# Differentiating Act from Ideology: Evidence from Messages For and Against Violent Extremism

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## Abstract

Although researchers know a great deal about persuasive messages that encourage terrorism, they know far less about persuasive messages that denounce terrorism and little about how these two sides come together. We propose a conceptualization that distinguishes a message's support for an act from its support for the ideology underlying an act. Our prediction is tested using corpus-linguistic analysis of 250 counter-extremist messages written by Muslims and U.K. officials and a comparison set of 250 Muslim extremist messages. Consistent with our prediction, Muslim extremist and Muslim counter-messages show disagreement on terrorist actions but agreement in ideological aspects, while U.K. officials' counter-messages show disagreement with both Muslim extremists' acts and ideology. Our findings suggest that counter-messages should not be viewed as a homogenous group and that being against violent extremism does not necessarily equate to having positive perceptions of Western values.

The rhetoric of those who seek to promote religiously or politically motivated violence has long been of interest to social scientists (Caton, 1987; Winter, 1993). Early research tended to conduct in-depth qualitative analyses of isolated aspects of texts, such as the use of fantasy in vision statements (Duffy, 2003) or imagery in predictions of apocalyptic times (Blazak, 2001). More recently, there has been a surge of quantitative content analyses of the arguments and "persuasive levers" that authors use to promote violence (Pennebaker & Chung, 2008; Prentice, Taylor, Rayson, Hoskins, & O'Loughlin, 2011;

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Salem, Reid, & Chen, 2008; Zhou, Reid, Qin, Chen, & Lai, 2005). These studies typically conceptualize messages as a series of persuasive acts that seek to change an audience's beliefs, attitudes, or behavior (Perloff, 1993). They have also provided insights into both the construction and organization of messages that aim to promote ideological violence and the personal and social levers that such messages address.

The growth in studies of messages promoting violence has not been matched by a growth in studies examining "counter-messages" that denounce such acts. There is some experimental research examining the extent to which attitude change is resistant to, or can be inoculated against, individual counter-arguments (Martin, Hewstone, & Martin, 2007; Tormala, Clarkson, & Petty, 2006). However, this experimental research focuses more on the contextual variables (e.g., source status) that mediate the influence of counter-messages than on the ideological or persuasive content of such messages. As a result, we know little about the different kinds of narratives and persuasive devices that are put forward to challenge messages promoting extremist violence. In the absence of an understanding of counter-messages, a definitive account of how pro- and counter-messages interrelate or "engage" with one another is lacking.

## Persuasion and Counter-Persuasion as Opposites

One reason why so few studies of counter-messaging exist is the assumption that pro- and counter-messages are direct opposites of one another. Early research on persuasive communication has typically examined the impact of pro- and counter-messages that varied, for example, in message strength and target involvement (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). More recent work has continued this tradition by examining how the impact of pro- and counter-messages are mediated by factors outside of the message itself (e.g., the majority vs. minority status of the source; Martin et al., 2007). This "opposites" conceptualization is endemic in the literature and appears in other research areas where persuasion might be seen to play a role. For example, theories of prejudice reduction seek to reduce violent or prejudiced outcomes between groups by moving individuals from a prejudiced to a tolerant mindset (Wright & Lubensky, 2008). In all of these examples, the underpinning conceptualization is one of a message changing a person's position along a singular "attitude" or "position" dimension that encompasses thought and act. Indeed, in many of these studies, the "single-dimension" assumption is made explicit by the fact that message impact is measured using a dependent variable that comprises a nominal (linear) measure (e.g., a Likert scale).

Although the prevalence of this "opposites" conceptualization may stem from the need to run controlled experiments, it is a view not confined to experimental research. In the domain of ideological violence, political commentaries center on the need to win "hearts and minds" by delegitimizing political violence and the actors who pursue it (Chowdhury & Krebs, 2010; Halafoff & Wright-Neville, 2009). For example, in his analysis of the ideological struggle between Al-Qaeda and Western governments, Payne (2009) found that the Al-Qaeda narrative is characterized by the concepts of Islamic utopia, an us-versus-them dichotomy, and jihad as a just response. By contrast, government narratives were characterized by the concepts of undermining Al-Qaeda and building

resilience and community cohesion through a sense of "Britishness". It is clear from such research that pro- and counter-messages are perceived most readily as ideological opposites with opposing views on how to act. From this perspective, arguing against extremist violence is a case of adopting the opposite position to that of those arguing for violence.

## Two or More Dimensions?

The one-dimensional "opposites" view is not a universal conceptualization of how pro- and counter-arguments relate to one another. The possibility of single issues being debated from multiple standpoints is implied in research that considers the different ways that authors frame their messages (Taylor & Donald, 2004, 2007; Wilson & Putnam, 1990) and the different persuasive tactics that are used to articulate those positions (Giebels & Taylor, 2009; Prentice et al., 2011). Implied in this research is a disconnection between the underlying position of the author (i.e., their ideology) and the kinds of acts that the author uses to argue for his or her position (i.e., their behavior). Similarly, in social psychological research, a number of authors have recognized that there is no necessary association between group identification and hostility. They have considered whether particular types of identification (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999) or constructions of the group (Li & Brewer, 2004) impact on the likelihood of beliefs translating to action. Of particular relevance here is Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears' (2008) recent social identity model of collective action. Based on a meta-analysis of 182 independent samples, this model shows that injustice beliefs are translated into collective action only when there exists the expectancy that action will result in the achievement of relevant goals. Although this work was based primarily on normative actions such as demonstrations, more recent work shows that the opposite is true for more extreme non-normative actions (e.g., Tausch et al., 2011). In this research, non-normative actions are primarily driven by a sense of low efficacy, supporting popular beliefs that terrorism is fed by feelings of powerlessness. These studies show that beliefs and actions do not necessarily have a one-on-one relationship and that that act and ideology may be targeted independently by persuasive messages.

The possibility that persuasive messages about the act may be distinct from messages about the underlying belief or ideology is consistent with social identity theory. Social identity theory postulates that people conceive themselves as belonging to multiple groups, each of which forms part of their identity based on membership of that group and enforcing boundaries with other groups (Tajfel, 1978, 1982). A person who identifies with two groups that have conflicting interests may experience tension over what aspects of their alternative group norms they choose to enact (Billig et al., 1988; Calhoun, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A person identifying as a member of one group may agree with certain aspects of the group's ideology, but his or her other identities may lead to disagreement over the acts used by the group to pursue the ideology. A person not identifying with either the act or the ideology will experience no such agreement or tension. In the case of violent extremism, it is conceivable that those arguing for and against violence may both identify with aspects of their ideology that is driven

by a Muslim identity, but they may distinguish among one another in terms of actions (Onishi & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2003; Peek, 2005).

Several theoretical accounts in the international relations literature lend support to the proposal that counter-extremists reject extremists' actions but relate to their ideology. For example, at the center of the integrative theory of peace is the concept of a unity-based worldview (Danesh, 2006), something that both extremists and counter-extremists have been found to hold in common (Payne, 2009). This suggests that there is some agreement along ideological lines, but a disagreement on the nature of peace and the manner in which to achieve it (Danesh, 2006). In a more fine-grained analysis of peace theory, Galtung (1967) argued that the conception of peace varies according to the civilizations involved. Peace in Arabic (i.e., ''sala'am'') is conceptualized as justice, whereas peace in Western nations is conceptualized as the absence of violence. Galtung's suggestion is that Muslim counter-extremists and Muslim violent extremists may hold a similar conception of peace, whereas Western counter-extremists will hold a different view.

### The Current Study

The two conceptualizations of pro- and counter-messages described earlier represent fundamentally different perspectives on the rhetoric of political violence and terrorism. Given the arguments outlined earlier, we predict that the most applicable perspective on the relationship between extremist and counter-extremist messages is dependent upon the evaluations and affiliations of their authors. Specifically, we predict that Muslim-authored counter-messages will show disagreement in relation to the act but not contend the underpinning ideology, while U.K. officials' messages will show disagreement in relation to act and ideology. We test these predictions by comparing the linguistic content of two separate corpora of counter-extremist messages to that of a corpus of extremist messages.

## Method

### Extremist and Counter-Extremist Messages

Data were corpora of 250 counter-extremist violence messages and 250 pro-extremist violence messages. These were downloaded from open-source Web sites accessible from the U.K. We focused on online material to avoid confounding our analysis with the qualitative differences that are known to exist across types of media (Gregory & Carroll, 1978). To be included in the corpora, a text had to conform to three criteria. First, a text had to be written in English, since the majority of material read by U.K. citizens targeted for violent extremism is written in English (cf. Beutel, 2007). Second, the text had to explicitly advocate or denounce/condemn the use of extremist violence. We used this criterion to avoid confounding results with texts from authors who seek only to advocate a strict version of their beliefs. Third, the text had to be written in the first person, therefore avoiding possible third-hand recounting of narratives. All of the texts in the corpora were written between 1995 and 2010.

Of the 250 counter-messages, 200 were Muslim-authored texts that combined instances of forum administrators responding to questions from guests (e.g., guidance from religious scholars) and posts on open discussion forums where the author's response met our criteria. In all cases, the counter-message had to be preceded by a message supporting or questioning issues relating to extremist violence and it had to be written by an author describing him or herself as Muslim. Combined, these Muslim-authored counter-messages contained 119,713 words ($M = 598.4$ words; $SD = 731.6$).

The remaining 50 counter-messages were U.K. officials' statements, collected from government Web sites or renowned news sites. To be included in this subset, the person responsible for the message had to be recognizable as a U.K. public figure, which may be viewed as expressing the country's ''official'' position. The lesser number of these messages in comparison with the Muslim-authored texts was the result of pragmatic and methodological considerations. The availability of U.K. officials' counter-messages was far less than that of Muslim-authored messages. In addition, the U.K. officials' statements were far longer than the average Muslim-authored counter-messages, such that increasing their number, or reducing the number of Muslim-authored counter-messages, would increase the disproportion in the number of words in each sample (as well as remove valuable data). The U.K. officials' counter-messages contained a total of 89,164 words ($M = 1785.1$ words; $SD = 1763.7$).

The corpus of 250 messages promoting extremist violence originated from the Web sites of well-known extremist groups and organizations (e.g., Al-Qa'ida) and unaffiliated Web sites and individual authors who advocate extremism but do not appear to have a particular group affiliation (e.g., Al-Fallujah forums). Data collection began with targeting the Web sites of known extremist organizations and individuals using, for example, the Home Office (2011) list of proscribed terrorist groups and organizations, followed by investigating links from such Web sites to other sites containing extreme material. In total, the corpus contained a total of 441,385 words ($M = 1814.0$ words, $SD = 2327.1$).

## Analyzing Semantic Content

There are a number of methods available for analyzing the semantic content of text. Although qualitative methods such as critical discourse analysis are popular (Dixon, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2011), recent advances in computerized text analysis has provided new, reliable ways to analyze and compare large collections of texts (Hancock, Woodworth, & Porter, 2011; Olekalns, Brett, & Donohue, 2010; Taylor & Thomas, 2008). We exploit this emerging methodology by using a web-based corpus-linguistic package known as *Wmatrix* to analyze the semantic content of text.[1] Wmatrix automatically annotates words and phrases according to their semantic meaning in three stages (Rayson, 2008). First, it uses a set of predefined templates to group together semantically meaningful chunks in texts such as phrasal verbs, idiomatic expressions, names, places,

[1]Visit http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/ for details of this software, including online access.

and organizations. Second, a part-of-speech tagger assigns major word class categories (e.g., noun, verb, adjective, and adverb) to each word in the text. Third, a semantic analysis system[2] categorizes each word or phrase with a tag or label from a semantic field taxonomy consisting of 21 major domains (groups of semantically related words) and 232 categories. The taxonomy is derived from lexicographic work, and the semantic tagger relies on large manually created dictionaries for its knowledge of possible word and phrase meanings (Rayson, 2008). A key distinction from other similar automatic content analysis systems is that the tagger applies tags and then disambiguates them based on surrounding context to choose the most likely meaning in each case.

Wmatrix then proceeds to count the words, phrases, and semantic tags found in the corpus. These frequencies may then be compared to a reference corpus (or another part of the dataset) that is examined in the same manner, in order to determine which words or semantic domains are "key". Here, "key" refers to those aspects of the two corpora that are significantly different beyond what might be expected by chance. The extent to which a word or semantic concept is key is determined by comparing the relative frequencies of occurrence in the two corpora, thus taking account of differing corpus sizes, using a log-likelihood (LL) test (Dunning, 1993; Rayson & Garside, 2000). Thus, the LL score acts as a "test" of the significance of the frequency differences and allows different concepts to be compared in terms of their "keyness".

An examination of the LL results can operate at several levels. To get an overall picture of the semantic differences, it is useful to compare the frequency of occurrence of underused and overused category (relative to the other corpora) differences across the corpora. To then get a richer understanding of what those differences reflect qualitatively, Wmatrix displays the results of the keyness analysis using word and semantic tag (i.e., a label representing the semantic category) "clouds" (Rayson & Mariani, 2009). In these clouds, the elements are shown in alphabetical order, but the font size and type is proportional to the keyness of the element. A larger font indicates a greater significance for a word or concept (i.e., its occurrence in one corpus was significantly more/less than its occurrence in the other corpora), while the valence of the relationship (i.e., more vs. less) is reflected by the standard font (over use) and italicized font (under use) of the key elements within the cloud. In the clouds featured in this article, a large standard font relates to a high significance in overuse of an item in the extremist messages. A large italicized font relates to a high significance in underuse in the extremist messages and, therefore, a high significance in overuse in the counter-message corpora with which it is being compared.

To support the analysis of the clouds, Wmatrix allows further exploration through the use of concordance examples and collocate information. Concordance examples allow a researcher to view key word or concept elements within their immediate context, thus allowing for a clearer understanding of the way in which a term is being used. Collocation information will be used to show words that occur commonly within a specified span (in this case, five words either side) of a key word or conceptual element, enabling

[2]Visit http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/ for details of the UCREL semantic analysis system.

one to build a picture of how a key term is being discussed and evaluated. All collocates are supplied along with their mutual information (MI) score, which is a measure of the strength of association between two terms, with a score of 3 or more typically considered significant (Rayson, 2008).

If extremist messages and Muslim-authored counter-messages share a common ideology, then we would expect the text clouds to show the extremist and Muslim counter-message authors overusing similar words and concepts. Likewise, if U.K. official messages have a differing ideological focus, then we would expect the text clouds to show that the U.K. officials overused a different set of words and concepts to the Muslim authors. Thus, we should find that the Muslim extremist messages and Muslim counter-messages show the most overlap in language use, and the Muslim extremist and the U.K. official counter-messages show the least.

# Results

## Overall Comparison

Table 1 contains the results of the LL comparisons across all semantic categories for the extremist messages, Muslim authors' counter-messages, and U.K. officials' counter-messages. When the proportion by which a type of message contained a particular semantic category was significantly above or below that of the average for the other two message types, then it was recorded as being overused or underused for the category. Specifically, when the LL value of a particular semantic category was equal to or over 6.63 ($p < .01$), then it was recorded as being overused. Items below this value were recoded as being underused. As can be seen in Table 1, there was no significant difference in the overuse and underuse of semantic categories across the Muslim authors' counter-messages and the extremist messages, $\chi^2_1 < 1$. By contrast, there was a significant difference in the overuse and underuse of semantic categories across the U.K. officials' counter-messages and the extremist messages, $\chi^2_1 = 4.29$, $p < .05$, $\Phi = .07$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.132], and there was a significant difference in the overuse and underuse of semantic categories across the two counter-message groups, $\chi^2_1 = 9.28$, $p < .01$, $\Phi = .10$, 95% CI [0.033, 0.163]. Thus, consistent with our prediction, the greatest semantic differences across the message types exist between the U.K. officials' counter-messages and both sets of Muslim authors' messages.

Table 1
*Number of Total Semantic Categories Over/Underused in Each Corpus*

| | Message type | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Category occurrence | Extremist | Muslim authors' counter | U.K. officials' counter |
| No. of categories overused | 212 | 197 | 244 |
| No. of categories underused | 267 | 282 | 235 |

## Key Word Comparisons

Figure 1 shows the key words that emerge when the extremist messages are compared to the Muslim authors' counter-messages (top panel) and the U.K. officials' counter-messages (bottom panel). The items displayed in boldface relate to overused items in the extremist messages, while the items displayed in italicized font relate to overused items in the counter-messages. In both cases, a larger font relates to a greater difference between the corpora. Compared to the violent extremist texts, the Muslim author's counter-messages (top panel) are characterized by a greater use of religious terminology, such as "Islam" (LL = 552.03), "prophet" (LL = 215.70), "Muslim" (LL = 111.13), "Muslims" (LL = 199.90), and "Qur'an" (LL = 602.76). However, it would be a mistake to conclude that counter-messages are founded on a religious ideology that is not present in extremist messages. As can be seen from the bottom panel of Figure 1, the extremist messages also significantly emphasize religion compared to the U.K. officials' messages, with words such as "Allah" (LL = 1449.53), "Islam" (LL = 95.88), "Islamic"

*Figure 1.* Key word differences between extremist messages and Muslim authors' counter-messages (top panel) and extremist and U.K. officials' counter-messages (bottom panel). Italicized font indicates greater occurrence in counter-messages. Boldface equals greater occurrence in extremist messages.

(LL = 176.91), and "Muslims" (LL = 111.34) all overrepresented in their use. Thus, use of language referring to religion and religious ideology is common to both the extremist and Muslim counter-messages, but not the U.K. officials' messages.

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations from Figure 1 is the presence of words in the Muslim counter-messages that one might traditionally associate with extremist literature. Terms such as "violence" (LL = 146.43), "killing" (LL = 118.48), and "apostasy" (LL = 120.80) all appear significantly more often in the Muslim authors' counter-messages than their extremist counterparts. To determine whether or not, in line with our prediction, these stereotypically extremist terms were occurring in the counter-messages because the authors are denouncing the acts, the collocates of "violence," "killing," and "apostasy" were investigated. This collocate investigation resulted in some expected results, such as "violence" strongly associating with the word "unnecessary" (MI = 9.18) and "killing" strongly associating with the words "forbade" (MI = 8.15), "prohibition" (MI = 7.28), "stop" (MI = 6.55), and "sin" (MI = 5.58). However, this was not always the case, with such words also occurring alongside unexpected associations, such as "killing" strongly associating with the word "permit" (MI = 7.15) and "apostasy" strongly associating with the word "punishment" (MI = 7.94).

To examine these conflicting collocates further, the concordances of examples of these terms were examined. Figure 2 shows concordance examples of the word "violence" in the Muslim authors' counter-extremist messages. If we view extensions of these concordances, they suggest that Muslim counter-extremists disagree with the violence used by all nations, not just the extremists within their own nations. For example, "If some Islamic groups are involved in violence and are considered extremist, there are also other

| are known for committing acts of | violence | , such as Israel, or Hindu groups |
|---|---|---|
| Israel, or Hindu groups in India. | Violence | has no nationality; it exists every |
| groups, or even nations that use | violence | to attain political aims is quite |
| ael has the worst record of using | violence | and committing atrocities against |
| nt to interpret the phenomenon of | violence | as the result of economic injustice |
| fear of paupersim. Others explain | violence | using conspiracy scheme, mean |
| me, meaning that behind all this | violence | is a diabolic design. This interpretat |
| eir own hands. Oppression breeds | violence | , and violence breeds more violence |
| Oppression breeds violence, and | violence | breeds more violence. The non-app |
| olence, and violence breeds more | violence | . The non-application of Shari'ah is |
| voke young men to commit acts of | violence | . The propagation of corruption and |
| ss, it is not right to resort to | violence | and force. Muslims should only us |
| s' these days call upon hatred, | violence | and terrorism across the world, t |
| assic case of people resorting to | violence | as a FIRST resort, not a last one |
| to purify its followers of wars, | violence | and crime par Therefore changing |
| ce is inhumane. Hate begets hate, | violence | begets violence, love begets love |
| ate begets hate, violence begets | violence | , love begets love and respect beg |
| ork to stop this vicious cycle of | violence | . It is important that Hindus should |
| manized individuals who carry out | violence | . When state sponsored crime again |
| g against extremism and senseless | violence | which is causing massive amounts o |
| for Muslims. As always, war and | violence | must be the absolute last option p |
| longer see acts of indiscriminate | violence | being committed by these aforemen |

*Figure 2.* Concordance examples of "violence" in the Muslim authors' counter-messages.

groups and even nations that are known for committing acts of violence, such as Israel or Hindu groups in India. Violence has no nationality; it exists everywhere. The list of individuals, groups, or even nations that use violence to attain political aims is quite long". In addition, these authors also appear to accept the ideological position that violence is permitted in certain circumstances though perhaps differ in what circumstances such action would be permitted (i.e., only in self-defense and only as a last resort). For example, "…it is not right to resort to violence and force. Muslims should only use force when they are compelled to, and as a last resort. They should not initiate fighting, unless there is some cause on the part of the kaafirs, such as their fighting the Muslims".

So what characterizes the U.K. officials' messages? An examination of the bottom panel in Figure 1 suggests that officials' messages (in italics) are instead characterized by language that seeks to build a sense of commonality. For example, there is highly significant overuse of words suggesting collective engagement, such as "we" (LL = 597.73), "community" (LL = 134.45), and "communities" (LL = 112.53), in the U.K. officials' statements compared to the extremist messages. (Interestingly, this same collective good is also emphasized in extremist messages, as evidenced by the fact that they contain a high usage of "we" when compared to the Muslim authors' counter-messages [LL = 106.41, see top panel]). The emphasis on commonality in the U.K. officials' messages is made particularly apparent when the collocates of value-related terms are examined. For example, collocates of the term "values" (LL = 146.79), a key component of ideology that is overused in the U.K. officials' counter-messages, include "shared" (MI = 6.79), "share" (MI = 6.58), and "common" (MI = 6.31). Similarly, the highest collocate of "community" (LL = 134.45) is "cohesion" (MI = 8.20), and among collocates of "communities" (LL = 122.53) are "across" (MI = 5.47) and "all" (MI = 4.25). This kind of language use is not as prominent in the Muslim authors' counter-messages. Indeed, although "community" (LL = 57.78) is present as a key word in Muslim authors' counter-messages, this is used to refer to an already established "Muslim" (MI = 6.14) community, rather than needing to create one.

## Key Concept Comparisons

Figure 3 shows the key concept clouds for both a comparison of the extremist messages to the Muslim authors' counter-messages (top panel) and a comparison of the extremist messages to the U.K. officials' counter-messages (bottom panel). Both Muslim authors' counter-messages and extremist messages appear concerned with religion, as expressed by concepts such as religion and the supernatural (counter-messages, LL = 584.54; extremist messages, LL = 1650.22); ethics, as expressed by concepts such as ethical and unethical (LL = 91.53 and 65.15); language, as expressed by the concept language, speech, and grammar (LL = 220.39 and LL = 39.68); and death, as expressed by the concept dead (LL = 67.89 and LL = 125.35).

There is also evidence of common use of polarized language, as expressed through the use of semantic pair concepts. For example, the Muslim counter-messages contain juxtapositions such as "Allowed" (LL = 110.29) and "Not allowed" (LL = 171.58),

*Figure 3.* Key concept differences between extremist messages and Muslim authors' counter-messages (top panel) and U.K. officials' counter-messages (bottom panel). Italicized font indicates greater occurrence in counter-messages. Boldface equals greater occurrence in extremist messages.

"Alive" (LL = 27.59) and "Dead" (LL = 67.89), "Calm" (LL = 280.93) and "Violent/ Angry" (LL = 123.11), and "Lawful" (LL = 370.62) and "Crime" (LL = 278.11). This kind of presentation is equally prominent in the extremist messages: "Alive" (LL = 26.69) and "Dead" (LL = 125.35), "In power" (LL = 161.05) and "No power" (LL = 39.85), "Respected" (LL = 47.20) and "No respect" (LL = 66.25), "Religion" (LL = 1650.22) and "Non-religious" (LL = 152.26).

Despite these ideological similarities, Muslim counter-message authors in our corpus retain their dislike of terrorist actions and appear to use a strategy of religious clarification (attempting to offer a more peaceful interpretation of the Qur'an and other Islamic texts) in which to dissuade others from engaging in such activities. This strategy is captured in many of the concepts to some degree. For example, it is reflected in Comparing: Usual (LL = 39.69) owing to the reference to "accepted" religious "norms" and "basic" principles; Likely (LL = 68.99) owing to terms relating to the "clarification" of the Islamic religion; and Strong obligation or necessity (LL = 35.18), owing to terms that espouse the obligations of the Muslim community in relation to the protection of innocents. With regard to the Violent/Angry (LL = 123.11) concept, this strategy arises because of authors quoting seemingly violent extracts from the Qur'an and mentioning of the fact that Islam does not condone violence against innocents, only against oppressors. While the authors of Muslim counter-messages at times sympathize with the anger felt by their Muslim audience, they ask that where possible it be directed in alternative ways, for example, through spoken demonstration and protest (hence, the presence of the concept "Linguistic Actions, States and Processes; Communication"— LL = 99.41).

In terms of the British official counter-messages (italic items, bottom panel, Figure 3), the contrastive concepts feature found in the Muslim-authored counter-messages is less present. The lack of contrasting concepts suggests that the U.K. officials do not represent the world from the same contrastive, ideological perspective as found in both the Muslim counter-messages and the extremist messages. There are some exceptions, with the U.K. official counter-messages showing overuse of the same semantic categories as the Muslim-authored counter-messages on categories including "Law and order" (LL = 206.47 compared with LL = 37.81), "Lawful" (LL = 32.40 compared with LL = 370.62), and "Crime" (LL = 885.25 compared with LL = 278.11). However, an examination of concordance examples around these topics reveals a different perspective between the counter-message types on what constitutes crime and law and order. For example, concordances of the "Crime" concept in the Muslim-authored counter-messages include "Islam believes in stopping injustice, oppression and any threat to peace or freedom. In many instances, there is no way to guarantee these goals without arms and fighting" and "It's about time we denounced terrorism publicly. This doesn't discredit the legitimate Jihads being fought to ease the oppression of Muslims, such as those in Kashmir, Palestine and Chechnya", while for the U.K. officials includes "The danger is that by positing a single source of terrorism—a global jihad—and opposing it with a single global response American-backed force we will simply fulfill our own prophecy". Such instances go to show, for example, that for Muslim authors, the concept of "jihad" is not criminal and has a part to play in the justice system, while for British officials the opposite is

true. Further, there are only nine collocates of "terrorism" in the Muslim-authored counter-messages, all of which do not so much seek to vilify terrorism as define it, the top collocate being "definition" (MI = 8.58). None of the collocates speak to preventing, fighting, or tackling terrorism. In contrast, there are over 50 collocates of "terrorism" in the British official counter-messages, the top of which is "crime" (MI = 10.25), with the majority of others suggesting terrorism is a threat that needs to be acted upon, such as "fight" (MI = 5.63), "tackle" (MI = 5.68), and "preventing" (MI = 5.48). The collocates therefore provide further evidence of differing understandings of "terrorism" between the counter-message types.

## Discussion

A novel text analysis methodology was used to test the prediction that conflict over a high-stakes issue such as violent extremism is best captured through a multidimensional conceptualization that distinguishes act from ideology. Overall, we found that the content of Muslim-authored extremist and counter-extremist messages shared ideological content but distinct views on the acts used to achieve such goals. This was true both in the overall analysis of the concept frequencies across the three corpora and when we exposed the qualitative differences among the corpora. Compared to the U.K. officials' counter-messages, the Muslim authors' counter-messages showed (at both the word and concept level) similar use of religious terminology, similar use of stereotypical extremist language, and equivalent ways of using "contrastive" concepts (Prentice, Rayson, & Taylor, in press) when discussing religion, ethics, and language. These similarities give some evidence of a shared value system between Muslim extremist and counter-extremist authors (Galtung, 1967). That is, both message types are characterized by similar presentation of semantics related to ideology, which is in contrast to U.K. officials' statements. Despite similarities in expression at the ideological level between Muslim extremist and counter-messages, both sets of counter-messages were similar when describing the actions of extremist violence. The exception being that, while Muslim counter-message authors are against violent acts per se, they are not against the use of violence in theory, in particular circumstances, as defined in Islamic ideology (Khan, 2002). This was affirmed by our finding of conflicting permissive–nonpermissive collocates of stereotypically extremist language items, coupled with the concordances of the term "violence" in the Muslim-authored counter-messages.

A second difference between the U.K. officials' and Muslim texts is the conception of law and order (which would provide some evidence of a shared value system). If "terrorism" is to be regarded here as religious warfare, then for the Muslim-authored counter-messages, not all forms of "terrorism" are regarded as criminal, some are viewed as acceptable to combat injustice (indeed, a study by Mascini, 2006; has found sympathizers for violent jihad among the Muslim community). In this way, justice appears intrinsically linked to religion. By contrast, within the U.K. officials' messages, "terrorism" in this sense is equivalent to crime. This difference may arguably have something to do with the separation of religion from state in Western cultures (see Halafoff & Wright-Neville, 2009), demonstrating the ideological difference between U.K. officials and Muslim

authors' counter-extremist messages. In addition, further evidence of their ideological difference from one another comes from the fact that U.K. officials have to expressly use group orientation terminology to gain a sense of commonality and build shared values with the target British Muslim audience, which is something Muslim counter-message authors do not do. Arguably, they do not have to engage in this strategy because they already intrinsically share values with the audience.

A third aspect of the results is the significant references to group orientation in both extremist messages and U.K. officials' counter-messages. This rhetoric may represent an attempt to highlight a battle to define the in-group—a battle that Muslim-authored counter-messages do not appear to engage. This again raises the question of influence. It may be, for example, that Muslim authors' counter-messages have more power to influence than the other message types featured in this article because the message source shares a commonality with the target audience and may appear more credible (cf. Giebels & Taylor, 2009). In line with our theoretical expectations, then, there is no apparent similarity in ideology from the above comparison, but there *are* similarities in arguments and audience engagement strategies. These similarities result in the surprising finding of a large overlap between the word use of extremists and U.K. officials, which is contrary to both general expectations and previous literature in the field of counter-terrorism (e.g., Payne, 2009). This literature suggests that their content would be distinctly different. However, just because two parties use the same language, it does not mean that they use such language to say the same thing.

Although the linguistic content of the different message types supported our predictions on the whole, there was one exception. Our framework suggests that the extremist messages and U.K. officials' counter-messages would be the most different, because the authors differ on both agreement with terrorist acts and ideological affiliation. However, surprisingly, and contrary to what previous research and popular opinion would expect, the Muslim and U.K. official's counter-messages show the greatest dissimilarity. It is difficult to provide a definitive explanation of this finding. One possibility, however, relates to the fact that Muslim counter-message authors may be deliberately distancing themselves from Western ideological values so as to avoid being dismissed as such in the responses of extremist authors. In this sense, they are adopting in their communication a social identity that is more extreme than that adopted by those advocating an extremist position, in order to make clear the focus of their argument. To be more effective then, U.K. officials would need to tailor their counter-narrative to the audience in question, adopting more of the characteristics of Muslim counter-extremist messages (cf. Leuprecht, Hataley, Moskalenko, & McCauley, 2010).

The findings of this study provided linguistic evidence to suggest that being against extremist violence and encouraging tolerance of non-Muslims do not equate to being positive toward or assimilating with Western values (see Sommerlad & Berry, 1970; on the challenges of assimilation between different ethnic groups). More importantly, the findings suggested that many authors of counter-messages presented similar, arguably stricter interpretations of their religion than those advocating violence. This distinction between act and ideology stands in contrast to the inculpatory framing of extremism,

which is sometimes presented by official authorities and the popular media (e.g., ''They are terrorists pure and simple'', Blair, 2001). It also suggests that any theory of how conflict over a position plays out must encapsulate the multidimensional nature of positions.

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