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Whether a religious group membership is shared and salient influences perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention toward refugees, but not charitable donation

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Abstract

This research investigates the ways in which (un)shared religious group memberships contribute to individual helping responses through perceived similarity in the context of a refugee emergency. Across three studies ($N = 762$), we examined religious subgroups of British people's helping responses to religious subgroups of Syrian refugees, in quasi-experimental and experimental designs. Overall findings suggest that sharing a religious group membership with refugee targets increases perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention, but not charitable donation—regardless of shared group membership being subtle or salient. However, when refugee targets' religious identity is that of a salient unshared group membership, not sharing a religious group membership reduces perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention, among those who are religious—with again charitable donation remaining unchanged. These results provide critical insights into developing more effective and unique strategies to promote and mobilize support for refugees among different groups of potential helpers.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, global refugee emergencies have reached unprecedented proportions, with a significant portion of the refugee population deriving from Muslim countries (Pew Research Centre, 2017; UNHCR, 2023). As the lives and well-being of refugees often depend on the support they receive from others, this study focuses on helping refugees far away in the context of the United Kingdom (UK). Refugees, as well as those willing to extend a helping hand, may exhibit a wide array of characteristics and backgrounds. Notably, refugees from Muslim backgrounds have usually been at the centre of public and political discourse (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016; Verkuyten, 2013). In various Western countries, there has been a recurring tendency to perceive Muslims as different from oneself, often due to their religious beliefs, resulting in persistent prejudices against them (e.g., Choma et al., 2012; Kunst et al., 2016; Uenal, 2016). Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as they can influence the extent and nature of assistance extended to predominantly Muslim refugee populations (see Levine & Crowther, 2008; Levine & Thompson, 2004).

The UK has received a relatively smaller number of refugees, in contrast to other countries, such as Turkey, Iran, and Germany where millions of refugees are hosted (UNHCR, 2023). As of the last data update in 2021, the UK's refugee population stands at approximately 300,000, with the exact number subject to change (UNHCR, 2022). Among these refugees, there exist people from a diverse range of backgrounds, with approximately 3% being Syrian—a predominantly Muslim group (UNHCR, 2022). While the UK government has

promised a commitment to assisting Syrian refugees (see The Guardian, 2015), public opinion on helping them may not necessarily align with this governmental decision and may hold different attitudes towards Syrians as a predominantly Muslim group. As such, the prevalence of prejudice against Muslims and other minority groups in the UK has been a topic of concern in recent years (see Hankir et al., 2019; Najib & Hopkins, 2020; Zempi, 2020). This study is designed to explore how people in this context may perceive Muslims as similar to themselves and support the predominantly Muslim refugee populations from far away. Despite the smaller scale of Syrian refugee reception, the UK's multicultural society and its complex intergroup dynamics warrant an in-depth examination of the interplay between religious group memberships and helping refugees. Our study, focusing on the case of Syrian refugees, aims to shed light on this multifaceted relationship.

The questions that emerge as critical in this context are as follows: How does the religious group membership of refugees relate to the support they receive from the members of other religious groups? What role does the salience of religious group memberships play in shaping helping responses? How do individuals prefer to help refugees? This research endeavors to address these questions by examining the helping responses of British citizens to Syrian refugees. Our focus is on three distinct forms of assistance: political support, which entails political attitudes towards one's own country providing help for refugees; helping intention, which encompasses willingness to assist; and charitable donation, representing tangible acts of support. Individuals may prefer different methods of offering aid, such as expressing support for government initiatives to accept more refugees or making charitable contributions. Furthermore, some individuals may desire to help but may be uncertain about how to effectively support refugees. Analyzing these diverse forms of help, therefore, provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex responses to a refugee emergency and allows for differentiation between attitudes, intentions, and concrete acts of support. By examining these dimensions, we hope to shed light on the multi-faceted relationship between refugees' religious group memberships and British citizens' helping responses in various forms. As such, this research is positioned within the broader context of addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with refugee integration and support in a diverse society.

While examining helping responses to refugees, we took helpers' national and religious identities into account as they have been intensely evoked in public and political discourse about migration in recent years (see McAndrew, 2020; Smith & Woodhead, 2018). Per definition, refugees are part of a different national group and often from a religious group that is different in the eyes of potential helpers. Hence, how much people identify with their national and religious groups can play a critical role in shaping individuals' desires or decisions to support refugees or overlook their situation. National identities are typically linked with exclusionist responses to newcomers (Hasbún López et al., 2019; Pehrson et al., 2009; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015), which could lead to reduced levels of willingness to help refugees. Yet, they can also trigger intergroup helping when their content and norms align with helping others (Reicher et al., 2006; Verkuyten et al., 2022)—for example, when a prime minister emphasizes how very typical of their nation to help others and encourage citizens to help refugees. Religious identities, on the other hand, can be drivers of help due to their unique content encouraging people to support one another, regardless of sharing a religious group membership or not (Héliot et al., 2020; White et al., 2021). However, they can also harm intergroup helping due to religious prejudice and hate, with rising levels of Islamophobia causing opposition to accepting Muslim refugees into one's own country (see Perocco, 2018; Poynting & Mason, 2007).

Group memberships, such as through nationality and religion, are not only important because their existence may influence intergroup helping but also vital because they may elicit a sense of similarity (Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008), which would then increase helping especially when those who can help and those who need help share a group membership (James & Zagefka, 2017). Therefore, while investigating the role of identifications in intergroup helping, we also control for the mediating role of perceived similarity in these relationships. We are specifically interested in people's perceptions of similarity, rather than the actual similarity between potential helpers and refugees. Similarity implies the degree to which individuals share common characteristics, values, or affiliations with a target group or person, as such, it refers to the extent to which individuals share attributes, backgrounds, or values with refugees. Perceived similarity is, on the other hand, the subjective judgment of similarity made by individuals themselves and it reflects how individuals assess the degree of commonality they have with a specific target group, like refugees. So, perceived similarity may not necessarily reflect actual shared characteristics but rather one's perception of shared attributes or affiliations. For example, a group of nonrefugee people may be similar to a group of refugees based on a shared religious group membership, even if other aspects like national, gender, or ethnic group memberships are different; however, they may not necessarily perceive themselves as similar to the refugee group because of a higher focus on unshared characteristics with them. Contrarily, sharing a group membership (e.g., based on religion) may also be useful to overcome the negative associations of not sharing other group memberships (e.g., based on nationality, gender, or ethnicity) through an increased perception of similarity in the shared dimension. Thus, this research seeks to shed light on the ways in which perceived similarity strengthened or weakened by unshared religious group memberships (and potentially by national and religious identifications) predict helping responses to refugees.

2 | THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Muslim refugee populations and their acceptance by Western countries have been an increasingly important area of interest in social and political psychology due to their high relevance to

contemporary societal events. Although religious group memberships and their effects on helping decisions have been at the forefront of debates on refugee emergencies, not a lot of studies on intergroup helping placed religious group memberships at the core of research. The present research, therefore, centers around the religious identities of potential helpers and refugee targets and investigates (1) whether and how (not) sharing a religious group membership influences helping responses to refugees, (2) whether and how national and religious identifications play a role in this, (3) whether perceived similarity is a relevant factor in shaping helping responses to refugees, and perhaps most importantly, (4) in what ways, individuals prefer to help refugees with whom they do not share a religious group membership.

The investigation of these four critical dimensions within the context of intergroup helping responses to refugees carries significant importance. First, the influence of sharing or not sharing a religious group membership on helping responses to refugees is a fundamental aspect of our study. Refugees often face challenges associated with their religious identity, and understanding how this variable impacts the willingness of individuals to provide assistance is essential. This research examines the role of religious commonality or dissimilarity in shaping helping responses, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of intergroup dynamics in times of emergencies. Second, the interplay between national and religious identifications in refugee support is a crucial aspect of this study. In a multicultural society like the UK, where individuals may hold multiple identities, it is vital to explore how these identities (and group memberships) influence attitudes and behaviors toward refugees. This investigation delves into whether national and religious identifications act as drivers of intergroup helping or as barriers and provides insights into the complex dynamics of group memberships in the context of refugee assistance. The examination of perceived similarity as a relevant factor in shaping helping responses to refugees is also a central theme in our research. Perceived similarity plays a pivotal role in intergroup relations and can either facilitate or hinder assistance efforts. This study aims to elucidate the subjective judgment of similarity individuals make when considering refugees, shedding light on the role of perceived commonality in guiding attitudes and actions. Lastly, understanding the diverse ways in which individuals prefer to help refugees from different religious backgrounds is of paramount importance. People may exhibit varying preferences in providing support, whether through expressing political support, demonstrating willingness to assist, or making tangible charitable donations. Investigating these preferences offers a nuanced view of the multifaceted nature of intergroup helping and helps distinguish between attitudes, intentions, and concrete acts of assistance. Overall, this research's exploration of these dimensions is critical in enhancing our comprehension of the complex interplay between religious group memberships, perceived similarity, and preferences in providing aid to refugees in multicultural societies. Figure 1 shows a conceptual overview of the paths examined in this research. Across three studies, we examine British participants' responses towards (typically Muslim) Syrian refugees with data collected between June 2017 and June 2018. We reported all measures and exclusions in this research. Analyses were conducted in R version 3.6.3 (R Core Team, 2021).[1] Materials, data, and analysis codes necessary to replicate three studies can be reached through the Open Science Framework (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SBJAT).

3 | STUDY 1

In this study, we compare the responses of non-Muslim British citizens (who share neither a national nor a religious group membership with Syrian refugees) and Muslim British citizens (who do share a religious group membership but not a national group membership with Syrian refugees) to (typically Muslim) Syrian refugees.[2] This study aims to set the stage for further analysis. First, we check whether a shared/unshared religious group membership

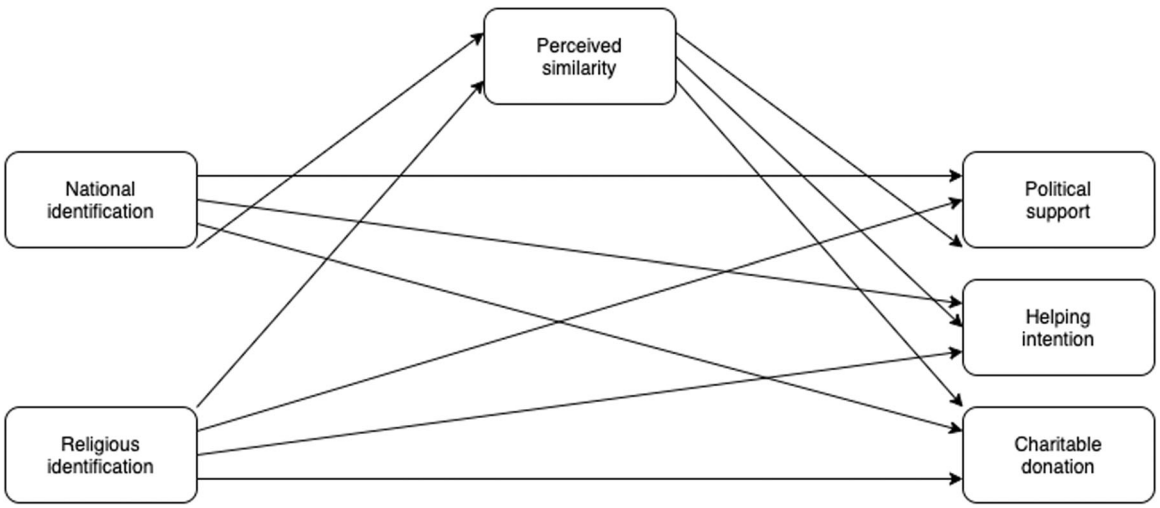

FIGURE 1 A conceptual overview of the paths tested.

(even when it is not salient) makes a difference in perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention in the context of helping refugees. Then, we explore whether national and religious identifications and perceived similarity reinforce political support and helping intention by checking for the mediating role of perceived similarity in the paths from national and religious identifications to political support and helping intention.

4 | METHODS

4.1 | Participants

We initially recruited 240 participants online through convenience and snowball sampling (i.e., sharing the study link via personal contacts and on social media), from two different groups: Non-Muslim British citizens and Muslim British citizens. Twelve participants were then removed because they did not meet the demographic inclusion criteria of their respective groups for nationality or religion ($N_{\text{Non-Muslim British}} = 11$, $N_{\text{Muslim British}} = 1$). The remaining sample comprised 228 participants, with 112 non-Muslim British participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 35.74$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.23$; $N_{\text{female}} = 79$, $N_{\text{male}} = 33$) and 116 Muslim British participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 26.90$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 6.31$; $N_{\text{female}} = 71$, $N_{\text{male}} = 45$). Within the non-Muslim British group, there were 77 Christian, 1 Jewish, 7 Agnostic individuals, together with 1 individual from other religious backgrounds and 26 individuals with no religious affiliation. While we did not calculate a priori power, we collected at least 100 participants per condition without stopping. Sensitivity analyses for a multivariate analysis of variance suggest that this sample size should be able to detect effects of at least $\eta^2 = .029$ at conventional α levels of .05 and power of .80.

4.2 | Measures and procedure

We employed a quasi-experimental design, in which participants from two different groups answered the same questionnaire with no manipulation. They responded to all measures on a 7-point Likert scale (1: *strongly disagree*, 7: *strongly agree*) unless noted otherwise. First, one item created by Doosje et al. (1995) was used to assess how much participants identify with their nation (*national identification*; e.g., "I see myself as a member of British people" and religious group (*religious identification*; i.e., "I see myself as a member of my religious group"). An item created by Albayrak-Aydemir and Gleibs (2021) measured the extent to which participants see Syrian refugees as similar to themselves (*perceived similarity*; "Syrian refugees are people like me"). We intentionally used one-item measures to assess perceived similarity, national identification, and religious identification because one-item measures for social identification are as reliable and valid as multiple-item measures (Postmes et al., 2013) and we wanted to keep the survey as short as possible while using convenience sampling. Finally, we employed two different measures from Albayrak-Aydemir and Gleibs (2021) to assess helping responses. *Political support* was examined with four items that measured the extent to which participants support the British government's policies that aim to support Syrian refugees (e.g., "The British government should grant humanitarian protection to Syrian refugees through normal asylum procedures"; 1: *strongly oppose*, 7: *strongly support*; $\alpha_{\text{Non-Muslim British}} = 0.83$ & $\alpha_{\text{Muslim British}} = 0.91$). *Helping intention* was examined with three items that measured the extent to which participants want to help Syrian refugees in different places (i.e., "I would like to help Syrian refugees in the United Kingdom/in Turkey/worldwide"; $\alpha_{\text{Non-Muslim British}} = 0.94$ & $\alpha_{\text{Muslim British}} = 0.95$). We intentionally added an item about helping refugees in Turkey because we sought to explore the extent to which individuals are willing to extend their support to refugees who are not within their immediate vicinity. For this, we specifically selected Turkey as it is the country that hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2023).

5 | RESULTS

We first ran a multivariate analysis of variance with the participant groups (Non-Muslim British and Muslim British) as the independent variable and national identification, religious identification, perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention as the dependent variables. National and religious identifications were added in this analysis to check whether the samples were randomized as they measured before participants were asked about refugees. Means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals by participant groups were presented in Table 1 ($F(5222) = 28.07$, *Wilks's* $\Lambda = .61$, $p < .001$). The results showed that non-Muslim British participants reported significantly higher levels of national identification than Muslim British participants ($F(1226) = 12.65$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, $p < .001$) while Muslim British participants significantly outscored non-Muslim British participants based on religious identification ($F(1226) = 91.34$, $\eta_p^2 = .29$, $p < .001$), perceived similarity ($F(1226) = 9.44$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, $p = .002$), political support ($F(1226) = 12.43$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, $p = .001$), and helping intention ($F(1226) = 17.99$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, $p < .001$). Then, we ran a multigroup SEM to see how the paths work across the two participant groups (Non-Muslim British and Muslim British). The model provided a good fit (χ^2 (40) = 58.62, $p = .029$; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.06; SRMR = 0.03) and the standardized factor loadings from the fully saturated model are presented in Table 2. In the non-Muslim British group, religious identification negatively predicted perceived similarity, which then positively predicted both political support and helping intention. In the Muslim British group, perceived similarity positively predicted helping intention, only. Moreover, to examine whether political support and helping intention would constitute one factor rather than two, their items were grouped as if predicted by one latent variable, which had a significantly worse fit to the data than the original model ($\chi^2(8) = 193.69$, $p < .001$). In addition, to examine whether national and religious identifications constitute one factor rather than two, these two items were grouped as if predicted by one latent variable.

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals by participant groups in Study 1, Study 2a, and Study 2b.

	M (SD)	95% CI [LL, UL]	*M (SD)*	95% CI [LL, UL]	*M (SD)*	95% CI [LL, UL]
Study 1	Non-Muslim British in the control-target condition		Muslim British in the control-target condition			
National identification	6.22^{H} (1.41)	5.96, 6.47	5.47^{L} (1.78)	5.14, 5.79		
Religious identification	3.80^{L} (2.18)	3.40, 4.21	6.18^{H} (1.53)	5.90 (6.46)		
Perceived similarity	5.57^{L} (1.72)	5.25, 5.89	6.20^{H} (1.35)	5.95, 6.45		
Political support	5.45^{L} (1.31)	5.21, 5.70	6.05^{H} (1.24)	5.82, 6.28		
Helping intention	4.86^{L} (1.65)	4.55, 5.17	5.76^{H} (1.55)	5.47, 6.04		
Study 2a	Christian British in the control-target condition		Christian British in the Christian-target condition		Christian British in the Muslim-target condition	
National identification	5.92 (1.14)	5.66, 6.17	6.07 (0.83)	5.88, 6.26	6.05 (1.15)	5.78, 6.32
Religious identification	4.27 (1.57)	3.92, 4.62	4.48 (1.45)	4.14, 4.82	4.34 (1.52)	3.99, 4.70
Perceived similarity	4.87 (1.58)	4.52, 5.22	5.14^{H} (1.39)	4.81, 5.45	4.31^{L} (1.84)	3.89, 4.74
Political support	5.23 (1.22)	4.95, 5.50	5.56^{H} (0.88)	5.36, 5.77	5.09^{L} (1.21)	4.81, 5.37
Helping intention	4.59 (1.40)	4.28, 4.90	5.10^{H} (1.01)	4.87, 5.34	4.31^{L} (1.65)	3.93, 4.69
Charitable donation	5.35 (4.12)	4.43, 6.27	4.00 (3.34)	3.23, 4.77	4.41 (3.76)	3.53, 5.28
Study 2b	Nonreligious British in the control-target condition		Nonreligious British in the Christian-target condition		Nonreligious British in the Muslim-target condition	
National identification	5.47 (1.15)	5.25, 5.69	5.64 (1.12)	5.42, 5.86	5.46 (1.36)	5.19, 5.72
Religious identification	2.67 (1.40)	2.40, 2.94	2.76 (1.51)	2.46, 3.06	2.87 (1.36)	2.60, 3.14
Perceived similarity	4.81 (1.57)	4.51, 5.12	4.55 (1.66)	4.21, 4.88	4.86 (1.57)	4.56, 5.17
Political support	5.46 (1.32)	5.20, 5.71	5.13 (1.37)	4.86, 5.40	5.45 (1.25)	5.21, 5.70
Helping intention	4.75 (1.39)	4.48, 5.02	4.47 (1.64)	4.14, 4.79	4.97 (1.52)	4.68, 5.27
Charitable donation	5.46 (4.02)	4.68, 6.24	4.56 (3.67)	3.82, 5.29	5.80 (3.92)	5.03, 6.56

Note: ^{H} significantly higher than ^{L} for the respective variable. ^{L} significantly lower than ^{H} for the respective variable.

This model also had a significantly worse fit to the data than the original model ($\chi^2(10) = 194.24$, $p < .001$). These results were consistent with our model specification.

6 | DISCUSSION

This study aimed to prepare the ground for investigating the role of unshared religious group membership in helping refugees by exploring the responses of non-Muslim and Muslim British citizens to Syrian refugees and analyzing the paths from national and religious identifications as well as perceived similarity to political support and helping intention. First, the results of this study demonstrated several significant differences between these two participant groups, providing valuable insights for setting the stage for further exploration. Non-Muslim British participants reported higher levels of national identification, while Muslim British participants had significantly higher levels of religious identification. Compared to non-Muslim British participants, however, Muslim British participants exhibited higher perceived similarity with Syrian refugees, higher levels of political support for British government policies aimed at assisting Syrian refugees, and a stronger intention to help Syrian refugees in various locations, including within the United Kingdom, Turkey, and worldwide. What is interesting about these findings is that they showed helping responses appearing even when the shared identity of the targets was not salient. The findings regarding political support are particularly relevant in the context of government policies and public opinion as they underscore the importance of examining how group memberships may shape political support for refugee-related policies, which has direct implications for policy-making and societal cohesion. Moreover, understanding the factors that influence individuals' willingness to help refugees in different locations (both near and far away) is critical for humanitarian organizations and policymakers as our findings indicate a significant role of perceived similarity in determining helping intention. Furthermore, these findings add depth to the understanding of how complex identities, such as national and religious identities, may interact with perceived similarity and helping responses to refugees

TABLE 2 Mediation analysis results in Study 1, Study 2a, and Study 2b.

Model	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Study 1	Non-Muslim British in the control-target condition		Muslim British in the control-target condition			
Outcome: Political support	R^2 = .18		R^2 = .07			
National identification	−0.15	0.09	0.00	0.10		
Religious identification	0.03	0.06	0.14	0.12		
Perceived similarity	0.30***	0.07	0.14	0.12		
Outcome: Helping intention	R^2 = .22		R^2 = .27			
National identification	−0.13	0.11	0.03	0.09		
Religious identification	−0.08	0.07	0.18	0.13		
Perceived similarity	0.38***	0.10	0.51***	0.10		
Outcome: Perceived similarity	R^2 = .06		R^2 = .08			
National identification	−0.05	0.11	−0.01	0.09		
Religious identification	−0.17*	0.07	0.25	0.13		
Covariances						
National identification and religious identification	1.13***	0.26	0.14	0.27		
Political support and helping intention	1.21***	0.20	0.94***	0.27		
Study 2a	Christian British in the control-target condition		Christian British in the Christian-target condition		Christian British in the Muslim-target condition	
Outcome: Political support	R^2 = .21		R^2 = .25		R^2 = .22	
National identification	−0.05	0.11	−0.03	0.11	0.18	0.10
Religious identification	−0.06	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.00	0.09
Perceived similarity	0.34**	0.10	0.28**	0.10	0.32***	0.08
Outcome: Helping intention	R^2 = .33		R^2 = .31		R^2 = .40	
National identification	−0.03	0.14	−0.05	0.12	0.18	0.13
Religious identification	−0.12	0.07	0.15*	0.06	−0.16	0.12
Perceived similarity	0.48***	0.12	0.34***	0.08	0.58***	0.11
Outcome: Charitable donation	R^2 = .24		R^2 = .03		R^2 = .03	
National identification	−1.22***	0.30	−0.40	0.51	0.20	0.31
Religious identification	−0.01	0.30	0.20	0.28	−0.07	0.27
Perceived similarity	0.81***	0.20	0.23	0.21	0.38	0.24
Outcome: Perceived similarity	R^2 = .03		R^2 = .05		R^2 = .07	
National identification	−0.19	0.22	−0.15	0.21	−0.43**	0.15
Religious identification	−0.08	0.09	0.19	0.11	0.08	0.14
Covariances						
National identification and religious identification	0.33	0.24	0.03	0.15	0.22	0.22
Political support and helping intention	0.74**	0.24	0.32***	0.08	1.01***	0.24
Political support and charitable donation	1.20**	0.39	0.53	0.30	1.46***	0.41
Helping intention and charitable donation	0.79*	0.40	0.67*	0.32	1.83***	0.49

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Model	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
Study 2b	Nonreligious British in the control-target condition		Nonreligious British in the Christian-target condition		Nonreligious British in the Muslim-target condition	
Outcome: Political support	R^2 = .35		R^2 = .22		R^2 = .34	
National identification	0.07	0.11	−0.31**	0.11	−0.18*	0.09
Religious identification	−0.05	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.08
Perceived similarity	0.50***	0.08	0.29**	0.10	0.41***	0.07
Outcome: Helping intention	R^2 = .35		R^2 = .22		R^2 = .27	
National identification	−0.08	0.09	−0.23	0.14	−0.22*	0.11
Religious identification	−0.02	0.09	0.10	0.09	−0.08	0.11
Perceived similarity	0.51***	0.08	0.39***	0.11	0.42***	0.09
Outcome: Charitable donation	R^2 = .17		R^2 = .15		R^2 = .06	
National identification	−0.41	0.31	−0.34	0.36	−0.42	0.31
Religious identification	0.34	0.25	0.22	0.23	0.14	0.28
Perceived similarity	0.95***	0.19	0.75***	0.20	0.42	0.22
Outcome: Perceived similarity	R^2 = .02		R^2 = .04		R^2 = .05	
National identification	−0.16	0.18	−0.15	0.14	−0.25*	0.12
Religious identification	−0.07	0.13	0.19	0.11	0.07	0.12
Covariances						
National identification and religious identification	0.22	0.17	0.11	0.18	0.26	0.17
Political support and helping intention	0.80***	0.19	1.22***	0.26	0.94***	0.18
Political support and charitable donation	0.96*	0.37	1.45***	0.38	1.64***	0.35
Helping intention and charitable donation	1.30**	0.38	1.47**	0.54	1.40**	0.46

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

especially when there is no shared group membership and highlight the need for nuanced approaches to address refugee-related issues within diverse societies.

We also examined the pathways through which national and religious identifications, perceived similarity, and supporting Syrian refugees are interconnected. According to these, in the non-Muslim British group, religious identification negatively predicted perceived similarity, which then positively predicted both political support and helping intention while in the Muslim British group, perceived similarity positively predicted helping intention. This indicates that the shared religious group membership itself is the main driver for political support and possibly for, helping intention (rather than national identification, religious identification, and perceived similarity as the reinforcers of these helping responses). In the case of an unshared religious group membership, however, religious identification and perceived similarity were key drivers for political support and helping intention, with perceived similarity mediating the paths from religious identification to political support and helping intention. Altogether, these findings establish the importance of religious-group membership in people's perceptions of similarity and helping responses to refugee targets and demonstrate that different mechanisms may come into action when there is no shared religious group membership.

A limitation of this study was, however, the unauthentic nature (i.e., not reflecting an original group people are attached to) of the non-Muslim British sample. Although this may be a strength in terms of not being dependent on the data from one group, the specific dynamics of not sharing a religious group membership might be better understood with data collected from a specific religious group who does not share a religious group membership with refugees. Another limitation was the religious identity of the refugee targets, which is not salient in the study. However, since this is an exploratory study to set the stage for further testing, it still gives important insights and shows that typicality might also play a role in people's perceptions of religious group memberships. Still, salience and lack of salience of refugee targets' religious identities might lead to differences in helping outcomes, which should be further investigated. For example, watching news about "Muslim Syrian refugees" may have different consequences than watching news about "Syrian

refugees." In addition, there is a lack of randomization caused by the between-group differences in national and religious identifications and this makes it harder to reach a robust conclusion. For instance, it is possible that religious identification negatively predicted perceived similarity in the case of unshared group membership because of the low religious identification levels or the unauthentic nature of this sample. Even though this difference might perhaps reflect the reality more accurately, a study where there is no difference based on national and religious identification results between the compared groups would give stronger outcomes. Moreover, the use of one-item measures for perceived similarity, national identification, and religious identification, while justified for the study's practicality, could raise concerns about the reliability of these measures. Finally, we had no behavioral measure while assessing helping responses, which prevented us from drawing more impactful conclusions from our data.

All in all, this study offers valuable insights into the role of unshared group memberships and perceived similarity in shaping attitudes and responses toward Syrian refugees among non-Muslim British and Muslim British citizens. While its findings provide a foundation for understanding these dynamics, another study deems it necessary to address this study's limitations and explore these issues in a controlled experiment.

6.1 | Studies 2a and 2b

In these studies, we compare the responses of British citizens to three different religious groups of Syrian refugees: target with a subtle (not salient) religious group membership which is not typically shared (i.e., Syrian refugees), target with a salient shared religious group membership (i.e., Christian Syrian refugees), and target with a salient unshared religious membership (i.e., Muslim Syrian refugees). In doing so, we repeat the same analyses as in Study 1, but in this study, we aim to overcome its limitations by recruiting Christian (Study 2a) and nonreligious (Study 2b) participants as original non-Muslim samples, by including multi-item measures for national identification, religious identification, and perceived similarity and by adding a charitable donation measure to assess helping behavior. In Study 2a, we expect that participants will score higher on perceived similarity, political support, helping intention, and charitable donation when there is a salient shared religious group membership, than when there is a subtle or salient unshared religious group membership. In Study 2b, we expect that participants will score the same in all conditions.

7 | METHODS

7.1 | Participants

A total of 622 non-Muslim British citizens were recruited online via Prolific (www.prolific.co) and paid £6.00 per hour for participating in the study. Nine participants were removed because of not stating their demographics and/or not meeting the inclusion criteria for nationality. The remaining sample comprised 613 participants. At this stage, we specifically did not limit the religion of our sample to specific religious groups because we wanted to see which and how many groups we could compare from naturally occurring samples. Since Christians and people with no religious affiliation are the two biggest religion-based populations in the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2021), we expected at least these two groups to be naturally formed from our sample. As expected, most of this sample were either Christian ($N = 228$) or had no religious affiliation ($N = 306$) whereas the remaining participants were Jewish ($N = 3$), Agnostic ($N = 51$), or from other religious backgrounds ($N = 25$). Therefore, we continued further analyses with the two biggest groups, involving 534 participants in total: Christians ($N = 228$, $M_{age} = 39.50$, $SD_{age} = 12.33$; $N_{female} = 168$) in Study 2a and those with no religious affiliation ($N = 306$, $M_{age} = 34.96$, $SD_{age} = 11.64$; $N_{female} = 203$) in Study 2b. While we did not calculate a priori power, we collected at least 200 participants per group without stopping. Sensitivity analyses for a multivariate analysis of variance suggest that this sample size should be able to detect effects of at least $\eta^2 = .030$ for the Christian group and $\eta^2 = .024$ for the nonreligious group at conventional α levels of .05 and power of .80.

7.2 | Measures and procedure

Participants in both studies were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. Participants in all conditions answered the same questionnaire; however, we manipulated the religious identity of the target group that is to be helped. Thus, they answered questions about Syrian refugees with no indication of Syrian refugees' religion (control-target condition), Christian Syrian refugees (Christian-target condition), or Muslim Syrian refugees (Muslim-target condition). Depending on the assigned condition, participants were presented with questions about—/Christian/Muslim Syrian refugees in all measures.

Differently than study 1, all four items created by Doosje et al. (1995) were used to assess *national identification* ($\alpha_{\text{Christian British}} = 0.92$ & $\alpha_{\text{Nonreligious British}} = 0.91$) and *religious identification* ($\alpha_{\text{Christian British}} = 0.95$ & $\alpha_{\text{Nonreligious British}} = 0.94$). *Perceived similarity* was also measured with two items as in the original study of Albayrak-Aydemir and Gleibs (2021), by using an extra item together with the item used in study 1 ("Syrian refugees are similar to me"; $r_{\text{Christian British}} = 0.81$, $p < .001$ & $r_{\text{Nonreligious British}} = 0.75$, $p < .001$). *Political support* ($\alpha_{\text{Christian British}} = 0.87$ & $\alpha_{\text{Nonreligious British}} = 0.91$) and *helping intention* ($\alpha_{\text{Christian British}} = 0.92$ & $\alpha_{\text{Nonreligious British}} = 0.95$) were measured as in study 1. Additionally, we examined charitable donation with a question that asked participants to donate all or some of their study participation rewards to Syrian refugees (from 10% to 100%).[3] All participants were debriefed and fully received their reward upon the completion of the study regardless of their response to this question.

8 | RESULTS

First, we ran a multivariate analysis of variance with the target identity conditions (control-target, Christian-target, and Muslim-target) as the independent variable and national identification, religious identification, perceived similarity, political support, helping intention, and charitable donation as the dependent variables, separately for Studies 2a and 2b. As in Study 1, national and religious identifications were measured before participants were asked about refugees and added to this analysis to check whether the sample was randomized per group. Means, standard deviations, and confidence intervals by target identity conditions were presented in Table 1 (Study 2a: $F(12,440) = 2.32$, *Wilks's* $\Lambda = 0.88$, $p = .007$; Study 2b: $F(12,596) = 0.95$, *Wilk's* $\Lambda = .96$, $p = .500$). Then, we ran a multigroup SEM to see how the proposed model works across the three conditions (control-target, Christian-target, and Muslim-target), again separately for Studies 2a and 2b. The SEM model provided a good fit, (study 2a: $\chi^2(121) = 351.92$, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.93; TLI = 0.92; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.05; study 2b: $\chi^2(121) = 297.12$, $p < .001$; CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95; RMSEA = 0.07; SRMR = 0.04), and the standardized factor loadings from the fully saturated models are presented in Table 2 and individual results for Studies 2a and 2b were presented below. To examine whether political support, helping intention, and charitable donation would constitute one factor rather than three, their items were grouped as if predicted by one latent variable, which had a significantly worse fit to the data than the original model (study 2a: $\chi^2(8) = 217.35$, $p < .001$; study 2b: $\chi^2(8) = 248.91$, $p < .001$). In addition, to examine whether national and religious identifications constitute one factor rather than two, these two items were grouped as if predicted by one latent variable. This model also had a significantly worse fit to the data than the original model (study 2a: $\chi^2(11) = 1192.30$, $p < .001$; study 2b: $\chi^2(11) = 1401.00$ $p < .001$). These results were consistent with our model specification.

8.1 | Study 2a (Christian British)

No significant difference was found between the target-identity conditions based on national identification ($F(2225) = 0.50$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, $p = .608$), religious identification ($F(2225) = 0.39$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, $p = .678$), and charitable donation ($F(2225) = 2.63$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, $p = .074$); however, there were significant differences between them based on perceived similarity ($F(2225) = 5.05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, $p = .007$), political support ($F(2225) = 3.56$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, $p = .030$), and helping intention ($F(2225) = 6.31$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, $p = .002$). Participants in the Christian-target condition scored significantly higher than participants in the Muslim-target condition based on perceived similarity ($p = .006$), political support ($p = .028$), and helping intention ($p = .002$). In the control-target condition, national identification negatively predicted charitable donation while perceived similarity positively predicted political support, helping intention, and charitable donation. In the Christian-target condition, religious identification positively predicted helping intention while perceived similarity positively predicted political support and helping intention. In the Muslim-target condition, national identification negatively predicted perceived similarity, which then positively predicted political support and helping intention.

8.2 | Study 2b (nonreligious British)

There was no significant difference between the target-identity conditions based on national identification ($F(2303) = 0.70$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$, $p = .497$), religious identification ($F(2303) = 0.53$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, $p = .590$), perceived similarity ($F(2303) = 1.15$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, $p = .319$), political support ($F(2303) = 2.05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, $p = .130$), helping intention ($F(2303) = 2.82$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, $p = .061$), and charitable donation ($F(2303) = 2.75$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, $p = .065$). In the control-target condition, perceived similarity positively predicted political support, helping intention, and charitable donation. In the Christian-target condition, national identification negatively predicted political support while perceived similarity positively predicted political support, helping intention, and charitable donation. In the Muslim-target condition, national identification negatively predicted perceived similarity, political support, helping intention, and while perceived similarity positively predicted political support and helping intention.

9 | DISCUSSION

The results of the individual studies are discussed separately below. Overall, these two studies collectively contribute to our understanding of the factors influencing helping responses towards Syrian refugees, emphasizing the significance of shared religious group membership for religious individuals, while highlighting the importance of perceived similarity for nonreligious individuals. These findings have practical implications for organizations and policy-makers striving to optimize their strategies for refugee assistance, and future research can build upon these insights to further enhance our understanding of humanitarian responses in diverse populations.

9.1 | Study 2a (Christian British)

In line with our hypothesis, we observed that when the religious identity of the target group was made salient, participants in the Christian-target condition reported significantly higher levels of perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention compared to the Muslim-target condition, which indicates that for Christian participants, the presence of a shared religious group membership and the saliency of an unshared religious group membership with Syrian refugees had a notable impact on their helping responses. Yet, charitable donation as the behavioral aspect of helping was not affected by these factors, pointing out the possibility that other factors than group memberships might come into play in the case of behavioral helping responses. Additionally, we found that national identification might be more relevant in the case of an unshared religious group membership as our findings demonstrate its negative connections to charitable donation and perceived similarity in the control-target and

Muslim-target conditions, respectively. These findings, therefore, highlight the complex interplay between national and religious identities in the context of humanitarian responses. Overall, however, the main difference between groups came from the shared/unshared religious group membership status, rather than differences in the reinforcers of helping responses. The implications of these findings are noteworthy, particularly for organizations and policymakers working with religiously affiliated communities to facilitate refugee assistance. By emphasizing shared religious group membership, it is possible to enhance the willingness of Christian British citizens to support Syrian refugees. This understanding can be harnessed to design more effective outreach and aid campaigns that resonate with the values and identity of the target audience.

9.2 | Study 2b (nonreligious British)

In line with our hypothesis, we did not find any significant differences in perceived similarity, political support, helping intention, or charitable donation across the control-target, Christian-target, and Muslim-target conditions. This outcome underscores a distinctive pattern in the responses of nonreligious individuals. Unlike their religious counterparts in Study 2a, the presence or absence of shared religious group membership did not influence their responses to help Syrian refugees. Instead, we found that for nonreligious participants, perceived similarity emerged as a key determinant of political support, helping intention, and charitable donation, irrespective of the religious identity of the target group. Yet, we found some differences in terms of reinforcers of the helping responses. National identification had a negative connection to perceived similarity when the religious identity of the refugees was salient, and also to political support and helping intention when refugees were saliently Muslim. In addition, perceived similarity positively predicted political support, helping intention, and charitable donation in all conditions, except it did not predict charitable donation when refugees were saliently Muslim. All in all, however, these differences did not affect levels of perceived similarity and helping responses, indicating that what fundamentally determines helping responses for nonreligious British people was not the unshared religious group membership status, but perceived similarity as the driver of helping responses. The findings from Study 2b are particularly noteworthy in the context of humanitarian efforts. They suggest that, for nonreligious individuals, the emphasis on religious group membership may not be as effective in eliciting support as it is for religious individuals. Instead, campaigns and interventions targeting nonreligious groups should focus on highlighting shared values, common humanity, or other factors that foster a sense of similarity with refugees.

10 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research examines intergroup helping in a politically vibrant context with a sample of pre-existing groups. In doing so, it underscores the importance of unshared religious group memberships to have a richer understanding of helping responses in refugee emergencies. The results indicate that while seeking support for refugees (or other similarly vulnerable populations caused by global emergencies), it is beneficial to consider both potential helpers' and targets' religious identities, together with whether these identities are shared between them (or not) and whether these identities are made salient (or not). The collective findings of three interconnected studies offer valuable insights into the intricate web of factors influencing individuals' helping toward Syrian refugees. Study 1, focused on non-Muslim and Muslim British citizens, established a foundation by revealing the distinct role of shared religious group membership on perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention, even when the religious identity of refugees is not salient. It provided a compelling illustration of how group membership plays a crucial role in shaping humanitarian responses. Building upon this premise, Studies 2a and 2b extended the exploration. In Study 2a, which concentrated on Christian British citizens, the findings underscored the crucial role of unshared religious group membership in eliciting lower levels of perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention when the religious identity of the refugees was made salient. Study 2b, focusing on nonreligious British individuals, presented an intriguing contrast, emphasizing the prominence of perceived similarity as a key determinant of their responses, regardless of the religious identity of the target group. What is remarkable is the consistency observed across the studies in highlighting the role of perceived similarity, but also the nuanced differences arising from religious and nonreligious affiliations.

More specifically, this research highlights several key findings. First, both when refugee targets' typically shared religious group membership is not salient (e.g., Syrian refugees for Muslim British citizens in Study 1) or when their atypically shared religious group membership is made salient (e.g., Christian Syrian refugees for Christian British citizens in Study 2a), sharing a religious group membership increases perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention. Additionally, perceived similarity appears as a strong reinforcer of helping intention in both instances. Second, making unshared religious group membership salient decreases perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention among those who are religious (e.g., Muslim Syrian refugees for Christian British citizens in Study 2a), but not among those who are not religious (e.g., Muslim Syrian refugees for nonreligious British citizens in study 2b). Third, when targets' typically unshared religious group membership is not salient (vs. salient), not sharing a religious group membership does not necessarily reduce perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention, neither among those who are religious (e.g., Syrian refugees for Christian British citizens in study 2a) nor nonreligious (e.g., Syrian refugees for Nonreligious British citizens in study 2b). Fourth, although levels of perceived similarity, political support, and helping intention are influenced by whether helpers share a religious group membership with refugees, the amount of charitable donation stays the same regardless of sharing a religious group membership with refugees or not. Finally, whether people share a religious group membership with refugees or not is a stronger indicator of their helping responses, compared to how much they

identify with their national and religious groups. Moreover, perceived similarity appears as a stronger driver of these responses, rather than national and religious identifications; however, national (not religious) identification seems to be a negative reinforcer of perceived similarity in the case of helping refugee targets who saliently do not share a religious group membership with helpers.

These key findings hold substantial importance on multiple fronts. They contribute to the rich tapestry of social psychology literature by deepening our understanding of identity dynamics in humanitarian contexts and underscore the delicate interplay between religious group membership, perceived similarity, and national identification in shaping individuals' responses to Syrian refugees. Understanding these mechanisms is pivotal in a world marked by migration and the pressing need for refugee assistance. Additionally, these insights offer practical implications for humanitarian organizations and policymakers. By recognizing the significance of unshared religious group membership for religious individuals, or by emphasizing perceived similarity among nonreligious individuals, tailored approaches can be crafted to foster increased public support and engagement in refugee-related initiatives. These findings highlight the necessity of acknowledging the multifaceted nature of identity dynamics in a globalized world and call for adaptable strategies that resonate with diverse populations. In essence, this research's significance lies not only in its scholarly contributions to social psychology but also in its real-world applicability for shaping more empathetic and responsive societies in an ever-connected world.

10.1 | Theoretical and practical implications

This research carries significant importance for the broader field of social psychology, where understanding intergroup relations, identity dynamics, and their impact on humanitarian responses has long been a subject of inquiry. Prior studies have noted the importance of group memberships in the acts, intentions, and attitudes of helping. It is now well established that people help those with whom they share a group membership more than those with whom they do not share a group membership, not necessarily to discriminate against the latter but to improve their own group's image (Leeuwen & Mashuri, 2012; Nadler, 2016; Wakefield & Hopkins, 2017). Much of this research focuses on the extent to which people identify with their group and reshaping group boundaries influence intergroup helping, and through which processes (Dovidio et al., 1997; Gaertner et al., 1993; Levine et al., 2005). The findings of the present research underscore that group membership may play a greater role in shaping intergroup helping than group identifications in politically vibrant contexts; however, reshaping group boundaries might be more challenging in such contexts, which may in turn require alternative mechanisms to improve helping responses. As such, our research identifies perceived similarity to targets as a potential mechanism that might mitigate the negative effects of unshared group membership in intergroup helping. Therefore, in contexts where group boundaries cannot be effectively reshaped, using strategies that highlight similarities with refugee targets (e.g., with a focus on being a "student" or a "mother") might bring more effective helping outcomes for people with whom there is no shared religious group membership.

Our findings additionally illustrate the ways in which the salience of unshared group memberships can shape helping preferences, supporting the literature on identity salience and intergroup helping (Levine & Manning, 2013). More specifically, they show that the level of helping responses is significantly lower in the case of a salient unshared group membership, compared to a salient shared (but not a subtle unshared) group membership. This difference, however, is only applicable to those who do not share a group membership and who are religious, which suggests that different strategies might bring more effective outcomes when support for refugees is sought from religious versus nonreligious groups of people. In addition, most striking in the current findings is that charitable donation is not as much reinforced by group memberships as political support and helping intention, which adds to the literature on the attitude-behavior gap (Godin et al., 2005; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) by exemplifying that a helping attitude or helping intention in the context of supporting refugees does not necessarily turn into an act of helping. This suggests that there may be factors beyond group membership that influence charitable donations and highlights the complexity of the attitude-behavior gap in supporting refugees. These findings also indicate the need for further research to understand the factors that influence charitable donations in the context of supporting refugees, as well as the underlying mechanisms of how group memberships uniquely influence helping attitudes, intentions, and behaviors towards refugee support. In examining three different forms of helping our research responds to the calls about the need and significance of examining different helping responses simultaneously for a more elaborate understanding of helping preferences in different contexts (Louis et al., 2019). The originality of our study is, therefore, the concurrent examination of three different helping responses.

Moreover, the present study offers some context-specific insight into helping research, by recognizing religious groups as being more important in the context of helping typically Muslim refugee populations and highlighting the significance of the context-relevant group memberships in helping attitudes and decisions. In effect, the relevance of religious group memberships can even be seen in a comment we received from one of the participants in a control condition (i.e., Syrian refugees) after completing the study (i.e., "I DON'T WANNA HELP THOSE MUSLIM REFUGEES!!"), which blatantly shows how an unshared religious group membership can become more important than an unshared national group membership in affecting helping decisions—even when the religious (but not national) identities of the refugee targets are out of the picture.

In recent years, there has also been an increasing interest in research on helping in specific contexts, and more specifically, helping refugees. The recent refugee flux in Europe, as well as the dissimilarities of the responses given to different refugee groups (e.g., Ukrainian vs. Syrian), has brought to the fore the challenges of understanding and managing humanitarian responses in unique

emergencies. There remains, however, a paucity of research, with only a few studies systematically investigating helping responses in refugee emergencies (Echterhoff et al., 2022). For example, Becker et al. (2019) examined antecedents and consequences of autonomy- and dependency-oriented help toward refugees and found a positive connection between paternalistic beliefs and dependency-oriented help. Even fewer studies have approached this topic in a specific context, scrutinizing pre-existing samples' responses towards a specific group of refugee targets. As exceptions, for instance, Karakiewicz-Krawczyk et al. (2022) surveyed Polish people's opinions on helping Ukrainian refugees while Albayrak-Aydemir and Gleibs (2021) explored British and German people's levels of global bystander intervention for Syrian refugees. Hence, the present research makes a major contribution to research on helping refugees by examining different pre-existing groups' helping responses to different groups or pre-existing refugee targets. By doing so, it also provides an important opportunity to acquire context-relevant information that can be applied to real-world settings.

Beyond its academic significance, this research holds practical value in the real world, particularly in the context of addressing global refugee emergencies. As nations grapple with the influx of displaced populations, policymakers as well as governmental, nongovernmental, and humanitarian organizations can draw vital insights from these findings. By recognizing the pivotal role of unshared religious group membership for religious individuals, campaigns and initiatives can be crafted to resonate with these communities more effectively. On the other hand, for nonreligious groups, highlighting shared values and perceived similarity can prove to be the key to mobilizing support. This adaptability in strategies acknowledges the diverse landscape of modern societies and offers a pathway to bridge divides and foster empathy. These findings are also relevant for policymakers involved in crafting refugee-related policies, as they emphasize the influence of group membership and perceived similarity on political support. Policymakers can benefit from recognizing how these factors shape public opinion and leveraging this knowledge to create policies that are more inclusive and resonate with the values and identities of different segments of society.

In addition to its implications for policymakers and humanitarian organizations, this research also holds practical significance for the media and charity organizations engaged in promoting support for refugees. The way refugees are portrayed in the media and advertising campaigns has a profound impact on public perceptions and support with refugees (or immigrants, in general) being often portrayed in media and political discourse as a threat to the culture and society of the countries to which they are seeking refuge (see Hellwig & Sinno, 2017). By understanding the dynamics of group membership and perceived similarity revealed in this research, media outlets can play a pivotal role in shaping more empathetic and inclusive narratives. Media can use these insights to promote inclusivity. By recognizing the significance of unshared religious group membership for religious individuals, media organizations can strive to depict diverse religious and cultural backgrounds among refugees. This can help create a more inclusive portrayal that resonates with various religious communities. Additionally, for nonreligious groups, media can emphasize shared values, universal experiences, and the common humanity that transcends religious or cultural differences. This approach can be instrumental in fostering support from a broader audience.

Moreover, media can combat stereotypes surrounding refugees by using this research to challenge misconceptions as our findings may encourage a more balanced reporting that reflects the diverse identities and backgrounds of displaced populations. Based on these findings, media can also highlight personal stories that emphasise the shared values, struggles, and aspirations of refugees, thereby connecting with a wider audience. Likewise, charity organizations can benefit from these findings by tailoring their advertising campaigns to appeal to a broader range of supporters. By acknowledging the pivotal role of group membership and perceived similarity and demonstrating how assistance benefits a wide range of individuals from various backgrounds, they can connect with different segments of their audience effectively. For example, instead of always using stereotypically Muslim displays of Syrian refugees, they may prefer to use a diverse representation of Syrian refugees in charity appeals to promote higher levels of support in multicultural societies.

10.2 | Limitations and future directions

While this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of humanitarian responses to refugees, it is essential to acknowledge several potential limitations. First, the use of self-report measures in all three studies may raise concerns about social desirability bias and the accuracy of participants' responses. Future research could benefit from incorporating more objective measures or behavioral indicators to complement self-report data. For instance, including behavioral measures of helping, such as real donation or volunteering behaviors, can provide a more concrete assessment of participants' intentions. Additionally, the reliance on convenience and online sampling methods may introduce sampling bias. Future studies could employ more diverse and representative samples, including participants from various regions and cultural backgrounds, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. A second limitation pertains to the study's cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between variables in the long term. Future research could employ longitudinal to explore the temporal dynamics of group membership, perceived similarity, and helping responses to refugees. This would enable a better understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships, allowing for a more robust determination of the mechanisms at play. Moreover, the findings primarily focus on participants in the United Kingdom, which might limit the generalizability of the results to other nations with different sociopolitical contexts. Future studies could involve cross-cultural comparisons to examine how these dynamics vary across diverse cultural settings.

Another issue is that the non-Muslim British sample in Study 1 included people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds who do not necessarily come together under an authentic "non-Muslim British" identity and are most probably religious minorities in the United

Kingdom. Muslim British sample in Study 1 also includes people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who are probably ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. In that sense, these two samples can be very diverse in terms of religiosity and ethnicity; therefore, their helping responses require further examination to differentiate how minority and majority members of a society might develop unique acts, intentions, and attitudes of helping in response to refugee emergencies. Future research on this topic could especially bring fruitful insights in light of the previous research disclosing the ways in which immigrants are against the immigration of new groups into their country (Strijbis & Polavieja, 2018). Lastly, the meaning of "1" on a Likert scale might be different for Christians who strongly identify with their religious group compared to nonreligious people who don't necessarily identify with their nonreligious group. Indeed, this might be the reason why perceived similarity was negatively associated with religious identification in Study 1 and instead, it was negatively associated with national identification in Study 2. Nevertheless, recent research examining religious identities showed that the nonreligious identification groups especially differed from each other in with religious group they identify and how strongly they believe in God (Lindeman et al., 2020). Therefore, being nonreligious may not necessarily mean that one is not, for instance, Christian or Muslim as those who do not much identify with their religious groups may also see themselves as nonreligious. Overall, however, a previous study conducted with nonreligious people in the United Kingdom indicates that even though nonreligious people may identify with different religious groups and have different levels of faith in God, nonreligious identification can still be a useful indicator of cultural groups in secular societies (Lee, 2014).

There is still abundant room for further progress in understanding the factors that affect the ways people help refugees from distant countries. Further work is needed to understand through which mechanisms the perceived similarity of those who do not share group memberships with refugees can be enhanced. Studying how visual portrayals of refugees in the media contribute to perceptions of similarity can especially be a good starting point for this as there is already a growing line of research showing the importance of pictures in shaping how people perceive refugees (e.g., Azevedo et al., 2021; Slovic et al., 2017). In addition, narratives that are used in the media can also feed into how people assess the trauma and suffering of victims and then, intend to help them, with victims who are repeatedly traumatized being perceived as suffering less (Zagefka, 2022). Therefore, future studies could compare helping responses towards different groups of refugees to understand if refugees from more troubled regions would be helped less because of a habituation fallacy. Like this, a further study with a more focus on how the emotional versus material costs of different refugee groups are portrayed in the media and perceived by the public could be beneficial to explain differences in the levels of helping responses toward different refugee groups (such as Ukrainian vs. Syrian refugees) (see Zagefka, 2021). Future studies can also take a helper-focused approach to unravel whether using a self-focused (e.g., helping to do good deeds) or an other-focused (e.g., helping to support others) cause is more effective in promoting humanitarian aid for refugees (see Chapman et al., 2020).

11 | CONCLUSION

In a world marked by migration and the ever-growing need for refugee assistance, this research offers a critical message: the interplay between shared religious group membership and perceived similarity plays a pivotal role in shaping helping responses toward refugees. This research emphasizes the necessity of tailored approaches that address the unique factors at play in different populations. By recognizing the importance of these dynamics, humanitarian organizations, policymakers, and those striving to foster support for refugees can work more effectively and compassionately toward the shared goal of aiding those in need. This research, therefore, provides a solid foundation for future research and the development of practical strategies to foster greater support and solidarity for refugees, contributing to a more compassionate and inclusive society. In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding the multifaceted elements that drive humanitarian responses is not only academically intriguing but is also essential for shaping a more empathetic and responsive society.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nihan Albayrak-Aydemir: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; funding acquisition; investigation; methodology; project administration; resources; writing—the original draft; writing—review & editing. **Ilka Helene Gleibs**: Conceptualization; funding acquisition; methodology; supervision; writing—review & editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

We report all measures and exclusions in this research. Materials, data, and analysis codes necessary to replicate three studies can be reached through the Open Science Framework (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/SBJAT).

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ENDNOTES

[1] We used psych version 2.1.9 (Revelle, 2021), Rmisc version 1.5 (Hope, 2013), lavaan version 0.4-14 (Rosseel, 2012), and lsr version 0.6 (Navarro, 2015).

[2] We also included a Muslim Turkish sample for exploratory purposes, whose data can be found in the data set together with the data from the two original samples.

[3] Originally, we had a donation range from 0% to 100%. However, due to a technical error, the response scale was mistakenly shown to participants from 10% to 100%. We acknowledge that this could have influenced participants' response; however, we opted to retain this measure in our analysis because the data collected within this range can still provide valuable insight into the extent of participants' support for refugees, even if they were not given the option of a 0% contribution.

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