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In the Line of Fire

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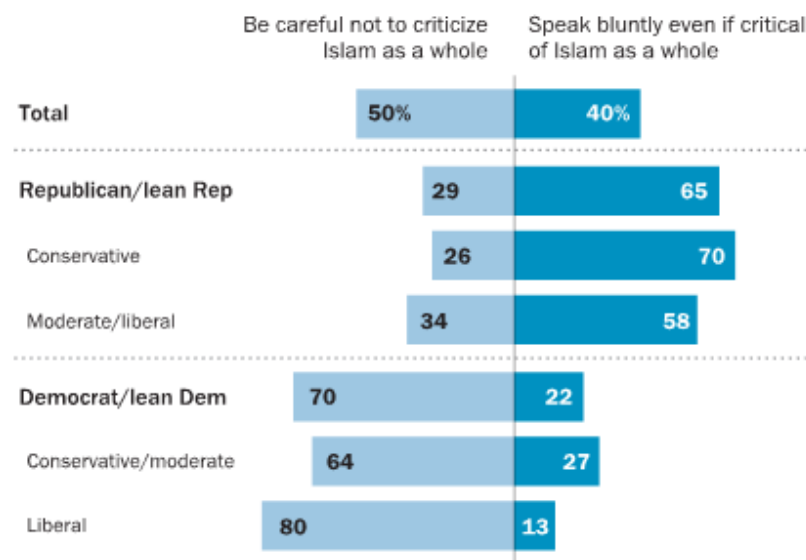POLS 344

<div align="center">In the Line of Fire</div>

Would you prefer to deal with someone who guards what they say, or someone who is in your face? Would you rather be associated with a person who tells you to your face they hate Muslims, or prefer someone who hides their contempt behind words and veiled threats? Maybe you would rather associate with someone who does not discriminate against people based on their religion? One might think the last one to be a given as we are living in the United States, the land of freedom from persecution. But unfortunately that is not the case, and the 2016 Presidential Race has put these issues front and center.

Many voters today seem to prefer blatant Islamophobia. According to data from a Pew Research study conducted in recent months there is a noted preference among Republican voters for blunt rhetoric when the topic of Islamic extremism is discussed. This could include the calls to shut down mosques, creating a national registry for Muslims, and even a total shutdown on Muslims entering the United States. All proclamations made by Donald Trump.

Islamophobia is generated by fear, so is it any surprise that candidates are using this fear for their own benefit? Research from Jonah Berger and Katherine L. Milkman (2011) found certain emotions—specifically anger, anxiety, and awe—increase the number of shares and overall "virality" of online content. When Donald Trump gets on a stage and imparts the horrors of terrorism and then says they government should register Muslims, people listen. People share this message and the ideas spread. Candidates recognize they can use emotion to drive citizens to vote.

Republicans and Democrats disagree on how the next president should talk about Islamic extremists

% who say next president should ... when talking about Islamic extremists

	Be careful not to criticize Islam as a whole	Speak bluntly even if critical of Islam as a whole
Total	50%	40%
Republican/lean Rep	29	65
Conservative	26	70
Moderate/liberal	34	58
Democrat/lean Dem	70	22
Conservative/moderate	64	27
Liberal	80	13

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 7-14, 2016. Other/don't know responses not shown.

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Attitudes towards Islamic extremists can be used as an indicator of how a group of people feels about the religion of Islam as a whole. There is a misconception in much of the Western world that the religion of Islam can be generalized as having the same ambitions and motivations as the small population of Islamic extremists who use the religion to justify their horrendous actions. These beliefs lead to feelings of islamophobia

by allowing the homogenizing of populations that have values very distinct from the broader population of practicing Muslims.

Simplifying the role of religion in acts of terrorism gives people like Donald Trump an easy place to lay blame and point fingers. People like to be able to point fingers and have simple solutions to highly emotional topics such as this. The idea that the religion of Islam creates radicals is a simple (and incorrect) answer to a complicated topic.
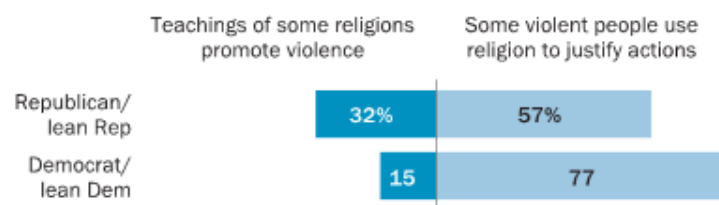
In terms of terrorism and Islam, the answers candidates are offering are not suitable because the right questions are not being asked. A question should not be, "How Islamic is ISIS?" There is not one uniform Islam for the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. And extremism is not a disease that some were lucky enough to avoid, but inevitably afflicting of others.

Those in the survey who preferred blunt rhetoric also agreed that they preferred this direct speech even if it generalized Islam, and was critical of the religion as a whole.
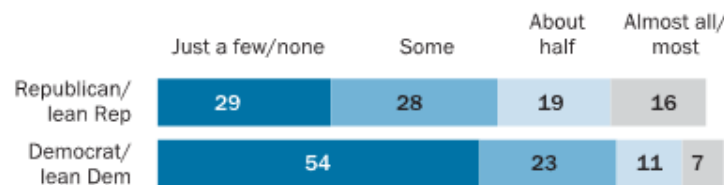
Republican's are more likely to say "some violent people use religion to justify actions," which I believe is because they identify with that statement. They see that it can be done from their own twisting of the Bible to depict they ideas they believe in. How many republicans have used text from the Bible as their platform to oppose issues such as homosexuality, and evolution?

Republicans more likely than Democrats to say some religions' teachings promote violence

Bigger problem with violence in the name of religion is ...

	Teachings of some religions promote violence	Some violent people use religion to justify actions
Republican/ lean Rep	32%	57%
Democrat/ lean Dem	15	77

How many Muslims in the U.S., if any, are anti-American?

	Just a few/none	Some	About half	Almost all/ most
Republican/ lean Rep	29	28	19	16
Democrat/ lean Dem	54	23	11	7

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 7-14, 2016. Other/don't know responses not shown.

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The Pew Research data continues to point to the fact that Republicans promote more negative ideas generalizing Muslims and Islam. Words are a powerful tool, and in the hands of many Republicans they are being used dangerously. Reza Aslan once said "religions are not violent—people are violent" (Marglin, 2015). This is the message we should spread when discussing Islamic extremism.

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Seeing as it is my turn to speak bluntly, I want to state my opinion that Islamophobia is simply repackaged racism, particularly in the speech of Donald Trump.

As an example, many people—Trump included—dislike Obama for one specific reason they are not willing to admit, but once the label of "Muslim" was applied people were provided a more socially acceptable reason for their prejudice. Society capitalized on the fear and hatred of Muslims and applied it to a person unconnected with the faith as an insult. The culture of Islamophobia is self-made, but perhaps 2016 is the year it will self-destruct.

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