a *suspect community* (Ali, 2016; Breen-Smyth, 2014). This term was first used to describe the treatment and experiences of the Irish under the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1974 in the United Kingdom (Hillyard, 1993). The concept later evolved to describe perceived threat of Muslims in the United Kingdom and the counterterror security policies that targeted the British Muslim community. This situation shared similarities to the perceived Muslim threat in the United States and the threat containment policies that were put in place by different administrations. This explains the appropriation of the term suspect community to describe the Muslim experience in the United States since 9/11.

Public anxiety based on the perceived threat from radical Islamic extremism called into question the loyalty and allegiance of Muslims in the United States (Selod, 2015; Snodgrass, 2010). A significant number of Americans expressed concern about homegrown and insider terror attacks linked to radicalized Muslims. Alarming to many

were the cases of terror attacks involving Muslim military personnel. Such worrisome attacks by Muslim U.S. military personnel include but were not limited to the 2003 grenade attack at a U.S. military base in Kuwait that killed two military service members, injuring several others and the 2009 high casualty shooting incident at Fort Hood, Texas, in which 13 service members were killed and 30 others wounded (Freilich et al., 2014).

These acts of terror and others since then that involved Muslims affiliated with the U.S. military contributed to the anxiety and distrust towards Muslim service members. They provided an impulse for many to question the loyalty of Muslims in the Unites States in general and specifically Muslims in the U.S. military (Gallup Polls, 2011; Mintz & Vistica, 2003; YouGov, 2013). The perceived potential for insider threat and nexus to radical Islamic terrorism (BaMaung et al., 2018) weighed on the perception of many towards Muslim service members post-9/11.

Mounting public anxiety and security concerns over the perceived increase in the radicalization of Muslims in the United States led to congressional hearings on the Muslim threat. One such hearing was the 2011 House Committee on Homeland Security hearing on the radicalization of Muslims in America chaired by Republican Congressman Peter King of New York. During the sessions, proponents of the idea of a Muslim threat described the threat posed by Muslims in the U.S. military as part of an infiltration plan of radical Islamic jihadist's intent in undermining or harming the United States (King, 2011). Simply stated, the Muslim threat was seen by many as grave and detrimental to the United States and its way of life (Bale, 2013).

However, the Muslim threat characterization was viewed by some as reflecting the politics of fearmongering. Brooks (2011) disputed the assessment of a grave national threat from radicalized Muslim Americans using a quantitative comparative analysis of cases of terrorist activities. He argued that the assessment of grave national threats linked to Muslims lacked evidentiary rigor based on data of terrorism reporting. Brooks (2011) further argued that the U.S. Muslim community has shown neither increased propensity nor motivation to undermine U.S. security and contended that mischaracterizing the nature of radicalization and homegrown terrorism risked alienating the community needed to confront the problem. Kurzman et al. (2011) also cited the statistical evidence, and Kurzman (2017) presented similar findings that reported less number and frequency of terrorist acts by Muslim Americans in comparison to non-Muslim ideologically driven groups in the U.S.

Despite differences of opinion interpreting the statistical data on violent extremism in the United States, threat perception remained a crucial underlying factor in the spread of anti-Muslim sentiment. The perception of a Muslim threat (real or imagined) in the United States has been linked to anti-Muslim prejudice and significant public support for stringent security and immigration policies that arguably targeted Muslims (Dunwoody & McFarland, 2018; Obaidi et al., 2018). The risk of anti-Muslim sentiment to U.S. security is realized by the creation of an "us versus them" polarizing social dynamic that deepens the trust deficit between the Muslim community and U.S. security organizations (Cherney & Hartley, 2017; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011).

The significant public fear and distrust of Muslims have the potential of alienating the critical resource of Muslim community engagement in fighting Islamic radicalization and terrorism threats. It also plays into the Islamist group's propaganda narrative that the United States is at war with the religion of Islam. This, according to the opinion expressed by notable military and intelligence professionals, acts as a boost to global jihadist recruitment and fuels the radical Islamic extremist threat to U.S. security (Brennan, 2010; Gude, 2015; Petraeus, 2016). This potential development foreshadows a significant risk to U.S. security and national interest in the Muslim world. These risk implications was the impetus for this study to provide policy makers a fuller understanding of perceptions towards Muslim service members from other service members and veterans based on shared experiences in the frontlines of defending America.

Problem Statement

 Most Americans trust and support the U.S. military. However, significant numbers harbor great anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the military and question their allegiance (Gallup Poll, 2016; Ibrahim, 2010; Joo, 2002; Selod, 2015). This attitude holds important implications for diversity in the U.S. military and to the broader national and homeland security interest of the United States.

The anxiety and distrust towards Muslim military personnel by some in the American public have been linked to a perceived threat of Muslims (Obaidi et al., 2018), a reaction exacerbated by the events of 9/11 and subsequent sporadic terrorist attacks, a

few of which involved radicalized Muslim military personnel (Gruenewald et al., 2016; Zegart, 2017).

The distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military presents potential risks to U.S. security in diverse threat scenarios that include radical Islamic extremism. The risk implications are realized via alienation of the U.S. Muslim community as important allies in fighting homegrown radicalization and foreign terrorist networks linked to radical Islam. This situation has a potential negative impact on the recruiting of valuable Muslim human resources in intelligence and national security institutions. This is consequential to public policy as research has shown that distrusted and stigmatized groups tend to exhibit aversion for institutions that magnify, or highlight, suspicion on them (Maliepaard & Verkuyten 2018; Schmader et al., 2008; Shamas, & Arastu 2014;). Furthermore, public distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military engenders a peculiar faith-related stressor shown to exert a mental health toll for some Muslim military personnel (Abu-Ras & Hosein, 2015). These mental health issues potentially create a vulnerability to radicalization (Esposito, 2019; Lyons-Padilla et al., 2015; Webber et al., 2018).

While the broader issue of Islamophobia has spawned a large body of literature, only a few studies explored the issue of public perception towards Muslims in the U.S. military as an extension to the broader social problem of islamophobia. The few studies that explored this area were focused mainly on the perceptions, views, and experiences of Muslim military personnel (Ahmad et al. 2014; Sandhoff, 2017). The gap in the literature is reflected in the dearth of studies that focus on non-Muslim U.S. military service

members' and veterans' perspectives on the social phenomenon of Islamophobia as it pertains to distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military.

This study, therefore, is a contribution to filling the literature gap by exploring non-Muslim U.S. military veterans' perspectives concerning public distrust and anxiety towards Muslims in the U.S. military using a phenomenological approach. I intended that the research would offer useful insights leveraging participants' lived experience serving alongside Muslim service members in contextualizing anti-Muslim sentiment for the American public and policy makers who are trusting of and responsive to views of the military (Golby et al., 2018), thus contributing to positive social change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and insights of non-Muslim U.S. military veterans of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) on the distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. The study leveraged the mission-driven shared experiences of interactions with Muslim military personnel in the climate of anti-Muslim sentiment. The participants' insights contribute to a fuller understanding of the implications of distrust and stigmatization of Muslims in the U.S. military in a global and diverse threat environment. With the study, I strove to provide a nuanced vista in the broader discourse of Islamophobia and intergroup prejudice that is exacerbated by stereotype media framing of Muslims (see Ahmed & Matthes, 2017).

Study Research Questions

RQ1: What are the experiences of serving alongside Muslim U.S. military

personnel in the GWOT?

RQ2: How have the experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel

supported or called into question anxiety and distrust towards Muslims

serving in the U.S. military?

RQ3: How significant is public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military

personnel to U.S. national security and military readiness?

Theoretical Framework

The perception of threat is central to the distrust towards Muslims by a significant population of the mainstream U.S. public. This study was anchored on three intersecting theories of intergroup relations. The pertinent theories were intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) and the social contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979). These theories posit identities of the self and other, perception of threat, and social interaction (contact) as salient to intergroup behavior and attitudes.

The intergroup threat theory explains the role of a perceived threat in motivating in-group attitudes toward outgroup populations. It was originally postulated as integrated threat theory positing four basic threat models that correlate with ingroup prejudice toward outgroups. These threats include realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes. (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

Realistic threat refers to the real or perceived physical or existential threat posed by outgroup(s). In the context of Muslims in the U.S., such a threat includes violent extremism or terrorism. Symbolic threats are perceived incursion of outgroup "alien" values, beliefs, and culture to the ingroup worldview. Many in the evangelical and conservative ideological leaning populations interpret the religious and cultural beliefs represented by Islam as a symbolic threat to the Judeo-Christian U.S. worldview. Intergroup anxiety refers to the sense of uneasiness, fear, and/or discomfort in dealing with a group different from a person's group. Negative stereotypes are negative attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors ascribed to outgroups. In the context of Muslims in the United States, the stereotype is of a dangerous "other" with the propensity for terrorism or violent extremism.

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) explains the individual and group sense of identity relative to other individuals and groups. The theory postulates that membership or belonging to a group confers a sense of identity that binds members to common solidarity with the group against the perceived threat to the group through a self-categorization process that delineates us from them and insiders from outsiders. The social contact hypothesis, on the other hand, predicts that intergroup contacts under certain supportive conditions result in prejudice reduction and group cohesion.

The intersecting theories of integrated threat, social identity, and social contact hypothesis provide a good theoretical framework to exploring the post 9/11 public distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military based on perceived Muslim threats. The theories are in alignment with the research questions because they focus on the centrality

of identity, threat perception, and intergroup contact in elucidating the Muslim experience in the U.S., especially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks by a radical Islamic extremists' organization, an event that colored the lens through which a significant portion of the population perceive Muslims.

Nature of the Study

The research was exploratory and aimed and presenting the perspectives of U.S. military veterans of the GWOT on the issue of public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military service consequent of the perceived threat of Muslims. The study's methodological approach was qualitative based on its perceptual and socially constructed premise.

According to Denzin et al (2008), qualitative research exists as a relevant method for the exploration of social phenomenon in times of uncertainty. The qualitative is a useful methodology in dealing with problems existing in the social world. It is fundamentally subjective and encompasses the premise of reality as socially constructed. The choice of qualitative research methodology for this research was predicated on the subjective nature of perception, which is at the heart of attitude and disposition towards Muslims in the U.S. in the post 9/11 period. Perception is influenced by individual and or group experiences, and interpretations of the social phenomenon based on constructed reality. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) posited that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

For the study, I used a phenomenological approach for the qualitative exploration of the research problem. Phenomenology essentially presents the perspective and insights from study participants who have lived or experienced a given condition, situation, or phenomenon that constitutes a problem or challenge. This study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of non-Muslim U.S. Army veterans of the GWOT centered on their contact, personal observation, and interaction with Muslim military colleagues in the time of significant public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims based on perceived threat.

The study sampling method was the purposeful approach based on the inclusion criteria of non-Muslim U.S. Army combat veterans of the GWOT who had served along with Muslim American military personnel. Data were collected through the medium of telephone and face-to-face interviews. The analysis of participant interview data was accomplished through thematic coding. The detailed description and explanation of methods, processes, and procedures are discussed in Chapter 3.

Definitions

A list of definitions is provided to clarify the meanings of some words and concepts that do not have a consensus scholarly definition. The listed words and concepts are defined as follows:

Anti-Muslim sentiment: This is used in this study to denote discriminatory attitudes and or negative dispositions towards Muslims based on their religious faith and affiliation with Islam.

Veterans of the Global War on Terrorism: This term refers to members of the U.S. military who were assigned, attached; or mobilized to a unit supporting operations in active-duty status after September 11, 2001, to a future date to be determined by the Secretary of Defense in an eligible war zone or theater of operation in the GWOT (Executive Order 13289 of 2003).

Muslim American: This is a social identity label used in this study to describe being Muslim and American or American of Islamic religious faith.

Ingroup: This term is used to categorize membership or belonging into a mainstream population with distinct characteristics that include but are not limited to race, language, culture, values system, and so forth. It denotes a population cluster that can self-refer as "we" with the sameness of meaning (Allport, 1958).

Islamophobia: This is a social atmosphere characterized by "prejudice towards or discrimination against Muslims due to their religion or perceived religious, national, or ethnic identity associated with Islam" (Bridge, 2016, n.p.).

Oriental: This is used in this study to denote people and cultures from Asia, the Middle East, and Arabs associated with the religion of Islam.

Other: The word other as used in this study refers to a distinction and representation of a person or persons different from the self or a person's group. It is often used pejoratively to imply the alien and inferior quality of an entity different from the self.

Outgroup: This refers to a population group or community considered as outsiders to the mainstream ingroup by reasons including but not limited to immigration the difference in race, language, culture, religion, values, and so forth.

Political correctness: This is a pejorative term for social and politically induced language or action intended not to offend a person or group perceived to be disadvantaged or discriminated upon (Roper, 2020) for fear of political or social backlash.

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitation, and Scope of Study

The assumptions, limitations, delimitation, and scope are important guardrails, boundaries, and constraints of this research. These represent qualifiers and parameters that situate the study within specific confines and limitations.

Assumptions

I assumed that data from participants in the form of expressed opinions, lived experiences, and insights are a truthful reflection of their perceptions and attitudes. I also assumed that participants were under no stress, duress, coercion, or collusion to provide other than freewill truthful information. I also assumed that each participant fully understood the research questions as was affirmed. I further assumed that the study sample population as drawn from the U.S. Army has similarities with other U.S. military branches as a diverse, hierarchical, regimented all-volunteer force that emphasizes unit cohesion and collective mission readiness over individualism.

Limitations

There are methodological limitations inherent in qualitative research. These include but are not limited to nonprobability sampling and small sample numbers that largely do not support the generalizability of findings. Consequently, the findings of the study may not be generalized to the study population. Another qualitative study limitation that is acknowledged in this study is the interpretive role of the researcher in assigning value and/or meaning to respondents' narratives. This role creates the potential for the introduction of researcher conscious or unconscious bias. However, the limitation was mitigated to the extent possible through documented bracketing of personal researcher views, member checking, and, importantly, through the critical review oversight of a dissertation committee.

For the study, I acknowledge the limitation of self-assessment and social desirability response bias by participants. There is potential that a participant may share responses considered politically correct or socially desirable which may not be a true reflection of actual held belief or perspective, especially as it pertains to socially sensitive and subjective issues such as attitudes towards other groups or individuals.

Scope of the Study and Delimitations

This study's purpose was to explore and give voice to the perspective of U.S. military veterans of the GWOT on the distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military by a significant population of the American public based on a perceived Muslim threat. The study's scope was delimited by choosing a single branch of U.S. military service (Army branch of service) as the sample frame of the U.S. military's study

population. This delimitation subsumed the role of other distinct demographic

characteristics in other military branches not selected for the study.

However, this scope's consideration was based on the general perception amongst

Americans who equate the U.S. Army branch of service as symbolizing the U.S. military

identity (Goldich & Swift, 2014). The Army is viewed as being "at the fore of American

military culture" (Goldich, 2011, p. 59). This perception stems from the Army branch of

service being the oldest and largest of the U.S. military service branches (U.S.

Department of Defense, 2019).

The choice of purposeful sampling with a small sample of seventeen study

participants was another delimitation of this qualitative methodology. This delimitation

made the generalizability of the research speculative. Nevertheless, as the focus of

qualitative research is in-depth understanding and presentation of meaning rather than

generalizability, the use of purposeful sampling and a small number of participants

satisfied the research goal. As exploratory research, the findings from the study would

create the impetus for comparative military service branch member attitudes to diversity

in general and Muslim service members in particular.

Significance

The study has twofold significance. The first was to underscore the distinctive

problem of public mistrust of Muslims serving in an otherwise trusted symbolic national

security institution (the U.S. military). Secondly, the study presents the unique

perspective of non-Muslim American military veterans who had a lived experience of

interaction with Muslim service members in the GWOT. The study participants' insights

and perspectives provided rich and nuanced context to the stereotype Muslim threat that kindle distrust towards Muslims, especially against the backdrop of radical Islamic extremism cases (Schmuck, Matthes, & Paul, 2017). The study's use of the phenomenological design provided an exploratory conduit for the participants' lived experiences negotiating the intersection of military culture and social perturbations in the broader polity. Such insights have practical application in public policy advocacy for military diversity as a national security imperative.

Summary

Significant U.S. public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military is an aspect of the broader problem of a perceived Muslim threat. This perception has been linked to radicalizations and terrorist attacks against the United States, especially since the 1998 *fatwa* by Osama bin Laden, the leader of the radical Islamic terrorist organization Al Qaeda. Bin Laden's *fatwa*, or Islamic religious injunction, called for the killing of American soldiers and civilians, proclaiming it a duty of every individual Muslim wherever it is possible to do so (Bin Laden, 1998). The later event of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and multiple cases of homegrown radical Islam-inspired terror attacks in the United States against civilians and military personnel appear to be an extension to the Osama bin Laden religious injunction. The resulting anxiety and suspicion of Muslims contributed to the perception amongst many in the United States of Muslims as a suspect group of doubtful loyalty to the United States of America and its flag.

The distrust of Muslims by a significant proportion of the U.S. population encompasses Muslims in the U.S. military. This is especially true in the light of acts of

fratricidal attacks by a few radicalized Muslim service members (Freilich et al., 2014).

The social tension as created by anti-Muslim sentiment enkindled an "us versus them"

dynamic in the minds of many. This situation portends implications to mutual trust and

vital cooperation between the Muslim community and U.S. law enforcement and

homeland security establishment. This is borne out by studies that have argued that

stigmatized groups are likely to become civic participation averse with institutions that

magnify suspicion on them for fear of validating negative stereotypes (Schmader et al.,

2008; Schwartz et al., 2008).

The issue of public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military

presents a significant policy dilemma that requires addressing. This is because of the

inherent implications to U.S. security through the potential challenges it poses to U.S.

military cross-cultural readiness and the vital cooperation of the U.S. Muslim community

with law enforcement, security, and intelligence agencies to counter radicalization. The

"us versus them" dynamic flowing from the distrust increases tension between the

Muslim community and the U.S. mainstream population. This situation has the potential

to instigate anti-Muslim hate crimes and negatively impact cultural diversity (Bayrakli &

Hafez, 2018).

The choice of study topic and goal of the research was to give voice to the

perspectives of military veterans on an aspect of the broader social phenomenon of

Islamophobia for which very little literature exists, thereby contributing to filling the gap

in the literature. Chapter 2 of the study consist of a review of the literature. This was

arranged by themes pertinent to the study. The goal was to connect the study to the

existing body of literature as a foundation based on thematic relevance. In Chapter 3, the

research methodology is presented detailing the study's instrumentation, process, and

procedures. Chapter 4 of the research provides details of the process and procedures for

data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 presents the study findings, discussion,

conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This study was centered on the research problem of distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military by some in the American public based on perceived Muslim threat. The problem is emblematic of Islamophobia or Muslim bias, which has been on the rise in the United States, especially since 9/11 (Gould & Klor, 2016), and portends some risks to U.S. security.

The construct of Islamophobia describes the "fear of and hostility towards Muslims and Islam" (Green, 2019, p. 9), especially in the western world. The term achieved socio-political discursive resonance (Allen, 2016) through the influential report of the British Runnymede Trust titled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (Conway, 1997). This report initially defined Islamophobia in a broad simple term as "unfounded hostility towards Islam" (Conway, 1997, p. 4). Contextual clarity was added to this definition in the 20th-anniversary follow-up report which extended the conceptual dimensions of Islamophobia and defined it as follows:

> Any distinction, exclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life (Elahi & Khan, 2017, p. 7).

Thus, the stereotyping, discrimination, suspicion, anxiety, and questioning of Muslims' active citizenship underpins the phenomenon of Islamophobia. The Georgetown

University Bridge initiative provided an encompassing definition linked to social and public policy to wit: "Islamophobia is an extreme fear of and hostility toward Islam and Muslims (that) often leads to hate speech and hate crimes, social and political discrimination, which can be used to rationalize policies such as mass surveillance, incarceration, and disenfranchisement, and can influence domestic and foreign policy" (Bridge, 2018, n.p.). As evidenced by other research (Bleich, 2011; Bravo López, 2011), Islamophobia's definition is encased in a conceptual framework that includes attitudes of prejudice, bias, distrust, and hostility against Muslims linked to the public threat perception of Islam in the West.

The threat of radical Islam embodied in the brazenness of the watershed 9/11 attacks in the United States amplified tension in the United States's checkered relationship with Islam and the Muslim faith community at home. Alarming to most Americans was the growing number of radicalization and homegrown terrorist attacks. Acts of terrorism involving Muslims in the United States military were particularly deemed worrisome and evoked high anxiety about the potential for radicalization of Muslim military personnel (King, 2011).

The review of literature on the distrust of Muslims in the United States and Muslims serving in the U.S. military was explored using three main thematic areas. The first theme focused on the foundation of the research study. In this theme, I reviewed literature deemed pertinent to the study's epistemological foundation and theoretical anchors. The review discussed the frameworks of social identity theory, integrated threat theory, and the social contact hypotheses as established constructs used in the exploration

of intergroup dynamics and pertinent in the context of Islamophobia in the United States. The second theme of the literature review was the post 9/11 public perception of the Muslim-American identity. This theme reviewed the public perception of the Muslim identity in the United States against the backdrop of radical Islamic extremism. Through this theme, I explored the concept of "othering" as a subtheme tied to ingroup behavior towards outgroups such as Muslims in the United States based on threat perception. The third theme was focused on Muslims in the U.S. military. The theme included subthemes on the subject of military diversity and alternative views about Muslims serving in the U.S. military.

Literature Review Strategy

I used a three-step approach in reviewing the literature. In the first step, I inputted specific keywords or search terms into metasearch engines and indexing platforms for research journals and other scholarly literature. I used Google Scholar extensively for this purpose to survey and earmark pertinent literature. Some of the keywords and search terms that were used included but were not limited to *Islamophobia, anti-Muslim sentiment, othering, stereotype, terrorism, social identity, perceived threat, social contact, radicalization, Muslims in the U.S. military, Muslim military personnel, Muslims in the U.S.,* and *distrust of Muslims*.

I reviewed the output from these search terms for sustained relevance through the reading of introductions and abstracts. Studies were included in the research literature pool based on relevance to the proposed study topic, research problem, methodology, locality of research, and publication dates. The second step involved using the Walden

University Electronic Library to access databases that contain the identified literature in their repository. The most relevant databases used include Academic Search Complete, Sage, ProQuest, ERIC, Scholar Works, EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, and Homeland Security Digital Library.

In the third step, earmarked studies were subjected to cross-referencing for similar works with potential relevance. I saved all relevant literature as earmarked to a personal library using online research references management platforms such as Mendeley, Colwiz, and Researchgate, which enabled online access from anywhere.

Research Foundation

This study was anchored on the philosophical foundation of reality as a social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) that is sustained by institutions and other agents of social legitimation (Vera, 2016). This epistemological foundation is manifest in the threat perception, a concept that undergirds the attitudinal disposition towards Muslims as a group-object of anxiety and distrust to a significant number of Americans (Granger, 2017; Uenal, 2016). The perception of Muslim threat according to Bowe and Makki (2016) represents a socially constructed reality. This is without prejudice to the factual reality that few Muslims (civilian and military) espousing radical Islamic ideology have actually carried out acts of terrorism targeting U.S. citizens and national symbols in the name of Islam.

Terrorism linked to Islam being the basis for the notion of Muslim threat in the U.S. represents a social construction in which the objective reality of violent extremism assumes subjective interpretation based on the identity of the committer or perpetrator.

Labels of terrorism are often arbitrarily assigned based on the identity construction of the perpetrator(s) when identified as Muslim (Rao & Shenkman, 2018). This fluid negotiation of label and subjectivity in the framing of terrorism is influenced by what Walsh (2017) described as "moral panic (that) stem from interlocking reactions of social control agents, the media, and publics" (p. 646.). This moral panic is said to be a selective outrage that highlights the barbarous stereotype of the *other*.

The racialization of terrorism as a Muslim threat (Selod, 2015; Sharma & Nijjar, 2018) was based on stereotype attributes of Muslims as being "predispose(ed) to violence, aggression, barbarism, and misogyny" (Bakali 2016, p. 28). This narrative of an innate penchant for violence gained resonance in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States and led to the identity construction of Muslims as a "suspect community in the eyes of many in the United States. According to Tsoukala (2008), the phenomenon of construction of social enemies is essential to defining mainstream society boundaries and social bonds (p.140).

The perception and construction of the Muslim identity as a (potential) threat to security and social order (Bakali, 2016) is a subjective cognitive response that advances the thesis of threat perception as being socially constructed (Macdonald, 2018). In an influential work in international relations, Wendt (1992) posited that the cognitive process of threat perception is based on an entity's social identity and how that entity or group perceives or constructs its security situation relative to others within a diverse group setting. This underscores the applicability of identity-centered intergroup threat theory and the social contract theory as useful theoretical constructs for the study.

Theoretical Framework

The intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002; Stephan, & Stepahn, 2000), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and the social contact hypothesis (Allport 1954; Pettigrew, 1998) are frameworks adopted in exploring the distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military by a significant number of the American public. Justification for the theories was based on the nexus of a perceived threat to prejudice towards outgroup as influenced by social identity salience (Stephan & Stephan, 2017). The two theories interface in explaining identity-driven threat perception and the mitigating effect of social contact in intergroup relations. The theories derive from the centrality of identity in categorizing insiders (ingroup) and outsiders (outgroup) in intergroup relations dynamics.

The social identity theory is the foundation theory from which the more narrow and tailored derivative theory of social identity and self-categorization evolved (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Thoits & Virshup, 1997). Social identity theory provides the critical framework to contextualize the underpinnings of "they" and "us." These terms are based on a cognitive process that delineates the ingroup from outgroup(s). This delineation is predicated on the categorizing of the self as different from the other (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). The theory posit that strong ingroup identification creates ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias (Turner, 1985). This theory applies to the Muslim experience in the United States wherein the mainstream American population perceives a potential threat from Muslims who are viewed as outgroup.

However, Brewer (2001) differed in the correlation of strong in-group identification with outgroup bias. He argued that in-group identification does not necessarily equal outgroup bias but is a contingent factor activated by social, political, economic, stresses and perturbations perceived as threatening by the in-group. Social identity and self-categorization are said to activate a social boundary of 'us' and 'them' tension that is exacerbated by the degree of social identity permeability, the threat environment, and the media as agents of social legitimation (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001; Mutz & Goldman, 2010).

Citrin, Wong, and Duff (2001) situated social identity and intergroup behavior within the U.S. context. They argued that the U.S. motto of 'E Pluribus Unum' was an acknowledgment of national and diverse racial ethnicities or cultural identities within the polity. Citrin, Wong, and Duff (2001) further inferred that American national identity consisted of a liberal interpretation that emphasized a civic commitment to American identity (individualism and democracy) as well as a nativist interpretation that espouses cultural conformity or assimilation of the worldview and values of the dominant group.

This argument supported the view that while the U.S. was by historical antecedence an immigrant nation, it had forged a unique social and cultural identity in which the 'Americanness,' or 'otherness' of groups living within its borders, are measured relative to the dominant group's worldview. This was consistent with the social dominance hypothesis (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin 2006). The phenomenon of social identity was described as a powerful force that integrates and divides (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001).

An aspect of social identity fault-line in the U.S. was illustrated in the speech to the nation after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2000. President George W. Bush gave voice to a nagging question likely in the minds of most Americans at the time: "Why do they hate us?" (Bush, 2002, p. xviii). The rhetorical question underscored the emergent social and cultural fault-line based on group identities (us vs. them). It highlighted the centrality of social identity in threat perception and friend/foe identity construction. The notion of social identity and self-categorization being correlated with a self-preference bias for the in-group and negative perception or hostility towards outgroup envisioned as 'other' has been supported by research (Hamley et al, 2020, Reimer et al., 2020; Espinosa et al., 2020; Bahns, 2015; Kteilly et al., 2014). Social identity underscores group identity salience to intergroup relations based on perception (or misperception) of a threat. Chua (2016) framed this assessment with the position that when groups feel threatened, they retreat into tribal identity. "They close ranks and become more insular, more defensive, more punitive, more us-versus-them" (p.8).

This assessment is arguably descriptive of the undercurrent of anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S. linked to a perceived threat of Islamic extremism and value differences between the Judeo-Christian Western worldview of the mainstream U.S. population and the Islamic faith community (Harvey, 2016). This is as the forces of demographic changes through immigration are perceived by many to be diluting, eroding, and or threatening to the historical socio-political status quo. This perception, according to Whitehead and Perry (2019), generates concern and impulse for "protection of

symbolic boundaries" (p. 2), an aspect of which manifests as prejudice towards Muslims in the U.S. military.

The construct of intergroup threat theory anchored to the foundation of social identity at the group level of analysis postulated explanations for attitudes between groups. The theory drew from several prior studies and elements from other intergroup social theories, including realistic group conflict theory (Sherif & Sherif, 1969), symbolic racism theory (Kinder & Sears, 1981), and intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). The theory as was originally proposed by Stephan and Stephan (2000), (Integrated threat theory) posited four threat categories. These are as follows: (a) realistic threat, which refers to physical and existential threats to an in-group's survival and well-being (Zhang, 2015), examples of which include terrorism, war, taking away jobs, and so forth; (b) symbolic threat, which includes perceived dilution or erosion of the values, culture, and mores of the in-group by outgroups; (c) intergroup anxiety, explained as the uneasiness and assumed negative outcome resulting from interaction with an outgroup consequent of differences in values and culture (Stephan, 2014); and (d) negative stereotypes, which refer to the attribution of negative traits and or qualities such as being aggressive, violent, or untrustworthy to outgroups (Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016).

Integrated threat theory was revised into the intergroup threat theory (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) with a reduction in the threat categories from four to two broad categories (realistic and symbolic threats) with five factors advanced as contingent conditions. The antecedents include strong in-group identification, negative outgroup contact or interaction, existing history of conflict, power inequality, social hierarchy, and status quo

that favors the in-group (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Integrated threat theory and its later revision to intergroup threat theory, has generated several confirmatory studies and meta-analyses (Riek, Mania, & Gartner, 2006), attesting to its reliability and validity in the study of intergroup behavior in social and political settings.

Since 9/11, several studies have posited a strong correlation between in-group threat perceptions and public support for policies hostile to outgroup(s) perceived as threat sources (Welch, 2016; Wirtz et al., 2016). Perceived threats have been shown to influence public policy by leveraging strong in-group or mainstream anxiety and or fear. Policies based on such in-group support include military action against perceived threat sources (Golec de Zavala & Kossowska, 2011), support for harsh interrogation and detention practices (Piazza, 2015), and general opposition to outgroup beneficial policies such as immigration (Dunwoody and McFarland 2017).

Conversely, social contact as a situational factor has been found to moderate threat perceptions (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). This aspect of intergroup threat theory drew extensively from the social contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979; Pettigrew, 1998), which theorized that social contact (under optimal conditions) mitigates prejudice to outgroup. Allport (1979) posited four conditions as antecedents. These include superordinate goals, cooperation, equality of status, and institutional or leadership support. These conditions share similarities to the evolved organizational culture of the U.S. military since its desegregation (Kamarck, 2017). The optimal conditions are operationalized in the culture of a common goal that revolves around training and

readiness to fight and win wars as a cohesive, inclusive entity à la "Army of One" (Dao, 2001).

Nevertheless, the U.S. military as an all-volunteer military force contends with the paradoxical corollaries of exclusivity, self-selection, and command-sanctioned intergroup social contact. Niu (2020) noted that exclusivity was implemented through both "formal and informal restrictions that bar or discourage specific groups of people from serving in the military" (p. 1477). As an all-volunteer-based military, self-selection made it more likely for certain demographics, perceptions, and attitudes in the larger in-group civil population to permeate the military institution (Nteta & Tarsi, 2016). On the other hand, command-sanctioned social contact in the U.S. military promotes inclusion and force cohesion through an emphasis on "organizational and collective effectiveness, discipline, and commitment…" (Goldich, 2011, p. 68) as the overarching values and objectives.

American Muslim Identity Post 9/11

The identity of being Muslim in the U.S. was thrust into greater scrutiny and censure by the watershed terrorist attacks of 9/11 that were carried out by the terrorist group Al Qaeda (Kean & Hamilton, 2004). This event and subsequent acts of high casualty terrorist attacks carried out in the name of Islam in the U.S. corroborated in the minds of many U.S. citizens, the clash of civilization and cultural incompatibility thesis (Huntington, 2011). Radical Islamic extremism, especially on American soil, colored the lens through which most Americans viewed Islam and its adherents. According to Georgetown University Bridge Initiative Super Survey (2015), "The brutality of groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram dominates headlines, and the religious language

they use(ed) to legitimate their actions and mobilize support, elicits suspicion and resentment towards all those who share their faith" (p. 24). The terror events created a backlash. Muslim Americans were perceived as a 'suspect community' and the potential enemy within (Gillum, 2018; Silva, 2017; Breen-Smith, 2014; Kundnani, 2014; Ciftci, 2012).

Muslims in the U.S. were caught in the intense spotlight of public scrutiny (Piazza, 2015). The ensuing high-level public anxiety and suspicion of Muslims made it understandable to perceive and frame Muslims as potential radicalization suspects (Breen-Smyth, 2014). Anxiety about 'the Muslim question' in U.S. homeland security became a priority concern for a significant portion of the American population who were fearful of potential terrorist sleeper cells and homegrown attacks. This state of anxiety is evidenced by a congressional hearing on 'the Muslim problem' (Bridge, 2020).

The news and entertainment media play an outsized role in public perception of Muslims/Islam in the U.S. through slants and portrayals of the Muslim identity as violent and barbaric (Matthes, Schmuck & Von Sikorski, 2019; Saleem et al., 2017). In a meta-analysis study of 345 published studies Ahmed and Matthes (2016), found evidence of the dominance of negative framing of Muslims and the portrayal of Islam as a violent and aggressive religion. This framing was consistent with the study by Powell (2018) that showed U.S. media coverage of terrorism involving Muslims depicted as part of a larger Islamic threat to the Judeo-Christian heritage of the United States. This view advances the clash of civilizations thesis popularized by Huntington (2011).

Several scholars acknowledged some degree of bias and racialization of terrorism. In an experimental design study, West and Lloyd (2017) reported terrorism labeling biases. The study contended that acts of violence by Muslims were more likely to be labeled terrorism compared to similar acts by non-Muslim white Americans. The effect of the labeling bias according to West and Lloyd (2017) manifests in the significant negative public perception towards Muslims. The perspective of labeling bias was supported by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) Report (Rao & Shenkman, 2018), which investigated bias in the treatment of ideologically motivated violence in the United States. The Report compared media coverage and judicial treatment when the perpetrator of ideologically motivated violence is perceived to be Muslim and when the perpetrator is non-Muslim white. The Report found a conflation of identity, ideology, and criminality for Muslim-perceived individuals. The conflation of ideology and identity according to Rao and Shenkman (2018), "makes collective guilt more likely and leads to public acceptance of discriminatory policies"(n.p).

Beydoun (2018) upheld the view of bias in media coverage and legal treatment of ideological crimes. He contended that there was "presumptive exemption from terrorism for white culprits and a presumptive connection to terrorism for Muslim culprits" (p. 177). This situation according to Beydoun (2018) was intended to confer different and far more negative implications for the Muslim perpetrators of violent extremism and their community than for white actor(s) and the white community for similar acts of violence. However, Bleich, Nisar, and Abdelhamid (2016) identified some balance and overall

positive articles depicting Muslims in the liberal-leaning Newspaper, *The New York Time*s.

Overall, perceived media bias in the portrayals of Muslim/Islam has been presented as a reality of the Muslim experience, especially since 9/11 (Semati, 2010). Some scholars have attributed this to identity politics and deep-seated religious suspicion that served to "providing [the] framework for the construction of symbolic boundaries…. [and] process of exclusion and inclusion" (Tope, Rawlinson, Pickett, Burdette, & Ellison 2017, p. 52).

Several scholars contend that relating terrorism to Muslim/Islam identity cements negative stereotyping of Muslims and has social and security implications for the 'othered' community (Shamas & Aratsu, 2013; West & Lloyd, 2017). This is significant because many in the U.S. perceive Arab and the Middle East to be synonymous and interchangeable with Islam/Muslim identity, making little or no distinctions to the diverse ethnicities and religions in the region (Hancock, 2018; Middle East Policy Council, n.d.). The implication of this broad stroke categorization is a 'Look Muslim or Middle Eastern' identity construction of a 'suspect community' and racialization of terrorism (Sharma & Nijjar, 2018; Sheth, 2017; Selod & Embrick, 2013).

Welch (2016) used the minority threat theoretical model to advance the argument that Arab/Middle Eastern (Look-Muslim Identity) stereotype was positively correlated to public support for tough security policy measures against Muslim communities. The mediating role of in-group anxiety and threat perceptions activate in-group support of public policies targeting outgroups such as Muslims in the U.S. This assessment was

contended by Dolan and Ilderton (2017) and Dunwoody and McFarland (2017).

The March 2011 U.S. Congress Hearings on Islamic radicalization in American (King, 2011) were seen by some as representing such containment through public policymaking. This Congressional Hearings generated controversy along the U.S. political divide (Stolberg & Goodstein, 2011). Supporters of the Hearings hailed them as courageous stand against political correctness necessary to confronting 'the cancer within' while its opponents decried them as targeting and stigmatizing a community for the transgressions of a few (Edwards, 2015). Notwithstanding the partisan divide, the intensity of the spotlight on the Muslim community illustrated the level of support for measures against perceived threat sources, consistent with Welch's findings (2016).

However, the American public perception of Islam's connection to violent extremism and threat against the U.S. is not without some factual incidents and or situations of radical Islam-inspired terror attacks targeting the nation and its citizens both in the homeland and overseas. Records show that the U.S. has been a target of transnational Islamic violent extremism (Mueller, 2017). Significant number of the attacks resulted in a massive loss of lives and properties. This was especially true since 1998 when Osama bin Laden, the Muslim extremist group leader Al Qaida, decreed it a sacred duty of faithful Muslims to kill Americans wherever possible (Bin Laden, 1998). The *Fatwah* by Osama bin Laden was a watershed as it signaled the first formal religious injunction authorizing the global *Ummah* (Muslim faithful's) to embark on violent Jihad against Americans.

However, a different reality emerges when radical Islamic extremism is compared to other forms of ideological extremism. Data from the Global Terrorism Database of the University of Maryland (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2016) show important differences in trends. A review of the 1998-2016 dataset showed approximately 459 incidents of terrorism, resulting in approximately 3,168 fatalities and 15,575 injuries in the U.S. (See Figure 1). These terror incidents data reporting was based on specific threshold criteria:

- Violent act(s) aimed at attaining political, social, economic, or religious goals.
- Evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some ideological message to a larger audience (or audiences).
- Action outside the context of legitimate warfare activities.
- All incidents reported as acts of terrorism, regardless of doubt.
- Reported unsuccessful attacks.

Figure 1

Terrorism Incidents in the United States 1998-2016
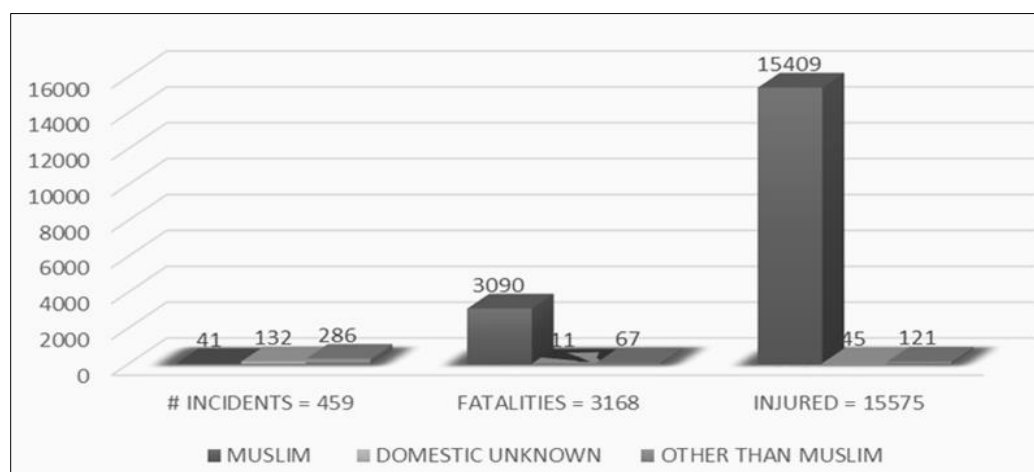
Data Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2016).

The data in Figure1 showed higher injury and casualty rates for attacks by Muslim terrorists the bulk of which stems from the single events of 9/11. But notably, the number of terror attack incidents by Muslims was less compared to non-Islamic ideologically motivated terrorist attacks for the same period. This comparative statistical finding was consistent with the findings presented by Kurzman et al. (2011) and Kurzman (2017). Both studies drew conclusions based on quantitative analysis that Muslims' incidents of terror attacks were much less in frequency than non-Islamic ideological attack incidents.

Data derived from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2016) on individual radicalization in the U.S., showed a notable upward trajectory in Muslim radicalization and violent Islamic extremism in the U.S. from the late 1990s (Fig. 2). However, data from Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) (Yates et al. 2020) show that the Islamic radicalization trend in the U.S. to have significantly been outpaced by far-right ideological radicalization. The more recent upsurge of radicalization by far-right groups has been attested by scholars (Johnson, 2021; Pantucci & Ong, 2021). This trend was validated by the 2020 U.S. Homeland Threat Assessment which cites white supremacist extremism as now constituting "the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland" (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020).

Some within the all-volunteer U.S. military have attested to this growth of white nationalist or far-right ideology, especially since the 2016 elections (Shane, 2017).

Figure 2

Radicalization Trend in the United States by Ideology 1948-2016
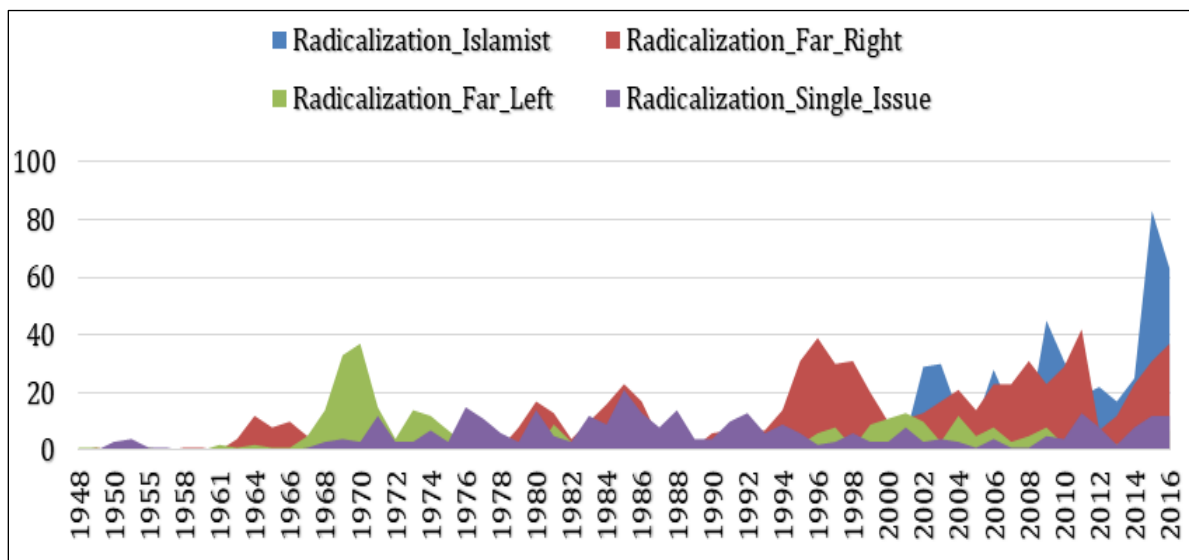
Data source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (2016)

Despite the statistical evidence of higher radicalization and terror attacks by non-Muslim sources, perceived Muslim threat and Muslim links to terrorism continue to drive the stereotype of Muslims as the dangerous 'other' (Saleem et al., 2015). Rising nativist and anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S. body politic since 9/11 has had an added effect on the perceived otherness of Muslims (Bulut, 2016). The U.S. public anxiety about radical Islamic extremism and the perceived complicity of the Muslim community became a crucial factor in the threat perception towards Muslims in the U.S. (including Muslim military service members).

Muslim-Americans as "Other"

Muslims in the U.S. are portrayed as 'other' by the mainstream non-Muslim U.S. population (Abrams et al., 2018). The notion of the 'other' as an identity compared and

relative to the self has its roots in the Hegelian treatise of master-slave dialectics (Jensen, 2011), in which consciousness of the self is derived from interaction, recognition, and judgment of the other. The concept of the 'other' was subject in the philosophy of phenomenological epistemology advanced by Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas (Budd, 2005). It gained critical importance through the pivotal work of Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) which focused attention on feminism. The representation of the 'other' as a foil and an inferior to the self was later explored by Spivak (1985) as a useful concept in exploring postcolonial denigration of the colonized distinctiveness.

The 'other' as a defining concept was appropriated to characterize the perceived inferior dissimilarity of the Muslim identity to the western quality through the immensely influential work of Edward Said (2004) titled *Orientalism*. This pivotal work had far-reaching resonance in its critique of western intelligentsia self-anointment as a mouthpiece projecting the definition of the Oriental identity which includes Islam that is portrayed as exotic.

Brewer (2001) situated othering in the context of intergroup dynamics, positing that the threat perception of the dominant group confers and or transfers otherness to non-members of the dominant culture or group; a process that is often informed by the threat perception of the dominant group. This was arguably descriptive of the Muslim experience in the U.S. revealing fault lines at the intersection of diversity and national identity in a perceived threat environment. This condition has been experienced by other minority groups in the U.S. in the quest for active citizenship (Rohall, Ender, and

Matthews, 2019). Biles and Spoonley (2007), affirmed the nexus of 'citizenship and national identity as being "inextricably linked" (p. 192).

While the U.S. national motto *E Pluribus Unum* (out of many, one) acknowledges the immigrant history and the diversity of identities and cultures within its boundaries (Citrin, Wong, & Duff, 2001), however, the argument about national identity and diversity as it pertains to the active citizenship of 'the other' especially in times of perceived national security threat, continue to be waged between pluralists and particularism worldviews (Ravitch, 1990). Biles and Spoonley (2007) concisely laid out the rhetorical argument jostling for supremacy in defining national identity which is also applicable to the Muslim question in the West:

> Can an inclusive and evolving national identity act as a bulwark against the sense of alienation and exclusion …Can a robust and clearly articulated immutable national identity act as an appropriate and impermeable membrane to exclude those elements that are unable or unwilling to be assimilated into the national identity of the state? (p. 192)

According to Kuzio (2001), "the construction of a national identity requires the existence of contrasting others… (And) a perceived sense of difference to (the) other …" (pp. 343-344). The 'other' therefore is conceptualized as different and implicitly somewhat inferior to the self or in-group. Seidman (2013) observed that the 'other' is objectified as the outsider, dangerous, and threatening. This is a salient fault line in societies with a diverse or multicultural population.

The British Runnymede Trust Report amplified this assessment, positing that inherent in the diversity of groups within a geopolitical enclave or nation are social fault lines of identities that fan the embers of social tension and kindle in-group threat perception. (Parekh, 2000). The report further posited that within diversity are "competing attachments to the nation, group's subculture, city, town, neighborhood, and the wider world" (Parekh, 2000, p. 25). These attachments and competition within diversity, according to the report, create social tension between dominant group(s) and the 'others.' This assessment has as much relevance in the U.S. as in the UK, based on the similarity of the countries as leading western democracies and the mosaic of cultural and religious diversity within their borders fueled by globalization forces.

Exploring the angle of historical context to western world distrust and uneasiness towards Muslims is important. From pre-colonial to post-colonial times, Kilani (2010) contended that colonial expeditionary contact by the West resulted in a power dynamic in which "the newly 'discovered' was constantly attributed (and compared) to the old known" (p.10). Furthermore, according to Kilani (2010) "colonization and domination led to a forced knowledge of the other" (p. 13). The asymmetry of the resulting power dynamic supports the orientalist argument that the Oriental (symbolizing much of the Muslim world) was defined through the perspective and self-interest of a politically and economically dominant West as the other (Said 2004).

The seminal work *Orientalism* by Said (2004) deconstructed the West's asymmetrical relationship and perception toward the Muslim world of the Middle East and described it as one in which Muslim identity and group persona was depicted as

hostile 'other' world beyond the seas (p. 56). Edward Said further contends that the characteristics and values attributed to the Orientals stemmed not from how the Orientals' worldview but from the perspectives of the 'Orientalists' (Western scholars and influencers who have appropriated the responsibility of defining the Orientals). Said maintains that the Orientalists claim to know the Orientals more than the Orientals know themselves or construct their identities.

Underscoring the implications of identity construction of the other, Gerges (1999) and, Little (2004) concur that Western views of Muslims are often Islamophobic and conveyed in the subtext of violence and or inferiority. Such characterizations were contended as commonplace in western literature and media and served to perpetuate the stereotype of Muslims, Arabs, and Africans as exotic and barbaric. According to Gerges (1999), the history of the contact and relationship between the U.S. and the Islamic world was rife with mutual suspicion and confrontations. This tension was attributed to culture clash, self-interest, perceived domination, and resistance dynamics between the U.S. and the Islamic world (Haddad, 2018).

The history of mutual suspicion and confrontations between the U.S. and the Arab world stretches far back to 1801-1805 disagreement and conflict with the 'Barbary Pirates' in Tripoli (Page, 2016). Other notable events that shaped perceptions between the U.S. and the Islamic world included trade and geopolitical issues such as the Balfour Declaration in 1948 that brought into being the state of Israel (Freeman-Malloy, 2017), the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargoes of 1973-74, the Iranian revolution and U.S. hostage crises in Teheran 1977-79. More recent events

include the bombing of the U.S. warship (USS Cole) by the radical Islamic terror network

Al Qaeda in 2000, the mass casualty 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the consequent U.S.

GWOT in multiple theaters of operation in predominantly Muslim countries.

These experiences and events as interpreted from a dominant western media

played a significant role in shaping U.S. public perception towards Islam and its

adherents. Muslims were often depicted as "an unpredictable lot whose penchant for

political and religious extremism constituted a grave threat to the U.S." (Little, 2004, p.

27). This viewpoint was consistent with Gerges (1999), who contended that "most

American cultural perception of Arab/Muslims (Orientalism) is that they are dangerous,

untrustworthy, undemocratic, barbaric, and primitive" (p. 7). This perspective was both

rooted in historical contact experiences and "stereotype perpetuating" (Allport, 1979, p.

200) media role.

The argument of Muslim victimhood and U.S. public misperception towards

Muslims/Islam was not without stout challenges and rebuttals to the narrative.

Challengers advanced opposite conclusions from the interaction between the U.S. and the

Arab world based on realism in international relations and the notion of American

exceptionalism. Lewis (1990) painted an apocalyptic picture of a "rising tide of rebellion

against western paramountcy" (p. 49), a status often equated with the pre-eminence of the

United States. He argued that the Islamic world has its identity construction of America

as a land peopled by decadent unbelievers and sinners or infidels who must be resisted by

true (Islamic) believers. Lewis attributed the animosity to perceived domination of

Islamic culture and civilization by a hubristic infidel (American) culture.

Lewis (1990) further postulated a cultural and ideological divide between Islam and the West with the U.S. as the standard-bearer. He presaged the potential for a clash of civilizations in which religion would be a catalytic factor. The "clash of civilization" notion gained impetus as an analytical framework accounting for entrenched differences in worldviews between the Judeo-Christian liberal democracies and Islam with its adherents and lands.

Huntington (2011) magnified the idea of "clashes of civilizations" advanced by Lewis (1990) making the concept a central thesis of his seminal work with the same title. Huntington (2011) argued that existing cultural or civilization fault lines bring about a "hate dynamic" of "us against them" based on cultural disimilarities (p. 266). He advocated for the preservation of a distinct American identity while acknowledging diversity imperatives.

The clash of civilization thesis as made popular by Huntington (2011) gained critical acclaim among conservative and nativist ideologues, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. by radical Islamic Jihadists from the Al Qaeda terrorist organization. The attack seemed confirmatory of a major salvo in the "clash of civilizations" struggle. The immediate consequence was an increase in the perceived threat of Muslims by the U.S. population. This dynamic was also consistent with the integrated threat thesis to the extent that Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim identity came to signify a security risk identity in the U.S. (Cainkar, 2009; Naber, 2008).

The clash of civilization thesis has been appropriated and cited by some in the far right-wing political demography in the U.S. to propagate charged nativist and populist

perspective of "civilizational incompatibilities between the West and Islam" (Haynes, 2019, p. 2). This was manifest in the rhetoric of some politicians in the run-up to the U.S. 2016 presidential elections (Haynes, 2017; Haynes 2020).

Several neo-conservative-leaning pundits and politicians describe as political-correctness public policy proposals and initiatives that support religious diversity and multiculturalism in the face of the perceived Islamic threat to the United States security (Schultz, 2018; Scribner, 2017; Pipes, 2013). Such political correctness includes reasonable accommodation and exceptions to policies, especially in the U.S. military. The accommodation of Muslim religious practices and observances by the U.S. military was described as dangerous appeasement to Islamist sensitivities (Rusin, 2013).

Muslim Americans in the U.S. Military

Muslims in the U.S. military are estimated at roughly 0.3% of the active-duty forces (Kamarck, 2017) or approximately 5,000 service members (Khan & Martinez, 2015) across the different branches of the U.S. military. These figures are based on self-reporting. The Department of Defense does not mandate the collection of service members' religious faith affiliation (Hunter & Smith, 2010). The actual number according to Bleuer (2012) may be over 20,000 including Reserve and National Guard Forces.

Like other minorities in the U.S., such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asians, or Hispanics; Muslims, have served honorably in the U.S. military from the revolutionary war to the present day (Curtis, 2017). However, the perception towards Muslims in the U.S. military became prejudiced after 9/11 and exacerbated by other

subsequent cases of radical Islam-inspired domestic terror attacks. There were few but notable incidents of deadly insider attacks involving individual Muslim soldiers including the high-profile Fort Hood shooting in 2009 involving a Muslim U.S. officer, Major Nidal Hassan (Bleuer, 2012). There were also a few cases of Muslim soldiers who voiced concern about fighting against other Muslims during the GWOT and sought religious guidance about their deployment orders to combat theaters in Muslim countries (Nafi, 2004). These activities spooked many Americans who questioned the trustworthiness and allegiance of Muslim service members based on perceived religious faith conflict.

Swanson (1999) explored the role conflict of Muslims in the U.S. military. Swanson argued that both the military and Islam have a commonality of being highly loyalty demanding, a characteristic that has the potential of role conflict between "soldier of God versus soldier of America" (Swanson, 1999, p. 41). This assessment underscored the mistrust of a significant portion of Americans towards Muslims in the U.S. military. Swanson (1999) reported evidence of role conflict amongst Muslim service members but indicated that many Muslim service members could integrate Muslim and U.S. military personnel roles by interpreting their profession as a calling and opportunity to bring about social change.

The September 2001 (9/11) terror attacks against the U.S. and the 2009 fratricidal attack at Fort Hood, Texas, by, Muslim U.S. Army Psychiatrist, Major Hassan, panned the spotlight on the Muslim community in general and Muslim military personnel in particular, resulting in public anxiety and increased anti-Muslim sentiment. The spotlight generated a few pertinent studies focused on Muslims in the U.S. military. One such

study was by Sandhoff (2017). This was a phenomenological study that explored Muslim military personnel's lived experiences.

The study interviewed fifteen Muslim military service veterans, focusing on their individual experiences as Muslim military personnel in the climate of distrust towards Muslims. Participants in the study recounted personal experiences of harassment and bigotry. However, the experiences were not perceived by the study participants to have risen to the level of systemic hostility and or prejudice. The participant presented their lived experiences as a source of significant stress that created a sense of estrangement for them especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The stress impact of anti-Muslim sentiment on the Muslim service members was the focus of Ahmad, Thoburn, Bikos, and Perry (2014). Their study explored prejudice and consequent stress experienced by Muslims in the U.S. military. The study adopted the discrimination and resiliency model to extend the race-connected stress model of Loo, Singh, Scurfield, and Kilauno (1998). The study utilized a grounded theory design to explore the experiences of Muslim American military personnel who served in U.S. military conflicts in Muslim countries. The study participants consisted of thirteen Muslim U.S. military personnel who detailed accounts of significant sense of stress and alienation due to perceived discrimination. The study posited three dimensions of discrimination faced by Muslim Americans as service members. The first dimension consists of a workplace or 'on-post' prejudice and bigotry from other service members' manifesting as innuendoes, name-calling, and social exclusion. The second dimension involves the perceived public or 'off post' distrust, suspicion, and profiling, while the

third dimension consisted of suspicion and estrangement from within the Muslim community.

Ahmad, Thoburn, Bikos, and Perry (2014), argued that U.S. public anti-Muslim sentiment generated significant stress on Muslim military service members. The stress was further complicated by estrangement with many in their faith community who harbor resentment or reservations about their role in the U.S. military perceived as force for the pacification of Islam. This combination of public suspicion and faith community estrangement according to Ahmad, Thoburn, Bikos, and Perry (2014), created vulnerability for Muslim service members to psycho-social stress. The observation aligned with studies that posited nexus between social alienation and discrimination on the mental health of vulnerable immigrant Muslims in the U.S. (Rippy & Newman 2006; Gaffer & Çiftçi, 2010). And several other studies reported a positive correlation between social alienation, perception of discrimination, and radicalization (Bhui, Everitt, Jones, 2014; Lahav & Perliger, 2016; De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2016; Ellis & Abdi 2017).

However, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of Muslims in the U.S. military share a favorable view of the U.S. military accommodation of their faith than the non-military population (Curtis, 2016). The positive perception was credited to the military leadership commitment to diversity, and equal opportunity policies as was noted by Sandhoff (2017). Nonetheless, Ahmad et al., (2014) study amplified the risks posed by Islamophobia in its various manifestations to the U.S. security and national interest. The experiences and perceptions of Muslim veterans of the U.S. military identified in the

studies by Baumgarten and Gober (2002), Sandhoff (2017), Ahmad, Thoburn, Bikos, & Perry (2014) suggested important perceptual differences between the U.S. military as an institution and the broader public sentiment concerning Muslim's accommodation.

As an institution, the U.S. military has evolved since its desegregation to be more welcoming to minority groups, including Muslims, in its branches of service as part of an overall strategic diversity and inclusion plan for total force readiness (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020). While some Muslim service members have reported perceived bigotry and acts of prejudice, these were not deemed as systemic within the military institutions as perceived by study participants (Sandhoff, 2017). The U.S. military has emerged as a pacesetter in diversity and inclusion in the U.S. workforce.

The acknowledgment by Muslim U.S. military personnel and veterans of the overall better acceptance, recognition, and accommodation in the U.S. Armed Forces suggest a perceived difference between the mainstream U.S. civilian public and the military in attitudes towards Muslims. Polling data suggest that there was deeper fear and anxiety about Muslims serving in the military-driven by a more acute perception of the 'Muslim threat' within the nativist or conservative-leaning demography of the civil society (Pew Research Center, 2017; Telhami, 2015). This assessment was supported by Hauslohner (2017), who concluded that anti-Muslim sentiment and threat perception is much stronger and greater amongst the conservative demography (of the civilian population) who perceive dangerous political correctness in the U.S. military regarding the perceived Muslim threat. This view was further illustrated by the report of findings of the conservative majority of the United States Congress House Committee on Homeland

Security (2012) chaired by Representative Peter T. King (R., NY). The findings in the

report stated amongst other things that:

- The radicalization of Muslim Americans constitutes a real and serious

    homeland security threat.

- There is not enough Muslim-American community cooperation with law

    enforcement.

- The "Insider" threat to military communities is a significant and potentially

    devastating development.

- Political correctness continues to stifle the Military's ability to effectively

    understand and counter the threat (United States Congress House Committee

    on Homeland Security, 2012, p. 153).

This assessment suggests a level of dissatisfaction, at least from some congress members'

perspectives, with the U.S. military establishment's embrace of diversity and inclusion

especially as it pertains to the accommodation of Muslim sensitivities. Some concerned

citizens and (neo) conservative political pundits view these elements of diversity as

political correctness that portends significant danger to U.S. national security (Roggio,

2010; Pipes, 2012; Rusin, 2013).

U.S. Military Diversity versus Political Correctness

The perceived threat of Muslims in the U.S. military has been a concern for some

in the U.S. who cite Islamic radicalization and insider terror attacks. This was against the

backdrop of 9/11 and insider acts of terror in the U.S. military carried out by a few

radicalized Muslim service members. King (2011) channeled this anxiety and argued that

enlistment in the U.S. armed forces is one way Islamists had penetrated the United States' military defenses. According to Murray (2015), the question of military accommodation of social issues championed by segments of the political elite has remained a source of tension between the U.S. military institutions, the political leadership, and the civil population who decide on funding priorities via Congress.

From racial and gender desegregation, gay and lesbian integration to accommodations of religious minorities (especially Muslims), the U.S. military has been perceived by some as a veritable tool for social change and the bellwether of the country's direction on diversity and multiculturalism (Hajjar, 2014; Karmack, 2017). According to Stoeckl and Roy (2015), the U.S. Military epitomized "Living social laboratory with the necessary institutional tools for intergroup integration and national harmony…" (p. 39). This notion is rooted in the idea that the military ought to reflect the inherent diversity of the population that its serves (Rohall, Ender, and Matthews, 2019). Opponents, on the other hand, dissent at what they perceive as the turning of the military into a bastion of political correctness that is eroding American values and cultural identity as well as endangering the nation (Adam, 2016, Rusin, 2013).

The divide between liberals and conservatives in U.S. political discourse finds expression in strong differences as to the social role and agency of the military in social change. Since the events of 9/11, the 'clash of civilization' thesis has gained a large following among political conservatives in the U.S. who also express concern and outrage at the perceived use of the military to address emergent social issues rooted in diversity and inclusion. Such perceived 'experiments' include military command

emphasis on diversity and multicultural awareness and sensitivity (U.S. Department of

Defense, 2012; Kamarck, 2017). Political and social conservatives believe that the

military was being co-opted to advance liberal social ideas of diversity and

multiculturalism that detract from the strict warfighting mission and readiness of the U.S.

military. Conservatives perceive such policies as a distraction that constitute an

existential danger to the country (Adams, 2016; Bale, 2013; Fonte & O'Sullivan, 2016;

Rusin, 2013). This perspective was pushed forwards by Schultz (2018) to wit:

> Multiculturalism, political correctness, misguided notions of tolerance, and sheer
>
> willful blindness have combined to create an atmosphere of confusion and denial
>
> about the current threat facing Western civilization. A subversion campaign
>
> conducted by Muslims within western countries, known as a "civilization jihad,"
>
> is taking place under government authorities' noses (p. 17).

Notwithstanding the political cum ideological split in the U.S. civil population,

the evolved U.S. military culture project an armed professional organization focused on

organizational effectiveness in its core mission of defeating threats against the U.S. (U.S.

Department of Defense, 2012; Redmond et al., 2015). The U.S. military strives to portray

a dynamic culture that is adept at filtering emergent social issues in its external

environment and to the extent possible within the organization, addressing them to suit its

operational effectiveness in diverse and potential threat environments (Hajjar, 2014).

The U.S. military highlights diversity and multicultural competence as a force

multiplier that is advantageous to its mission in a fluid global threat environment (U.S.

Department of Defense, 2020). Such threats include asymmetric security hazards of

radical Islamic extremism for which the religious and cultural diversity provides superior cross-cultural competencies to understand and defeat the threat. However, the threat assessment of risks as may be posed by diversity within the military, especially as it pertains to the accommodation of Muslims which has been espoused by some otherwise military supporting conservative population, still portend potential civil-military gap implications (Yamada, Atuel, & Weiss 2013).

Summary

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, marked a watershed moment in the U.S. This monumental act of radical Islamic extremism colored the lens through which a significant number of Americans view Islam and by extension Muslims in the U.S. military. The public distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military is integral to the broader social climate of Islamophobia in the U.S. The review of the literature drew significantly from this phenomenon. The study literature review was explored through themes pertinent to the research problem. The themes dealt with study theoretical framework, Muslim identity in the U.S., Muslim in the military, and issues of diversity in the U.S. military.

The study was focused on eliciting insights and perspectives of participants who were non-Muslim military veterans of the GWOT in exploring the problem of negative public perceptions towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. The study was designed to fill a gap in the literature on Islamophobia as it pertains to public attitude towards Muslims in the U.S. military for which very little research attention had been devoted. The study's positive social change contribution stems from giving voice to the

perspective of U.S. military service members and veterans on the contested social

phenomenon of Islamophobia as manifest in public perception towards Muslims in the

U.S. military. Chapter three of the study presented the research methodology. The chapter

provided details of the instrument and processes with which the study was conducted.

The chapter outlined the scope of the study, sources, and method as used for the study

informed by the research problem.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Distrust and suspicion towards Muslims is a social problem that has grown in the United States since the events of 9/11. The terror attacks fomented a backlash of negative public perception towards Islam and its adherents (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Haddad & Harb 2014). The public anxiety and distrust towards Islam reflected on Muslims in the U.S. military (Curtis, 2016). The situation was exacerbated by notable cases of radicalization and violent extremism by a few Muslim service members (Simcox & Dyer, 2013) during the early 2000s decade.

However, public distrust of Muslims in general and Muslims serving in the military, in particular, carries implications for U.S. national security and the well-being of Muslim military personnel. The risk potential of anti-Muslim sentiment is realized through alienation of the Muslims who perceive a siege on their community as a suspect community (Breen-Smyth, 2014; Shamas & Aratsu, 2013). The consequence is double jeopardy for Muslim military personnel. They become targets of suspicion by their faith community and a suspicious country. Anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States has been argued by top-ranking retired U.S. military personnel as playing into the Jihadist narrative of a United States of America that is at war with Islam, a narrative that is said to bolster jihadist recruitment while alienating the U.S. Muslim community (Gude, 2015; Petraeus, 2016).

The perceived threat and consequent distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military provide the context of the research inquiry. In this chapter, I discuss the methodology of

the research. Specific sections present the research design and rationale, the role of the

researcher, research questions, instrumentation, sampling, data analysis, issues of

validity, and ethical considerations. The chapter provides detail on how the study was

conducted consistent with its methodological parameters.

Research Design and Justification

The perceived threat of Muslims in the U.S. military is linked to social perception

and characterized as a subjective cognitive process (Hackel et al., 2014). This is based on

the constructivist view of social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Phenomena nested

under subjective social perception finds a good analytical fit in qualitative

phenomenological design (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This is to the extent that

phenomenology stems from the concepts of *dasein* or "being there" and *Lebenswelt* or

"lived world" as postulated by Husserl and Heidegger (Giorgi, 2007) to the effect that

knowledge is derived from the human lived experience in the social world.

Several other qualitative research designs, such as ethnography, case study,

discourse analysis, and grounded theory offer meaningful pathways to exploring the

social world from a humanistic perspective. This study was focused on exploring the

perspectives of non-Muslim combat veterans of the GWOT. The focus on their lived

experiences informed the choice of the interpretive phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology according to Alase (2017) offers the "best opportunity to understand the

innermost deliberation of the lived experiences of research participants" (p. 1). This

experience is deemed crucial in exploring perception through lived reality in the context

of distrust of Muslims serving in the U.S. military. The phenomenological design enabled

a focus on the distinctive military experiences of study participants involving interactions with Muslim military personnel. The phenomenological study design gives voice to firsthand experiential narratives of study participants in the exploration of a social problem and phenomenon (Moustakas, 1991) presented by Islamophobia. This was consistent with the use of qualitative and phenomenological research as a vehicle for exploring human experiences dealing with the social issue(s) of concern. The qualitative research methodology was chosen over quantitative because it supported the multiple realities that undergird social construction. The methodology permitted necessary flexibility to explore nuance, complexity, and contradictions of life that cannot be measured by rational reductionist quantitative logic.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in qualitative research is that of an instrument in the knowledge production process (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2008). Implicit in this assessment is that the researcher is embedded as a primary conduit of data collection, assignment of values, and interpretation. This role is not completely value-free because of the potential for researcher bias and role conflict (Råheim et al., 2016). The researcher's role is consequential as in this study in which the researcher is professionally affiliated with the study population (U.S. Army veterans of the GWOT). However, the shared background with study participants was positive to the extent that it helped "minimize the distance and separateness of researcher-participant relationships" (Råheim et al., 2016, p. 1). This insider-researcher positionality helped to create a trusting environment in which participants spoke freely, thus reducing the potential for social

desirability response bias. Nonetheless, I maintained a measured level of detachment to let the focus be on the participant's own experiences and perspectives in the exploration of the research questions.

I addressed the potential for researcher bias by using strategies and methods recommended to fortify study validity. These methods included but were not limited to the use of reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, member checking, and disinterested party oversight. In my reflexive journaling (see Guba & Lincoln, 1985), I recorded considerations informing consequential decisions in the research process. Such decisions included the informed choice of the study topic, research methodology, design, and assignment of values in the coding of participant interviews. I recorded and preserved raw participant audio interviews as substantiating data for the audit trail. My role remained that of a conduit through which each participant's opinion and perspective addressing the research questions were presented without adding biases.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

The study addressed three research questions (RQ) to wit;

RQ1: What are the experiences of serving alongside Muslim U.S. military personnel in the GWOT?

RQ2: How have the experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel supported or called into question anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military?

RQ3: How significant is public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military personnel to U.S. security and military readiness?

The research questions were designed to explore the perspectives of non-Muslim U.S. Army combat veterans of the GWOT (study participants) on public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military. The research questions were designed as open-ended, semistructured, and subjective inquiry that is consistent with qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The focus of the research questions was on the experiences of non-Muslim U.S. Army combat veterans of the GWOT in the time of heightened public anti-Muslim sentiment. This was in recognition of the influence of lived experience in the construction of individual (social) realities (Tuohy et al., 2013).

Data Analysis Plan

I collected data from participants through recorded interviews. The audio recordings were later transcribed and edited for content relevance. The resulting transcripts were manually coded to uncover themes that addressed the research questions. I used software programs from the Microsoft Office suite such as Excel, Word, and PowerPoint applications to store, manipulate and present data in the iterative process of computer-assisted manual coding. While manual coding is a labor-intensive undertaking (Creswell, 2014), it led to a deeper acquaintance with the data. This process helped in the uncovering of nuances in participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and insights.

The coding approach followed the sequence of open, axial, and selective coding processes (William & Moser, 2019). This coding approach was nested in a modified seven-step process design recommended by Creswell (2014). The process consisted of a hierarchical bottom-up approach (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Data Analysis Steps

Interpretation & Report	7
Link & merge category codes relationship to form major and themes.	6
Coding/recoding of Aggregated data to categories	5
Integrate individually coded interview data	4
Initial manual coding of individual interview (using priori or initial codes & noting emergent themes)	3
Data immersion through holistic reading and listening to individual interviews, field notes/journals	2
Assembling of raw data, transcription and digitization for analysis	1

Selective Coding

Axial Coding

Open Coding

The initial step consists of assembling and prepping raw data for analysis through transcription of interview audio recordings into text. In the second step, transcripts were read multiple times and compared against the audio recording. This crucial data-immersion step also involved the simultaneous review of interview field notes.

In the third step, the initial coding of individual interviews was carried out using descriptive and *in vivo* coding techniques.

The descriptive coding consisted of summarizing portions of interview text into descriptive terms that were synthesized into categories. This coding technique included the use of appropriate first-level codes (See Appendix A). *In vivo* codes consisted of participants' own words or phrases. These are value-laden terms encapsulating participants' perspectives. These meaningful language capsules were tagged and assigned numeric designators for ease of tracking across individual transcripts. In step four, all

individual interview responses to the same interview questions were collated and nested in categories.

The fifth step involved a second iteration coding and recoding the categories linking similarities, highlighting differences, and discovering outlier themes across the study cohort (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2013). In step six, I used data visualization to present the relationship linkage of emergent themes as well as contrasts. This was accomplished using purpose-designed charts as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). In step seven, the emergent category codes from consolidated participant responses to each research question were analyzed and interpreted highlighting the overarching themes addressing each research question. These emergent overarching themes constituted the research findings presented in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5 of this study.

Study Population and Selection Criteria

The study population consisted of U.S. Army combat veterans who served during the GWOT. The cohort selection criteria include being mobilized and or deployed in support of the GWOT expeditionary mission, as outlined in Executive Order 13289 (United States Government Publishing Office, 2003). I predicated the choice of using the U.S. Army branch of service on the Army being the oldest branch of the U.S. military from which much of the ethos, values, and overarching culture of the U.S. military evolved (Gentile, Linick, & Shurkin, 2017), especially on social issues of diversity and inclusion. Also taken into cognizance was the fact that the U.S. Army as the largest military service branch has more Muslim service members in its mission footprints than

all other branches combined (Khan & Martinez, 2015). The higher number of Muslims in the Army in comparison to other service branches suggested a higher likelihood that more Army service members would have had contact and interaction with Muslim colleagues. The experience of contact is central to the research.

Another important factor that influenced the selection of the Army branch of service for the study population was the service member privileged access in the U.S. Army community. By way of full disclosure, I am a non-Muslim full-time U.S. Army service member. The Army service branch affiliation conferred me easy access to Army communities, exclusive soldier assembly points, and contact opportunities. This insider-researcher role was important in this study, as it helped usher a trusting environment between researcher and informants which led to more credible and open exchanges, as predicted by Labaree (2002). Another consideration was the widely shared public perception of the Army as emblematic of the U.S. military in its mission as defenders of American freedom and way of life.

Purposeful sampling was used as the method of data collection. This is consistent with the qualitative research objective for a deeper and unique perspective, which compels the use of informants who have the experience and or knowledge of the phenomenon or condition under inquiry. The purposeful selection of information-rich participants is an important hallmark of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful sampling design aligned with the purpose of qualitative research which according to Patton (2015) is to "inquire into, document, and interpret the meaning-making process" (p. 3).

In keeping with the purposeful sampling approach, study participants were limited to veterans and still serving Army personnel (active-duty and reservists) who had service interaction and or contact with Muslim military service members during the GWOT; a multi-year military operation to defeat radical Islamic extremist groups. The purposive sampling was accomplished through the snowball technique (Babbie, 2016; Mason, 2010), whereby identified and consenting participants (s) were requested to provide information of other potential participants with the same inclusionary experience criteria. This non-probability sampling method was necessary to gain access and contact within insular organizations where populations are difficult to access (Engel & Schutt, 2012).

Participant recruitment initially was carried out by leveraging the researcher's social and professional network as a U.S. Army service member. Request for participation was sent via, text messages, email, and telephone calls to contacts known to the researcher that met the study participant inclusion criteria. This initial direct recruitment was later followed by referrals from recruited participants (snowball technique). My membership in the military was a positive asset in the recruitment phase of the study. It was instrumental to the high interest and willingness of nearly all approached individuals agreeing voluntarily to be considered for study participation.

Sample Size

The sample size used for the study consisted of 17 participants. This sample size was predicated on multiple recommendations for qualitative study sample sizes and review of studies with similar methodology and design approaches. As noted by Marshall (1997), the appropriate sample size for a qualitative study was one that adequately addresses the

research question, which Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) interpreted as a small sample number. Specific number recommendations had ranged from no less than 6 participants (Morse, 1994); 10 or more participants for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2014), under 50 participants (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2013). The use of 17 participants was within the recommended sample size consistent with a significant number of qualitative studies that used a phenomenological approach and was affirmed through the principle of data saturation.

The data saturation principle provided the threshold for my sample size. This was the point at which no new information was emerging from the data. During the study, by the twelfth participant interview, the trend line in participants' viewpoints was quite evident and robust. In keeping with the data saturation principle, I continued interviewing a few more participants until I was convinced of information redundancy (Sandelowski, 1995) and that no radically different views, themes, or insight were emergent (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Important considerations were devoted to stratifications in the U.S. Army. The sample frame was stratified by gender, race, religion, citizenship category, rank, and military occupational specialty. These stratifications were intended to explore potential influence in viewpoint and opinions based on any demographic stratification within the cohort. This was to provide potential lead and impetus for further research studies that would explore the demographic variable.

Figure 4

Study Design Architecture

Risk or Contra-Political Correctness with Distrust Towards Muslims in the U.S.

PROBLEM STATEMENT
Most Americans trust and support the U.S. military however significant number harbor anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the military especially since 9/11. This attitude hold implications for diversity in the U.S. military as well as to broader national and homeland security interest.

RQ.1
What are the experiences of serving alongside Muslim U.S. military personnel in the Global War on Terrorism?

RQ.2
How have the experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel supported, or called into question, anxiety, and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military?

RQ.3
How significant is public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military personnel to U.S. national security and military readiness?

INTV-Q: 1
Tell me about your experiences serving alongside Muslim military personnel especially in the global war on terrorism?

INTV-Q: 2
In what ways did your experiences of military missions alongside Muslims service members allay or vindicate some public distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military?

INTV-Q: 3
Do you have any standout experiences or incident(s) you wish to share?

INTV-Q: 1
In what ways has your lived experience in the U.S. military shaped your attitude & disposition towards Muslims in general and Muslims service members in particular?

INTV-Q: 2
How would you characterize public attitudes towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military since 9/11?

INTV-Q: 3
What do you see as the source(s) of mistrust if any?

INTV-Q: 1
How would you characterize the risk(s) and or consequence(s) of anti-Muslim sentiment to U.S. security and military readiness in diverse threat environment?

INTV-Q: 2
In what ways can or should public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military be mitigated or addressed?

17 PARTICIPANTS

U.S ARMY GWOT COMBAT VETS

Instrumentation

The personal interview survey was the method of data collection. This method aligned with the study phenomenological design (See Figure 4). The personal interview data collection method was optimal in eliciting participants' views and insights about their unique experiences concerning the research questions. This choice was supported by

Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) postulation that the role of the interview in research was "to explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters" (p. 1). The personal interview as a data collection tool drew from Brinkmann (2014) postulation that interview provided an opportunity for conversation that humans have used from time immemorial as a tool to garner information about other people and how they interpret their reality.

The interview questions were designed to focus on the study participants' pertinent lived experiences as non-Muslim U.S. war veterans of the GWOT in the climate of significant anti-Muslim sentiment. The interview survey instrument was consistent with the knowledge generation interaction between interviewer and interviewee, which acknowledges the subjectivity of human experience in the qualitative phenomenological research model (Høffding & Martiny, 2015).

The interview questionnaire used in the study was researcher generated (see Appendix B). Justification for a self-developed interview questionnaire was predicated on the need to frame direct and relevant queries that would elicit responses that directly and sufficiently address the research questions. Support for this approach was justified by Bevan (2015), who posited that "the researcher is free to structure his or her interview in a way that enables a thorough investigation" (p. 138). The interview questionnaire's design also drew from Giorgi's (1997) recommendation for the use of broad and open-ended questions in qualitative phenomenological research. This was predicated on the nature of open-ended questions to elicit participants' narrative of their experience(s) and

how they interpret them(s) in direct relation to the research problem, phenomenon, or subject of inquiry.

To demonstrate construct validity, I created an alignment table that linked specific interview questions to each research question being addressed. This served to ensure relevance and focus (See Appendix B). Construct validity was further strengthened through member checking. Interview transcripts as generated from interview audio recordings were emailed back to individual participants for their review and approval as being consistent with their shared views and opinions. All the participants approved their transcripts, while two participants added language clarifying aspects of their statements without changing their positions.

All the participant interviews were researcher administered. Twelve interviews were administered via telephone while five interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face). The choice of interview format was predicated on each participant's preference. The telephone interview format was found advantageous because it bridged the distance gap in communicating with information-rich study participants in distant locations. Telephone interview formats also provided logistical cost-effectiveness. The format also increased the comfort level of some participants in discussing perceived sensitive social issues as postulated by Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2013).

Collection Procedure

Individuals that I identified as potential study participants were contacted by phone, email, and in-person and asked if they wish to participate in my study. Those who indicated interest were briefed with information on the nature of the study and participant

involvement expectations. I sent a consent form document via email to each potential

participant. No data was collected from any participant without a signed consent form.

Following receipt of the consent, I contacted participants via the telephone and scheduled

a mutually convenient time and date for an interview as well as a preferred interview

format. For participants that chose an in-person interview, a location that is mutually

convenient and adequate for the purpose was agreed to.

During each interview session, I requested permission of the participant to audio

record the interview as reference material. In all cases, participants granted the request. I

re-introduced myself and the proposed study. This was followed by a review of the

consent form. I reiterated to each participant of the voluntary nature of their participation

and their right to discontinue participation at any time if they chose to do so. I then asked

each participant at this stage if they had any questions and or concerns that they would

want me to address. Thereafter I commenced the actual interview session which was all

conducted in the English language. Each interview duration was on average forty-five

minutes in duration. Interview questions were asked in the same order for every

participant. Follow-up question(s) as necessary was asked for clarifications and further

insight based on participant views and opinions as shared. I made notes documenting

participants' standout statements, body language, contradictions, and emerging themes in

the iterative process of initial data analysis.

On completion of each interview, the audio recording was transcribed. I relied on

the audio-to-text function of my recording software to generate the raw interview

transcript. I reviewed each transcript against the audio file and was able to edit out

external audio interferences and auto-transcription errors. I emailed the individual transcript to the respective interviewee for member checking. The protocol of member checking served to strengthen the credibility and validity of data. All 17 participants approved the transcripts as being consistent with the information they shared of their experiences and opinions. Two participants added language to clarify some statements without altering their positions or conclusions. These clarifications were incorporated into their transcripts.

The transcripts were purged of personally identifiable information of participants and replaced with alphanumeric codes. The original audio recording data was saved in a password-protected computer storage drive for references, reviews, and maintaining of an audit trail of the study.

Validity and Reliability

I implemented specific measures to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research. Primarily, I used an established methodology and design that has been successfully used by several scholars in studies of similar nature as recommended by Fusch and Ness (2015). The use of a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological design has a long history of interdisciplinary validity as an appropriate framework for the exploration of subjective realities and knowledge generation in the social world.

I used a sample size of 17 participants. This sample size was within the threshold recommended by various scholars for phenomenological study, this is recommended to be from up to 10 individuals to a number less than 50 (Creswell & Poth 2017; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson 2006; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam 2013). Comparable qualitative studies

that examined Muslims' experiences in the U.S. military (Ahmad, 2011; Baumgaten, 2002; Sandhoff, 2017) used between 6-15 participant interviews to answer their research questions. The principle of data saturation was leveraged to arrive at a sample size of 17 participants. This entailed sampling until emerging data became repetitive, with no new insights being discovered (Fuch & Ness, 2015; Mason, 2010; Morse, 2015).

Triangulation (use of multiple sources) was used to validate some participants' information and statements to reduce the "risk of systematic biases and the limitation of a specific source or method" (Maxwell, 2013 p.102). I used online records such as Unit Facebook pages and unclassified DOD open access websites to verify unit service deployments and affiliations. I also asked participants for names and contact information of colleagues that served with them in the missions that created their experiences. I contacted a few of these individuals who confirmed individual stories.

I used member checking for validation by study participants (Birt, et al., 2016) to fortify the study's trustworthiness. Edited transcripts of individual interviews were emailed back to each participant to review as being a correct reflection of their views. This process of review and validation by study participant increased data validity and also represented a mitigation measure for potential researcher bias to the extent that participant was allowed to review the transcript fidelity to their views and narrative.

Other methods implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of this study include the use of disinterested party review of coding, analysis, and conclusions. I sent the draft of my interview transcripts and coding to two post-doctoral academics with roots in qualitative research for their review, comments, and or suggestions. I also kept an audit

trail of documentation including reflexive notes in which I recorded the minutiae of

mood, time, and place in the process of data acquisition (Shenton, 2004). I used thick and

rich descriptions to present information, this consist of detailed direct quotations of

participant's language warts and all. This was an invaluable method for retaining data

authenticity and trustworthiness.

Ethical Issues

The tenets of beneficence and non-maleficence (Eddie, 1994) were the overriding

ethical consideration in this study. To ensure that the research was ethically grounded, I

implemented measures supportive of informed consent as the basis for collecting the

interview data and observation (Bhupathi & Ravi, 2017). No data was collected until a

signed consent was received from each study participant. I reviewed the consent with

each participant at the beginning of each participant interview session. Explanation and

clarifications were provided that ensured that every participant had a full understanding

of the study intent, expectations, and their rights in the informed consent form (Tamariz,

Palacio, Robert, & Marcus, 2013).

I addressed confidentiality and anonymity of informants in line with the Walden

Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and the code of Federal Regulation Title 45

(Revised Common Rule) on the ethical conduct of human-subject research (Office of

Human Research Protections, 2017). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with only

the researcher and the participant present and in a room out of earshot and public gaze. I

masked the names of participants both in the audio recording and interview transcripts by

assigning alphanumeric codes in place of actual names. The same alphanumeric codes

were used to identify the same participant throughout the research study. All personally identifiable information linking each participant to their actual identity was carefully separated. I addressed the potential for researcher bias by bracketing my personal opinions. This was executed through self-reflection and the maintenance of a reflexive journal. I also added a full disclosure statement in the study stating my background and professional affiliation as a full-time soldier in the U.S. Army branch of service. I also refrained from using any individual as a participant in the study that I have any level of supervisory control or influence over.

I utilized peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014) to garner constructive input and criticism. I did this by requesting and receiving reviews and suggestions on various aspects of the study from peers and established scholars. The Walden University Residency Program provided a one-stop-shop to discuss my research and receive feedback from a wide selection of peers and faculty members. The sustained supervision and oversight of the assigned dissertation committee provided guardrails and research quality compliance review.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Muslims serving in the U.S. military are an integral part of the American Muslim community. This community is perceived as a 'suspect community' by a significant number of mainstream American population based on the perceived threat of Islamic extremism. This perception manifest in anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. This consequent attitude is emblematic of Islamophobia and carries implications for U.S. security and national interest.

The experiences of contact and interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim U.S. Army war veterans of the GWOT provided unique background to contextualize and explore public distrust towards Muslim military personnel. The study participant's contact and interaction experiences with Muslim military service members provide unique insight and perspective that has the potential to allay or vindicate public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military. This is pertinent to the extent that some researchers have theorized that the U.S. military is a living social experiment of intergroup contact whereby the organizational culture of the U.S. military moderate members' behavior and instill group cohesion (Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Lüdtke, & Trautwein 2012) as predicted in the intergroup contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979).

A qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was selected as a good fit methodology to explore the research problem. While other qualitative research designs such as ethnography, grounded theory, and biography could also be used to explore the research problem, the phenomenological approach was chosen because it provided the necessary flexibility to leverage lived experiences that give voice to military service members and veterans of the GWOT on their unique perspective on the broader social problem of Islamophobia. Chapter 4 of this study presents the collection of the data and its analysis. This chapter provides detail of researcher-participant interaction in the process of knowledge creation on the subject under inquiry.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Muslims serving in the U.S. military are perceived with some degree of anxiety and distrust in the minds of many in the U.S. general population. This attitude exemplifies the broader social problem of Islamophobia that ratcheted up post-9/11 terrorist attacks and other subsequent acts of radical Islamic violent extremism in the U.S. homeland. Consequently, a significant population of otherwise military-supportive Americans harbors anxiety and suspicion towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military (Curtis, 2016).

The purpose of this research study, therefore, was to explore and present the perspective of non-Muslim U.S. Army veterans of the GWOT on the public attitude towards Muslim military personnel and any potential risks and implications. The study was conducted using a phenomenological approach to explore perspectives of non-Muslim U.S. Army veterans of the GWOT focusing on lived experiences of contact and interaction with Muslim military personnel. The study was anchored on the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the experiences of serving alongside Muslim U.S. military personnel in the GWOT?

RQ2: How have the experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel supported or called into question anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military?

RQ3: How significant is public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military personnel to U.S. national security and military readiness?

This chapter presents the details of data collection, data analysis, and the study findings addressing the research questions.

Study Setting

Data collection occurred between January and April 2020. This was after receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval #12-23-19-0335836). There were no known environmental or organizational conditions with the potential to influence the participants' views during the data collection period. However, it is of note that in the month preceding the beginning of data collection, there was a nationally reported shooting incident involving a Muslim foreign military trainee in the U.S. Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida, on December 6, 2020.

The shooting involved a Saudi Arabian Air Force personnel trainee at a U.S. naval training facility in Pensacola, Florida. The shooter was identified as First Lieutenant Mohammed Saeed Al-Shamrani, who reportedly opened fire on classmates, killing three U.S. Air Force service members and wounding eight others, before being killed. The attack was ruled an act of terror (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). The incident added to the public discussion of the perceived terrorism-Islam nexus fueling public anxiety and mistrust towards Muslims in the United States.

Regardless, 17 interviews were conducted for data collection in this research. Seven of the interviews were conducted in person (face-to-face format); the rest of the interviews were conducted via telephone.

Demographics

Study participants were drawn from serving and retired U.S. Army veterans of the GWOT. This cohort consisted of soldiers in active-duty military and its reserve component, most of whom live in North Texas. This pool consisted of seven females and 10 males. The age average of participants was 46 years. The minimum educational attainment within the cohort was a high school diploma. The vast majority of participants had 4-year college undergraduate degrees. The sample cadre consisted of five officers and 12 noncommissioned officers. Twelve of the participants were U.S. citizens by birth, and five were naturalized U.S. citizens. Other demographic information, included race, military occupational specialty, years of service, and military rank. The demographic information data is presented in Table 1.

Data collection

Data collection took place in the period January through April 2020. Out of the 17 participant interviews, five interviews were conducted through a face-to-face format, while the remaining 12 interviews were conducted via telephone. The preference of each participant dictated the interview format. I utilized the private reading room at the Betty Warmack Library, 760 Bardin Road, Grand Prairie, Texas, to conduct the face-to-face interviews. For telephone interviews, I initiated the calls from my home office. I sent text messages to each participant 5-10 minutes before the interview time as reminders and reconfirmed the phone numbers through which the interview was to be conducted.

Table 1

Demographic Information

PID[a]	SEX	AGE	RACE[b]	REL	EDU	CADRE[c]	STATUS[d]	MOS[e]	YRS[f]	RNK[g]	CTZ[h]
XM1	M	65	AA	CHR	PHD	OFF	RTD	38A	28	LTC	US1
XM2	M	42	WHT	CHR	MA	OFF	RES	38A	16	CPT	US1
XM3	M	47	AA	CHR	MA	ENL	RES	31B	12	SSG	US2
XM4	M	52	AA	CHR	HS	ENL	RTD	92Y	29	MSG	US1
XM5	M	46	AS	BUD	HS	ENL	RES	68W	21	MSG	US2
XM6	M	52	HPN	CHR	HS	ENL	RES	79T	26	SFC	US1
XM7	M	53	WHT	CHR	HS	ENL	AD	11B	30	MSG	US1
XM8	F	48	AS	CHR	BA	OFF	RES	38A	23	MAJ	US1
XM9	F	37	AA	CHR	HS	ENL	RES	25U	20	SSG	US1
XM10	F	40	WHT	CHR	MA	OFF	AD	35D	16	MAJ	US1
XM11	F	46	WHT	CHR	MA	ENL	RES	31B	30	MSG	US1
XM12	F	37	WHT	CHR	BA	ENL	AD	91Z	20	MSG	US1
XM13	F	46	AS	CHR	BA	OFF	RES	38A	23	MAJ	US2
XM14	F	34	WHT	CHR	MA	ENL	RES	38B	13	SFC	US1
XM15	M	44	MENA	NON	BA	ENL	RTD	35P	6	SSG	US2
XM16	M	48	WHT	CHR	HS	ENL	AD	38B	26	MSG	US1
XM17	M	45	AA	CHR	MA	ENL	AD	92Y	18	SFC	US2

Notes. [a] Participant identifier code. [b] Racial origin abbreviation. AS=Asian; MENA=Middle East & North African.] [c] Military cadre composed of commissioned officers (OFF) and noncommissioned officers or enlisted soldiers (ENL). [d] Participant military service status: AD=Active duty and full-time service member; RES=Army Reservist; RTD=Retired. Military occupational specialty. 11B=Infantryman; 25U=Signal Support; 31B=Military Police; 35P=Cryptologic Analyst; 35D=Military intelligence; 38A/B=Civil Affairs; 68W=Combat Medic; 79T=Recruiting & Retention; 91Z= Supervisory Maintenance; 92Y=Unit Supply. [f] Number of years served in the Army. [g] Participant military rank. CPT=Captain; LTC=Lieutenant Colonel; MAJ=Major; MSG=Master Sergeant; SSG=Staff Sergeant; SFC=Sergeant First Class; [h] Citizenship category: US1=US citizen by birth; US2= US citizen by naturalization.

Each interview began with a self-introduction followed by the introduction of the research subject, purpose, and goal. This was followed by a review of the consent form. I reiterated the voluntary nature of participation in the study and the right of the participant to withdraw from or decline further participation in the study at any time without any conditions. I restated to each participant that individual identity, views, and opinions as

shared in the study shall remain anonymous and no personally identifiable information shall be used in the research. I then asked if the participants had any questions or concerns. I did request and obtain the permission of each participant to record the interview. The interview was thereafter recorded. The recording was done using the Google voice recorder application (Recorder App) version 1.2.312465208 running on an Android operating system cellular phone.

The audio recording application provided storage, retrieval, and voice-to-text auto transcription capability. However, this voice-to-text functionality had limitations. A review of the auto-generated transcripts against audio recording files revealed some transcription errors due to transcription limitations in automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology especially as it applies to racial minorities especially the immigrant population communicating in English (Koenecke et al., 2020). The errors were linked to differences in participants' accents and speech patterns. I addressed this challenge by importing the audio files into a computer and manually reviewing each participant's interview transcript while simultaneously listening to the audio files. I identified transcription errors and manually applied corrections using the audio recordings as the authoritative data source. This was a time-consuming vetting and correction process but one that led to a fuller immersion and familiarity with the data.

A notable discovery during data collection was of a participant who had self-reported no religious affiliation during the participant-recruitment phase but indicated during the data collection interview to being previously Muslim. This development was reviewed against the study participant selection criterion of being a non-Muslim U.S.

Army war veteran of the GWOT. After careful consideration, the interview was included

based on the participant's current non-Muslim/no religion self-identification. I also saw it

as an opportunity, albeit unintended, for added dimension in the exploration of the

research questions from an ex-Muslim perspective.

Data Analysis

The data generated from participant interviews were analyzed using a systematic

manual coding approach (Ose, 2016). This process consists of manually assigning tags or

labels to "descriptive or inferential information" (Basit, 2003, p. 144) embedded in the

data collected from participants for analysis. The process was executed using Excel

spreadsheet program and Microsoft Word to host and manipulate data in the coding

process. Purpose-designed templates were created using Microsoft Publisher and

PowerPoint applications for data visualizations (Appendix C). The familiar data

management and presentation programs, all part of the Microsoft Office Suite, provided

simpler, cost-effective, and adaptable functionalities. The use of these data processing

programs for qualitative studies, especially with a small sample population, was affirmed

by scholar-practitioners (Amozurrutia & Servós, 2011; Bree & Gallager, 2016; Meyer &

Avery, 2009; Saldana, 2016;).

The sequence of analysis started with the transcription of the participants'

interview recordings. This was initially done through the auto transcription function of

the voice recording application. A review of the auto-generated transcription showed

significant errors and extraneous materials embedded in the transcripts. I conducted a

simultaneous reconciliation edit in which I reviewed each transcript while simultaneously

listening to the same audio file. This was an immersive and holistic approach through which I manually and painstakingly corrected software transcription errors. This data-immersive approach also resulted in a high degree of familiarity with the data.

Transcripts were further edited for relevance and focus by trimming off repetitions and participants' digressions to stories that were not related to the interview questions. Data distillation was an essential part of preparing for coding through alignment with the research questions. This was supported by Saldana's (2016) position that not all elements in the pool of collected data are relevant to answering the research question or later analysis within a given study framework (p. 79).

Each edited transcript was sent back to the source participant by email for member-checking purposes. This process was to confirm fidelity to participant views from audio formate to textual transcripts. The process served to enhance the credibility of the data. The edited transcripts were all approved by participants as reflecting their experiences and perspectives as shared. These transcripts were then deemed ready for formal coding and analysis.

In coding the data, I utilized an eclectic coding approach (Saldana, 2016) that was driven by the research questions. This coding approach involved the use of a combination of two or more coding types. This was justified by the necessity to capture the multiple dimensions of meanings in qualitative data. Under the umbrella of eclectic coding, I used *in-vivo* coding which is a coding technique that focuses on participants' own words or language. I used this technique to label meaningful language capsules in participants' own words which address aspects of the research questions. This was in keeping with the

study goal of giving voice to participants' lived experiences and opinions. I used descriptive coding to categorize and summarize participants' opinions or perspectives. Magnitude coding was used to convey the proportion, intensity, and or nature of the issue, event, or condition, as described by the participants.

The approach and sequence to coding were through the use of open, axial, and selective coding cycles or phases (William & Moser, 2019). This was executed through a modified seven-step process design recommended by Creswell (2014) (See Fig. 3 in Chapter 3). The open coding phase was the initial level coding (See Appendix B). *In-vivo* coding was used to label pertinent own words of participants that address the research question. Descriptive (interpretive) coding was used to tag summary or deduced meanings of participants' narratives. This was followed by axial or intermediate-level coding. This phase was also used to build category codes from similarities in initial codes of individual responses to the same interview questions. The third coding phase was the selective phase where code categories were synthesized into themes and descriptive concepts that provided overarching themes that embody the study findings (Appendix D).

The data analysis process was a continuous loop where codes were identified, assembled, categorized, disassembled, recoded, and or re-categorized through a dynamic process of "nonlinear directionality" (William & Moser, 2019, p. 47). Some codes were earmarked in the research journal as early as data collection; then post-collection reviews (listening) to raw audio recordings. The vast majority of the codes emerged during the actual coding stages of data analysis. This was a dynamic process of meaning-making

through the sequencing and synthesis of data into meaningful codes, categories, and themes that encompass the research question findings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research refers to the reliability and validity of processes through transparency and consistency to study design. These imperatives were established to instill confidence in the research study (Polit & Beck, 2014). The elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research, as advanced by Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), include credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity. The strategies and protocols implemented in this study to fortify and sustain the reliability and validity (trustworthiness) of research included but were not limited to data triangulation, member-checking, rich and thick detailed descriptions of processes and content; opinion bracketing, full disclosure statements, peer debriefing, and use of a disinterested external reviewer.

Credibility

To enhance the research study's credibility, I used a sample size (17 participants) within the threshold recommended by scholars for phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth 2017; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson 2006; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam 2013). I also implemented member checking as a critical tool to enhance study credibility. To this effect, edited transcripts of each participant interview were emailed back to the participants for review and approval. All 17 respondents approved the transcripts as being a true reflection of their views and opinions during the interviews.

The study also benefited from the process and procedure oversight of the dissertation committee Chairperson, who reviewed and provided extensive feedback consistent with an external auditor's role. I also reached out and received input and suggestions from scholars whose published studies were germane to this study (Sandhoff, 2017; Hosein, 2019). I used triangulation to validate military status self-reporting of participants as Army service war veterans of the GWOT. I also utilized in-group access as a U.S. Army member to verify the participants' claimed unit affiliation. I used publicly accessible military service verification resources provided by the Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), through the Service Member Civil Relief Act's web portal to verify status and service member dates of service.

Transferability

This study was a qualitative phenomenological study; the focus of which was on the subjective experiences and perspective of the informant(s) and not generalizability per se. Transferability in the context of the study's design was focused on detailed documentation and an audit trail as a vital element for study replication and/or comparison to larger or other populations. To this extent, I established detailed documentation of participant demographic information and cataloged participant raw interview materials and the derived transcripts used in the coding process. I maintained consistency in the coding scheme to address the research questions based on participant experiences and perspectives related to the research questions.

Dependability

This quality refers to the reliability and consistency of the data and its direct relationship to findings. To ensure dependability in the study, I maintained an audit trail of processes and steps used in data collection, analysis, and findings through journal entries. I maintained the background and pertinent demographic information of each of the 17 participants without personally identifiable information (PII). The curated information provided transparency and detail of the sample cohort. This is critically important to replicate the study or a critique of the sampling pool.

As described under credibility, triangulation was also applicable to ensuring the study's dependability and findings. I verified that participants were members of the U.S. Army, (serving or retired) by verifying their current or last unit of assignment with at least one service member who served with the researcher.

Confirmability

Confirmability is compared to the qualities of objectivity and neutrality in research (Connelly, 2016). I used the reflexive journal as a tool to document, confront, and bracket my own biases. I made a full disclosure statement of my status and affiliation as a scholar and serving member of the U.S. Army.

Member checking or interview validation was also used to fortify the data's credibility (Widodo, 2014). Edited transcripts of participants' interviews were shared with each participant with a request to vet for consistency with their perspectives as shared during the interview. All 17 participants approved the edited transcripts as consistent with the views and opinions they expressed.

Findings

The study's findings represent results from the thematic coding of participants' responses to the research questions through answers to pertinent interview questions. It also includes important contextual information derived from follow-up questions that further address or present new insight into aspects of the research problem. The sequence of presentation of the study findings include:

- Restatement of the research question and interview questions addressing it.

- Overarching and major themes.

- Data visualizations of coding.

The research explored the problem of public distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military and potential risk(s) to U.S. security in a global threat environment. The study was anchored on three research questions. These research questions were explored through interview questions crafted to elicit participants' responses that address the research questions as well as provide new insights and context (see Figure 4: Research Design Architecture).

Participants' responses were manually coded to derive pertinent themes that address each of the research questions. The emergent themes from all participants addressing each research question were aggregated and re-categorized into overarching thematic concepts that represent the study findings. The study findings are presented in the same sequence as the study research questions (RQ 1-3).

RQ1: What are the experiences of serving alongside Muslim U.S. military personnel in the GWOT?

Positive experience emerged as the dominant theme in the responses expressed by most participants as they recounted their observations and interaction with Muslim military service member(s). They leveraged their lived experiences in the GWOT to present their opinions and perspectives on the public distrust towards Muslim military personnel. The theme of positive experiences encapsulated other complimentary themes (see Appendices D1-3 and E1-3) that highlighted positive dispositions towards Muslim service members by the majority of study participants. Notably, most participants stated indifference to any soldier's religious faith or the lack thereof. These participants stated they were only interested in what each soldier "brings to the fight." A few participants, however, expressed concern about perceived Islam anti-American doctrine and stereotype incompatibility with the American way of life. These participants also stated that they did not have any negative experience with Muslim service members nonetheless.

The vast majority of participants recounted their experiences highlighting the commitment, contributions, and qualities of the Muslim service members that they interacted with or observed while serving in missions in support of the war against terror. Participant XM1 stated being positively "skewed towards working with individuals of the Muslims faith" According to the participant "… my particular mission within the Army requires having individuals of multiple cultures. I have had an overall good experience working with Muslim soldiers" (XM1, data collection interview, 2020). This participant further shared a pertinent experience during his deployment in Iraq in support of the GWOT to illustrate his viewpoint:

I worked with a transportation Sergeant in Iraq (was Muslim) fluent In Arabic…

He was attached to a unit I was working in. We were also working hand in hand

with the USAID and the State Department. After several interactions with him

and the public, it became that first that his educational level was extremely high

and talking with him later, I found out that the participant was an architect from

the country he came from. I'm not going into what led him to come to the United

States and join the Army. He was highly educated, which led us to use his

architectural knowledge and general engineering and build construction

knowledge to work on some projects with the host nationals. But it took time for

us to recognize what he was doing, recognizing that he was doing more than just

being an interpreter (XM1, data collection interview, 2020).

XM1 saw in the Muslim transportation Sergeant, a highly educated and multi-skilled

service member with an unalloyed commitment to mission success. This was presented as

a testament to the positive role of Muslim Military service members in the theatres of war

in Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the GWOT.

Another participant, XM8 attested to a positive experience and personal

satisfaction working alongside a Muslim soldier and interpreter during military

deployment overseas; "while deployed during the GWOT, I worked with a military

interpreter/translator (Military occupational specialty code 09L) who was Muslim. He

was phenomenal, great worker, and I had no issues" (XM8, data collection interview,

2020). Similarly, participant XM14 pointed to battlefield cross-cultural competence that

Muslim Military service members brought into the mission in Iraq and Afghanistan, stating:

> We relied on several that were…U.S. citizens with Muslim and Arabic backgrounds. These soldiers were the Army linguists… They (Muslim military personnel) were respectful ...they wanted to serve America just such as the next person, and also, they wanted to show Americans that just because they are Muslims does not mean that they do not love America
>
> (XM14, data collection interview, 2020).

Most participants spoke of Muslim service members they had contact with, with a fondness. They characterized them as respectful, modest, empathetic, and patriotic soldiers. Participant XM3 responded to the question of how his experience serving alongside Muslim military personnel challenged or vindicated public anxiety and distrust towards Muslim service members by simply stating, "I will trust them with my life." This vote of trust extended to local Muslim nationals who worked with U.S. forces in the GWOT combat theaters of Iraq and Afghanistan in the view of this one participant. Participant XM6 spoke of trust and loyalty while recounting his interaction with local Muslim nationals working alongside U.S. military personnel. XM6 described the experience as "very endearing...a couple of them have died for us. They would take a bullet for you...they were loyal. I've seen them take a bullet for us…" (XM6, data collection interview, 2020). This opinion and character witness for Muslim support services personnel to the U.S. military in the GWOT was also used by the participant to describe the trustworthiness of Muslim service members. The participant added that there

were no doubt extremist elements exist within Islam just as they exist within other non-Muslim ideological groups and religions.

The attitude of indifference to service members' religious preference was recurrent in the views expressed by participants who stated positive experience working alongside Muslim service members. These participants maintained that they saw no difference between Muslim and non-Muslim U.S. military service members in how they perform as members of the U.S. military. In this regard, participant XM15, an enlisted 44-year-old naturalized American with roots from the Middle East/North Africa (MENA), shared his perspective as follows; "As you know, in the Army, there, are no religious identifiers; we don't go to each other asking, are you Christian, are you Jewish, or are you Muslim? We are all soldiers, and we are all green. We conduct operations as we are assigned" (XM15, data collection interview, 2020). This participant explained that he saw the U.S. military as a professional mission-driven national security institution that emphasized capabilities and expertise over religious or social grouping.

In a related response, participant XM14 stressed that diversity and inclusivity are values implicit in the modern U.S. military culture. According to the participant, "In the military we try to be inclusive of all faiths and so I never had an issue with any of the Muslim people I have interacted with, they have always been respectful, you know, they are just normal people, okay" (XM14, data collection interview, 2020). Participant XM11 reiterated the commonality and shared value of U.S. military service members which include Muslim service members. According to XM11, Muslim service members were, "Just like any other soldiers, I did not experience issues of allegiance or disloyalty with

them or anything like that. If anything, my interaction with Muslims in and outside of the military made me realize we all have a similar need." (XM11, data collection interview, 2020). In Concurrence, participant XM10 stated; "I never had any negative experience with any Muslim service member and therefore no reason to distrust anyone based on religion. Religion simply did not make any difference" (XM10, data collection interview, 2020). Several other participants reiterated the positive experience of serving alongside Muslim soldiers and the shared commitment as service members in the U.S. military (See Appendix D, Figures D2 & D3).

However, a few participants conveyed some ambivalence about Muslims serving in the U.S. military based on the perceived risk of Islamic radicalization and insider threat. Participant XM6 acknowledged the cloud of distrust on Muslim service members based on the Muslim stereotypes of religious extremism. XM6 puts it this way:

I have not had any experience that has put doubt in my mind, though for the time I was in Afghanistan working with the Muslim military interpreter, had something come about wrong. It would have been easy for me to go like, 'hey, maybe he is working for his side, his religion or (him being) anti-American because he already has like a flag (flagged)[sic]. It is just like if I hired you and you were previously a convict, the first time something comes missing, I would think you took it. So that is reality (XM6, data collection interview, 2020).

This religious identity stereotype, according to XM6, made it more likely that Muslim service members would be targets of public suspicion based on the association of their faith with anti-American violent extremism. Few other participants shared this

perspective of wariness based on the stereotype associated with being Muslim.

Participant XM5 spoke directly to this concern to wit:

> We have to be skeptical, you do not trust them (Muslims) because of their
> different way of thinking. Their ways of things are different, so we have to be
> skeptical and cautious because of how they react to certain things or how we
> should have our conversation with them or how to approach them [sic], they are
> different, you know; culturally different (XM5, data collection interview, 2020).

XM5 went on to make a connection between U.S. public perception towards Muslims
and media influence stating to wit:

> I mean, the public has an opinion of whom they want to serve in their military, but
> then again, the public does not know the individual. They have a perception of
> what they heard or what they see; they do not have a chance to interact with that
> individual. Okay, so you like to see a lot from the news media portray Islam and
> Muslims [sic] how they will turn on you in a heartbeat if you say or do something
> offensive to them (XM5, data collection interview, 2020).

XM5 further stated that beyond the news cycles, the influence of talk shows and movie
characterization of Muslims and Islam has a significant influence on how the public
Muslim U.S. military service members.

Sharing his own experience, XM4 stated that he did not have any bad experience
with any Muslim service member in his over 29-years of military career but he stated that
acts of terror perpetrated by Muslim military service members amongst which was the
Fort Hood shooting in Texas created in his view a legitimate reason for concern. He

explained to wit: "I see what is happening today with the current Muslim soldiers, sailors, and airmen; I think there is distrust because of the vetting process when they come here [sic]. I think it should be looked at [sic] and maybe somehow upgraded" (XM4, data collection interview, 2020).

This view represented a perspective emphasizing strict vetting of Muslims as a suspect community being a condition precedent to gaining public trust. The vast majority of study participants acknowledged significant public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims which encompass Muslim military personnel. One participant offered insight from a firsthand experience of Muslim soldiers on the receiving end of suspicion while serving. Participant XM3 shared an experience of an incident:

> I was at the Troop Medical Center (TMC), two U.S. Muslim soldiers and myself, and they were having a conversation in Arabic. Then came a captain who yelled at them, and he is like, "Hey, you cannot speak Arabic here, you know, you are gonna scare people." The two soldiers were saddened about this. That was … sad (XM3, data collection interview, 2020).

The participant cautioned on the likelihood of demoralization, self-consciousness, and hyper-vigilance amongst Muslim service members that may be inimical to their productivity because of the overhanging cloud of public suspicion.

The summary of participant views in response to research question #1 showed that the vast majority of study participants stated positive experience and favorable disposition towards Muslims as co-service members. This vast majority also indicated that they viewed Muslim colleagues as no different from themselves and therefore saw

them as trustworthy team members. The theme of positive disposition was shared across participant demographics. However, participants acknowledged awareness of significant public anxiety and mistrust of Muslims which include Muslim military personnel due to the stereotype of violent extremism associated with their religion.

Figure 5:

Research Question 1 Category Codes Collation and Theme Identification
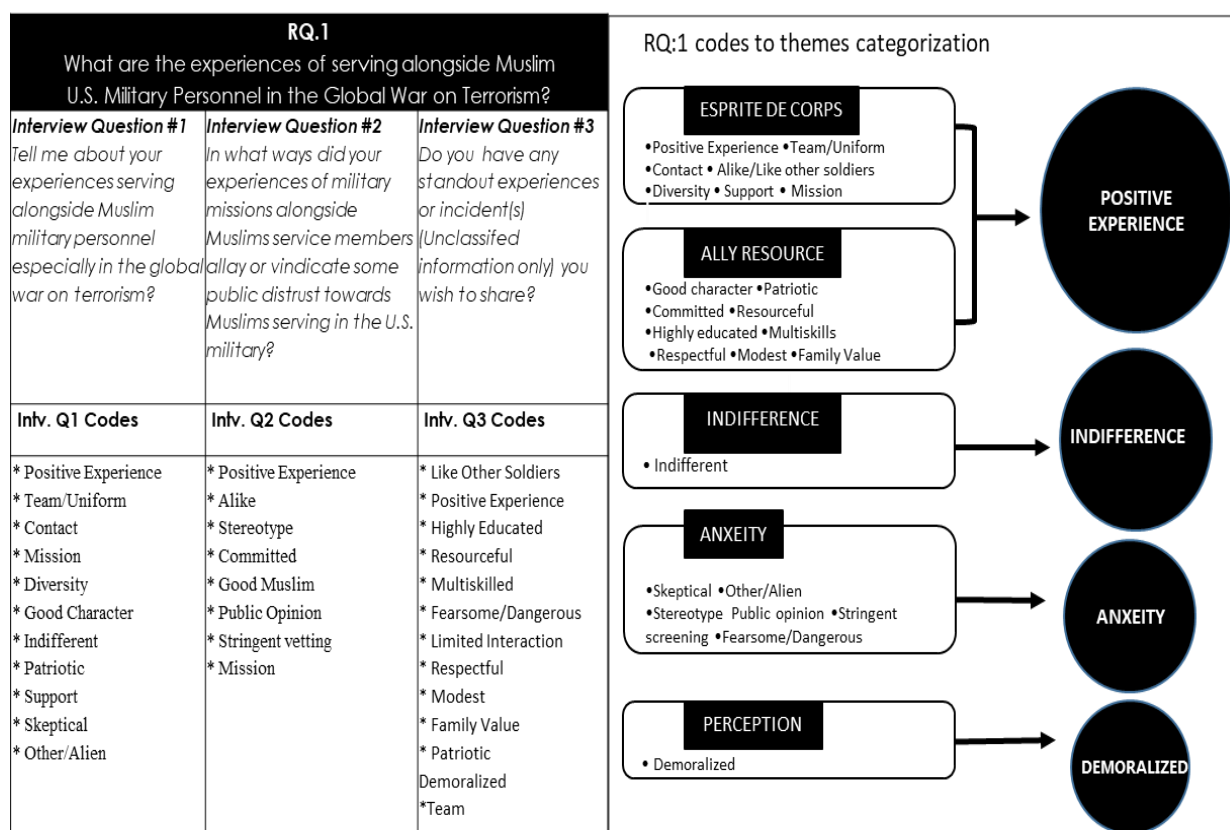
RQ2: How had the experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel supported, or called into question, anxiety, and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military?

Three interview questions were used in the in-depth exploration of research question # 2. The first interview question asked participants how their lived experiences in the U.S. military influenced their attitude and disposition towards Muslim military service members. This question was intended to elicit responses to address the research question while interview questions two and three were designed to elicit insights and context.

The dominant theme that emerged from the coding of all the participants' responses to RQ2 was of positive influence. Individual responses coalesced around initial codes such as command policy, individual attribute, team spirit, diversity, mission, etc., (see Figure 6). The vast majority of the 17 participants that shared their experiences of contact and interaction with Muslim military personnel overwhelmingly viewed them as positive experiences that influenced their outlook towards Muslims. The Army command policy which promotes equal opportunity, diversity, and a mission-centered institutional environment were factors that participants credited with fostering esprit-de-corps among service members regardless of religious affiliation, national origin, race, or gender. Participant XM2 put the Army command policy and military culture squarely as major influence factors stating to wit:

> I feel like I have, much better understanding and better insights than the average
> person, and I think that if more people had the opportunity to interact with
> Muslims widening their aperture, I think we would be much better off if people
> understand that for the most part Muslims are just people too just trying to live
> their lives (XM2, data collection interview, 2020).

This position was widely shared across study participants' demographics of educations, race, gender, age, and military ranks. Participant XM9 described her view to wit:

> The military values helped instill tolerance, especially in people who might
>
> otherwise have extreme views of Muslims and others. I would say that military
>
> training helped us understand Muslim culture and some of their religious beliefs
>
> because that was one thing that the chain of command pushed heavy on,
>
> especially at the beginning of the war (XM9, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM11 shared a similar view describing U.S. military culture as a positive influence to wit:

> The military was accommodating of members from different religious or social
>
> backgrounds. What mattered the most is being part of the team and performing
>
> your assigned duties and tasks...Such experiences often make people see things
>
> differently afterward. My interaction with Muslims in and outside of the military
>
> made me realize we all have a similar need (XM11, data collection interview,
>
> 2020).

The perspective that military values and culture were a positive influence in shaping a more tolerant attitude towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military was also succinctly articulated by XM10, who stated:

> I would say a positive influence because it is like; you are all supporting one
>
> another. No one is different when you are in the army... being a certain race or
>
> gender or color or whatever might be part of you, but it is not all of you. There is

a saying that when you join the military, you do not see color anymore; you only

see family (XM10, data collection interview, 2020).

XM14 provided a noteworthy perspective about the double-edged influence of the U.S.

military in the shaping of public attitudes towards Muslims and Muslim service members

in particular. This perspective operated at the intersection of military culture and military

involvement in the GWOT. XM14 shared the view to wit:

If I never joined the military, I probably would have had limited exposure to

individuals that are of Muslim faith up close as in the military. On the other side,

being in the military and the war has created some anxiety. I carry some

instinctive prejudice because of the war's focus on Muslims. I must admit it is in

the military that has fostered even greater prejudice that I do not think I would

have had I never joined the military (XM14, data collection interview, 2020).

This perspective advances a thesis of opposites in the role of U.S. military institutions

and culture on public attitudes towards Muslim service members. These inverse sides

consist of intentional force-building policies and perceptions of military operations such

as the war on terror expeditionary campaigns. Participant XM8 shared a similar

perspective to wit:

Americans and the war have shaped the military culture...We associate Muslims

with terrorists because of the (military) war on terror ...; I think it (the war on

terror) has shaped the stereotype that if you are Muslim, you are a terrorist. It is

just a general perception of my experience (XM8, data collection interview,

2020).

These two participants' perspectives offer important contextual insight into national security-driven policy influence (intended and unintended) on public perception towards Muslims. This linkage was perceived as contributory to an enemy identity construction by some in the U.S. public of Muslims against the backdrop of 9/11 and the consequent global war on (Islamic) terrorism. However, a majority of study participants also acknowledge the role of U.S. Army command policy posture in moderating inter-group anxiety and prejudices within its institutions.

An important insight that emerged from some participants' responses, was the attribution to personal values. Several of the study participants asserted that their values and background were the primary influence on their tolerant attitudes and warm disposition towards Muslim service members even as they also acknowledged that the military institutional support for diversity and inclusion played a significant role. The implication was that their values of openness found compatibility with the diversity and inclusion imperatives of the U.S. military. Participant XM15 threaded the needle to wit:

> My perspective and attitude did not have much to do with being in the military, but I will say that the military created a work environment that brought together different races, religions, and cultures more than individuals will ordinarily be exposed to. This environment made for a more tolerant attitude toward other people and cultures (XM15, data collection interview, 2020).

imilar perspective was shared by participant XM13 who stated to wit:

> Being in the Army did not change my views. It (the Army) may have opened my views to working with other service members and different religions... because

the military did not focus on religious background, it was unimportant. The army

recognizes differences in religious backgrounds they have changed some

regulations ... to accommodate different religious beliefs (XM13, data collection

interview, 2020).

This perspective was also shared by participant XM6 who put it this way:

The Army did not shape my attitude towards anyone, but the Army says you

cannot dislike anyone because of their religion; you cannot do that; in the Army,

you judge people based on their character, they are pulling their weight. We all

wear the same uniform (XM6, data collection interview, 2020).

However, a few participants vehemently dismissed the notion of the military influencing

their perception of Muslims better or worse. Participant XM6 objected to any notion that

military culture influences his attitude towards Muslim service members. He stated that

he did not believe that the military culture had such influence; "none whatsoever."

Participant XM5 ventured further in the same viewpoint, stating:

The military does not necessarily shape the way you think as an individual.

Nothing could shape my opinion towards one race, you know. Because this is the

way I grew up. I always have been very skeptical … you cannot give a hundred

percent trust to anybody. So, I would not say anybody shaped my opinion (XM5,

data collection interview, 2020).

Study participants also shared important feedback to the question of their

perception of the American public attitude towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military.

The theme of negative perception emerged as the dominant viewpoint of participants

(Appendix D, Figure D5). The negative public attitude towards Muslim service members as perceived by the overwhelming majority of study participants highlighted some degree of contrast when compared to the positive and supportive opinion of nearly all participants towards Muslim service members.

According to participant XM17, "I have one answer, one-word answer to your question; terrible, very terrible, they have been viewed negatively because they are Muslims. Some Americans' perception of Muslims is bad" (XM17, data collection interview, 2020). XM16 highlighted the contrast in attitudes between the military and the public regarding attitude towards Muslims in the Military stating to wit:

> I think there is a military view, and there is public perception. Outside of the military, all you hear is about the Muslim soldiers that have done something wrong, you know. And it is not put in the context where other soldiers of other nationalities or religions have done the same bad things...The public tends to view bad things done by Muslims in the military differently from other religions or cultures (XM16, data collection interview, 2020).

Study participant XM15 provided a firsthand account of lived experience to illustrate some differences in attitude towards Muslims between the public and military based on a perceived threat. According to XM15:

> There is hate from the past. 9/11 event contributed to the mistrust. It shaped how Americans perceive soldiers who are Muslims… There is association hate which is prevalent amongst U.S. civilians, and I experienced a lot of this when we go off base, they will ask, "where are you from, we hear an accent" I finally stopped

telling them I was born in the Middle East and instead tell them I was born in

Italy (XM15, data collection interview, 2020).

According to XM15, claiming Italian ancestry was reassuring to the public and spared

him further interrogation from some anxious members who were uneasy about his Middle

Eastern look and accent. This according to him was in contrast to the camaraderie he

enjoyed with fellow soldiers in the garrison.

Another participant re-echoed the perspective of negative public attitude and

anxiety about Muslims serving in the U.S. military based on fear of perceived ulterior

motives by Muslims. Participant XM14 characterized the public anxiety:

I think that American's non-military public does have an overall negative outlook.

I feel like the public judge Arab people differently, whether they are Muslim or

not. There is some level of mistrust … [based on] terrorist attack on our soil ... it

just fuels the fire for the average American to say, "What is their ulterior motive?

(XM14, data collection interview, 2020).

There was near unanimity among participants that media-created stereotypes play

a significant role in how the American public perceives Muslims; a perception that

extends to Muslim service members. According to Participant XM9:

The public is not well educated on Islam as a religion because of 9/11 and other

acts of terrorism...most Americans are unwilling or unable to process the reality

that Muslims are not monolithic ... Most people in the U.S. public want to put

Muslims in this little box of you are a Muslim, so you are evil, just like every

white baldheaded man is a child abductor. Much American public just likes to

throw things into these little boxes because they think it fits and requires no further thinking (XM9, data collection interview, 2020).

Notably, some participants stated that public attitudes toward Muslims in the U.S. military have continued to evolve towards positive territories since 9/11. Participant XM10 shared such a view stating, "… depends on the political spectrum…I would say that public attitude towards Muslims in the military is more positive than negative" (XM10, data collection interview, 2020). However, more study participants spoke of divided public perception of Muslims (including Muslim service members) based on religious and political-ideological affiliations. Participant XM8 detailed the nature of this divide;

> It is politically divided. I feel like the Republican side looks at Muslims through a microscope, like what are your intentions? ... There is, I think, a level of prejudice. The patriotic red blood in some Americans is not comfortable with Muslims because there is a fear that Muslims are terrorists, because the people who attacked with the planes on 9/11 did not look like bad people (XM8, data collection interview, 2020).

XM1 summed up the position of an evolving attitude and divided opinion to wit:

> The initial shock of the 9/11 event created a negative perception or amplified negative perception, but over time, it has gotten better. I think there is probably more concern in the Bible belts. There is a more fundamentalist view of the Bible. Many people in this area, the evangelicals, are more prone to be suspicious of Muslims (XM1, data collection interview, 2020).

Further exploration of the research question through interview question #3 which asked participants of their views as to the source(s) of the public mistrust towards Muslims in the military provided important context to the research problem. Study participants attributed public mistrust of Muslims including those serving in the U.S. military to primarily media bias, the 9/11 event, ignorance amongst other factors.

Participant XM5 expressed the view that public distrust is influenced by news media biased reporting. According to XM5, "The media output influences the public perception, so that is mainly why many the population mistrust Muslims." Participant XM3 went further in this trajectory, stating, "There are still some voices, you know, in the media, they kind of still call Muslim's extremist and whatever…. And I think there is a lot of demonizing going on, and I think that is wrong." However, participant XM4 offered the perspective that 9/11 was a watershed event captured by the media and presented to the public. According to XM4, people react to what they see on the screen. XM4 explained that:

> the mistrust probably comes from what everybody saw on 9/11 and what some of the Muslim countries say when they are in front of the camera, like death to America, death to Israel and the hatred of our flags, burning our flags, and you know stuff like that. I think the media do service, and sometimes they do a disservice was just as well (XM4, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM7 presented a different take on media culpability. He contended to wit:

> It has a lot to do with a lot of the things in the news. It has a lot to do with fake news, not the Trump Fake news, I am talking about people screaming about being

discriminated against, but it turns out they did it to themselves to get

attention[sic]. It is more like if one cannot prove crime or discrimination, you

create or manufacture discrimination. That is the biggest problem I see in this

country (XM7, data collection interview, 2020).

In the view of this participant, the media is not so much seen as a source but a tool being leveraged by individuals to advance their political agenda.

Several participants highlighted the theme of ignorance as a major source of negative public attitudes and dispositions towards Muslims in general, which is inclusive of Muslim service members.XM8 recounted a personal experience to underscore the theme of ignorance of Muslim religion as a source of mistrust towards Muslims, stating in strong terms:

The mistrust source is ignorance, not knowing the religion, not knowing what the

Muslim religion is. I'm going out into these towns, and people are blowing

themselves up, and we are like, "oh in the name of Allah blah blah" I was

ignorant about religion. I did not know about the religion, so I thought all

Muslims are terrorists because I spent an entire year wondering if I was going to

live or die next to him (terrorist). When I educated myself on what a Muslim is

and what a radical Muslim is and the difference between two, you know, you

learn, so I think that ignorance is probably the biggest source of mistrust yeah

(XM8, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM1 responded to the same question and described a combination of ignorance and media bias as major influences on public anxiety and distrust towards

Muslims in the U.S. military. XM1 stated that it was the "…lack of knowledge… (And) also active disinformation in the mix which relies on the ignorance of its target audience to succeed." Participant XM2 summed up the combination of factors that influence perspective stating:

> The majority of mistrust is based on ignorance and a lack of education. Not just ignorance but just the lack of exposure, and you know, the fear of the unknown that comes with that. People see bad news stories, or they see, you know, terrorists, and they do not see the human side of it; they just assume everybody is this (terrorist) because of a few bad apples, you know the analogy (XM2, data collection interview, 2020).

In summary, the exploration of research question #2 produced an overarching theme of positive influence. This was elicited through interview question #1 that asked participants in what ways their lived experience in the U.S. military shaped their attitude towards Muslims service members. Important contextual question on study participants' characterization of American public perception towards Muslims in the Military highlighted a dominant theme of negative perception.

Participant's perspectives on the sources of negative public perception towards Muslim military service members highlighted themes of media bias, terrorism, and ignorance. The collation and categorization of themes from the main research question and contextual questions are shown in Figure 6.

U.S. security and military readiness. The second interview question asked participants of ways through which public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military can be mitigated or addressed.

Participants' responses to interview question #1 showed that the vast majority of participants (15 of 17) believed there was a potential risk(s) or peril of alienation and social schism from unaddressed public anti-Muslim sentiment. Initial codes that emerged in the data analysis consist of concepts that include diversity impediment, alienation, mutual distrust, radicalizations, social tensions, and hate crime (see Appendix E, Fig. E7). Coding aggregation and categorization in the axial and selective coding phase produced an overarching theme of an impediment to national interest and security. Study participant XM1 characterized the risk stemming from public distrust towards Muslims in the military with the contention;

> [It] would limit the pool of individuals that we can recruit from people who serve the nation very well. You have the potential to create what you are fighting against; you treat people miserably then you create resentment that can potentially push some people to becoming radicalized, so you create a pool of alienated people who may find acceptance in the terrorist networks (XM1, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM8 echoed the negative effect viewpoint and pointed to a potential chilling effect on the recruitment and retention of Muslims in the military and national security institutions. According to the participant, "I can see recruiters having issues recruiting from that community because maybe their families will not be supportive (having)

experienced the prejudice …and based on the advice that they received probably in their community" (XM8, data collection interview, 2020).

Several other participants highlighted the risk potential for alienation-induced radicalization, which in their opinion can lead to insider threat involving radicalized Muslims. Participant XM2 shared the view of significant risk to military unit cohesion that is created by mistrust. According to this participant, "people getting shunned and people getting marginalized … causes … friction … and … degrades morale" (XM2, data collection interview, 2020).

Other participants spoke of distrust as breeding mutual distrust between the distrusted and the distruster(s) at a group level of analysis. A situation that can manifest in less cooperation and collaboration on homeland security issues. Participant XM6 spoke to this concern to wit:

> There is (a) consequence to both sides … distrust wherever it starts, it just gets bigger, very difficult to beat it back. Once you have distrust, it invites much more to the table ... like the public thinking we are becoming soft for allowing them to serve side by side when look what they caused, or that they are working from within now[sic] (XM6, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM6 made the point that distrust alienates not just Muslims but also some segments of the American population who are wary of Muslims. According to XM6, some conservative-leaning Americans view the military as a symbolic national institution and are therefore distrustful of Muslims serving in it. Furthermore, according to this participant, some segments of the population view U.S. military accommodation of

Muslims as problematic because such accommodation is perceived as making the military soft by lowering the standards and letting in potential Islamic radicals. Some of the perceived accommodations include the exception to policies issues on regulations such as growing beards, Friday worship day, changes in dining menu to include halal meals, etc.

However, several participants shared the perspective that the spotlight on Muslim service members had made it particularly difficult for them to do their jobs while being under cloud of suspicion that silhouetted them as 'potential enemy within.' Participant XM9 pointed to this effect on Muslim service members stating; "It make(s) it hard for the Muslim soldiers that we do have to be able to do their duties and their jobs while living with much public distrust and being second-guessed…being constantly on the defensive" (XM9, data collection interview, 2020). Participant XM10 also submitted that the situation created significant consequences. This participant rhetorically asked: "Who wants to go to work somewhere where people may not like you if they (Muslims) feel like that is the sentiment of a significant portion of the population." (XM10, data collection interview, 2020). A similar sentiment was shared by another participant XM11 who detailed:

> If any group perceives some mistrust towards them based on blanket religious, racial, or cultural assumptions, it creates stress and fear. It is like they have to prove to other people that their faith is valid. People do not give their best under the cloud of distrust. This may result in avoidance and alienation (XM11, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM17 raised the issue of hate crime. According to the participant, this was not a potential consequence but something that was already happening. The participant further spoke about the nexus between public anti-Muslim sentiment, hate crimes, and Muslim's avoidance of active citizenship in symbolic national security institutions which include the military because such a profession creates a spotlight that magnifies their presumed suspect identity. According to participant XM17;

> There are already some repercussions against the Muslims through many hate crimes targeting Muslims and people who dress like Muslims like the Sikhs since 9/11... If you ask most in the Muslim community where they would like to work or have a family member work, they will close their eyes to jobs with the police and military mainly because they perceived the system does not trust them and they do not want to get in trouble (XM17, data collection interview, 2020).

In a similar perspective, participant XM14 spoke of broader national interest and contended that American global interest was not best served by the perception of prejudice towards its Muslim population, especially for a faith that is the bedrock to the identity tapestry of a significant population from regions of the world that are of significant importance to U.S. national interest. According to XM14, "Muslims make up a large portion of the world if the relationship is destroyed by mistrust and prejudice, then it becomes a detriment to their cooperation on issues important to the U.S. (XM14, data collection interview, 2020).

However, not all participants agreed there was a significant risk, peril, or consequence to the negative public perception of Muslims in the military. Two

participants shared noteworthy views contending that distrust of Muslims in the military, and or in the general population, has little or no consequence to U.S. security and or military readiness. Participant XM7 stated that any impact adduced to the issue of public distrust of Muslims in the U.S. was likely overblown. The participant stated that the issue of distrust towards Muslims was individual and does not rise to the level of being a major concern. According to participant XM7: "If one perceives it as an issue, then it becomes an issue for the individual. So (if) some Muslims feel they are not liked in a neighborhood; maybe the Muslims do not like the neighborhood, so it is reciprocal (XM7, data collection interview). Another participant also maintained that there was no implication to U.S. security or national interest based on public perception of distrust toward Muslims including those in the military. In the opinion of participant XM5, "There are no implications that I can think of."

The views as shared by the two participants present another vista, albeit a minority one amongst participants on perception towards Muslims service members and potential implications.

Overall, participants' responses to research question 3, showed an overwhelming majority expressed the view that public distrust of Muslims in the U.S. military was detrimental to U.S. security and national interest. On the contextual question of risk mitigation strategies to addressing the public distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military, the majority opinion of study participants pointed towards public enlightenment and education as central to achieving the desired outcome. Other measures nested within

the broad theme of education include leadership, media objectivity, counter-messaging, and cultural awareness (Appendix E, Fig. 7).

Highlighting the role of education in mitigating perception towards Muslims, Participant XM2 suggested that educating the public through highlighting Muslims' positive contribution to the military was critical. The participant stated:

I think it all comes down to education and exposure, more coverage [sic] ...that highlight things like the number of Muslim personnel in the military; highlight some of those individuals and (put) a face to it. "Like 'hey, here is Sergeant So-and-so, they have been serving for this long, here is what they have done". Show that they have been successful. This can help educate folks and then show that they are not what people tend to think they might be (XM2, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM10 shared a similar perspective, explaining to wit: "I think it would have come down to counter-messaging...to use the media for a counter-narrative showing the positive contributions of Muslim service members in media reports." (XM10, interview data collection, 2020). This view was also shared by XM13, who called for a nuanced approach in highlighting the contributions of Muslim service members, stating:

you do not necessarily have to teach them the Muslim ways, but you have to teach them the positive impacts of Muslim military personnel, you know, you have to teach them (public) that they (Muslims) still can serve, just letting the public know that they can trust them because they are serving the American public as part of a team. We just have to assure the public that they (Muslims) do not need

to be singled out. The public should understand that they (Muslims) are soldiers, and every soldier is part of one team irrespective of differences in religious faith (XM13, data collection interview, 2020).

Several participants emphasized the leadership's role in setting a 'fair tone' to educate the public on the importance of tolerance. Participant XM9 staked the position to wit:

It is going to have to come from the top-down, and it is going to have to be a big push for the media influence to bring about change, especially the civilian perspective outside of the military for how they feel about the Muslims. Because for as long as they are allowed to put that negative spin on things, some people will never open up to the positive aspects of having Muslims serving along as great soldiers….So leadership all the way around has to set a fair tone (XM9, data collection interview, 2020).

XM17 highlighted the critical role of political leadership as an important tool in moderating U.S. public attitude towards its Muslim community stating:

I cannot emphasize enough that it has to start from the top down. The top is the President of the country to set a tolerant tone…. The effort should be to see Muslims as fellow humans and emphasize that there are bad people in every religion. The positive achievements of Muslims in the military and the civilian public should be highlighted. Again, it has to start from the top of the chain (XM17, data collection interview, 2020).

However, several of the participants expressed skepticism that enlightenment or education will change the negative perception towards Muslims in general by many in the

U.S. These participants point to entrenched worldviews and rising nativist nationalism in the "national body politic." Participant XM1 succinctly explained the skepticism:

> The easy answer is education ... [But] I'm just not so sure. One would have trouble trying to persuade some audience otherwise. So, I'm just not so sure if the answer is more education because to educate, you have to have some group that is willing and open to being informed (XM1, data collection interview, 2020).

The perception that some people's opinions are fixed when it came to matters of race, culture, and religion was shared by participant XM5 who stated:

> It is hard to convince people. Once they had their minds already made up. You are not going to convince many people to change their minds on certain issues, and they are always going to have their mindset regardless of the information [sic] (XM5, data collection interview, 2020).

Participant XM 15 restated the inherent difficulty of changing entrenched positions within the civilian population and traced the problem to a gap in a military-civilian culture that can be mitigated through closer interaction and information sharing. This participant stated to wit:

> I think it is going to be difficult changing the public mind. I don't think you can change their mind because civilians don't think like the military. They don't have the education about the military ... I think the problem is that the military and the civilian population don't have a channel or platform for communication … on military culture maybe if the military found a way of engaging the civil society

about … such issues as the diversity of culture and religious background how it

has positive military impacts (XM15, data collection interview, 2020).

A few of the study participants shared opinions that public anxiety and distrust

towards Muslims in the U.S. military can be reduced by stronger security vetting of

Muslim military personnel. Participants with these opinions primarily predicated it on

Muslims as mainly immigrant citizens. Participant XM4 spoke in favor of stringent

vetting of Muslim military recruits during accession. According to the participant:

There needs to be a better vetting process and background check... a better and a

stronger vetting process to vet. I think if that's done, we can potentially stop a lot

of these, maybe suicide bombings, wars, or whatever they got planned [sic]. It's

all part of the vetting process (XM4, data collection, interview, 2020).

XM14 expressed the belief that when the public is assured of a thorough vetting process

of Muslims that root out potential extremists, the public can then begin to trust those who

must meet the security standards. Participant XM7 puts the onus on the Muslim

community to assimilate into the culture and values of the country they chose to become

a part of. According to XM7, "People that choose to become part of a new country should

do well to assimilate in their new country, not isolate to their roots."

This sentiment spoke to the Muslim community's responsibility towards allaying

public suspicion by adopting and projecting an identifiable Americanness over ancestral

cultural and religious cleavage. Participant XM3 echoed aspects of this sentiment while

calling for shared responsibilities in addressing the significant public distrust towards

Muslim service members. According to XM3:

>All sides need to do their homework. I ask my Muslim brothers and sisters to show their good side … integrate themselves, teach people, and say who you are [sic] ... [And] the other side; to kind of listen, not always afraid of the unknown (XM3, data collection interview, 2020).

The idea expressed by participant XM3 was of a mutual give and take in which Muslims integrate themselves into mainstream U.S. culture while the dominant or mainstream U.S. public maintains more openness towards Muslims.

The participants' responses in the exploration of research question three showed most participants underscored detriment as an overarching theme in characterizing the risk and impacts of the U.S. public's anti-Muslim sentiment manifesting as distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military. Education emerged as the major theme in the analysis of participant responses to potential means for mitigating the public anti-Muslim sentiment, even though some participants expressed skepticism about the likelihood of success because of perceived entrenched worldviews and current hyper-partisan political climate.

Figure 7

Research Question 3 Codes Collation and Categorization

| RQ. 3 |
| How significant is public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military personnel to U.S. national security and military readiness? |

Interview Question 1
How would you characterize the risk(s) and or consequence(s) of anti-Muslim sentiment to U.S. security and military readiness in diverse threat environment?

Interview Question 2
In what ways can or should public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military be mitigated or addressed?

Intv. Q. 1 Codes

* Diversity impediment
* Group alienation
* Mutual distrust
* Radicalization
* Tension
* Defensiveness
* Personal opinion
* Exclusion
* Resentment
* Prejudice
* Low morale
* Hostility
* divided public support
* Avoidance
* Fear
* Discrimination
* Hate crime
* Impediment to cooperation
* No risk

Intv. Q. 2 Codes

* Education
* Media objectivity
* Skepticism
* Exposure
* Assimilation
* Leadership
* Military narrative
* Stringent vetting
* Social contact

SOCIAL DIVISION
•Diversity impediment •Group alienation •Cooperation impediment •Mutual distrust •Radicalization • Tension •Defensiveness •Exclusion •Resentment •Prejudice •Low Morale • Hostility • Fear •Hate crime • Avoidance •Discrimination •divided public support

INSIGNICANT
•No risk •Individual view

SIGNIFICANT IMPEDIMENT

INSIGNIFICANT CONCERN

PUBLIC ENLIGHTENMENT
•Education •Highlight MMP Contributions •Exposure •Leadership commitment •Religion/cross cultural awareness •Social contact •Openness •Military-Civil society communication • Addressing xenophobia •Religious leadership commitment

CHALLENGE
• Skepticism • Difficult/Challenging

STIPULATIONS
•Stringent vetting • Assimilation •Good citizenship

EDUCATION/ PUBLIC ENLIGHTENMENT

SKEPTICISM

PRECONDITION

Summary

The study used a qualitative interview for data collection from 17 participants who are U.S. Army war veterans of the GWOT. The participants weighed in on the three research questions through interview questions designed to elicit their opinions and perspectives based on their lived experiences. Participant's responses to the interview questions addressing each of the three research questions were coded through a three-phased coding method (open, axial, and selective coding) executed using the seven-step approach (Figure 3). The end state was the emergence of overarching themes that encapsulate the participants' opinions and perspectives on the research questions.

Research question #1 explored participant's experience serving alongside Muslim U.S. military personnel in the GWOT, and in response, the vast majority of participants expressed positive experiences fighting and training alongside Muslim military colleagues in the GWOT. A few participants expressed some level of anxiety based on a perceived risk of radical Islamic extremism.

Research question #2 asked how the participants' experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel supported or called into question anxiety, and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. Most participants' feedback underscored positive influences as a central theme encapsulating their experiences serving alongside Muslim service members. The majority opinion viewed the U.S. public perception of Muslims serving in the military as negative and traced the sources of this negative perception to media bias and ignorance on the part of the public.

Findings on RQ3 concerning how significant an impact was public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military personnel on U.S. national interest and security, showed an overwhelming majority of participants stating that it impeded national interest and security goals. A majority of respondents presented education, or public enlightenment through diversity committed leadership, as important mitigation tools. However, some participants expressed skepticism on education's efficacy, citing entrenched ideological positions fanned by disinformation and fear.

The importance of these findings is presented in Chapter 5 of this study. This chapter will summarize the study findings and provide interpretations and conclusions drawn from the research. It also outlined the study limitations and recommendations for positive social change and potential follow-on research efforts.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The American Dream represents ideals paramount to our democracy and is vital

to our national security. In what other nation can you find a military composed of

women and men who carry such a plethora of experiences and come from so

many distinct backgrounds? Diversity is critical to military readiness. It makes

our nation unique, and in this diversity lies our strength. Extraordinary skills,

languages, lessons, and perspectives meld together, allow us to better defend the

United States and its interests, and provide our military with a competitive edge to

combat our adversaries.

—Maj. Sadia Ali Heil (2021)

Muslim military personnel represents a minority in the U.S. military. Their

religious faith evokes anxiety and distrust in a significant number of Americans who

otherwise trust and espouse support to the U.S. military (Kennedy, 2016). The anxiety

and distrust towards Muslims in the military is an aspect of the broader social problem of

Islamophobia in the United States that has generated divided opinion between

conservative and liberal-leaning populations based on threat perceptions.

This qualitative study was carried out using a phenomenological approach.

Seventeen Army veterans were interviewed for their opinions and insights addressing

three research questions leading to insight into the research problem. My intent in this

study was to present the perspective of non-Muslim U.S. military veterans of the GWOT

on the public anxiety and distrust of Muslims in the U.S. military, drawing from their

lived experiences of serving alongside Muslim military personnel. Participants' responses to the interview questions addressing the research problem were analyzed by thematic coding. The emergent themes that sufficiently addressed the research questions are presented as the study findings.

The vast majority of the study participants reported positive experiences in their contact and interactions with Muslim military personnel in their respective military missions in the course of the GWOT. The positive-contact experiences with Muslim service members were cited by a majority of the participants across all interview questions. A majority of study participants shared the common view that Muslim military personnel was on the "receiving end" of significant public distrust based on their Islamic religious faith.

Furthermore, the study showed that the overwhelming majority of study participants considered the public distrust towards Muslims in the military as constituting a significant impediment to strategic diversity in the military and vital U.S. security and national interests. Most participants cited fear of radical Islamic extremism, media bias, ignorance, and fear as principals and influences fomenting negative public attitudes toward Muslims in general and Muslim military service members in particular. The study also showed that the majority of study participants shared the views that strong leadership support and public education through an all-of-government approach to civilian-military engagements were important means of addressing the anti-Muslim sentiment.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study findings represent the overarching themes from participant responses addressing three research questions underpinning the research problem. Positive experience emerged as the dominant theme from the participant's narrative of the lived experience of interactions with Muslim U.S. military personnel in the GWOT. The study found that the vast majority of participants viewed their experiences of contact with Muslim U.S. military personnel as a positive influence even against the backdrop of significant public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. The study also found that the vast majority of participants viewed public distrust of Muslims in the U.S. military as inimical to U.S. security and national interest.

These findings support the theses of the intergroup theories that position social identity, perception of threat, and social contact as critical factors that exert influence on intergroup relations. The vast majority of participants acknowledged that the current public attitude in the U.S. towards Muslims was characterized by anxiety, distrust, and suspicion. These perceptions were consolidated under the overall theme of negative attitudes. Such attitudes were seen as emblematic of social identity tensions between multiculturalism and resurgent nativist sentiment based on a perceived threat. The emergent social polarization was consistent with Parekh's (2000) postulation that inherent in the diversity of groups are social fault lines of identities that can fan the embers of social tension in which a strong in-group (nativist and or strong conservative) identification instigate prejudice towards an outgroup (Hogg & Abrams, 2007) as arguably evinced by Islamophobia or anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States.

Most participants linked the public feeling of anxiety and distrust towards Muslims to their Islamic faith perceived by many in the U.S. public to be violent, repressive, and incompatible with western values. One participant provided an opinion that summarized this view stating "[T]hey are being viewed negatively because they are Muslims" (XM17). This view, while arguably an individual's opinion, nonetheless speaks to the perceived public uneasiness with Islam, wherein the Muslim identity is viewed with suspicion and prejudice (Beydoun, 2018; Considine, 2017; Lajevardi, 2020).

Some participants spoke on the "us-versus-them" dynamic in which Muslims are viewed as other in the minds of many in the public. Participant XM14, reflecting on the issue of public perception towards Muslim service members, stated, "I feel like the public judge Arab people differently whether they're Muslim or not." This quote informed on Muslim identity construction by many in the United States in which the diverse people and cultures of the Asian/Middle Eastern and North African regions are conflated and subsumed into a monolithic radical Islamic identity (Syed & Pio, 2018).

A significant number of participants made the distinction that public perception towards Muslims was not a homogenously shared attitude across the U.S. population. Study participant XM8 linked anti-Muslim sentiment to political party affiliation in the United States. According to the participant, "The Republican side look at Muslim through a microscope, like what are your intentions … the patriotic red blood in some Americans is not comfortable with Muslims because there's a fear that Muslims are terrorists" (XM8). This perspective was consistent with some polls that found that significant conservative-leaning demography that espouses literalist Christian dogma and nativist

nationalism in the United States (such as evangelicals) were more likely to harbor distrust

and anxiety towards Muslims (Lipka, 2014; Steensland & Wright, 2014). The view

linking strong ingroup identification and prejudice towards Muslims amongst Republican

and evangelical demography in the United States was directly called out by study

participant XM1 who stated that "there's probably more concern in the Bible belt

[socially conservative U.S. southern states]. There's a more fundamentalist view of the

Bible in these regions, a lot of people in this area, the evangelicals [sic] are more prone to

be suspicious of Muslims" (XM1).

The delineation of specific groups as more disposed to anti-Muslim sentiment

spoke to the divide in the U.S. body politic between conservative and liberal camps. The

conservative camp, which is said to include "sectarian Protestants, white Catholics, and

biblical literalists" (Sherkat & Lehman 2018) is more suspicious of and prejudiced

against Muslims (Braunstein, 2019). Social identity salience in the exploration of public

attitude towards Muslim U.S. military personnel was also underscored by the observation

shared by many study participants. XM13 shared the opinion that "Americans will thank

anyone who is wearing the uniform, but many get uneasy if the service member is

Muslim" (XM13).

These observations taken together suggest participants' acknowledgment of the

fact that a significant population of Americans harbors some anxiety and distrust of

Muslims inside the U.S. military and national security institutions. The findings from the

study were also supportive of integrated threat theory, which posits that in-group

perceptions of threat kindle prejudice towards outgroups perceived as threat sources

(Bahns, 2015). Participants referenced the 9/11 terrorist attacks and other acts of violence against Americans, American interest, and the American way of life as influence factors of public distrust towards Muslims in general (including those serving in the military).

Study findings on participants' characterizations of public attitude toward Muslim service members and the reasons behind them showed that most participants linked negative public attitudes to the 9/11 attacks. Participant XM1 offered the view that the "shock of the 9/11 event created negative perception or amplified negative perception" (XM1). The perspective of the watershed influence of 9/11 and other radical Islam-inspired violent extremism was shared by almost all the study participants. According to participant XM3,

> There was 9/11, then there was a Muslim soldier who threw a grenade into a tent and killed some people and things like that. So, they [the American public] look at all Muslims as being like Usama Bin Laden [or] the Taliban. So, some people really don't want to get closer to the Muslims or treat them well. They just don't want to deal with them.

In a similar vein, another participant stated, "[T]he events of the 9/11 has a significant impact on American's perception towards Muslims ... people speak with anger about Muslim community because they're perceived as the ones that attacked us on 9/11" (XM12). This view was reiterated by participant XM15, who stated, "The 9/11 event contributed to the mistrust. It shaped how Americans perceive soldiers who are Muslims. There is association hate which is prevalent amongst U.S. civilians" (XM15).

These opinions advanced by participants in the study suggest a robust view of a nexus between perceived realistic and symbolic threats posed by radical Islamic extremism as manifest in the 9/11 terror attacks and the public distrust and anxiety towards Muslims in the U.S. military.

The study showed robust support for the social contact hypothesis (Allport, 1979). This was based on participants' experiences, opinions, and perspectives as shared. The thesis of the social contact hypothesis explored in the literature review suggested a positive correlation between social contact and prejudice reduction in the majority and minority group settings (in-group and outgroup). Participants' responses to research question #1, which explored participant's individual experiences of interaction with Muslim U.S. military colleagues, and research question #2, which inquired of the importance of contact experiences against the backdrop of significant public anti-Muslim sentiment, revealed notable support for the social contact hypothesis. Almost all of the study participants recounted positive experiences from interactions (personal and professional) with Muslim service members. Participants expressed supportive views of Muslim service members based on observed attributes of commitment to mission, loyalty, family values, honor, friendship, etc. (see Appendix D). These firsthand observations based on interactions were consistent with social contact's positive relationship to prejudice reduction as predicted by Allport (1979).

The study's findings also highlighted the composite nature of attitude modification influences in the modern-day all-volunteer U.S. military. This was manifested in the attributions by participants to different, and sometimes complementary,

influences that shaped their attitude towards Muslims and Muslim service members. The two main influence factors cited by participants were individual values (self-selection) and institutional socialization (social contact). The perspective emphasizing a dominant influence of institutional socialization encased in the military culture of diversity was articulated by participant XM9 to wit:

> The military values helped to instill tolerance especially in people who might otherwise have extreme views of Muslims and others. I would say that military training did help us understand Muslim culture and some of their religious beliefs because that was one of the things that the chain of command pushed heavy on, especially at the very beginning of the war (XM9, Data collection interview, 2020)

Another perspective espoused by albeit a few participants was to the effect that their value was the dominant influence in their openness or nonjudgmental attitude towards Muslim service members. This view was summed up by participant XM5, who stated:

> The military doesn't necessarily shape the way you think as an individual. Nothing could shape my opinion towards one race, you know. Because this is the way I grew up… so I wouldn't say anybody shaped my opinion on certain issues (XM5, Data collection interview, 2020).

Other participants, however, indicated that a combination of personal values and the evolved inclusive culture of the U.S. military moderated their attitude and or perception towards Muslims in general and Muslim service members specifically. This was the majority shared position. This viewpoint was contextualized by participant XM15 to wit:

> My perspective and attitude didn't have much to do with being in the military, but
> I will say that the military created a work environment that brought together
> different races, religions, and cultures more than an individual will ordinarily be
> exposed to. This environment made for more tolerant views of other people and
> cultures (XM15, Data collection interview, 2020).

The attribution by study participants to different influences or combination of influences for their attitude towards Muslim service members underscored the intersection of self-selection and socialization as exist in the U.S. all-volunteer military. This was consistent with the postulation of Nteta and Tarsi (2016) highlighting the significance of self-selection as a confounding variable in the contact hypothesis as it applies to the all-volunteer U.S. military model. The implication suggests that self-selection inherent in the U.S. all-volunteer military auto-injects "preexisting individual-level characteristic" (Nteta & Tarsi, 2016, p. 18) and attitudes drawn from social ideological cleavages of religion, politics, races, and culture. These attitudes remain latent and constitute some challenges to the assumptions of the social contact hypothesis.

Limitations of the Study

There are inherent limitations in a qualitative study, and some apply to this study. The top-most is the subjectivity of data generated from participants' views and opinions. The opinions shared by participants are subjective, non-static, and may evolve with changes in socio-economic and political dynamics. This subjectivity is a limitation to the extent that shared insights, opinions, and or experiences cannot be generalized.

There was also the potential that some participants may share socially desirable or 'politically correct' responses that mask actual belief, perception, and or attitude especially when it pertains to delicate social issues of identity. This limitation was illustrated by a participant question during the data collection phase of the study. The participant wanted to know if I (as the researcher) was Muslim. I responded that I was not and asked to know if that was a concern. The participant responded that he does not want to say anything that might be taken the 'wrong way' by a Muslim. I reiterated that the study was not designed to elicit right or wrong answers or designed to vilify any group. This interaction was illustrative of the potential for social desirability bias inherent in qualitative research data collection predicated on study participant views, opinions, and self-reporting.

The potential for researcher bias was acknowledged as a potential limitation. The potential for this limitation stemmed from the multiple roles of the researcher, such as study design architect, participant recruiter, data collector, analyst, and reporter. However, the potential for this limitation was addressed through measures, such as bracketing of personal views through detailed journaling, researcher's use of a professional post-doctoral external editor, member checking, and the supervisory oversight of an engaged dissertation committee.

Another applicable limitation inherent in qualitative studies was the use of a small sample population. The sample size of 17 participants used in this study is small relative to the population of U.S. Army and reserve personnel. While the sample size was sufficient in exploring the phenomenon, it was limited in its representation of social

demographics as exist in the study population. A much larger sample frame may have provided more diverse demographic insight, especially from veterans of evangelical Christian faith; a religious group that studies have shown to be much more suspicious of Muslims (Kidd, 2013).

Furthermore, the study acknowledged a limitation in the use of participants drawn from a single branch of the U.S. military (Army branch). Though a compelling argument can be made that the U.S. Military Forces are all regulated under the common framework of the Uniformed Code Military Justice (UMCJ) and other service branches trace origin or evolution from the U.S. Army. However, there are some differences in military branch sub-cultures, which may have a potential and different impact on unit cohesion as well as diversity imperatives.

Recommendations

The focus of this study was on the perspective of non-Muslim U.S. military veterans of the GWOT on the public distrust and anxiety towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military since 9/11, implications if any. The findings from the study suggested non-Muslim service members have favorable opinions and dispositions towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military. This finding supported the postulated evolved role of the U.S. military as a vanguard institution for intergroup contact and national cohesion (Stoeckl & Roy, 2015).

The thesis of the U.S. military as a vanguard of intergroup relations social change opens opportunity and the need for longitudinal studies to gauge perception and attitude of veterans post-military service when no longer bound by command enforced

socialization, diversity, and inclusion. This is especially topical in the context of the current climate of domestic political extremism as manifest in the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capitol in which a disproportionate number of the white supremacist group arrowhead of the insurrection were U.S. military veterans (CBS News, 2021; Diaz, and Treisman, 2021; Schrader, 2021; Steinhauer, 2021). Such study opportunity should include using larger samples drawn from more, or all, branches of the U.S. military. Such studies may reveal nuances (if any) in the different military branches of service on members' perceptions of public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims and other social minorities as service members in the U.S. military.

Other opportunities for further studies include exploring whether the support and accommodation of Muslims in the U.S. military improved attitudes towards Muslims writ large, or if such perceptions were a limited manifestation of transient intergroup cohesion driven by military command enforced interaction, and or military esprit de corps. Such studies may make important contributions to understanding the extent and or limitations of social contact in the military and its applicability to broader intergroup relations 'outside the wire'.

Implication

This study adds to the existing literature on Islamophobia with a focus on the distrust and anxiety towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military, which is nested in the broader phenomenon of Islamophobia. By giving voice to the perspectives of select veterans and service members on the issue of public distrust of Muslims in the U.S. military, the study presented a window into views and opinions from members of one of

the few intuitions that still command bipartisan respect in an otherwise polarized socio-political climate in the U.S. The study provided counter-narratives to media stereotypes and partisan political punditry. The study also provided the impetus for the promotion of diversity in the military to reflect the population that it serves and for cross-cultural competency in a global threat environment.

This study also creates an opportunity for further research exploring the intersection of self-selection and diversity imperatives in an all-volunteer military force such as the U.S. military. Such a study would be of immense importance in sustaining or modifying existing policies towards building a military force that enjoys wide public support and one that reflect the society that it serves, while still supporting national security imperatives.

Conclusion

Most Americans respect and support the U.S. military (Gallup Poll, 2020), but significant portions of the population are uneasy and suspicious when the military service members happen to be Muslims. This paradoxical attitude is tied to perceived threats of Islamic extremism and had resulted in the securitization of Islam and the Muslim identity in the U.S. body politic (Shipoli, 2018). The situation has led to the emergence of controversial policies such as Executive Order 13769: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States which sort to clamp down on immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries designated as purveyors of radical Islamic extremism (Trump, 2017). The implication of the 'extreme vetting' created heightened public anxiety and bias against the U.S. Muslim community that includes Muslim

military personnel. The study explored and presented the views of non-Muslim veterans of the GWOT on the aforementioned anxiety and distrust towards Muslim service members by the American public.

The findings of the study as detailed in chapter 4 showed that the vast majority of study participants recounted their contact and interaction with Muslim service members as positive experiences. Participants further expressed positive opinions and good testimonials of Muslim military colleagues and spoke of them as equally loyal to the oath of military enlistment like other U.S. service members. However, a majority of participants also acknowledged the trust deficit in public attitude towards Muslim service members and the Muslim community in general. These findings suggest that sanctioned social contact and intergroup interaction in the U.S. military engendered a net positive in attitudes towards Muslim service members; a finding that is consistent with the social contact hypothesis. This is without prejudice to the role of self-selection bias in the all-volunteer U.S. military force model.

The study acknowledged the potential for social desirability response bias in self-assessed attitude reporting (Van de Mortel, 2008). Consequently, it was not inconceivable that participant(s) may have shared views that they deemed politically correct, expedient, or socially desirable which mask actual beliefs and or views. The study also acknowledged that distrust of Muslim service members may be a latent attitude in some service members despite the diversity imperatives of the U.S. military. Consequently, some service members may still act on such latent attitudes in non-work settings or when no longer bound by military laws and regulations.

This point was indirectly illustrated by participant XM 11 who shared a poignant recollection. "[T]here are (military) friends that I know who would be searching for a new home with their family and they find that beautiful house and nearby was a mosque and they're like, "nope not living there" (XM11, interview data collection, 2020). The insight by this participant and others who were circumspect about Muslims in general due to the perceived risk of radicalization and terrorism underscored the salience of perceived threat to U.S. public anxiety towards Muslims in general.

The study inferred through opinions and experiences shared by participants that the U.S. military does play a significant role in engendering a tolerant attitude towards its Muslim service members as well as other religious and cultural minorities. However, study participants' opinions also suggested that the American publics' sensitivity to the perceived threat posed by radical Islamic extremists has a spillover effect on public perception towards the vast majority of otherwise peaceful and diverse Muslim faithful. This remains a source of anxiety and distrust that requires more than U.S. military diversity imperatives to address.

The mitigation measures as suggested by most study participants require a whole-of-government approach in the form of concerted military-civilian leadership engagement, with the U.S. President as the 'enabler-in-chief'. The central goal would be to engender social integration and inclusivity into the social fabric of the U.S. without compromising American values, vital interests, and security. Such a state could be achieved by projecting shared security goals and forging an ascendant American identity that is attainable by the mosaic of groups and subcultures within the boundaries of the

United States. As noted by Saleem et al., (2018) such "identity integration among stigmatized minorities may buffer the negative effects of discrimination" (p.1).

In the concluding part of the study, I have included curated recommendations by study participants for mitigating public distrust towards Muslim service members in the social climate of Islamophobia. The recommendations that follow are in the study participant's own words and were deemed important to the extent they addressed positive social change through the overarching theme of leadership (political, military, and civil society). This was in fulfillment of giving voice to non-Muslim U.S. military veterans of the GWOT (study participants) on the issue of public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military as an aspect of the broader social problem of Islamophobia.

- (Change) has to start from the top down. The top is the President of the country to set a tolerant tone. Then it is critical to have public education. This can start from the media especially those that portray Muslims as bad people. The effort should be to see Muslims as fellow humans and to emphasize that there are bad people in every religion. Positive achievements of Muslims in the military and the civilian public should be highlighted. Again, it has to start from the very top of the chain (SM17, Interview data collection, 2020).

- It's gonna have to come from the top down and it's gonna have to be a big push for the media influence in order to bring about change, especially the civilian perspective outside of the military for how they feel about the Muslims because for as long as they're allowed to put that negative spin on things some people will never open up to the positive aspects of having

Muslims serving along as great soldiers….So leadership all the way around has to set the fair tone. (XM9, Interview data collection, 2020)

- Religious leaders of both faiths can work together to bridge the divide by educating their faithful about tolerance and the positive aspect of each other's religion as means of mitigating the fear factor... It is necessary to use education to address concerns and dispel doubts. Political leadership must have to be fully and convincingly engaged in fostering inclusiveness, highlighting on shared qualities and shared goals of the country.
(XM11, Interview data collection, 2020)

- I think the military (leadership) could do a better job of highlighting the positive aspects of different cultures; the positive aspects of the soldiers. We should do a better job as a military force of highlighting various cultures as well as differences as a way of fostering understanding of our Muslim brothers or our Buddhist brothers or our Hindu brothers and the differences that their culture and religion bring with them. This understanding will bring about mutual respect when individuals understand themselves and understand that...though we may have some differences but for the most part very much alike. (XM14, Interview data collection, 2020)

- I think the problem is that the military and the civilian population don't have channel or platform for communication to educate the public on military culture. Maybe if the military found a way of engaging the civil society about

what on such issues as the diversity of culture and religious background how it has positive military significance. (XM15, Interview data collection, 2020)

- Public mistrust can be addressed based on what we do in the military. We need to get rid of bad news, I mean, counter the bad news. We need a PR program, telling the military story, its culture, and values. We should be getting the good story out and letting the public know that there are positive things that soldiers from all backgrounds are doing within the US military than any negative things (XM16, Interview data collection, 2020).

These recommendations were predicated on the shared perspective of study participants that public distrust towards Muslims in general and Muslim military service members in particular, kindle alienation of the Muslim service members and their community. The resulting mutual distrust was viewed as a potential impediment to U.S. security and national interest. A significant example of such implication is the aversion of Muslims to engagement with law enforcement and national security institutions including the U.S. military based on perceived latent nativist animus towards Muslims. (Gillum, 2018; Selod, 2018)

A major recommendation shared by a significant number of participants suggests a perspective that the U.S. military has an important role in shaping public perception towards Muslims in the military and their community. This is to the extent that the U.S. military has remained at the top of institutions most respected by Americans (Gallup Polls, 2020). This tremendous public confidence and goodwill confer a social capital and institutional credibility to engage in programs and public policy that can allay public

anxiety and distrust towards Muslim service members. Studies show that the U.S.

military is widely seen as a social change bellwether in diversity and inclusion (Hajjar,

2014; Karmack, 2017) not just within the confines of its access-controlled bases but in

the hearts and minds of a largely doting American public. This is to the extent that

military leadership opinion has significant influence in shaping public opinion and

consequently public policy (Golby, Feaver & Drop, 2018).

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Appendix A: First Level Themes

The discovering of themes is the hallmark of qualitative data analysis. This Appendix

consists of priori first-level thematic codes consisting of ideas, words, phrases, and

concepts used as an initial coding scheme to analyze participants' interview transcripts.

These codes are drawn primarily from the research questions and literature review as

prominent and relevant concepts tied to anti-Muslim sentiment. They provide a uniform

analytical template for the analysis of participant's interviews in answering the research

questions. The use of Nvivo coding will generate other themes as emergent from the

participant's interview data.

First Level Themes

- Security threat
- Extremist/Extremism
- Contact
- Experience
- Anxiety
- Distrust/Mistrust
- Violent
- Radicalization
- Religious
- Loyalty and Allegiance
- Diversity
- Political correctness
- Trustworthiness
- Risk

Appendix B: Interview Questions Alignment to Research Questions

Table 2

Interview Questions Alignment Table

RQ.1: What are the experiences of serving alongside Muslim U.S. military personnel in the Global War on Terrorism?	a) Tell me about your experiences serving alongside Muslim military personnel especially in the Global War on Terrorism? b) In what ways did your experiences of military missions alongside Muslims service members allay or vindicate distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military? c) Do you have any standout experiences or incident(s) (Unclassifed information only) you wish to share?
RQ. 2: How have the experiences of contact with Muslim military personnel supported or called into question anxiety and distrust towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military?	a) In what ways has your experiences in the U.S. military shaped your perceptions towards Muslims in general and Muslim service members in particular? b) How would you characterize public attitudes towards Muslims serving in the U.S. military since 9/11? c) What do you see as the source(s) of mistrust if any?
RQ. 3: How significant is public distrust and anxiety towards Muslim military personnel to U.S. national security and military readiness?	a) How would you characterize the risk(s) and or consequence(s) of anti-Muslim sentiment to U.S. security and military readiness in a diverse threat environment? b) In what ways can or should public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military be mitigated or addressed?

Appendix C: Initial Coding Templates

Figure C1

Research Question 1: Interview Question #1 Coding Template
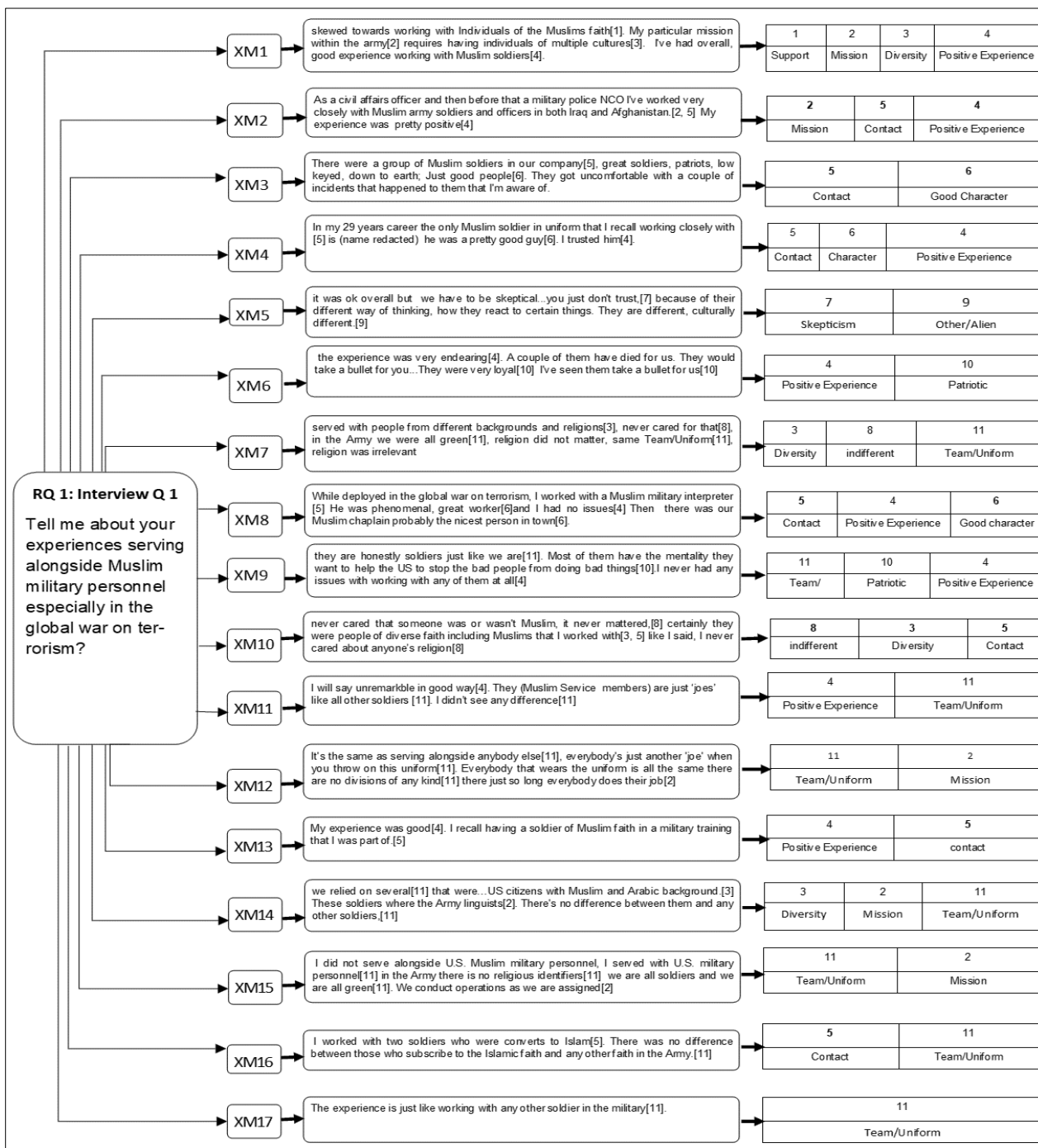
Figure C2

Research Question 1: Interview Question #2 Coding Template

Figure C3

Research Question 1: Interview Question #3 Coding Template

Figure C4

Interview Question #1 Coding Template

RQ 2

Interview Question # 1

In what ways has your lived experience in the U.S. military shaped your attitude & disposition towards Muslims in general and Muslims service members in particular?

XM1

The Army requires having individuals from multiple cultural background[33].This is even more critical in my area of civil Affairs occupational specialty[2]. I have had good experience working with Muslim soldiers[5]   [+]

33	2	5	4
Army Command Policy	Mission	Contact	Positive Experience

XM2

I feel like I have, much better understanding and better insights than the average person[28] and I think that if more people were have the opportunity to interact with Muslims [5]widening their aperture, I think we would be much better off if people understand that for the most part Muslims are just people too just trying to live their lives.[28] [+]

28	5
Better Understanding	contact

XM3

Getting to know these people and serving with them side by side,[5] … in a combat zone answered the question[11]. What more is loyalty than really having yourself serving with them in frontline[10]. Because for me, the bullet doesn't discriminate between the Arab, the Muslim, the Captain, the enlisted or the PFC so and I thought they're just great good people[+]

5	11	10	4
Contact	Team	Patriotic	Positive Experience

XM4

None, whatsoever[-]. When I was in the military, I didn't work with a lot of Muslim soldiers. (but) I got to see on the news what happened across the country with Muslims that we are training and we're trying to protect in Afghanistan or wherever.[31]. They can't see that we are basically trying to help them. But let's face it. It's not all Muslim, it's just the one that radicalized already bent on destroying the west our culture and other countries that have similar cultures or whatever.

4d	31
No Influence	Media Coverage

XM5

The military doesn't necessarily shape the way you think as an individual. nothing could shape my opinion towards one race, You know. Because this is the way I grew up.[32] I always have been very skeptical…you cannot give 100% trust to anybody.[32] So I wouldn't say anybody shaped my opinion on certain issue.[-]

4d	32
No Influence	Individual attribute

XM6

The Army didn't shape my attitude towards anyone[32] but the Army says you cannot dislike anyone because of their religion, you cannot do that[33], in the Army you judge people based on their character, their pulling their weight. We all wear the same uniform.[11] [+]

4d	32	33	11
No Influence	Individual attribute	Army Command Policy	Team

XM7

in the Army, everyone wore the green uniform[11] and focused on getting the job done[2]. We were on the same side[11] and military regulations applied to all no matter the background.[33] [+]

11	2	33
Team	Mission	Army Command Policy

XM8

Americans and the war has shaped the military culture[15]…. We associate Muslim with terrorists because of the (military) war on terror[34] …, I think it (the war on terror) has shaped the stereotype that if you are Muslim you're a terrorist,[4e] It's just a general perception in my experience.

15	34	16b
Public opinion	Islamophobia	Stereotype perpetuation

XM9

The military values helped to instill tolerance especially on people who might otherwise have extreme views of Muslims and others[42]. I would say that military training did help us understand Muslim culture and some of their religious beliefs because that was one of the things that the chain of command pushed heavy on especially at the very beginning of the war[28]

42	28
Diversity Tolerance	Better Understanding

XM10

I would say a positive influence[4b] because it is like, you're all supporting one another[11] No one's different when you're in the army[33]… being a certain race or gender or color or whatever might be part of you but it's not not all of you. There is a saying that when you join the military you don't see color anymore you only see family.[42]

4b	11	42
Positive Influence	Team	Diversity Tolerance

XM11

The military was accommodating of members from different religious or social backgrounds.[33]What mattered the most is being part of the team[11] and performing your assigned duties and tasks.[2]…Such experiences often make people see things differently afterwards….my interaction with Muslims in and outside of the military made me realize we all have similar need. [4b]

33	11	2	4
Army Command Policy	Team	Mission	Positive Influence

XM12

There no differences based on race or creed in the soldiers that serves in the United States military[33][+]

33
Army command Policy

XM13

Being in the Army didn't change my views[32] it may have opened my views to working with other service members and different religions…[33]. ..(this) is because the military didn't focus on religious background, it was unimportant. The army recognize differences in religious backgrounds they've changed some regulations … to accommodate different religious beliefs[42]

32	28	42
Individual attribute	Better Understanding	Diversity Tolerance

XM14

if I'd never join the military I probably would have had very limited exposure to individuals that are of Muslims faith up close as in the military[5] On the other side, being in the military and the war has created some anxiety. I carry some instinctive prejudice because of the war focus on Muslims. I have to admit it being in the military has fostered even greater prejudice [34]that I don't think I would have had I never joined the military.

5	34
Contact	Islamophobia

XM15

My perspective and attitude didn't have much to do with being in the military[32]but I will say that the military created a work environment [33] that brought together different races, religion and culture more than an individual will ordinarily be exposed to.[42] This environment made for more tolerant views of other people and cultures[42]

32	33	42
Individual attribute	Army Cmd Policy	Diversity Tolerance

XM16

I never had any bias towards anyone[32] but the military kind of open your eyes a little more not to suspect anybody[37] because if you wear the greenyou're always gonna do what is supposed to be done or should be done. [33] [+]

32	38
Individual attribute	Better Understanding

XM17

I can tell you that, based on my experience, the military is tolerant to all religions [42]and treat them more less equally, there not much of a difference in the way Muslims or any other faith is treated[42]. In my experience, the military is more tolerant to other faiths in the military but when you go outside the military, totally, totally different. [+]

42
Diversity Tolerance

Figure C5

Interview Question #2 Coding Template

XM1

The initial shock of the 9/11 [45] event created Negative perception[43] or amplified negative Perception but over time, it has gotten better[44]. I think there's probably more concern in the bible belts. There's a more fundamentalist view of the Bible. A lot of people in this area the evangelicals are more prone to being suspicious of Muslims[45]

45	43	44	46
9/11	Negative perception	Improved disposition	Evangelicals Distrust

XM2

Most Americans still have a very positive perception of the military[43] while they might have different opinions of Muslims in general, think the public exhibit cognitive dissonance [48] there where they might have negative perceptions towards Muslims in general, but feel differently about Muslims serving in the military. I think they're probably much more friendly to that idea than they might be to just an ordinary Muslim person that they saw on the street something like that.

43	48
Negative Perception	Cognitive dissonance

XM3

There was 9/11 and then there was a Muslim soldier who threw a grenade into a tent and killed some people and things like that[45]. So, They look at all (Muslims as being) like Usama Bin Laden, the Taliban. So some people really don't want to get closer to the Muslims or treat them well. They just don't want to deal with them. [43]

45	43
9/11	Negative Perception

XM4

In my opinion, the public as a whole don't like it,[43] (Muslims serving in the U.S.Military) I disagree with it and would wish there was a stronger, better vetting process[14] Okay.

43	14
Negative Perception	Stringent Screening

XM5

Some have positive opinion about it some have negative opinion[49] looking at it after all the trouble that we had know, in the course of 9/11 [45]They've seen it before and first hand and they say the memories of stuff is not gonna disappear right away, so it's hard to say this, to pull them to positive side. You know, because they always see the news.

49	45
Divided opinion	9/11

XM6

As for the American public, I don't know what they think but I would have to think that they have an opinion. So I don't know what The public think, that's part of what this wrong with this country and people trying to say what other people think. So, I don't have a clue what they think. [50]

50
Don't know

XM7

I don't know what the public thinks[50]... There's a lot of made up stories to gain attention. Don't get me wrong, they maybe some racism [51]and stuff like that but a lot of such claims are plain manufactured and these fake stories [52]make it difficult to underscore actual problem.

50	51	52
Don't Know	Some racism	Fake News

XM8

It's politically divided.[49] I feel like the Republican side look at Muslim through a micro-scope, like what are your intentions[39]? ... there is I think a level of prejudice[65] the, patriotic red blood in some Americans is not comfortable with Muslims because there's a fear [58]that that Muslims are terrorists, because the people who attacked with the planes on 9/11 [45b]didn't look like bad people.

49	39	65	58	45b
Divided opinion	Doubt	Prejudice	Fear	Terrorists

XM9

The public is not well educated on Islam as a religion, because of 9/11 and other acts of terrorism [45] ...most Americans are unwilling or unable to process the reality that Muslims are not monolithic... Most people in the U.S public want to put Muslims in this little box of you are a Muslim so you are evil [43b]just like every White baldheaded man is a child abductor. A lot of the American public just like the to throw things into this little boxes because they think its fits and require no further thinking.[16]

45	43b	16
9/11	Evil	Negative Stereotype

XM10

The answer depends on the political spectrum[49] but I would say that public attitude towards Muslims in the military is more positive than negative[53]

49	53
Divided opinion	Positive perception

XM11

There are no doubt of some anxiety and mistrust[43c] that is linked to Islamic radical Islamic extremism, especially since the 911 attack.[45] There are friends that that I know who would be searching for a new home with their family and they find that beautiful house and nearby was a mosque and they're like, "nope not living there", yeah.

43c	45
Mistrust	9/11

XM12

I'm sure the events of the 9/11 [45]has significant impact on Americans perception towards Muslims...people speak with anger [54]about Muslim community because they're perceived as the ones that that attacked us on 9/11,

45	54	45b
9/11/Terrorism	Anger	Terrorists

XM13

There is the thing with the public attitude,...when they see the uniforms they're proud, they thank you for your service but when it comes to religion wise it becomes a trust thing.[48b] I don't want o say that the public would necessarily trust them all the way...[48b]The public would thank and appreciation anybody who is wearing the green uniform[but some get uneasy if the service member is Muslim.[48c]

48b	47
Distrust	unease

XM14

I think that Americans non-military public do have a negative overall outlook[43] I feel like the public judge Arab people differently whether they're Muslim or not [55]There's some level of mistrust (based on) terrorist attack [45]on our soil ... it just fuels the fire for the average American to say "what is their ulterior motive?

43	43c	55	45
Negative perception	Mistrust	Different standards	9/11/Terrorism

XM15

Mistrust.[43c] There is a hate from the past[54b], 9/11 event contributed to the mistrust.[45] It shaped how Americans perceive soldiers who are Muslims.. There is an association hate[54] which is preva-lent amongst U.S. civilians, I experienced a lot of this when we go off base, they will ask "where are you from, we hear and accent", I finally stopped telling them I was born in the Middle East and instead tell them I was born in Italy.

43c	54b
Anxiety/Mistrust	Animus

XM16

I think there is the military view and there is the public perception. [49] Outside of the military, all you hear is about the Muslim soldiers that have done something wrong,[43] you know, and it's not put in the context where other soldiers of other nationalities or religions have done the same bad things...The public tend somewhat to view bad things done by Muslims in the military differently than other religion or cultures.[55].

49	43	55
Divided opinion	Negative perception	Double standard

XM17

I have one answer, one word answer to your question; terrible, very terrible. [43]. , they are been viewed negatively because they are Muslims[55]. Some Americans perception towards Muslims is really bad.

43	55
Negative perception	Double standard

RQ2

Interview Question 2

How would you characterize public attitudes towards Muslims serving in the U.S. Military since 9/11?

Figure C6

Research Question 2: Interview Question #3 Coding Template

RQ2: Interview Question 3

What do you see as the source(s) of mistrust if any?

XM1: Very lack of knowledge[56]....There is also active disinformation[57b] in the mix that relies on the ignorance of its target audience to succeed.

56	57b
*Ignorance	misinformation

XM2: The majority of mistrust is based around, ignorance and a lack of education. Not just ignorance but just the lack of exposure[56b] and you know, the fear of the unknown [58] that comes along with that., people see, bad news stories[57] or they see, you know terrorists[45] and they don't see the human side of it they just you know assume everybody is this because of a few bad apples, you know the analogy .

56	56b	58	57	45b
Ignorance	Parochial	*Fear	Biased Media	Terrorist(s)

XM3: There are still some voices, you know. In the media, they kind of still call Muslims extremist and whatever.[57] .... And I think there's a lot of demonizing going on and I think that's kind of wrong. [57]

57
Media bias

XM4: I think the mistrust probably comes from what everybody saw on 9/11[45] and what some of the Muslim countries say when they're in front of the camera like death to America, death to Israel and the hatred of our flags, burning our flags and you know stuff like that[54]. I think the media do a service and sometimes they do a disservice was just as well. [57]

45	54c	57
9/11	Muslims Anti-American rhetoric	Biased Media

XM5: it based on the news media. The media output influences the public perception okay,[57] so that's mainly why a lot of the population mistrust Muslims

57
Based Media

XM6: Maybe what is on the news[57], then again I think there is risk in focusing on a group. We all wear the same uniform and should be treated the same. We are a brotherhood. I don't think we should put money into every social issue;

57
Biased Media

XM7: It has a lot to do with a lot of the things in the news. It has a lot to do with fake news, not the Trump Fake news, I am talking about people screaming about being discriminated upon but it turns out they did it to on themselves to get attention. Its more like if one can't prove crime or discrimination, you create or manufacture discrimination. That is the biggest problem I see in this country.[52]

52
Fake New

XM8: The source of mistrust is ignorance not knowing the religion, not knowing what Muslim religion so I think that ignorance is probably the biggest source of mistrust [56]

56
Ignorance

XM9: The media plays a role because the media say whatever they think is gonna sell a story whatever itss gonna take to keep people watching and unfortunately bad attracts more viewers versus good so they're gonna paint things to be in a bad way to try to grab those viewers. most people are drawn to negative and controversial issue so the media want to create this whole bloody gory picture because that's what they feel that draw the viewers in.

57
Biased Media

XM10: The media help shape peoples opinion. How the media emphasizes or defines an event often shape the opinion of those that get their information from such media.[57]

57
Biased Media

XM11: Radical Islamic extremism is a source of mistrust [45c] it tend to be interpreted based on political ideological leanings of folks than hard evidence.the media plays a very significant role in how issues are framed and for the most part this is often driven by liberal versus conservative ideologies in the U.S. The media stokes the divide to sell their stories.[57] They sensationalize social issues knowing that Americans are glued to their TV and soaking up everything.

45c	57
Radical Islamic extremism	Biased Media

XM12: I really can't speak to that, I think people have their own different reasons for what they think or do.[50b]

50
Personal grounds

XM13: I think it is primarily the lack of knowledge, you know, a lot of people correlate Muslim religion with negativity[56]...for most people when they are fearful they distrust [58] ...The media role is also significant, a lot of media can be tipped, you know and manipulated ...[57]

56	58	57
Ignorance	fear	Biased Media

XM14: The media has done a really good job of kind of destroying Muslims over the years.[57] They made it look like all Muslims agree with terrorism even through significant majority of Muslims are against terrorist act. The negative stereotype of Muslims by the media is significant.

57
Biased Media

XM15: Fear of insider threat from soldiers with Middle Eastern background.[58]...The media also plays a role in the way they present their news. [57] If a black or white person shoots a lot of people it is called mass shooting and if a person of Muslim descent shoots a lot of people it is terrorism

34	57
Islamophobia	Biased Media

XM16: The public only see what the news media puts out....The news media shape opinions by what they choose to present to the public[57]

57
Biased Media

XM17: It all started from 9/11 If you cast your mind back...Everything changed after 9/11 in terms of American public attitude towards its Muslim community. I also think that media also plays a huge role. News media, like Fox News in particular, conservative radios talk shows peddling conspiracy theories, proffering all sorts of negative attitude towards the Muslim community.

45	57
9/11	Biased Media

Figure C7

Research Question 3: Interview Question #1 Coding Template

RQ 3:

Interview Question 1

How would you characterize the risk(s) and or consequence(s) of anti-Muslim sentiment to U.S. security and military readiness in diverse threat environment?

XM1: ...would limit the pool of individuals that we can recruit from people who serve the nation very well[59]. you have the potential to create what you're fighting against,...you treat people miserably then you create resentment[60] that can potentially push some people to becoming radicalized,[61] so you create a pool of alienated people[62] who may find acceptance in the terrorist networks.

59	60	61	62
Diversity	Resentment	Radicalization	Group Aliena-

XM2: I would say one of the consequences of anti Muslim sentiment would be (that it) deteriorates good order & discipline, it makes for an unsafe environment[63],..because it leads to mistrust, it leads to other problems that could potentially lead to biases[64] like, people getting shunned and people getting marginalized[65] which then causes other friction in other areas and then just degrades morale.[66]

63	64	65	66
Tension	prejudice	exclusiom	Low morale

XM3: A lot of them are doctors and you know and they are really good and they are very handy and we need these kind of skills[59], So if we want to isolate them and not integrate them and live with them in harmony, they will be a lot of tension [63], resentment[60] and hostility[67]

59	63	60	67
Diversity impediment	Tension	Resentment	Hostility

XM4: The more that we distrust ...the Muslims citizens the more they don't trust us [68], so if they're not from where we have to work together of course there's gonna be some resistance [69] because someone is not gonna want to work with the person or go training with this person because, They don't know if that person has a (different) motive

68	69
Mutual Distrust	Discrimination

XM5: There are no implications that I can think of

70
No risk

XM6: So there's a consequence to both sides, having a distrust wherever it starts, it just gets bigger, very difficult to beat it back[68],Once you have distrust it invites much more to the table ...like the public thinking we're becoming soft for allowing them to serve side by side when look what they caused, or that they are working from within now [77b].

68	77b
Mutual Distrust	Loss of public support

XM7: If one perceives it as an issue, then it becomes an issue for the individual[71]. So some Muslims feel they are not liked in a neighborhood maybe the Muslims don't like the neighborhood so it is reciprocal.[68]

71	68
Individual view	Mutual distrust

XM8: I can see recruiters having issues recruiting from that community[59]because maybe their families will not be supportive experiencing the prejudice you know and based on the advice that they received probably in their own community[62].

59	62
Diversity impediment	Group Alienation

XM9: I think it will make it hard for the Muslim soldiers that we do have to be able to do their duties and their jobs while living with a lot of public distrust and being second guessed[68],...being constantly on the defensive [72].

68	72
Mutual distrust	defensiveness

XM10: who wants to go to work somewhere where people may not like you if they feel like that's the sentiment of of significant part of the population.[59] Also it is likely going to cause Muslims to be less forth coming about their religious background and identity. [72]

59	72
Diversity impediment	Defensiveness

XM11: I think If any group perceive some mistrust towards them based on blanket religious, racial or cultural assumptions, it creates stress and fear.[63] It's like they have to prove to the other people that their faith is valid. People don't give their best under the cloud of distrust. This may result in avoidance and alienation[62].

63	73	62
Tension	Avoidance	Group Alienation

XM12: I think the biggest that we've seen as a whole was that time in the late 2000s; of the shooting down in (Ft. Hood)Texas[61]. I am under the understanding that he is from Muslim faith, but I think people might have been skittish for a little while after that.

61	58
Radicalization	Fear

XM13: there can be some soldiers that won't want to work with them period, or will refuse, [64]...Like that Muslim soldier in our training school I, heared people saying "well, but why is he training with us". We were all supposed to be one team.[65] if you had a soldier that's Muslim and you're in a Muslim territory or country that's a very good impact there because you have someone who can relate to the populace , that's a good impact but imagine if you don't have that.[59]

64	65	59
Prejudice	exclusion	Diversity impediment

XM14: I will say that distrust towards Muslims does create distancing and separation of Muslim community[62.]. Also, Muslims make up a large portion of the world if the relationship is destroyed by mistrust and prejudice then it becomes a detriment to their cooperation on issues important to the U.S.[74]

62	74
Group Alienation	Cooperation impediment

XM15: there a lot of people whose Muslim or middle Eastern background may prevent being recruited for certain position or certain jobs[59]

59
Diversity impediment

XM16: I look at it as misperception from both the Muslim community in the U.S. and some in the rest of the public based on what they hear or see on the news. For those who actually serve in the military the reality is different.

71
Individual view

XM17: There's already some repercussions against the Muslims through many hate crimes targeting Muslims and people who dress like Muslims like the Sikhs[75] since 9/11... if you ask most in the Muslim community where they would like work or have a family member work, they will close their eyes to jobs with the police and military mainly because they perceived the system does not trust them and they don't want to get in trouble.[62][59] some Muslims in the military keep low profile or go into hiding and even abandon some of their culture and traditions that identify them as Muslims.[72] They become alienated because of the lack of public trust and sometime this can make them easy to be lured by Islamic terrorist groups.[61]

75	62	59	72
Hate Crime	Group Alienation	Diversity impediment	Defensiveness

61
Radicalization

Figure C8

Research Question 3: Interview Question #2 Coding Template

RQ3-2

In what ways can or should public anxiety and distrust towards Muslims in the U.S. military be mitigated or addressed?

XM1 — The easy answer is education.[76].. I'm just not so sure[77], One would have trouble trying to persuade some audience otherwise. So I'm just not so sure if the answer is more education, because in order to educate you have to have some group that is being willing and open to being informed.

76	77
Education	Skeptical

XM2 — I think it all comes like the education[76] and exposure[78], more coverage ...that highlight things like the number of Muslim personnel in the military[79]...highlights some of those individuals and a face to it like 'hey here is sergeant so and so they've been serving for this long here's what they've done and showed that they've been successful this can help educate folks and then show that they're not, what people tend to think they might be.[79]

76	78	79
Education	Exposure	Highlighting MMP

XM3 — All sides need to do their homework. I ask my Muslim brothers and sisters, to do their homework show their good side,[80]... integrate themselves,[81], teach people,[76] , say who you are... the other side to kind of listen not always afraid of the unknown.[77]

80	81	76	77
Good citizenship	Assimilation	Education	Openness

XM4 — overall I think there needs to be a better vetting process background check... a better and a stronger vetting process to vet. And I think if that's done, we can potentially stop a lot of these maybe suicide bombings, wars or whatever they got planned. It's all part of the vetting process.

14
Stringent vetting

XM5 — it is hard to convince people.[77b] Once they had their minds already made up. you're not gonna convince many people to change their mind on certain issues and they always gonna have their mindset regardless what the information[77b].

77b
Difficult/Challenging

XM6 — So I think to work on teaching people that we may have worked with different people that we like but never know they are Muslims and we may also have worked with people we disliked and they are of the same religion as us. People should be educated that character and competence is what should be emphasized not background or religion.

76
Education

XM7 — I just think we should focus less on sensational news, judge individual action as individual action.[77] People that chose to become part of a new country should do well to assimilate in their new country not isolate to their roots[81].

77	81
Openness	Assimilation

XM8 — Through I think very proper education[76],..we don't talk about a lot of things that happen because we think our biggest discriminator is race, so maybe...education on religion is important because though America was built on Christian religion, it is important to teach soldiers the differences in religion ...teach them how not to discriminate based on religion especially in an organization that values diversity.[76b]

76	76b
Education	Religious/cross cultural awarenes

XM9 — It's gonna have to come from the top down[82] and it's gonna have to be a big push for the media influencein order to bring about change especially the civilian perspective outside of the military for how they feel about the Muslims because for as long as they're allowed to put that negative spin on things some people will never open up to the positive aspects of having Muslims serving along as great soldiers[79]....So leadership all the way around has to set the fair tone.[79]

82	79
Leadership Commitment	Highlighting MMP

XM10 — I really think it would have come down to counter messaging...to use the media for a counter narrative showing the positive contributions of Muslim service members in media reports.

79
Highlighting MMP Contributions

XM11 — I think education[76] and opportunity for interaction[83]may help. Religious leaders of both faiths can work together to bridge the divide[82] by educating[76] their faithful about tolerance and the positive aspects of each other's religion as means of mitigating the fear factor... It is necessary to use education[76] to address concerns and dispel doubts. Political leadership[82] must have to be fully and convincingly engaged in fostering inclusiveness, highlighting on shared qualities and shared goals of the country.

76	83	82b	82
Educ.	Social contact	Relig Ldrship Commitment	Ldrship Commitment

XM12 — Education. If we go around as a society living in fear because of other race and religions then we're not living the full life that we can because we're always living in fear. We have to address the fear through education.[64b][76]

76	64b
Education	Address Xenophobia

XM13 — Through addressing the lack of knowledge,[76] you don't necessarily have to teach them the Muslim ways, but you have to teach them the positive impacts of Muslim military personnel,[79] you know, you have to teach them (public) that they (Muslims) still have the ability to serve, just letting the public know that they can trust them because they're serving the American public as part of a team We just have to assure the public that they (Muslims) don't need to be singled out. The public should be made to understand that they (Muslims) are soldiers and every soldier is part of one team irrespective of differences in religious faith.

76	79	76b
Educ.	Highlighting MMP Contributions	Religious/cross cultural awareness

XM14 — I don't think that you will ever make it to go away just like you can never truly get rid of racism. [77] I think the military could do a better job of highlighting the positive aspects of different cultures; the positive aspects of the soldiers. We should do a better job as a military force of highlighting various cultures as well as differences as a way of fostering understanding of our Muslim brothers or our Buddhist brothers or our Hindu brothers and the differences that their culture and religion brings with them.[76b]This understanding will bring about mutual respect when individuals understand themselves and understand that...though we may have some difference but for the most part very much alike.

77	76b
Skeptical	Religious/cross cultural awareness

XM15 — I think it is going to be difficult changing the public mind.[77b]I don't think you can change their mind, because civilians don't think like military, the don't have the education about the military[76]... I think the problem is that the military and the civilian population don't have channel or platform for communication to educate the public on military culture[84] . Maybe if the military found a way of engaging the civil society[84] about what on such issues as diversity of culture and religious background how it has positive military significance.

77b	76	84
Difficult/ Challenging	Educ.	Mil-Civil society communication

XM16 — public mistrust can be addressed based on what we do in the military. We need to get rid of bad news, I mean, counter the bad news.[79] We need a PR program, telling the military story, its culture and values[84]. We should be getting the good story out and letting the public know that there are positive things that soldiers from all backgrounds are doing within the US military than any negative things.

79	84	76b
Highlight MMP Contrib.	Mil-Civil society comm	Relig./cross cultural awareness

XM17 — I cannot emphasize enough that it has to start from the top down. the top is the President of the country to set a tolerant tone.[82]Then it is critical to have to have public education.[76]This can start from the media especially those ones that portray Muslims as very bad people. The effort should be to see Muslims as fellow humans and to emphasize that there are bad people in every religion. Positive achievements of Muslims in the military and in the civilian public should be highlighted.. Again it has to start from the very top of the chain.

82	76	79
Ldrship Commitment	Educ.	Highlighting MMP Contributions

Appendix D: Coding Aggregation Charts

Figure D1

Research Question 1: Interview Question #1 Aggregated Codes

	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	TEAM/UNIFORM	CONTACT	MISSION	DIVERSITY	GOOD CHARACTER	INDIFFERENCE	PATRIOTIC	SUPPORT	SKEPTICISM	OTHER/ALIEN
XM1	✓			✓	✓				✓		
XM2	✓			✓							
XM3			✓			✓					
XM4	✓		✓			✓					
XM5										✓	✓
XM6	✓							✓			
XM7		✓					✓				
XM8	✓		✓			✓					
XM9	✓	✓						✓			
XM10			✓		✓		✓				
XM11	✓	✓									
XM12		✓		✓							
XM13	✓		✓								
XM14		✓		✓	✓						
XM15		✓		✓							
XM16		✓	✓								
XM17		✓									
TOTAL	8	8	6	5	3	3	2	2	1	1	1

	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	TEAM/UNIFORM	CONTACT	MISSION	DIVERSITY	GOOD CHARACTER	INDIFFERENCE	PATRIOTIC	SUPPORT	SKEPTICISM	OTHER/ALIEN

Figure D2

Research Question 1: Interview Question #2 Aggregated Codes

	LIKE OTHER SOLDIERS	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	HIGHLY EDUCATION	RESOURCEFUL	MULTISKILL	FEARSOME/ DANGEROUS	LIMITED INTERACTION	RESPECTFUL	MODEST	FAMILY VALUE	OWNGROUP REJECTION	PATRIOTIC	DEMORALIZED	TEAM
XM1			✓	✓	✓									
XM2	✓													
XM3						✓							✓	
XM4	✓													
XM5		✓					✓							
XM6		✓												
XM7	✓													
XM8		✓												
XM9		✓												
XM10	✓													✓
XM11	✓									✓				
XM12	✓													
XM13		✓												
XM14	✓							✓				✓		
XM15											✓			
XM16	✓													
XM17	✓								✓					
TOTAL	9	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

LIKE OTHER SOLDIERS	POSITIVE EXPERIENCE	HIGHLY EDUCATION	RESOURCEFUL	MULTISKILL	FEARSOME/ DANGEROUS	LIMITED INTERACTION	RESPECTFUL	MODEST	FAMILY VALUE	OWNGROUP REJECTION	PATRIOTIC	DEMORALIZED	TEAM

Figure D3

Research Question 1: Interview Question #3 Aggregated Codes

	Positive Experience	Alike	Team	Stereotype	Committed	Good Muslim	Public opinion	Stringent Screening	Mission
XM1	✓								
XM2	✓					✓			
XM3	✓								
XM4								✓	
XM5				✓			✓		
XM6	✓			✓					
XM7			✓						✓
XM8	✓								
XM9	✓				✓				
XM10	✓								
XM11	✓	✓							
XM12			✓						
XM13	✓								
XM14	✓	✓							
XM15	✓								
XM16		✓							
XM17	✓								
TOTAL	12	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1

| | Positive Experience | Alike | Team | Stereotype | Committed | Good Muslim | Public opinion | Stringent Screening | Mission |
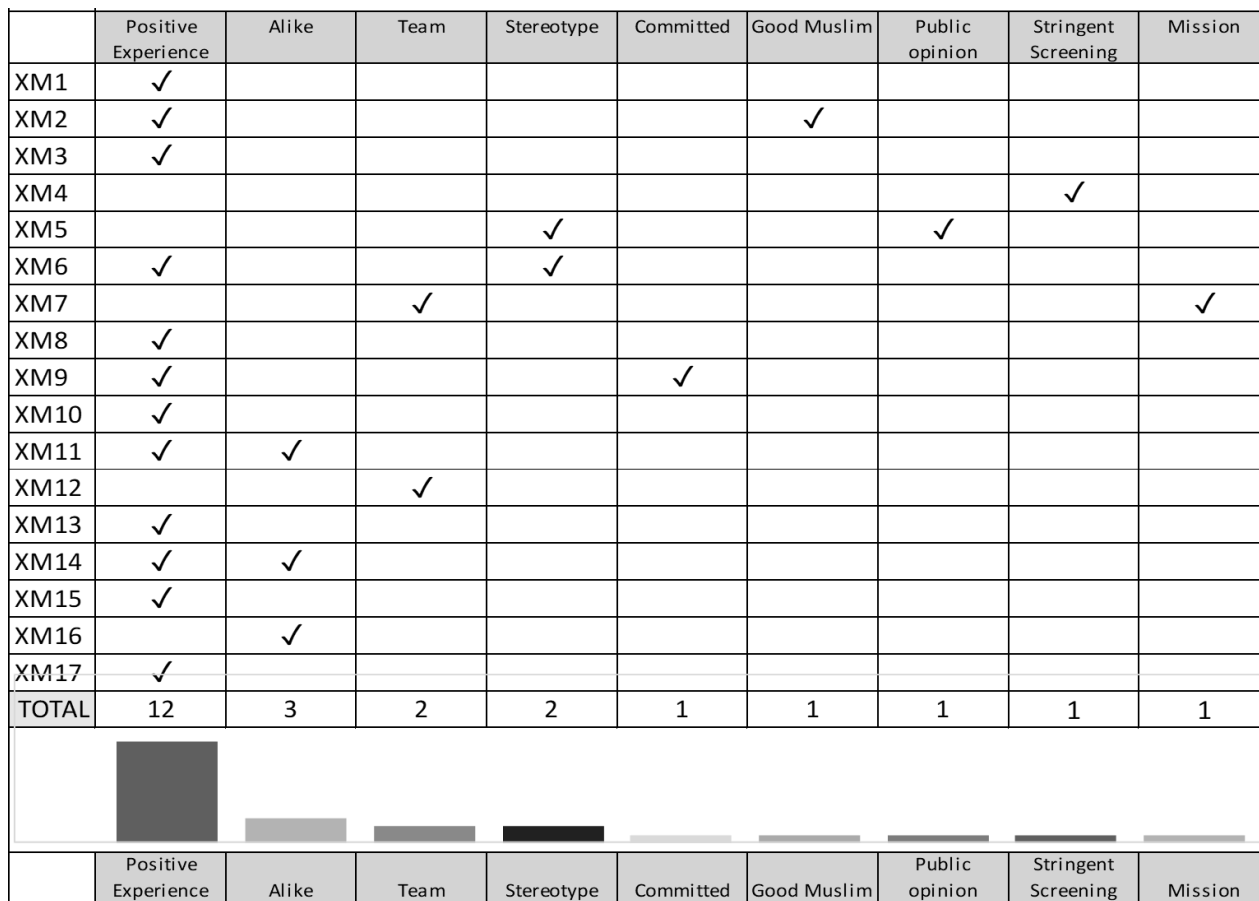
Figure D4

Research Question 2: Interview Question #1 Aggregated Codes

	Army Command Policy	Individual Attribute	Team	Better Understanding	Positive Experience	Contact	Diversity Tolerance	Mission	No Influence	Islamophobia	Patriotic	Stereotype Perpetuating	Neg. Public Perception	Media Coverage
XM1	✓				✓	✓		✓						
XM2				✓		✓								
XM3			✓		✓	✓					✓			
XM4									✓					✓
XM5		✓							✓					
XM6	✓	✓	✓						✓					
XM7	✓		✓					✓						
XM8										✓		✓	✓	
XM9				✓			✓							
XM10			✓		✓		✓							
XM11	✓		✓		✓			✓						
XM12	✓													
XM13		✓		✓			✓							
XM14						✓				✓				
XM15	✓	✓					✓							
XM16		✓		✓										
XM17				✓										
TOTAL	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	2	1	1	1	1

Army Command Policy	Individual attribute	Team	Better Understanding	Positive Influence	Contact	Diversity Tolerance	Mission	No Influence	Islamophobia	Patriotic	Stereotype Perpetuating	Neg. Public Perception	Media Coverage

Figure D5

Research Question 2: Interview Question #2 Aggregated Codes

	Negative Perception	9-11/Terrorism	Divided Opinion	Double Standard	Support to Military	Cognitive Dissonance	Dont Know	Positive Perception	Fake News	Stringent Screening	Stereotype	Improvement	Evangelicals	Dislike
XM1	✓	✓										✓	✓	
XM2					✓	✓								
XM3	✓	✓												
XM4	✓									✓				
XM5		✓	✓											
XM6							✓							
XM7							✓		✓					
XM8	✓	✓	✓											
XM9	✓	✓									✓			
XM10			✓					✓						
XM11	✓	✓												
XM12		✓						✓						
XM13	✓				✓	✓								
XM14	✓	✓		✓										
XM15	✓	✓												✓
XM16	✓		✓	✓										
XM17	✓			✓										
TOTAL	11	9	4	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1

Figure D6

Research Question 2: Interview Question #3 Aggregated Codes

	Partisan/Biased Media	911/Terrorism	Ignorance	Fear	Dont Know	Dislike
XM1	✓		✓			
XM2	✓	✓	✓	✓		
XM3	✓					
XM4	✓	✓				✓
XM5	✓					
XM6	✓					
XM7	✓					
XM8			✓			
XM9	✓					
XM10	✓					
XM11	✓	✓				
XM12					✓	
XM13	✓		✓	✓		
XM14	✓					
XM15	✓			✓		
XM16	✓					
XM17	✓	✓				
TOTAL	15	4	4	3	1	1
	Partisan/Biased Media	911/Terrorism	Ignorance	Fear	Dont Know	Dislike

Figure D7

Research Question 3: Interview Question #1 Aggregated Codes

	DIVERSITY IMPEDIMENT	GROUP ALIENATION	MUTUAL DISTRUST	RADICALIZATION	TENSION	DEFENSIVENESS	INDIVIDUAL VIEW	EXCLUSION	RESENTMENT	PREJUDICE	LOW MORALE	HOSTILITY	LOSS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT	AVOIDANCE	FEAR	DISCRIMINATION	HATE CRIME	NO RISK
XM1	√	√		√					√									
XM2					√			√		√	√							
XM3	√			√					√			√						
XM4			√													√		
XM5																		√
XM6			√										√					
XM7			√				√											
XM8	√	√																
XM9			√			√												
XM10	√					√												
XM11		√			√									√				
XM12				√											√			
XM13	√							√		√								
XM14		√																
XM15	√																	
XM16							√											
XM17	√	√		√		√											√	

DIVERSITY IMPEDIMENT	GROUP ALIENATION	MUTUAL DISTRUST	RADICALIZATION	TENSION	DEFENSIVENESS	INDIVIDUAL VIEW	EXCLUSION	RESENTMENT	PREJUDICE	LOW MORALE	HOSTILITY	LOSS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT	AVOIDANCE	FEAR	DISCRIMINATION	HATE CRIME	NO RISK

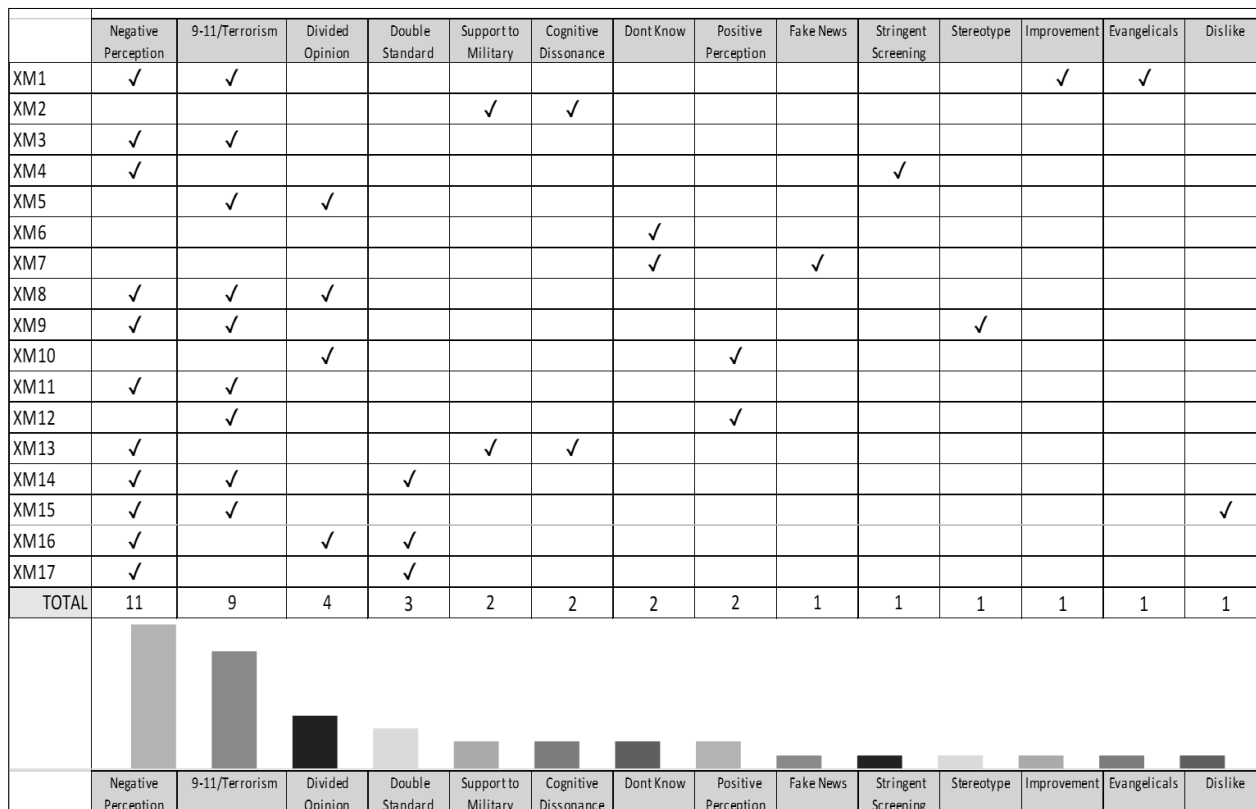**Figure D8**

Research Question 3: Interview Question #2 Aggregated Codes

	EDUCATION	HIGHLIGHT MMP CONTRIBUTIONS	RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY ADVOCACY	LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT	SKEPTICAL	OPENESS	DIFFICULT/ CHALLENGING	MIL-CIVILIAN RELATIONS ENGAGEMENT	ASSIMILATION	EXPOSURE	STRINGENT VETTING	GOOD CITIZENSHIP	SOCIAL CONTACT	RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP	COMMUNICATE MIL CULTURE	CONFRONT XENOPHOBIA
XM1	✓				✓											
XM2	✓	✓								✓						
XM3	✓					✓			✓			✓				
XM4											✓					
XM5							✓									
XM6	✓															
XM7						✓			✓							
XM8	✓		✓													
XM9		✓		✓												
XM10		✓														
XM11	✓			✓									✓	✓		
XM12	✓															✓
XM13	✓	✓	✓													
XM14		✓			✓											
XM15	✓						✓	✓							✓	
XM16		✓	✓					✓								
XM17	✓	✓		✓												
TOTAL	10	6	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1