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# The Effect of Religious Affiliation and Religious Markets on Islamophobia in Four European Nations<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper compares the effects of religion affiliation and religious market structure on public attitudes toward Muslims in four different countries: Germany and the United Kingdom (religiously pluralistic), Sweden (predominately Protestant), and Spain (predominately Catholic). Catholic respondents in Germany and Protestants in Sweden are more likely to accept Muslims as neighbors than are the religiously nonaffiliated. Self-reported Catholicism is not significantly related to attitudes toward Muslims among Spanish respondents.

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The second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed a rise in the public assertion of ethnic nationalism in a number of nations around the globe. In settings as diverse as Poland, the Philippines, France, Great Britain, India, and the United States, political movements have arisen that have opposed what had seemed to be inexorable historical trends toward cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and globalization.

One important symptom and symbol of this trend is a substantial increase in visible opposition to Muslim immigrants among mass publics in Western nations. Indeed, one issue in the 2016 presidential election in the United States was the propriety of the very use of the term “Islamic terrorism.” On the other side of the Atlantic, the rise in the immigrant population in Europe has caused great concern and has affected public opinion and public policy with respect to economic and cultural issues, as well as issues involved in EU integration. The increase in the Muslim population in Europe has manifested fear of a possible Muslim “takeover” and has caused an increase in the public expression of anti-Muslim attitudes. Indeed, the term “Eurabia” has been coined to describe fears of Islamic hegemony (either demographic or ideological) on the “Christian” continent of Europe (Ye’Or 2005). The increase in the Muslim population of various European countries has also caused a number of European countries to implement anti-Muslim legislation (Gallagher, Laver and Maier, 2006: 15).

The term “Islamophobia” has been used in the English language since 1923; it is defined as “intense dislike or fear of Islam, esp. as a political force; hostility or prejudice towards Muslims” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2015). Martias Gardell (2010) defines Islamophobia as socially reproduced prejudices and aversion to Islam and Muslims, as well as actions and practices that attack, exclude or discriminate against persons on the basis that they are perceived to be Muslim and be associated with Islam (see also Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008).

There have been several notable perception studies on Islamophobia. Yilmaz (2005) conducted a qualitative study in which he surveyed European respondents from five major EU countries (Britain, France, Italy, Germany, and Spain) who resided in Istanbul for three months or longer. Yilmaz addressed the question, “What exactly do the European publics mean when they talk about ‘Islam’ in particular or ‘religion’ in general?” The study revealed that European respondents were opposed to Islam if it is mobilized as a social, political, and cultural force to deny the rights of women and to drive people away from a modern life (Yilmaz and Aykaç 2012).

The 2006 *Transatlantic Trends* study found that 91 percent of the people in nine EU countries (UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain) believed that radical Islam poses an important threat to Europe (Yilmaz and Aykaç 2012). A 2006 Pew Research Centre survey polled the largest EU countries and found that the overwhelming majority of the

public felt that Muslims were not respectful of women (Yilmaz and Aykaç 2012). Other studies have shown that accommodation to Muslim minorities in European nations varies substantially across countries and across levels of education and religious observance (Fetzer and Soper 2005).

The present study seeks to examine the extent to which the attitudes of European Christians enhance or inhibit Islamophobia in selected European countries in different religious contexts, which the literature calls “markets” (Iannaccone 1991; Stark and Finke 2000). In the context of the present study, the “markets” approach allows us to pose the question of whether religious affiliations and behaviors have greater effects on anti-Muslim sentiment in religiously pluralistic environments. To this end we examine the effects of religious affiliation and religious composition in four distinct European nations: religiously pluralistic Germany (whose Christian population is divided between Roman Catholics and Protestants) and Great Britain, predominately Protestant Sweden, and heavily Catholic Spain. The motivation for the present study is to analyze the religious sources of anti-Muslim attitudes in Europe based on the manner in which these attitudes are affected in different religious markets. This study is based on the general hypothesis that differences in the nature of religious markets affect the outcome of regimes politically.

The increased number of immigrants in Europe has been a major source of Islamophobia and, more generally, anti-immigrant movements and attitudes. The population of Muslims in Europe has increased from 10 million in 1990 to approximately 17 million in 2010. The absolute number of Muslims and the percentage of Muslims in a particular country’s population vary from nation to nation in Europe. In the four countries examined in this study, however, the percentages of Muslims in the population are quite similar. A 2011 Pew Research study reports that in Sweden (which is relatively religiously homogeneous), there were approximately 433,000 Muslims, who constitute 4.9 percent of the total population, in 2010. In Spain (which is predominately Catholic) there were 1.021 million Muslims, and Muslims constituted 2.3 percent of that country’s population. Germany (which is religiously pluralistic) had 4.119 million Muslims, who represented about 5.0 percent of Germany’s population, while the comparable proportion of Muslims in the United Kingdom was 4.8 per cent, with just under 3 million Muslims residing in Great Britain (Pew 2011). Thus, all three nations under consideration here have substantial, highly visible Muslim populations, although adherents of Islam do not approach a plurality in any of the three.

As members of the European Union, Germany, Sweden, and Spain must all deal with issues involved in the relatively free movement of people across borders within the EU, as will the United Kingdom until the “Brexit” policy of separation from the EU becomes operative. Of course, each nation considered

here has a distinctive history of interaction with Islam, ranging from the relatively recent surge in Muslim immigration into Sweden (*Economist* 2017), to Germany's decades long experience with Turkish guest workers, to Spain's long history of Moorish occupation and *Reconquista*. Again, the experience of the United Kingdom with Muslim immigrants (primarily from South Asia) has created tensions which have contributed substantially to the Brexit referendum. This combination of distinct national histories and a common international environment has occasioned nativist reactions in all four nations, as well as most other EU nations as well (for overviews, see Fetzer and Soper 2005; Lockett 2015). Issues of immigration, religious attire, support for Islamic religious and educational institutions, and mosque construction have all been contested in recent German, Swedish, British, and Spanish politics. Questions of immigration and multiculturalism, which are heavily tinged with popular reactions to Islam, have assumed center stage on much of the continent of Europe and in the British Isles. Indeed, exactly one month into his presidency, Donald Trump made some controversial remarks to suggest that even Sweden is saddled with the threat of Islamic terrorism. Although the factual basis of President Trump's statements has been challenged (Chan 2017), questions of Islamic immigration, accommodation, or assimilation remain prominent on the Swedish political agenda.

A large literature in the sociology of religion (Finke and Stark 2000; Iannacone 1991; Jelen 2002) asserts that religious pluralism leads to greater overall religiosity. This literature (using economic models) suggests that religious competition and pluralism lead to greater religiosity (Finke and Stark 2000; Iannacone 1991). The studies that comprise this literature are based on the hypothesis that, where there are multiple religions, denominations must compete and make themselves more attractive to lay members and to potential members of the lay congregations. A great deal of evidence suggests that pluralism increases religiosity. For example, the data on which this study are based show that once other variables are controlled, Germans are likely to be more religious than Swedes and Spaniards, since Sweden and Spain have effective religious monopolies (Lutheran and Catholic, respectively).<sup>1</sup>

Some studies suggest that Catholic social teaching is more clearly transmitted in settings in which Catholics are a minority. Dependent variables are typically abortion, gender role attitudes (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1993; Jelen, O'Donnell, and Wilcox 1993; Jelen and Wilcox 1993). The present study extends this research program by examining Islamophobia as dependent variable and by applying the market model to a nation with a Protestant majority.

There are likely effects of religion on anti-Muslim attitudes. Religious particularism involves a belief in the superiority (indeed, perhaps the exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the 2014 Pew Survey, on which the data from the UK are based, does not contain measures of attendance at religious services.

superiority) of one's own theological or denominational tradition. Particularism can also cause fragmentation in religious coalitions, which can cause religious groups with similar beliefs on policy to lose sight of issue goals that could be won if they were in alliance (see Stark and Glock 1968; Jelen 1993).

Conversely, other analysts have suggested that Protestantism (Woodberry 2012) and post-Vatican II Catholicism (Huntington 1991) may increase tolerance. In particular, Huntington has suggested that the ecumenism associated with the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s has resulted in an increase in democratic values (such as tolerance) in predominately Catholic countries. Political scientists have maintained in various studies that effects of religious variables are likely to be strongest among frequent church attenders (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1993; Green 2010). Religious socialization may occur as the result of exposure to religious messages or as a consequence of interaction with co-religionists (Djupe and Gilbert 2008.)

### *HYPOTHESES*

In this study, we test the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* People with Protestant or Catholic religious affiliations are more accepting of Muslims than seculars.

*Hypothesis 2:* The effects of religious variables (affiliation, observance) will be stronger in religiously pluralistic environments (Germany and the United Kingdom), than in religiously homogeneous Sweden or Spain.

### *DATA AND METHOD*

Data for this study were taken from two sources. The World Value Survey (WVS) for Germany, Sweden, and Spain in 1999–2007 (Waves 4 and 5) represent data gathered prior to the events of 9/11, which seem likely to have mobilized anti-Muslim sentiment in Western nations. A second data source is the Pew Research Center's survey on Global Attitudes and Trends, with data collected in the post-9/11 era (spring 2014). Data from the Pew Survey are taken from national surveys in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

The dependent variable in the pre-9/11 data is the respondent's willingness to accept a Muslim as neighbor. This measure is a dichotomous dependent variable. Respondents are given a list of ascriptive minorities (e.g. foreigners, immigrants,

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<sup>2</sup> Again, these strategies reflect the frustrations often associated with secondary analysis. Although the UK is included in the WVS, the dependent variable for the pre-9/11 survey was not included for the UK. Similarly, Sweden is not included in the Pew (post-9/11) survey.

people of different races/religions/languages) and behavioral minorities (e.g. homosexuals, drug addicts, alcoholics) and asked whether they would object to having members of each group as neighbors. A respondent is considered “Islamophobic” if s/he is unwilling to accept a Muslim neighbor. This variable has the virtue of simplicity, since it simply measures acceptance of Muslims, and is not complicated by considerations of politics, taxation, or immigration. The dependent variable measured by the WVS is a very straightforward measure of affect toward people of the Islamic faith. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, the estimation technique is logistic regression.

For the post-9/11 Pew survey, the dependent variable is the respondent’s attitude toward Muslims, with codes including ratings of “Very favorable,” “Mostly favorable,” “Mostly unfavorable,” or “very unfavorable.” To ease interpretation, the estimation technique used in the post-9/11 analysis is Ordinary Least Squares regression.

The pre/post-9/11 research design permits a partial test of the effects of the 9/11 tragedy and subsequent events relating to perceptions of religiously motivated political violence. The tension surrounding allegations of terrorism on the part of “Islamic fundamentalists” is, of course, ongoing, and the Pew (2014) data were gathered before the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings of 2015. It has been argued that ethnic and racial stereotypes are relatively long-standing and that events such as 9/11 simply activate such pre-existing prejudices (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Tesler 2016). The longitudinal research design permits a partial test of the effects of recent political events.

Of course, the comparison is not ideal. Aside from the fact that we do not have pre-9/11 data from the United Kingdom or post-9/11 data from Sweden, the dependent variables for the two analyses are comparable but not identical. Separate analyses are performed for respondents from each country under investigation. The main independent variables are dummy variables for affiliation as Roman Catholic or Protestant. A dummy variable measuring frequency of attendance at religious services is coded 1 if the respondent reports attending church once a week or oftener and 0 if the respondent attends church less frequently.<sup>3</sup> Control variables include respondent age, gender, education, and urbanization.

## *FINDINGS*

Table 1 contains estimates of religious affiliation by country. The data in Table 1 show that the claim about Germany’s diverse religious affiliation, Spain’s homogeneous Catholicism, and Sweden’s homogeneous Protestant religious

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<sup>3</sup> Although this item is not included in the Pew survey, excluding the variable from the WVS analyses does not affect the results reported here.

population are correct.<sup>4</sup> The table result shows that Germany is indeed more pluralistic, which provides empirical confirmation of the premise of the study. The United Kingdom contains a high percentage of religious “nones” and is mostly Protestant, although the UK contains a substantial Catholic minority. The estimates of the religious composition of Spain and Germany differ somewhat. The WVS estimate for Germany shows a more Protestant German population than does the Pew Survey, while the Pew Survey for Spain contains a lower percentage of self-reported Roman Catholics (although the percentage of Spanish Protestants is negligible in both surveys). Nevertheless, the overall patterns of religious affiliation in both surveys in nations included in both are broadly similar.

**Table 1: Religious Affiliation by Country**

<b>Pre-9/11</b>			
	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant</b>	<b>N</b>
Germany	20.8	33.1	2064
Spain	80.0	0.4	2197
Sweden	1.4	69.3	1716

*Source:* Computed by authors from *World Values Survey* Wave 4 and Wave 5.

<b>Post-9/11</b>			
	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Protestant</b>	<b>N</b>
Germany	30.2	30.0	1000
Spain	61.1	0.6	1009
Sweden	9.3	30.3	1000

*Source:* Computed by authors from Pew Research Center, *Global Attitudes and Trends*, Spring 2014.

Table 2 contains the results of multivariate models (logistic regression) for each nation, explaining attitudes toward Muslim neighbors for each survey. For the pre-9/11 survey, the data show that, in Germany, self-identified Catholics and Protestants are more accepting of Muslim neighbors than religiously unaffiliated respondents. Among German respondents, self-identification as either Catholic or Protestant is related to greater acceptance of Muslims as neighbors. The relationships between Catholic and Protestant affiliation and intolerance of

<sup>4</sup> Note that the number of respondents does not add up to 100, as the vast majority of people who are not Catholic or Protestant are “nones.”



Muslims are negative and significant. Relative to the non-affiliated, Germans who describe themselves as adherents of Christian denominations are relatively tolerant of Muslim neighbors.

**Table 2: Multivariate Models of Rejection of Muslim Neighbors, Pre-9/11 (Logistic Regression)**

	Germany	Spain	Sweden
Catholic	-0.384* (0.011)	0.374 (0.177)	-----
Protestant	-0.260* (0.034)	-----	-0.468* (0.023)
Attendance	0.214 (0.284)	-0.112 (0.612)	-0.1544 (0.132)
Age	0.007* (0.021)	0.015* (0.011)	0.017** (0.006)
Education	-0.119*** (0.000)	-0.027 (0.555)	-0.105* (0.027)
Sex	-0.079 (0.465)	0.288 (0.132)	-0.490* (0.015)
Urbanization	-0.032 (0.167)	-0.044 (0.278)	-0.002 (0.972)
Constant	-0.541	-2.895***	-1.694**
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.036	0.036	0.049
N	2064	2197	1716

Dependent Variable: Attitudes of the respondent's willingness to accept a Muslim as neighbor.

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Computed by authors from *World Values Survey* Wave 4 and Wave 5.

Contrary to expectations, the effects of Protestantism in Sweden are quite similar to those observed in Germany. Despite the fact that Sweden does not represent a religiously competitive market, the relationship between Swedish Protestant and German Protestant affiliation and intolerance of Muslims are negative and significant, which substantively means that German and Swedish Protestants are less Islamophobic than their non-Protestant counterparts. German Protestants and Swedish Protestants are relatively more likely to be tolerant of Muslim neighbors.

For Spain, the relationship between Spanish Catholic affiliation and tolerance of Muslims are positive but statistically insignificant. Spanish Catholics are no more or less likely than non-Catholics Spaniards to be tolerant of Muslim neighbors.

Thus, the data presented in Table 2 show that *Hypothesis 2* is generally supported in Germany, prior to 9/11. The logistic regressions show that German Catholics and Protestants as well as Swedish Protestants are more accepting than non-affiliates in each country. Spanish Catholics are not significantly different from the “nones,” or religiously non-affiliated.

*Hypothesis 2* is thus confirmed for Catholics but not for Protestants. The effects of Catholic affiliation are not significant in Spain (there are too few Protestants for analysis). Catholics are more accepting of Muslims in the religiously pluralistic environment of Germany. The effects of Catholic and Protestant affiliation on attitudes toward Muslims are significant and negative in Germany. Substantively, this means that both Catholics and Protestants are more willing to accept Muslim neighbor than the religiously non-affiliated. The effects of Protestant affiliation are significant and negative in Sweden. Substantively, this finding means that Protestant Swedes are more accepting of Muslims than non-affiliated Swedes are (Sweden has too few Catholics to analyze). Pluralistic Germany and Protestant Sweden show similar relationships between Protestant affiliation and willingness to accept a Muslim neighbor. Conversely, in Spain, Catholics are no more or less likely to accept the Muslim neighbor than non-Catholics. The only variable that matters in Spain is age. Younger people are more accepting of Muslims in all three countries.

In the post-9/11, Pew survey, affiliation with Roman Catholicism is associated with lower levels of Islamophobia in religiously competitive Germany and the United Kingdom, in which Catholics constitute a small but consequential minority. The effects of Catholicism on negative attitudes toward Muslims remain insignificant in heavily Catholic Spain.

By contrast, the effects of Protestant affiliation on attitudes toward Muslims become statistically insignificant in the post-9/11 survey. Unfortunately, we are only in a position to attempt a cross-time comparison for Germany, but our analyses suggest that Protestant affiliation is associated with greater tolerance for Muslims prior to 9/11 in Germany and Sweden, but that the attitudes of Protestants do not differ significantly from non-affiliates in Germany or the UK in the post-9/11 period.

**Table 3: Multivariate Models of Attitudes Toward Muslims, Post-9/11 (OLS Regression)**

	Germany	Spain	United Kingdom
Catholic	-0.371** (0.134)	0.003 (0.109)	-0.512* (0.224)
Protestant	-0.144 (0.135)	-----	-0.076 (0.145)
Age	0.018*** (0.003)	0.018*** (0.003)	0.017** (0.004)
Education	-0.028*** (0.005)	-0.010* (0.004)	0.000 (0.004)
Sex	0.045 (0.112)	-0.074* (0.010)	0.129 (0.128)
Urbanization	0.292* (0.131)	0.181* (0.063)	0.061 (0.046)
Constant	1.089***	1.682***	0.1705***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.064	0.044	0.027
N	999	1008	999

Dependent variable: Attitudes toward Muslims (Very Favorable, Mostly Favorable, Mostly Unfavorable, Very Unfavorable)

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Source: Computed by authors from Pew Research Center, *Global Attitudes and Trends*, Spring 2014. Jelen, Ted G. 2002. *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies: Essays on Religious Markets and Religious Pluralism*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

The Hirschmann (1970) theory of *lazy monopoly* may possibly explain the difference in attitudes among citizens of these four countries. “Lazy monopolies” are organizations that fail to satisfy their members (who either “exit” or stay but “voice” their displeasure) and yet do little to address the concerns of their (ex-) constituents. This concept has been applied to the study of religious markets (Stark and Finke 2000; Tamadonfar and Jelen 2014).

In religiously competitive markets, adherents of traditions such as Catholicism may be aware of the distinctive nature of their religious affiliation. Such identification, which is not strongly related to citizenship, may make members of non-majority religions sympathetic to the needs of other religious minorities (such as Muslims). Since shared church membership is not a characteristic of the laity in competitive markets, religious adherents may be more receptive to church teachings and may feel a common bond with adherents of other non-dominant religious traditions (such as Islam).

## CONCLUSION

It is perhaps appropriate to reiterate the exploratory nature of this study and to call attention to some of its limitations. Although the analysis contains survey data from four nations, we have longitudinal data for only Germany and Spain. Moreover, the dependent variables in the pre- and post-9/11 surveys are similar but not identical.

Why does public opinion about Islamophobia matter? It matters because in democracies, governments are accountable to citizens, and this tendency may be stronger with respect to highly emotional issues such as immigration or political Islam. All four nations in this study are democracies. Thus, the opinions of ordinary citizens can be expected to affect public policies toward Muslims in these countries. Voters can leave a political party (or stay with it) if its action does not match their opinions (Dalton 2014) or the political consequences of their religion. Although voters may not get explicit laws written in agreement with their opinions (or they may not be able to determine which policies the party they support will follow on positions), they do feel somewhat confident the elites will produce similar measures on issue preferences close to their opinions (Dalton, 2014: 243).

Religion does seem to have an effect on attitudes toward Muslims, which seems likely to affect the behavior of political parties and elected officials. This influence seems especially likely since issues of religion and immigration are likely to be “easy” issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980) on which voters have coherent opinions.

Woodberry (2012) offers a possible explanation of why Protestant churches in Sweden and Germany might have been sources of greater acceptance of Muslims. Woodberry asserts that Protestantism laid the foundation and conditions for democracy and economic growth. Later the Catholic Church after Vatican II followed suit (Huntington 1991). Although Woodberry’s focus is primarily devoted to the effects of Protestant missionary activity, his account suggests that Protestantism in general is associated with characteristics of Western-style democracy. In the pre-9/11 analyses of Sweden and Germany, greater tolerance may be the result of relating Protestantism to democratic norms. Comparative historical analyses show that Protestants consistently initiated and spread factors that past research suggests promote democracy: mass printing, mass education, civil society, and rule of law (Woodberry 2012). The apparent change in Protestant attitudes after 9/11, however, suggests that the civic effects of Protestantism may be ephemeral. Nelsen and Guth (2015) have suggested that European Protestants have generally been less supportive of European integration (and, perhaps more generally, of internationalism) than their Catholic counterparts.

Conversely, the comparison among Roman Catholics in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom shows that there may be a difference in the manner in which the Catholic Church pursued its religious market. Although the Protestants were generally the catalysts to educate and create civil societies, the Catholic Church began to provide education and political resources after Vatican II because they had to compete with the Protestant Church in making active markets and increasing religious pluralism (Tamadonfar and Jelen 2014; Trejo 2012).

The Catholic Church was historically able to block competition in countries like Mexico and Spain (predominately Catholic countries) in which there was relatively little religious competition, and they offered fewer education and political resources to those countries. In countries such as the United States, Ireland, India, Germany, and Sweden, the Catholic Church was more aggressive in vying for the religious markets and provided more education and political resources to those countries because competition was greater (Woodberry 2012).

The results of this study show that religious contexts (specifically religious markets) affect the political consequences of religion but do so inconsistently across traditions. The effects of Catholic affiliation on Islamophobia seem consistent among religiously competitive nations and are relatively resistant to political events. By contrast, the effects of Protestantism seem more complex. Protestant tolerance toward Muslims appears to be relatively insensitive to the nature of religious markets, but the individualistic nature of Protestantism may make Protestants more sensitive to contemporary political events.

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