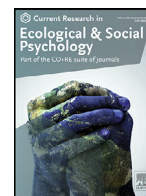




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## Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/cresp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/cresp)When religious fundamentalists feel privileged: Findings from a representative study in contemporary Turkey<sup>☆</sup>Sarah Demmrich<sup>a</sup>, Paul H.P. Hanel<sup>b,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Sociology, Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics", University of Munster, Germany<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Essex, United Kingdom

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Religious fundamentalism  
Deprivation  
Turkey  
Conspiracy beliefs  
Personality

## ABSTRACT

Previous research established that people who are or feel more privileged tend to be less religiously fundamentalist. However, in the present research we predicted this association to be reversed when political leaders such as governments are promoting and incentivizing (religious) fundamentalism. Using Turkey as an example, we found support for our hypothesis in a Muslim sample ( $N = 736$ ) representative for age, gender, education-level ethnicities, and urbanicity: Individuals, who feel more privileged – i.e., less deprived – were *more* fundamentalist, even after controlling for a range of other variables that were previously associated with fundamentalism including conspiracy beliefs, personality, and sociodemographic variables. This negative association between deprivation and religious fundamentalism was not mediated by conspiracy beliefs. Interestingly, the associations of the control variables such as authoritarianism and conspiracy beliefs with religious fundamentalism mostly replicated previous research. Implications are discussed.

## Introduction

Fundamentalism, fanaticism, and extremism are often ignited or reinforced by political leaders (Mazumdar, 2019; Weiberg-Salzman, 2014). For example, the former US-president Trump has been incriminated of supporting religious-fundamentalist groups and of being responsible for a rise in right-wing extremism and hate crimes (Feinberg et al., 2019). In Turkey, President Erdoğan was accused of an authoritarian and Islamist agenda that promotes religious fundamentalism (RF) (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018; Özpek and Yaşar, 2018) and which is partly based on beliefs that 'Western' countries conspire against Turkey (De Medeiros, 2018; Gürpınar, 2019; Koopmans, 2021). To maintain power, Erdoğan repressed against those who do not support him and reward those who support him and the course of his party, the AKP (Yilmaz et al., 2020). For example, Erdoğan restricted freedom of education (Aydin and Avincan, 2021; Babacan, 2020), press (Akser, 2018; Karatas and Saka, 2017; Reporters without borders, 2018), and state-led religious infrastructure (Babacan, 2020; Çokgezen, 2022; Öztürk, 2016). However, as many people oppose the course of the government, Turkey is now considered one of the most polarized societies around the world (Somer, 2019; Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Yavuzylmaz, 2022) and political polarization, in turn, is a well-known contributing factor to

radicalization (McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2011; Porta and LaFree, 2012). Polarization shifts social norms to less openness and plurality, and consequentially, fundamentalism as well as related radical ideas become more and more acceptable to the majority (Wodak, 2015; Zick and Böckler, 2015).

Therefore, we suggest that such political measures influence the Turkish society beyond the individual support for the current government. We expect that especially those Muslims living in Turkey who hold more RF attitudes feel more privileged (Khosrokhavar, 2016), because of Erdoğan's spread of an ideology of Turkey's superiority (Cook, 2017; Yilmaz, 2021). This hypothesis goes against past research which suggests the opposite pattern, also in Turkey (Coreno, 2002; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2008, 2018). However, we argue that in today's Turkey deprivation, especially *perceived* deprivation, is *negatively* associated with religious fundamentalism (RF).

Specifically, in the present study we test whether deprivation is negatively associated with RF even when controlling for a range of other variables such as governmental support, CBs, and personality variables, using a nationally representative quota sample from Turkey. Further, we test whether the link between deprivation and RF is mediated by CBs. Finally, we replicate and extend the research on other predictors of RF. Together, our research provides an initial empirical test whether more

**Abbreviations:** RF, religious fundamentalism; CBs, conspiracy beliefs; CM, conspiracy mentality.

<sup>☆</sup> Contributions of authors: (i) conception and design: SD; (ii) data collection: SD; (iii) data analysis and interpretation: PH & SD; (iv) manuscript drafting and revising: SD & PH; (v) approval of final version for submission: PH & SD

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2023.100115>

Received 16 November 2022; Received in revised form 15 March 2023; Accepted 8 May 2023

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fundamentalist individuals feel more privileged when a government ignites RF in the general public.

#### *Religious fundamentalism, deprivation, and conspiracy beliefs*

RF is an exclusivist worldview, which claims superiority as well as universality, and aims to restore a past 'Golden Age' (Antoun, 2010; Marty, 1989; Pollack et al., forthcoming; Taylor and Horgan, 2001). Fundamentalists are considered socio-structurally deprived (e.g., low education, unemployed) or as perceiving themselves as deprived and are, therefore, alienated from the mainstream society (Coreno, 2002; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2008, 2018; Schiffauer, 1999). Being socio-structurally and/or perceived as deprived on one side but holding a fundamentalist worldview (e.g., belief to be exclusive and superior to others) on the other side can create cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) since such underprivileged life circumstances of the 'true believers' seem to disturb an alleged holy order which is characterized by deterministic thinking (Taylor and Horgan, 2001).

This dissonance can be solved by adding the belief that certain groups conspire against the true Muslims and thereby create such an underprivileged situation for them. Therefore, referring to conspiracy beliefs (CBs) externalizes life problems through blaming outgroups (Herriot, 2008; Swami and Furnham, 2014; Tezcan, 2020; Zeidan, 2001; for the wider radicalization literature see Snow and Byrd, 2007; Bruce, 2008). This fulfills central functions of CBs, such as restoring feelings of control when people are in anxious and powerless situations (Kofta and Sedek, 2005), providing simple explanations for complex issues, and raising ingroup cohesion (Bruce, 2008; Douglas et al., 2017; Goertzel, 1994; Pfahl-Traughber, 2002; Swami, 2012).

While the link between deprivation and CBs is well established (Douglas et al., 2017), the association between RF and CB in the context of socio-structural and perceived deprivation has not yet been rigorously tested and if it was, it was barely explained (Choueiri, 2010; Riesebrodt, 1993; Williamson and Demmrich, 2023). In general, there are only a few broad-scale studies that investigated the relation between RF and CB among Muslims. For example, Moaddel and Karabenick (2018) found across representative data from eight Muslim-majority countries, including Turkey, that believing in conspiracies against Muslims was robustly associated with higher RF. However, the inclusion of CB into the regression model did not change objective indicators of deprivation (SES, employment). Also, in a representative sample of Egyptian adolescents RF and a Muslim-specific CB were positively correlated (Beller, 2017). Further, a qualitative study found among 29 Islamists with a migration background in Austria that following an Islamist ideology is mainly the cause rather than the effect of interpreting various negative life events as an attack against Islam or Muslims from outside and that such a frame is often accompanied with socio-structural or perceived deprivation (Aslan et al., 2017). Together, this suggests that the link between deprivation and RF is mediated by CB.

#### *Other predictors of religious fundamentalism*

We include several other variables that might also be associated with RF for two reasons: First, they allow us to test whether the deprivation-RF link remains robust even after controlling for other variables. Second, including other variables allows us to replicate and extend their relations with RF in an understudied and non-Western country, Turkey.

Past research identified several personality variables that are associated with RF. However, hypotheses and empirical findings are mostly scattered (Bruce, 2008; Hartz and Everett, 1989; Unterrainer et al., 2016). From an extensive literature review, we identified four personality traits which were theoretically and/or empirically related to RF in previous studies: authoritarianism, narcissisms, schizotypy, and dependency (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 2005; Furnham and Grover, 2021; Ghorbani et al., 2019; Hughes and Machan, 2021).

First, (right-wing) authoritarianism was linked to RF (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 2005; Hathcoat and Barnes, 2010; Saroglou et al., 2020; for an overview see Williamson and Demmrich 2023). There are several underlying mechanisms that can explain this association such as lower cognitive flexibility (Zmigrod et al., 2020) or perceiving the world as a dangerous place by finding refuge in these authority-claiming worldviews that can, at the same time, be used to impose authority over others (Richey, 2017).

Second, narcissism is described as feeling grandiose and superior over others as well as being socially dominant and even exploitative (Raskin and Hall, 1979). Research that empirically investigates the often-proposed link to RF (Abella, 2018; Beier, 2006), is, however, inconclusive: while Unterrainer et al. (2016) found a weak correlation between both concepts among Austrian student, Ghorbani et al. (2019) did not among Iranian students. A narcissistic personality structure might predict RF as RF is aiming to enhance the own self-esteem by inflating the view of the own authoritativeness and by devaluing others (Herriot, 2008).

Third, schizotypy, a subclinical precursor of schizophrenia (Kerns, 2006), encompasses positive characteristics (paranoid ideation, magical thinking, delusions), cognitive disorganization, negative symptoms (e.g., anhedonia), and antisocial aspects (impulsiveness, nonconformity, poor self-control) (Mason et al., 2005). Schizotypy plays a crucial role within various forms of religiosity (Hanel et al., 2019), and we expect, in line with other researchers in the field (Schneider, 2002), a positive relation with RF. Schizotypy might predict RF as RF includes the tendency to magical thinking and delusions, is fired by paranoia and, therefore, often include antisocial tendencies in the form of distrust and suspiciousness against the mainstream society.

Finally, and most explorative in our study, is a proposed relation between RF and the subclinical dependent personality trait, which is "characterized by the tendency to rely on others for nurturance, support, and guidance" (McClintock and McCarrick, 2020, p. 1). While Helm et al. (2001) found a moderate correlation only among women, Ghorbani et al. (2019) uncovered a small relation between RF and the maladjusted form of exploitable dependency, but Furnham and Grover (2021) could not find any relation. However, the religious radicalization literature, in which RF plays a crucial role (Koopmans, 2021; McGregor et al., 2015; Moghaddam et al., 2013) found that individuals with a dependent personality might be prone to accept radical worldviews and narratives due to their high suggestibility and eagerness to please others (Lloyd and Kleinot, 2017; Miller, 2006).

In addition, earlier studies found that age, gender, ethnic identity, and living in rural areas are correlated with RF (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018) as well as with CBs in Turkey (Sayın and Bozkurt, 2021). We include them as control variables.

#### *The present research*

To summarize, the established positive link between deprivation and RF might be reversed in social contexts in which RF became mainstream. We suggest that Turkey is such a context as RF is widespread (Huber and Krech, 2009; Koopmans, 2021; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018; Pickel, 2019; Saroglou et al., 2020) as well as politically supported and even spread by the current government since many years (Koopmans, 2021; Şen, 2010). Similarly, CBs are widespread in Turkey (Bruder et al., 2013; Salali and Uysal, 2021), especially those CBs related to Muslim-victimhood (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2011; Tangün and Parlak, 2020; Yilmaz and Albayrak, 2021). The latter are also supported and spread by the current Turkish government (De Medeiros, 2018; Güler, 2016; Gürpınar, 2019).

Further, we expect to replicate the positive associations between authoritarianism, narcissisms, schizotypy, and exploitable dependency with RF. This is because we assumed that the Turkish context would have a unique impact on the deprivation-RF link but not on other asso-

ciations. Based on these findings as well as those discussed throughout the literature, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- We expect to find a *negative* association between deprivation and RF (Hypothesis 1)
- We expect this association from Hypothesis 1 to be robust even after controlling for CBs, personality, governmental support, and various sociodemographic variables (Hypothesis 2).
- Further, we test whether this association is mediated by CBs and conspiracy mentality, respectively (Hypothesis 3).
- Finally, we predict that authoritarianism, narcissisms, schizotypy, and exploitable dependency are all positively associated with RF (Hypothesis 4).<sup>2</sup>

## Method

### Participants

We recruited a quota sample of Muslims living in Turkey representative for age, gender (Tüik, 2020), and education-level (OECD, 2014) with the support of Qualtrics. Additionally, our sample mirrors representative numbers on ethnicities, urbanicity (Doğan, 2018), and voting preference (Metropoll, 2021) (see supplemental materials for more details on demographics). Participants completed an online questionnaire in early 2021; recruitment is based on an access panel and potential respondents from this panel were recruited via email, SMS or an app by Qualtrics and their partners in Turkey. Qualtrics used captcha, Geoblocking, and IP addresses to ensure that only real people living in Turkey could participate once. Filter question at the beginning of the questionnaire were religious affiliation and age. Only Muslim participants older than 18 years were allowed to complete the questionnaire. Participants who finished in less than half of the median time were automatically excluded. Additionally, 16 participants were manually excluded due to dubious response patterns (e.g., straight-liners).

The final sample consists of 736 participants (18–24 years: 14.9%, 25–34 years: 23.7%, 35–44 years: 22.7%, 45–54 years: 18.1%, 55–70 years: 20.54%, 4 missing; 50.3% female, 0.1% diverse). 47.0% indicated that they have no school education or were still in school or any other further education; 18.1% stated that their highest school degree is an elementary school or lower secondary school degree, and 33.8% reported an upper secondary school degree /A-level as highest educational qualification. 88.9% identified as Turkish, 14.5% as Kurdish, and 2.2% as another ethnic identity (multiple answers were possible). 73 lived in a village, 85 in a town, 204 in a city, and 374 in a metropolitan city. 35.8% supported one of the two parties forming the government (AKP and MHP) while the rest supported another or no party.

Sample size was determined by budget-constraints. A sensitivity analysis revealed that 736 participants would be sufficient to detect a small effect size of  $r = 0.12$  with a power of 0.95.

### Materials

RF was measured with a four-item scale (Pollack et al., forthcoming). Example items include “There is only one true religion” and “Only Islam is able to solve the problems of our time” which were answered on a four-point scale ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ; for more details on the scale and its use see supplementary material).

Socio-structural deprivation was measured first by highest educational qualification (based on the International Standard Classification of Education of UNESCO (1997), ranging from 0 = no degree [yet]; to 3 = upper secondary degree/A-level), and unemployment, which was formed out of ‘job seeking’ and ‘not employed for other reasons’ (occupational status: 1 = full-time, 2 = part-time employed, 3 = [university] student,

4 = in vocational training/apprenticeship or in retraining, 5 = job seeking, 6 = retiree, 7 = housewife/househusband, 8 = not employed for other reasons). Second, a more *subjective perception of deprivation* was measured by subjective stratification (“Imagine a ladder with seven steps, representing social status: Where would you place yourself?”, 1: at the bottom, 7: at the top; recoded), relative deprivation (“Compared to other people living in Turkey: Do you believe you receive the portion you deserve?”, 1: More than the just portion, 4: Much less), and discrimination (“Are you part of a group that is discriminated against in Turkey?”, 0: No, 1: Yes). By z-standardizing and averaging these three latter items, an overall score *subjective perception of deprivation* was formed ( $\alpha = 0.53$ ).<sup>3</sup>

*CBs and conspiracy mentality*: Belief in Muslim-specific conspiracies was measured with one item: “There are conspiracies against Muslims” (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018), which was answered on a four-point scale. Conspiracy mentality (CM) is – in contrast to a specific CB – defined as a “general susceptibility to explanations based on such [myths]” (Bruder et al., 2013, p. 1). It was measured with a 5-item scale in the Turkish translation from the same authors. Example items include “I think that many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about” and “I think that politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions”. Answers were given on an eleven-point Likert scale from 0% = *definitely not* to 100% = *definitely* ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

*Governmental support* was measured by coding governmental support with 1: supporters of the parties forming the government (AKP [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi] and MHP [Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi] = 1), and 0: all others.

*Authoritarianism* was measured with one item “One of the most important qualities someone should have is disciplined obedience to authority” on a 4-point-response scale (Pollack et al., 2016).

*Narcissism* was assessed with the corresponding subscale of the Dark Triad (Jonason and Webster, 2010) in its Turkish translation (Özsoy et al., 2017) on a 9-point response scale. Example items include “I tend to expect special favors from others” and “I tend to want others to admire me” ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

*Schizotypy* was measured using a yes/no-response format with the 22-item Schizotypal Personality Questionnaire-Brief (Raine and Benishay, 1995) in its Turkish translation (Aycicegi et al., 2005). Example items include “People sometimes find me aloof and distant” and “Are you sometimes sure that other people can tell what you are thinking?” ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ).

*Exploitable dependency* was measured on a five-point Likert scale with the 12-items of the corresponding subscale of the Interpersonal Dependency Scale (Pincus and Gurtman, 1995). Since we found no Turkish version, we translated the scale using independent forth and back translations until satisfactory concordance was achieved. Example items include “I am afraid of hurting other people’s feelings” and “I am very sensitive to others for signs of rejection”. As two items (items 10 and 12) were uncorrelated with the remaining 10, they were excluded, which also improved internal consistency from  $\alpha = 0.78$  (12-item scale) to 0.84 (10-item).

## Results

The bivariate correlations supported most of our hypotheses (Table 1). Although RF was negatively associated with education, it was – as expected – also negatively related to unemployment as well as to perceived deprivation (Hypothesis 1). In line with hypothesis 4, RF was

<sup>3</sup> Low internal consistencies are considered acceptable if the construct that is measured is broad. For example, Graham et al. (2011, p. 370) argued that “it is better to have dissimilar items that are moderately correlated but that each capture a different facet... than it is to have similar items that are highly correlated and capture only a small amount of the [dimensions] scope” (cf. Clifton, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> The data and R-code are available at [https://osf.io/prwue/?view\\_only=4e47b20cc8f3439d9c10ac81593713c9](https://osf.io/prwue/?view_only=4e47b20cc8f3439d9c10ac81593713c9)

**Table 1**  
Bivariate correlations between all variables of interest.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Religious fundamentalism	3.14	0.78														
2 Perceived Deprivation	0.00	0.72	-0.32***													
3 Education	2.34	1.36	-0.22***	.08*												
4 Unemployed	.09	0.29	.14**	.14**	.07*											
5 Conspiracy beliefs	2.99	0.99	.19**	.08*	.05	.05										
6 Conspiracy mentality	66.90	20.48	.12**	.12**	.03	.03	.24***									
7 Exploitable dependency	3.60	0.78	.23***	-.02	.01	-.05	.21***	.09*								
8 Schizotypy	0.49	0.23	.22***	-.03	.07*	-.04	.02	.01	.06							
9 Narcissism	5.05	2.22	.04	-.01	-.13***	.01	.19***	.18***	.25***	.06						
10 Authoritarianism	2.48	1.10	.37***	-.30***	-.19**	-.02	.09*	.11**	.04	.17**	.06					
11 Supporting government (0: N, 1: Y)	0.36	0.48	.29***	-.24***	.05	-.06	.16***	-.10**	.14**	-.08*	.05	.18**				
12 Age	40.38	14.60	.35***	-.30***	-.35***	-.10**	.16***	.03	.03	-.018***	.06	.35**	.13***			
13 Gender (1: Men, 2: Women)	1.50	0.50	-.04	-.12**	-.13***	-.07	-.17**	-.03	0	-.013	-.02	-.05	-.02	.14***		
14 Part of ethnic majority (0: No, 1: Yes)	0.84	0.36	-.15**	-.02	.17***	0	.02	.06	.07	.02	.08*	.07	.14**	-.012**	-.07	
15 Urbanicity	3.19	0.99	-.25***	.21***	.27***	-.01	.19***	.04	.03	-.02	.08*	-.022**	.04	-.029**	.01	.25***

Notes: \* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

positively associated with exploitable dependency and with authoritarianism, but neither with schizotypy nor narcissism. Finally, RF relates to higher CBs, governmental support, and age, as well as to lower ethnicity and urbanicity. No relation was found to gender.

To test Hypothesis 2 – the negative association between perceived deprivation and RF remains robust even after controlling for CBs, CM, personality, governmental support, and various sociodemographic variables – we ran a stepwise multiple regression. Model 1 only included perceived deprivation as predictor. Model 2 additionally included demographic variables, model 3 added additionally conspiracy mentality and conspiracy beliefs, and model 4 all variables listed in Table 1 as predictors. Perceived deprivation remained significant in all four models. (Table 2 and Fig. 1).

To test Hypothesis 3 – the negative association between perceived deprivation and RF is mediated by CBs and CM – we ran a mediation analysis with CBs and CM as mediators using the R-package psych (Revelle, 2022). However, we did not find evidence for a mediation (Fig. 2). To test whether our findings hold when we used a somewhat different approach, we ran two causal mediation analyses, one for each mediator using the R-package mediate with non-parametric bootstrapping (Tingley et al., 2014; see also Imai et al. 2010). When we included conspiracy against Muslims as a mediator, the average causal mediation effect was significant, ACME = 0.02,  $p = .046$ , as was the average direct effect, ADE = -0.37,  $p < .001$ , and the total effect,  $c = -0.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . When we included conspiracy mentality as a mediator, the average causal mediation effect was no longer significant, ACME = 0.00,  $p = .63$ , but the average direct effect was significant, ADE = -0.36,  $p < .001$ , as was the total effect,  $c = -0.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . While the ACME was significant for the first model, this effect disappears after controlling for multiple comparisons. Hence, we still conclude that neither CBs nor CM mediate the effect.

Exploratory analyses

As CBs have not mediated the deprivation-RF-link, we tested whether CBs function as a moderator. Indeed, when CBs are high, the link between deprivation and RF is still negative,  $B = -0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p = .002$ , but less so than when CBs are average,  $B = -0.37$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , or low,  $B = -0.60$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $p < .001$  (Fig. 3). Interestingly, when we replaced CBs with CM as a moderator, we found no significant interaction.

In a next step, we explored whether government support moderates the link between four predictors (authoritarianism, narcissism, schizotypy, exploitable dependency), the dependent variable religious fundamentalism, in a series of four moderated regression. Since this analysis is exploratory, we set our  $\alpha$ -threshold to  $0.05/4 = 0.0125$ . None of the four interactions was significant,  $ps > 0.028$ .

Finally, we tested for mean differences between those participants that score high on RF (i.e., > 3 on the 1–4 RF scale,  $n = 400$ ) and those who score lower ( $\leq 3$ ,  $n = 336$ ), following common practice in the literature (Pollack et al., forthcoming; see supplementary materials for details), forthcoming; see supplementary materials for details). The findings displayed in Table 3 replicate the bivariate correlations reported in Table 1.

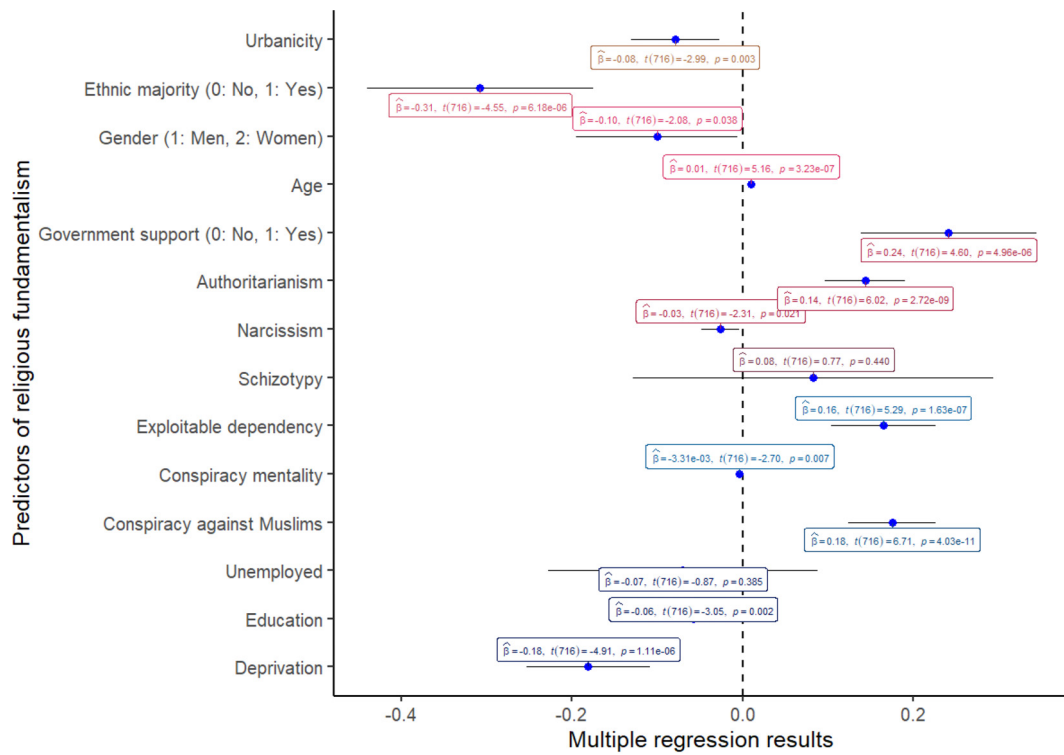
Discussion

RF is usually considered a counter-movement to modernity and positively correlated with deprivation (Coreno, 2002; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2008, 2018). However, as predicted, we found a negative link between perceived deprivation and RF in contemporary Turkey – which suggests that in this specific context, Muslims with an encompassing fundamentalist worldview feel more privileged. In line with our second hypothesis, this negative association between perceived deprivation and RF remained stable even after controlling for many variables, which are often associated with RF, as well as for governmental support.



**Table 2**  
Stepwise regression with religious fundamentalism as predictor.

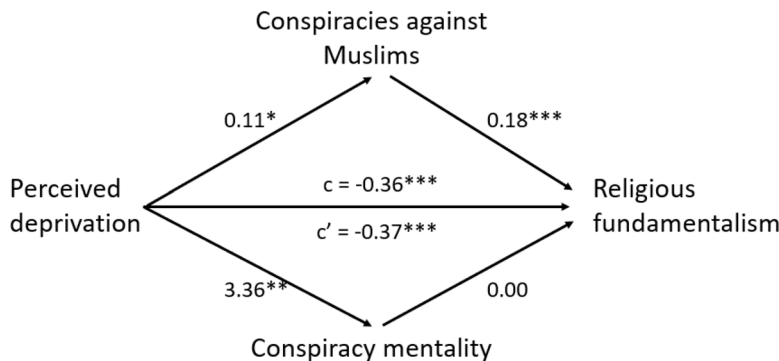
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p	B	SE	p
Intercept	3.14	0.03	<0.001	3.53	0.17	<0.001	2.97	0.19	<0.001	2.22	0.21	<0.001
Perceived Deprivation	-0.36	0.04	<0.001	-0.28	0.04	<0.001	-0.25	0.04	<0.001	-0.18	0.04	<0.001
Education				-0.06	0.02	.0034	-0.06	0.02	.0054	-0.06	0.02	.0028
Unemployed				-0.07	0.09	.4432	-0.09	0.09	.3020	-0.08	0.08	.3504
Age				0.01	0.00	<0.001	0.01	0.00	<0.001	0.01	0.00	<0.001
Gender (1: Men, 2: Women)				-0.20	0.05	<0.001	-0.13	0.05	.0112	-0.09	0.05	.0532
Part of ethnic majority (0: No, 1: Yes)				-0.24	0.07	.0014	-0.19	0.07	.0078	-0.31	0.07	<0.001
Urbanicity				-0.06	0.03	.0241	-0.10	0.03	<0.001	-0.08	0.03	.0036
Conspiracy beliefs							0.23	0.03	<0.001	0.17	0.03	<0.001
Conspiracy mentality							0.00	0.00	.0019	0.00	0.00	.0057
Exploitable dependency										0.20	0.04	<0.001
Schizotypy										0.07	0.11	.5134
Narcissism										-0.02	0.01	.0317
Authoritarianism										0.14	0.02	<0.001
Supporting government (0: No, 1: Yes)										0.24	0.05	<0.001
R <sup>2</sup>	.11		<0.001	.23		<0.001	.30		<0.001	.39		<0.001



AIC = 1388, BIC = 1462

**Fig. 1.** Predictors of religious fundamentalism in one multiple regression.

Notes. No multicollinearity was detected (VIFs < 2). Horizontal lines around each estimate represent 95%-CIs.



**Fig. 2.** Mediation model.

Note. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

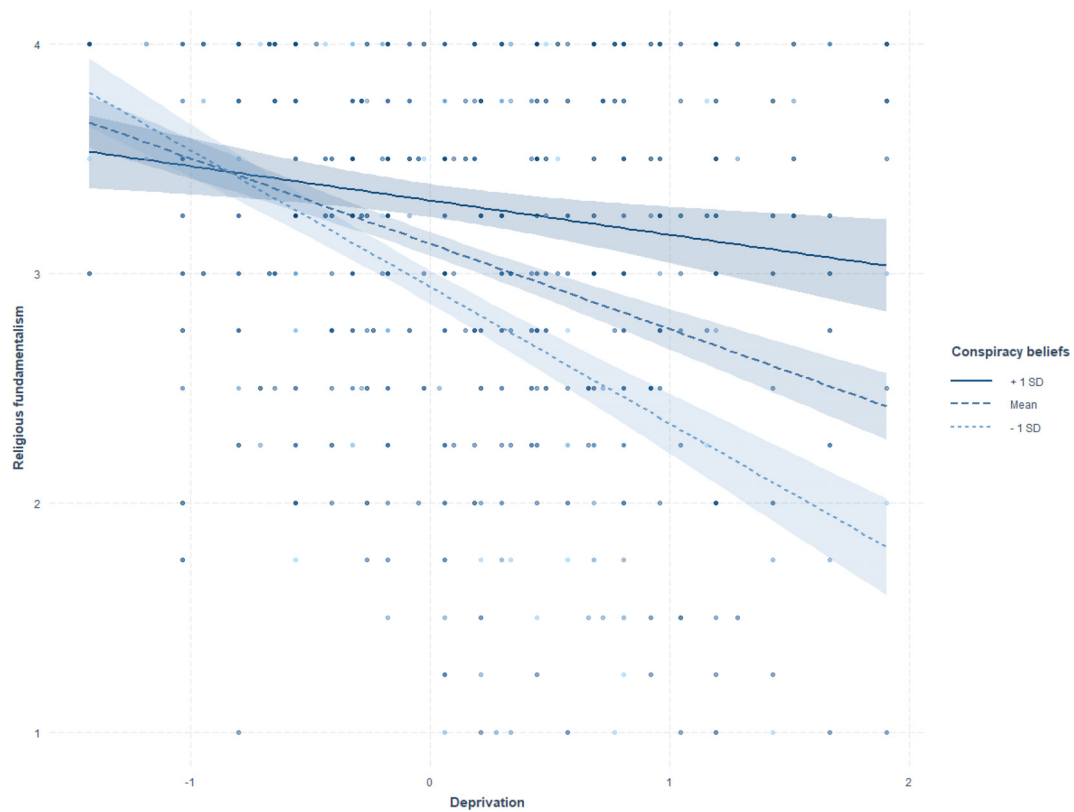


Fig. 3. CB as a moderator of the relationship between perceived deprivation and RF.

The stability of this negative link could suggest that the current political context in Turkey can turn such an established relation upside down. Nonetheless, future cross-country research is necessary on specific political variables such as freedom of press, education, and religion (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2008), as well as governments’ support of specific cultures of emotions (Tezcan, 2020) that might influence the direction of the deprivation-RF-association.

In line with the assumption that RF is spread by the Turkish government (Koopmans, 2021; Şen, 2010), governmental support was an independent positive predictor of RF. This result can extend a previously found relation between general religiosity on one hand and decreased perceived oppression as well as increased perceived fairness of the current political system since the AKP was elected in 2002 (Aytaç, 2022). This mechanism seems to be similar for people who hold an encompassing fundamentalist worldview as this is supported by the government

(Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018; Özpek and Yaşar, 2018). However, as we proposed, RF is not restricted to governmental support and the share of Muslims with an encompassing RF worldview far exceeds the share of supporters of the current government (see supplementary material). We believe that RF narratives are widely spread in Turkish society (Cook, 2017; Yilmaz, 2021) since the ruling party AKP controls basic channels of society, such as education, media, and religious infrastructure (Babacan, 2020; Öztürk, 2016).

Supporting previous research, Muslim-victimhood CBs are widespread in Turkey (Pew Research Center, 2011; Tangün and Parlak, 2020), positively related to RF, and a robust predictor of RF (Beller, 2017; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018). In contrast to earlier theories and empirical results (Aslan et al., 2017; Taylor and Horgan, 2001), CBs did not mediate the RF-deprivation-link (Hypothesis 3). Thus, RF and feeling privileged are congruent cognitions and do

Table 3  
Comparisons of religious fundamentalists with non-religious fundamentalists.

	Non-RF		RF		t	p	d	U3
	M	SD	M	SD				
Perceived deprivation	0.19	0.67	-0.16	0.72	6.92	<0.001	0.51	0.69
CBs	2.90	0.90	3.06	1.05	-2.20	.0284	-0.16	0.44
Conspiracy mentality	67.67	19.82	66.26	21.01	0.94	.3494	0.07	0.53
Narcissism	4.90	2.14	5.18	2.27	-1.73	.0837	-0.13	0.45
Authoritarianism	2.13	0.96	2.78	1.13	-8.47	<0.001	-0.62	0.27
Schizotypy	0.50	0.23	0.49	0.22	0.16	.8708	0.01	0.50
Exploitable dependency	3.40	0.82	3.76	0.71	-6.28	<0.001	-0.47	0.32
Government support	0.21	0.41	0.48	0.50	-8.09	<0.001	-0.59	0.28
Age	34.67	11.49	45.15	15.20	-10.61	<0.001	-0.77	0.22
Gender	1.51	0.50	1.50	0.50	0.20	.8406	0.01	0.51
urbanicity	3.42	0.79	3.01	1.10	5.86	<0.001	0.42	0.66
Ethnic majority	0.90	0.31	0.80	0.40	3.76	<0.001	0.27	0.61

Note. Cohen’s U3 is a more informative effect size than Cohen’s d. It tells us the percentage of non-RF who score higher than the average religious fundamentalist.

not seem to create dissonance which need to be solved by adding CBs.

Nevertheless, CBs moderated the RF-deprivation-link: It was strongest among those who score low on CBs. Individuals who score high on Muslim-specific CB show the weakest – but still negative – correlation between RF and perceived deprivation. This presumably refers to the positive link between CBs and RF which confirms previous studies (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018). However, feeling privileged goes hand in hand with RF almost independent of CBs. Future studies could focus on Muslim-specific CBs and RF in relation to violent radicalization (Beller, 2017), in which perceived deprivation seems to play a key role, too (Kunst and Obaidi, 2020).

Regarding conspiracy mentality, no effects were found. Similar to Swami (2012) among Malay Muslims, we also found only a small correlation between conspiracy mentality and Muslim-specific CBs, with CBs – but not conspiracy mentality – became a significant predictor of outcomes of interest, in our case RF. Similar to Umam et al. (2017) study among Indonesian Muslims, RF correlated only with specific CBs in our study. It should be noted that three of the five items of the CM scale (Bruder et al., 2013) ask for CBs in relation to politics and the government. This could explain why governmental support is positively associated with CBs but negatively with conspiracy mentality. In summary, conspiracy mentality seems not to be a valid indicator in our context, in which governmental support plays an important role in the framework of RF, perceived deprivation, and CBs (De Medeiros, 2018; Gürpınar, 2019).

Further, in line with Hypothesis 4, we found that individuals with a dependent personality, and thus with a high suggestibility and eagerness to please others, might more easily accept a fundamentalist worldview and its narratives (Furnham and Grover, 2021; Ghorbani et al., 2019; Helm et al., 2001; Lloyd and Kleinot, 2017; Miller, 2006). This could be especially pronounced in a context in which such a worldview is very widespread and in which Islamism is a strong part of the political agenda (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018; Özpek and Yaşar, 2018). Additionally, our study replicated the finding that individuals with an authoritarian personality try to find refuge in a fundamentalist, that is in an authority-claiming worldview (Altemeyer and Hunsberger, 2005; Hathcoat and Barnes, 2010; Richey, 2017; Saroglou et al., 2020). Exploitable dependency and authoritarianism correlate positively in our study and, thus, our one-item measurement of authoritarianism might reflect authoritarian submissiveness. To gain a more differentiated understanding of the relation between these two personality variables and RF, future studies could use a more comprehensive authoritarianism measure, which distinguishes between submissiveness and authoritarian aggression and could result in two clusters: those who impose authority over others and those who tend to get exploited by them.

Contrary to our fourth hypothesis, no relation was found between RF and schizotypy, and therefore, findings related to religiosity, might be not extended to RF (Hanel et al., 2019). Furthermore, we found no association between RF and narcissism (Ghorbani et al., 2019; Unterrainer et al., 2016). Future studies might profit from including *collective* narcissism as the “belief in-group’s greatness associated with a conviction that others do not appreciate the in-group enough” (Cichocka et al., 2016, p. 159) in relation to RF and CBs. In general, there are undoubtedly other personality traits which might be associated with RF, such as the Big Five, empathy, or borderline personality (for an overview see Williamson and Demmrich, 2023) and further clarification of these relations might be of interest.

One limitation of our study is the use of single-item measures for authoritarianism and conspiracy beliefs. There is a general debate in the literature on whether the use of single-item measures is a threat to the validity of a study (Bakker and Leikes, 2018). In our reading, most articles which compared single-to multi-item versions of the same scale seem to be overall positive towards the use of the former (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007; Spörrle and Bekk, 2014). More importantly however, an inspection of the correlations of the single-item measures with

other variables (Table 1) shows that they are in line with the theoretical expectations and the literature. For example, while Ruffman et al. (2016) found in a sample of over 2600 New Zealanders a correlation between age and authoritarianism (measured with a 6-item version of the scale) of 0.32, we found a correlation of 0.35.

Finally, a general limitation of our study is that we used quota sampling rather than probability sampling, which is overall considered to be the somewhat better (Cumming, 1990; Yang and Banamah, 2014). Nevertheless, our sample was nationally representative in terms of age, gender, education-level ethnicities, and urbanicity, thus being more representative than most other psychological studies which are typically based on student and convenient samples (Arnett, 2008).

## Summary

Together, RF constitutes a very widespread worldview in contemporary Turkey (Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018; Pickel, 2019; Saroglou et al., 2020). Our results supplement the decline of general religiosity in Turkey (Çokgezen, 2022). Such a process of secularization is not unilinear, but processes of religious self-assertion, like RF, are also a result of modernization and go alongside or against secularization (Riesebrodt, 2005). A fundamentalist worldview is not restricted to individuals who support the current government, which could suggest that with the control of education, press, and religious infrastructure (Aydin and Avincan, 2021; Çokgezen, 2022), the Turkish government was presumably able to spread RF beyond their supporters (Bashirov and Lancaster, 2018; Özpek and Yaşar, 2018). With the same mechanisms (Yardımcı-Geyikçi and Yavuzylmaz, 2022), Erdoğan polarizes the Turkish society by repressing against those who did not support him and rewarding those who support him (Yilmaz et al., 2020). This seems to be reflected in our results as although RF relates to lower education levels, it also relates to being employed and feeling privileged at the same time.

In conclusion, in a social context in which RF and Muslim-specific CBs are widely spread and even supported by the government, individuals who hold an encompassing fundamentalist worldview also feel more privileged. Additionally, individuals who score higher on RF, hold more CBs, support the regime, are submissive to authorities, and tend to become exploited by them are then predisposed to accept RF, especially those who tend to have a low education, live in villages or towns, belong to an ethnic minority, and to be male. Since RF is more and more discussed as a starting point of further radicalization (Koopmans, 2021; McGregor et al., 2015), the presented results should be also of interest when it comes to domestic and international security policy. At the end, there is no simple psychological solution to such strong fundamentalist claims of exclusivity, superiority, and universality that are paired with feelings of being privileged in the own country but with simultaneous CBs of Muslim-victimhood. One way out might be to restructure the society (Herriot, 2008; Moaddel and Karabenick, 2018) with new governmental structures, which provide less fundamental narratives via the basic channels of society.

## Funding

This project was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy – EXC 2060 „Religion and Politics. Dynamics of Tradition and Innovation“ – 390,726,036.

## Ethics & informed consent statement

Participants provided informed consent prior to participating in our research. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were in accordance with the 1975 Helsinki Declaration and the ethics guidelines from the institution of the lead author.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

Data is available on osf. See manuscript for link.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Havagül Akçe for supporting the forth- and backtranslation process as well as Abdulkemir Şenel for the technical support of the online questionnaire.

## Supplementary materials

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.cresp.2023.100115.

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