Exclusionary Religious Discourse and Islamophobia: Impact and Solutions

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ABSTRACT:

Hate speech cases involving religion are contentious due to community disagreements on balancing restrictions with public freedom, involving complex understandings of religious adherence as a personal and cultural identity. This study aims to promote tolerant religious discourses to lessen hate speech and religious violence by examining the impact of exclusionary religious discourse on Islamophobia. The study revealed that exclusionary religious rhetoric and hate speech are the primary causes of religious intolerance and Islamophobia expansion. To prevent exclusionary religious discourse, people should promote open debate, encourage respectful communication, and establish deterrent laws. Besides, every single member of society should set a good example by using inclusive language and refraining from harsh language. Moreover, people should recognize common values and principles in all religions to prevent hate speech and protect people's lives from exclusionary religious discourse.

INTRODUCTION:

Exclusionary religious discourse refers to the communication or expression of religious beliefs, teachings, or ideas that intentionally exclude or marginalize individuals or groups who do not adhere to the same religious beliefs or practices. This type of discourse often emphasizes the differences between "us" (those who share the same religious identity) and "them" (those who belong to different religious groups). It can involve asserting the superiority of one's own religious beliefs and demeaning or devaluing the beliefs of others.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Hate speech cases involve religion as a source or target of hateful views. These cases are contentious due to community disagreements on reconciling hate speech restrictions with public freedom of expression. Religious hate speech cases also face challenges due to complex understandings of religious adherence as a personal and cultural identity. Hate speech regulation distinguishes between attacks on religious groups, which can be considered hate speech, and attacks on the group's beliefs, which can be permissible even in extreme cases. Hate speech should only apply to assertions of group inferiority or undesirable traits, while religious beliefs should be open to criticism.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Religion discourse promotes social capital and well-being, but also promotes social division and exclusion. A study using data from the World Values Survey reveals that people's belief in their religion's authenticity and others' inauthenticity affects their acceptance of immigrants, race, and language speakers. However, religious individuals are more likely to trust and accept others. This highlights the

distinction between religiosity and exclusive religious beliefs, suggesting that the connection between religion and social exclusion may be due to exclusionary religious discourse rather than religiosity.

OBJECTIVES:

This study aims to discuss the exclusionary religious discourse and its impact on the spread of Islamophobia. The study also targets developing means to encourage moderate religious discourses to reduce hate speech, which is the main reason behind the spread of faith violence.

HYPOTHESIS:

This study hypothesizes that exclusionary religious discourses and hate speeches are the main reason behind the increase in religious intolerance in general and the spread of Islamophobia in particular. The study also assumes that replacing hate speech with more moderate religious discourse will have an effective effect in reducing violence based on ideological grounds.

SCOPE:

The scope of this study is limited to the Middle East, which is inflamed by conflicts based on ideological foundations.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Concept of religious discourse:

Religious discourse involves the exchange of ideas, beliefs, and perspectives related to religion, involving discussions, debates, and writings within religious communities, traditions, and between religious and non-religious individuals. Religious discourse involves interpretation, understanding, and dialogue about religious texts and teachings. It helps believers from different traditions understand differences and similarities, promoting interfaith dialogue. It also delves into ethical and moral considerations, theological exploration, and interfaith dialogue. It also includes discussions on controversial topics like women's roles in religious institutions, LGBTQ+ inclusion, religious extremism, and the relationship between religion and science. Religious discourse can also influence societal norms, cultural practices, and political decisions. It can also be used to address conflicts and misunderstandings in regions with religious tensions. Promoting a constructive approach to religious discourse is crucial for fostering understanding, empathy, and cooperation among diverse communities. According to Russell M. Parks, Karen Tracy (2015) *"Discourses of religion are forms of social interaction in which a connection to religion is foregrounded. This can be because the setting or particular features of the social interaction has a distinctively religious character"*.

Concept of exclusionary religious discourse:

Exclusionary religious discourse is a form of communication that emphasizes the superiority and exclusivity of a specific religious group, often marginalizing or rejecting others who do not belong to that group. Exclusionary religious discourse is characterized by a clear divide between "us" and "them," reinforcing a sense of belonging within the ingroup and emphasizing the separateness of the outgroup. It often asserts sole authenticity, rejecting pluralism, marginalizing others, fearing contamination, and limiting dialogue. Extreme forms can lead to conflicts and division within the religious community and with other communities. It is crucial to differentiate between exclusionary discourse and healthy,

respectful expressions of religious identity. Promoting a more inclusive approach to religious discourse is essential for fostering understanding, peace, and cooperation among diverse religious groups and broader societies. Encouraging dialogue, education, and interfaith interactions can help counter the negative effects of exclusionary religious discourse. Busra Yurtalan (2022) stated that, Islamic thought has evolved through various religious discourses, sometimes claiming truth and salvation, but also excluding other groups, affecting fundamental rights and freedoms, and cannot be attributed to a single sect.

The impact of exclusionary religious discourse:
Exclusionary religious discourse can have significant negative effects on individuals, communities, and societies. It promotes intolerance, discrimination, and conflict, leading to social exclusion, economic disadvantage, and violence against marginalized groups. It also creates social divisions, inhibiting social cohesion and cooperation. Interfaith conflicts can escalate to violence, with long-lasting negative effects on local and global levels. Extreme forms of exclusionary discourse can contribute to radicalization and extremism. It stifles intellectual growth by discouraging critical thinking and open dialogue about religious beliefs. It also misses opportunities for learning and weakens the social fabric of a diverse society. It can hinder peaceful coexistence and establish a negative perception of religion, erode public trust in religious institutions and spirituality. It can also undermine religious freedom by justifying restrictions on minority groups or dissenting individuals. To counter these negative impacts, religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners should encourage open, respectful, and inclusive religious discourse. According to Carrie Antal (2008), students in developing nations are at risk of accepting exclusionary religious discourses due to teacher-centered, textbook-based instruction, leading to increased inter-religious conflict, social destabilization, and democracy subversion.

keyways in which such discourse can affect various aspects of life:
Exclusionary religious discourse can lead to social division, intolerance, discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and undermining social cohesion. It can also result in human rights violations, such as limited access to education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. It can also contribute to interreligious tensions and conflicts, limiting open-mindedness and critical thinking. This can also impede economic development by preventing the free flow of goods, services, and ideas among different communities. To counter this, efforts should be directed towards promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding among different religious communities, and encouraging a more inclusive interpretation of religious teachings. Education and awareness campaigns emphasizing diversity, tolerance, and respect for all individuals are also crucial steps towards building harmonious and inclusive societies.

Exclusionary religious discourse and islamophobia:
Islamophobia is a form of irrational fear, prejudice, or hatred directed towards Islam and its followers. Exclusionary religious discourse can reinforce stereotypes, promote fear and distrust, legitimize discrimination, marginalize Muslims, and misrepresent Islam. This can lead to discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes. The discourse can also lead to misrepresentation of Islam, which can reinforce negative stereotypes. The impact on identity is significant, as Muslims may struggle to express their religious beliefs without constant defense. To combat Islamophobia, it is crucial to promote inclusive education, foster interfaith dialogue, challenge exclusionary discourse, and advocate for equal

rights. This requires a multifaceted approach involving individuals, communities, governments, and media working together to promote tolerance, understanding, and respect for all people, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Islamophobia as a result of the exclusionary religious discourse:

Islamophobia is a form of irrational fear, prejudice, discrimination, or hatred towards Islam and Muslims. It can be influenced by various factors, including cultural, political, and socio-economic factors. Exclusionary religious discourse can contribute to its perpetuation through confirmation bias, misinterpretation, dehumanization, polarization, fearmongering, social exclusion, media influence, and normalization of discrimination. Confirmation bias reinforces negative perceptions of Islam, while misinterpretation and dehumanization dehumanize Muslims. Polarization and division foster an "us vs. them" mentality, leading to increased prejudice and discrimination. Fearmongering fuels fear and anxiety, leading to discriminatory policies, surveillance, and hate crimes. Social exclusion can result from excluding Muslims from certain opportunities or conversations based on their religious beliefs. Media influence amplifies Islamophobic narratives, reinforcing Islamophobic narratives. Addressing Islamophobia requires education, media literacy, promoting diverse narratives, and respectful conversations among different religious and cultural groups.

Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment

Islamophobia is a complex issue involving social, cultural, political, and psychological factors. It stems from historical events like the 9/11 attacks and terrorism attributed to extremist groups. Media influence, political discourse, cultural misinterpretations, religious differences, socio-economic disparities, fear of the "other," online radicalization, counterterrorism measures, interfaith dialogue, and individual empathy contribute to this issue. Cultural differences, religious differences, socio-economic disparities, fear of the "other," online echo chambers, counterterrorism measures, interfaith dialogue, and individual empathy can all contribute to Islamophobia. Addressing Islamophobia requires collaboration between governments, communities, religious leaders, media, and civil society organizations, as well as individual empathy. A comprehensive approach that considers these factors and seeks to address them through education, dialogue, policy changes, and a commitment to human rights and social justice is needed. *Aziz (2006) stated that, "Western Muslims believe that the hate speech is responsible for racism, Islamophobia, discrimination, socio economic marginalization and a failure of society to accept Muslims".*

METHODOLOGY:

The descriptive method is considered one of the most important scientific approaches and tools used in many phenomena and topics, especially human, social and psychological ones. This methodology depends on the process of describing topics and their various factors and components. It relies on observing the phenomenon or problem and describing it accurately, then analyzing it to find the optimal and best solutions for it.

Instrument:

Using surveys in research writing can be a powerful method to collect data and gather insights from a large number of respondents. Surveys are commonly used in various fields, including social sciences,

psychology, business, and more. The researcher used a survey to collect data for this study. The survey included ten multiple-choice questions. The survey was distributed to the audience of the study consisting of people who are different in terms of ages and religious and sex in the Middle East region.
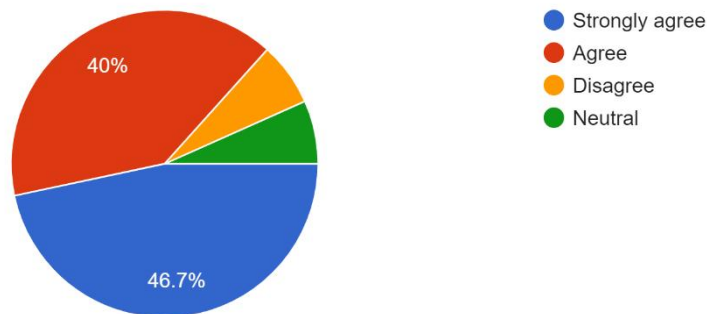
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:
The statistical Analysis of the study audience Responses to the Questionnaire:

Question No. (1)

Exclusionary religious discourse is quite common nowadays.
30 responses

Graph of the first question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that exclusionary religious discourse is common these days by about 46 % strongly agree and 40% agree, while only 20% are between disagree and neutral.

Question No. (2)

People can easily get carried away behind religious discourses.
30 responses
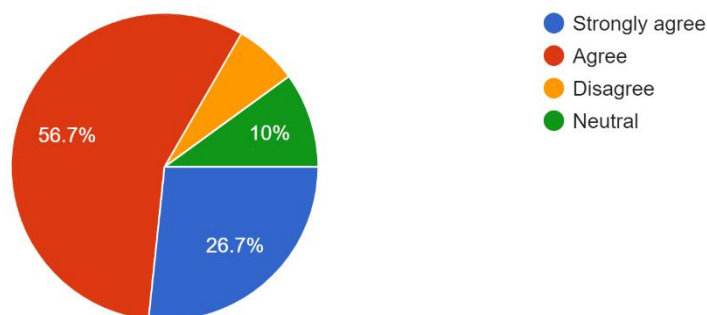
Graph of the second question shows that 56% of the audience strongly agree that people can easily get carried away behind religious discourses. 26 % agree, while only 20% are between disagree and neutral.
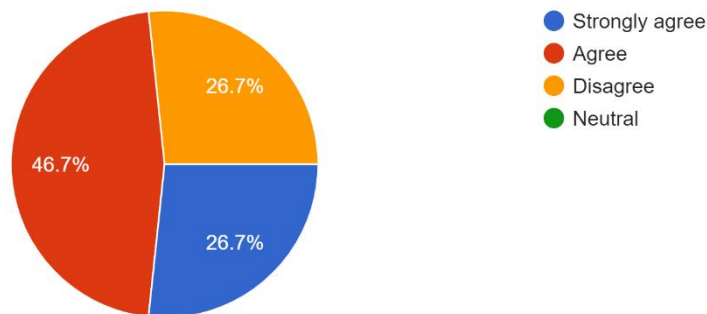
Question No. (3)

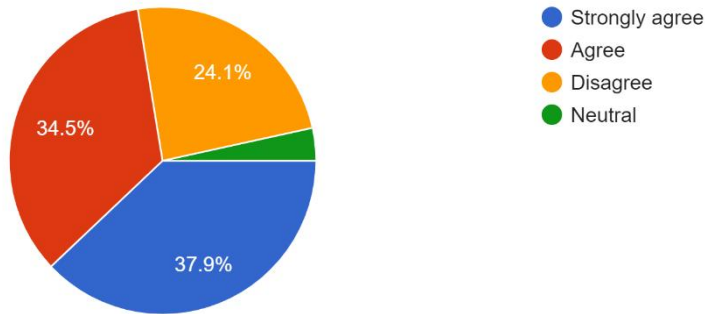Exclusionary religious discourses and hate speeches are two faces of one coin.
30 responses
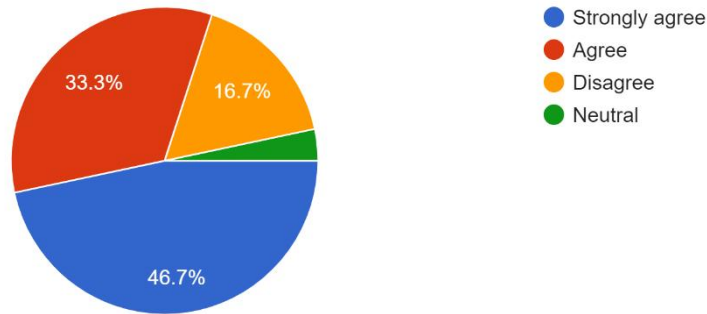
Graph of the third question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that Exclusionary religious discourses and hate speeches are two faces of one coin by about 46 % who agree and 33% who strongly agree, while only 20% of the responses are between disagree and neutral.

Question No. (4)

Exclusionary religious discourse is a main source of hatred and discrimination.
30 responses

Graph of the fourth question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that exclusionary religious discourse is a main source of hatred and discrimination by about 73% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while the other 20% of the responses disagree with idea.

Question No. (5)

Islamophobia is a common result of exclusionary religious discourse.
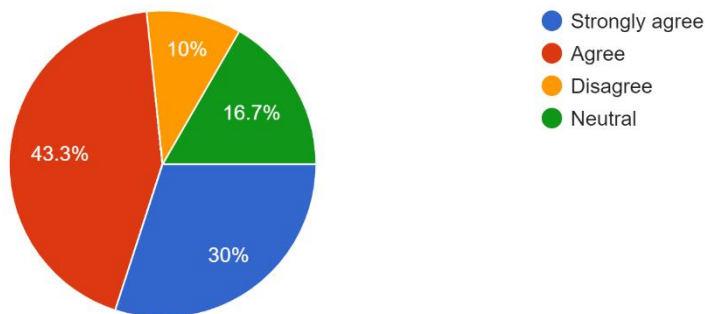29 responses

Graph of the fifth question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that Islamophobia is a common result of exclusionary religious discourse by about 70% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while the other 30% of the responses disagree with idea or just neutral.

Question No. (6)

Religious violence is originally a result of exclusion and hate speeches.
30 responses

Graph of the fifth question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that religious violence is originally a result of exclusion and hate speeches by about 70% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while10% of the responses disagree with idea and 16 % neutral responses.

Question No. (7)

Moderate religious discourses contribute to reducing the impact of hate speech.
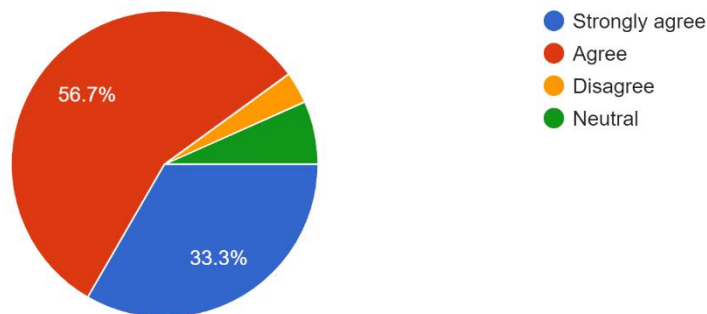30 responses
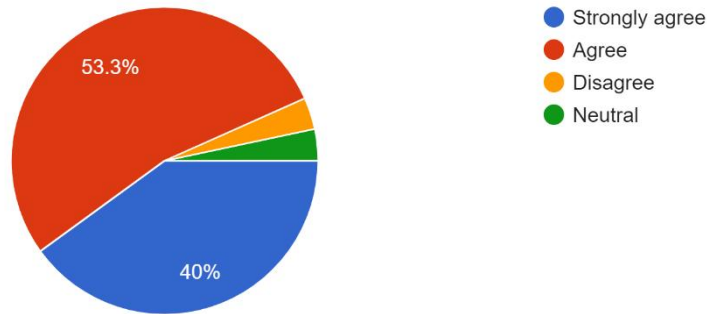
Graph of the seventh question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that moderate religious discourse contributes to reducing the impact of hate speech by about 90% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while10% of the responses disagree with idea or neutral.

Question No. (8)

Strict laws should be enacted to control the spread of exclusionary religious discourse.
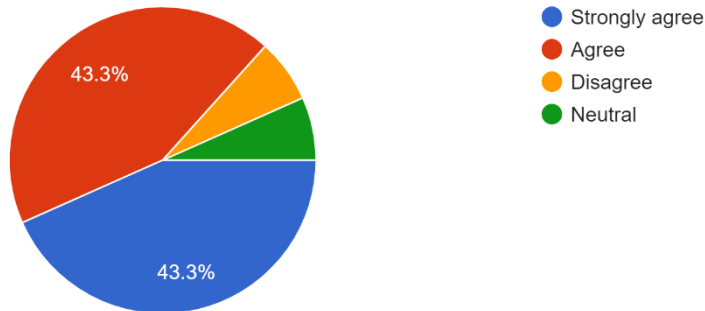30 responses

Graph of the eighth question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that strict laws should be enacted to control the spread of exclusionary religious discourse by about 90% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while10% of the responses disagree with idea or neutral.

Question No. (9)

Fighting hate speech can contribute to building a healthy society that is free from religious and regional violence.

30 responses

Graph of the ninth question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that fighting hate speech can contribute to building a healthy society that is free from religious and regional violence by about 86% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while14% of the responses disagree with idea or neutral.

Question No. (10)

Fighting exclusionary religious discourse can be considered an assault on freedom of opinion and expression.

30 responses
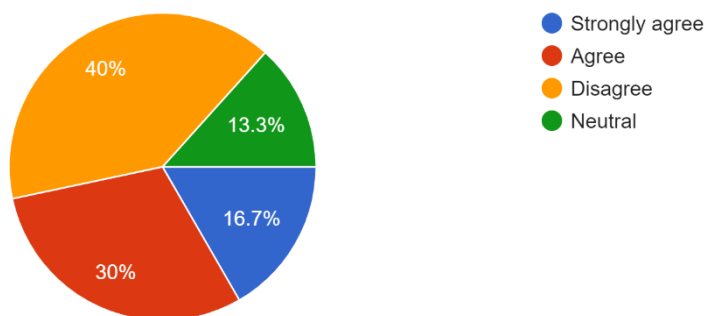
Graph of the ninth question shows that the majority of the answers confirm that fighting exclusionary religious discourse cannot be considered an assault on freedom of opinion and expression by about 70% audience who strongly agree or just agree, while 30% of the responses disagree with idea or neutral.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of exclusionary religious discourse on the growth of Islamophobia. The study also focuses on creating strategies to support moderate religious discourses in order to lessen hate speech, which is the primary driver of religious violence.

To answer questions and hypotheses of the study, the researcher adopted the questionnaire as a tool to collect the data. The collected data went through different computerized analytics. results of the data analysis interpret the findings and the recommendation of the study as follows:

The fundamental cause of the rise in religious intolerance in general and the expansion of Islamophobia in particular is exclusionary religious rhetoric and hate speech. It will effectively reduce violence motivated by ideologies to replace hate speech with more moderate religious discourse.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Exclusionary religious discourse fosters division and marginalization based on religious beliefs, requiring the following recommendations to address or avoid this division.

1- Encouraging respectful dialogue by promoting open and respectful discussions, allowing for diverse viewpoints exchange without demeaning or belittling others, and focusing on understanding different perspectives rather than proving superiority.

2- Governments should enact deterrent laws to combat exclusionary religious discourses and hate speeches in order to limit its negative effects on the lives and safety of peoples.

3- Lead by Example: People need to demonstrate inclusive behavior and language in their conversations. They also need to avoid derogatory terms, stereotypes, and offensive language. (Model the kind of discourse you'd like to see).

4- Acknowledge Common Values: Emphasize shared values and principles that are present across different religious traditions. Highlighting common ground can help build bridges and foster understanding.

5- Promote Diversity and Inclusion: People should celebrate the diversity within and between religious communities. They also need to Highlight stories of cooperation, understanding, and unity among people from different faiths.

6- People should recognize that a single belief or action of an individual or a small group doesn't represent an entire religion to avoid attributing the actions of a few to an entire faith community.

7- Actively listen to others when they share their beliefs. This shows respect and validates their experiences, even if you don't agree with them.

8- Challenge Harmful Discourse: In case of encountering exclusionary language or harmful stereotypes, gently challenge them by asking questions or providing alternative perspectives. Encourage critical thinking and reflection.

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