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# Are anti-Muslim feelings more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings? Evidence from two split-sample experiments

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## Abstract

This article tests the claim that anti-Muslim feelings are more widespread than general anti-foreigner feelings. It reports on two split sample experiments, in which a randomly selected part of the respondents evaluated statements for which the target group was identified as 'foreigners' and the other part evaluated the identical statements but with the target group identified as 'Muslims'. By using open-ended questions we are able to separate those respondents who had Muslims in mind when asked about foreigners from those who did not. We find that anti-Muslim feelings are more intense than anti-foreigner feelings along a wide range of attitude dimensions. Furthermore, those respondents who had Muslims in mind while judging statements about foreigners, turned out to be at least as hostile as those who were asked explicitly about Muslims.

## Keywords

Anti-foreigner feelings, anti-Muslim feelings, split-sample experiment, stepping stone theory

Many authors claim that in European societies anti-Muslim feelings, sometimes described as Islamophobia, are more widespread than general anti-foreigner feelings (e.g. Allen and Nielson, 2002; Bleich, 2009; Sheridan, 2006; Strabac and Listaug, 2008; Verkuyten and Zaremba, 2005). However, that thesis is most often based on measurements that are ill-suited for drawing such a conclusion. In this article we briefly recall the reasons to expect higher levels of anti-Muslim

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feelings than of general anti-foreigner feelings, criticize the evidence used to corroborate that thesis and test it on the basis of a split-sample approach.

### **Anti-Muslim feelings, a stepping stone for more general anti-foreigner feelings?**

Many scholars working in public opinion research conclude that, even though anti-Muslim feelings can be distinguished from more general anti-foreigner feelings, the two phenomena are (very) strongly related: persons holding general anti-foreigner feelings are very likely to have negative attitudes with regard to Muslims (e.g. Billiet and Swyngedouw, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Helbling, 2010; Kalkan et al., 2009; Stolz, 2005). Yet, many authors also claim that anti-Muslim feelings are more widespread than general anti-foreigner feelings (e.g. Dunn et al., 2007; Strabac and Listhaug, 2008). Some suggest that this is due to 9/11 (Allen and Nielson, 2002; Field, 2007; Sheridan, 2006), whereas others argue that the attitude with regard to Muslims became markedly more negative in the last decade of the 20th and first decade of the 21st century (Bleich, 2009; Helbling, 2010) or that it did so in response to the success of populist parties at the onset of the 21st century (e.g. Verkuyten and Zaremba, 2005). Other authors maintain that anti-Muslim feelings already have been more widespread than negative attitudes with regard to 'immigrants' or 'foreigners' for a long time (e.g. Kleg and Yamamoto, 1998; Verkuyten et al., 1996).

The higher frequency of anti-Muslim feelings, compared to other forms of prejudice, is often interpreted in terms of the stepping-stone theory. Some authors demonstrate that different forms of prejudice can be ordered as on a cumulative, Mokken- or Guttman-type scale, in the sense that people who show some less frequent, 'harder' forms of prejudice (e.g. blatant racism) will also show more widespread forms of prejudice (e.g. the belief that foreigners constitute an economic threat) while the reverse is not necessarily the case (De Witte, 1999; Kleinpenning, 1993; Raden, 1994). The 'softer', subtle, symbolic, colour-blind forms of prejudice are, according to many authors, considered more socially acceptable (Bobo et al., 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995). They can therefore act as stepping stones towards more blatant and harsher forms of prejudice (Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn, 1993: 35). In several European societies, anti-Muslim feelings are considered as such: a low, accessible stepping stone towards more blatant and general forms of prejudice, and eventually biological racism (as suggested by Rootham, 2010; Saeed, 2007).

There are at least three reasons to expect anti-Muslim feelings to be a very accessible form of prejudice and, hence, to be more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings in general. First, the critique of Muslims based on the defence of consensual values such as equality, individual rights, democracy, security and tolerance, has become widespread in public discourse and in the media (Bilsky, 2009; Fernandez, 2009; Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008:4; Ho, 2007; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007). One can therefore expect that attachment to those values

can induce, at least in some people who are otherwise less susceptible to prejudice, negative feelings towards Muslims (Hagendoorn and Sniderman, 2001:21). The probability of this happening can be increased by the fact that anti-Muslim feelings are now also publicly expressed by individuals and groups, such as public intellectuals and left-leaning parties that are usually not associated with prejudice (Cesari, 2011; Raymond, 2009).

Second, contemporary criticism of Muslims often addresses simultaneously Muslims as a religious and as an ethnic category (Kalin, 2011:11). This is not only observed in discourse analysis (Dunn et al., 2007; Modood, 2010) but also in survey research. The evaluation of Muslims seems to be inspired by both the prejudices held against cultural minorities in general (such as people on welfare, gays and lesbians) and against ethnic minorities (e.g. blacks, Hispanics) (Kalkan et al., 2009:851). In this sense anti-Muslim feelings seem to be the cumulative result of different forms of prejudice.

Third, there are also some indications that, not only cultural entrepreneurs such as parties, media and intellectuals play a role in shaping the contemporary critique of Muslims, but that there is also intensified 'boundary work' between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe (Kalin, 2011:16). The documented differences in norms, attitudes and ways of life (Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007) become the subject of mutually exclusive feelings of identity and negative perceptions of the other (Verkuyten and Zaremba, 2005).

Together those three elements can easily make Muslims into a 'suitable enemy' (Fekete, 2009), a group with perceived characteristics that makes it a legitimate object of negative feelings. One can therefore expect anti-Muslim feelings to be more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings. This article will test that expectation. In what follows we will describe the attitudes we measure as 'anti-Muslim feelings' and 'anti-foreigner feelings'. That choice of terminology is inspired by the fact that an alternative and often used designation of the kind of attitude scale we use, 'Islamophobia', is heavily contested (Halliday, 1999). Today some authors want to reserve the label 'phobia' for explicit and specific measures of fear (Lopez, 2011). While that argument is usually developed in reaction to the use of Islamophobia it also applies to xenophobia. The items of the scales we use address a much broader range of feelings than fear. Yet, it should be noted that a number of authors using the label 'Islamophobia' (e.g. Allen, 2010; Modood, 2010) would consider these items as an important component of Islamophobia. Second, the items used to measure anti-Muslim feelings always refer explicitly to Muslims, not to Islam. They are inspired by the specificity of contemporary critique of Muslims and Islam and do not refer exclusively to either religion (Islam) or ethnicity (Arabs).

## Methodological considerations

In the previous section we presented three reasons to expect that anti-Muslim feelings are more widespread than more general anti-foreigner feelings. Such a

claim is often made, but the two kinds of supporting evidence suffer from important weaknesses.

One method of comparing different forms of prejudice uses questions concerning living proximity (e.g. Helbling, 2010; Strabac and Listaug, 2008) or whether one would be disturbed if a relative were to marry a person of a specific ethnic or religious group (e.g. Dunn et al., 2007). Measures of that kind suffer from at least three weaknesses. First, in terms of measurement technique they have the disadvantage of basing a conclusion about a difference in the extent of different forms of negative feelings toward outgroups on a single statement, not on a set of scalable statements, as measurement theory would require (Savelkoul et al., 2011). Second, the category of 'immigrant' (foreign worker) is potentially vague. It is not clear what kind of groups and connotations the respondents have in mind when they react to such as denotation. Analyses based on the use of the Bogardus-scale measuring social distance, show that such distance is usually smaller for people who are more alike in terms of geographic origin and/or religion (Siongers, 2011). Possibly, some respondents associate the label 'immigrant' with groups close to themselves in terms of geographic origin and/or religion, while others do not. Third, this way of measuring anti-Muslim or anti-foreigner feelings gives no clue about the reasons for, for example, not wanting to live next to Muslims or foreigners.

Another method, which avoids some, but not all, of the above-mentioned problems, is based on a comparison of scales based on the judgments of different statements, measuring different attitudes with regard to different target groups (Muslims, foreigners, immigrants, asylum seekers, etc.) (e.g. Billiet and Swyngedouw, 2009; Dekker and van der Noll, 2009). The use of different statements allows researchers to address the stereotypes specifically associated with different target groups and hence gain a clearer view of the specific motivations underlying the attitudes toward those groups. In standard surveys, however, it is difficult to ask respondents to react several times to the same statement in which only the designation of the target group is changed. And when the items used to measure the attitudes towards different target groups are different, one cannot, in fact, separate the effect of the wording and the connotation of the statements from the effect of the identified target group.

In order to overcome those problems we conducted two split-sample experiments in which a randomly selected part of the research population evaluated statements in which the target group was identified as 'foreigners' and another part of the research population evaluated the identical statements but with the target group identified as 'Muslims'.

## **The research population**

The selected research population consists of first-year university students. About 85 percent of Flemish young people obtain a diploma of secondary education. A little over 20 percent continues education at one of the universities, becoming the more

highly educated members of society. Longitudinal research has shown that the pursuit of university education itself does not significantly influence ethnic prejudice, but that the less prejudiced young people, because of the educational tracks they followed at the secondary school level, are more likely to attend university (for an overview see Elchardus and Spruyt, 2009). The research population will therefore have attitudes typical of more highly educated members of society. Research has consistently demonstrated a negative correlation between the level of education and different forms of ethnic prejudice (for an overview: Hagendoorn and Nekuee, 1999). The experiment will therefore allow us to see whether, even among a population less inclined to prejudice, anti-Muslim feelings are more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings in general.

The research population of Experiment 1 consists of first-year university students in the human and social sciences (economics, sociology, political science, psychology, pedagogy, communication sciences, social pedagogy and law). They responded in class to a written questionnaire at the beginning of the academic year 2009–10 ( $N=684$ ). The statements we use to measure negative feelings about Muslims or foreigners are not neutral with regard to ethnicity and religion. Therefore Muslims ( $n=86$ ) and students of which one or both parents were born outside Europe and North America ( $n=76$ ) were eliminated from the sample, leaving us with a sample of 522 students.

The research population of Experiment 2 consists of the next cohort of students in the human and social sciences at the same university (2010–11): 569 students participated. Again Muslim students ( $n=81$ ), Jewish students ( $n=3$ ) and students with one or both parents born outside the Europe or North America ( $n=10$ ) were removed from the research population. In the first experiment the research population was randomly divided into two groups. In the second experiment it was divided into three groups, the first was given statements pertaining to ‘foreigners’, the second was given identical statements referring to ‘Muslims’ and the third the same statements, this time referring to ‘Jews’. In this analysis, only the first two of those groups was considered, leaving us with 317 respondents in the second split-sample experiment.

In order for the split-sample experiments to be meaningful the different sample segments should be perfectly randomized. To ensure this, for both the 2009 and the 2010 experiments, we compared the sample segments for a series of attitudes (populism, authoritarianism and utilitarian individualism; these are all attitudes for which ample evidence suggests that they are strongly correlated with ethnic prejudice), as well as for a number of background characteristics (Table 1). None of the comparisons between the sample segments yielded a significant difference, neither in 2009 nor in 2010. This means that the differences observed between the split samples in the experiment can be attributed to the difference in stimulus or the target group, ‘foreigners’ in one case, ‘Muslims’ in the other.

The two experiments, although similar, were not identical because the second one built cumulatively on the first. We first describe the 2009 experiment, then the 2010 one, and in the conclusions address the findings from both.

## Experiment I

In the first experiment, 13 rigorously identical statements were presented to the two randomized samples of students, in one sample referring to ‘foreigners’, in the other to ‘Muslims’. ‘Foreigners’ is a very broad category and it is quite possible that different respondents think of different specific groups when reacting to a statement about ‘foreigners’. Therefore the participants in the experiment were also asked to

**Table 1.** Testing the randomization of the split samples of university students in two samples

Sociopolitical attitudes interval scales <sup>d</sup>	Year <sup>a</sup>	$F^b$	$p$	
Political populism (6 items)	2009	2.581	0.109	
	2010	0.416	0.520	
Authoritarianism (shortened version of Adorno's <i>F</i> -scale) (4 items)	2009	0.157	0.692	
	2010	0.419	0.518	
Utilitarian individualism (4 items)	2009	1.288	0.257	
	2010	0.919	0.338	
Subjective feelings of fear of crime (8 items)	2009	0.065	0.799	
	2010	2.232	0.128	
Categorical variables		$\text{Chi}^2$	d.f.	$p$
Course of study (Law – economics/Sociology and political science – pedagogy – psychology – agogics/Criminology)	2009	0.586	3	0.785
	2010	6.240	3	0.100
Gender	2009	0.132	1	0.422
	2010	0.345	1	0.557
Does mother have a diploma of higher education?	2009	0.451	1	0.233
	2010	0.025	1	0.873
Does father have a diploma of higher education?	2009	0.253	1	0.289
	2010	1.058	1	0.304

Notes:

<sup>a</sup>2009: Total  $N = 522$  (Group I,  $n = 266$ ; Group II,  $n = 256$ ); 2010: Total  $N = 317$  (Group I,  $n = 163$ ; Group II,  $n = 154$ ).

<sup>b</sup> $F$ -test between the two groups based on a one-way ANOVA-model. The null hypothesis is the absence of a group difference.

<sup>c</sup> $\text{Chi}^2$ -test based on the pairwise cross tabulation of the experimental variable and the different background characteristics.

<sup>d</sup>Item wordings are available upon request.



describe what they understood by 'foreigners', in an open question. About a quarter of the participants did not answer the question, indicating that they were unable or unwilling to do so. About a fifth of those explicitly wrote something along the lines that they 'did not believe in the existence of foreigners', 'we are all humans', 'foreigners are the people I do not yet know', etc. Of the respondents giving a definition of 'foreigner', about 12 percent did so in terms of religion, skin colour, language, civilization (non-western) or degree of integration or assimilation into the respondents' culture, that is, 'a foreigner is someone who is not integrated'. The bulk, about 63 percent, used nationality as a criterion: 16 percent described foreigners as non-Belgians, 6 percent as non-Europeans, 3 percent as illegal residents, and the rest mentioned specific countries (e.g. Morocco, or groups of countries, e.g. eastern Europe, Muslim countries). Given the nature of the experiment in which we want to contrast attitudes with regard to foreigners with attitudes regarding Muslims, it is important to distinguish people who very explicitly associate the label 'foreigner' with Muslims. As such, we consider the people who define foreign as being Muslim (3%), as coming from a Muslim country (4%), from Morocco (20.7%) or from Turkey (6.9%). About 35 percent of the total sample and 47 percent of the total number of students who were willing (and able) to offer a definition of what constitutes a foreigner, spontaneously associated being foreign with being Muslim or from a Muslim country. This result is surprisingly similar to what a survey among the Flemish population found more than 20 years ago (Billiet et al., 1990). For a long time now and for many people in Flanders, the 'foreigner' or 'stranger' is a Muslim or someone from a Muslim country, particularly Morocco and Turkey (countries from which most Belgian Muslims originated).

In the light of this finding, we distinguish three groups (Table 2). The first group consists of half of the sample that responded to statements for which the target group is defined as 'Muslim' (Group I). The second half of the sample for which the target group was defined as 'foreigners' is subdivided into one group of respondents indicating in the open question that they associate foreigners with Muslims, people from Muslim countries, or Moroccans and Turks (Group IIa) and another group of respondents who did not associate foreigners that way (Group IIb).

In 12 out of the total 13 statements the responses of the three groups differ significantly. There is no difference for the extent to which foreigners/Muslims should be helped through positive discrimination. Such policies enjoy little support, regardless of the target group.

From the analysis of the responses to the other 12 statements, three conclusions emerge. Overall, the most negative attitudes are expressed by the respondents who reacted to statements concerning 'foreigners' but who associate foreigners with Muslims. The most positive responses are given by the students who answered questions concerning foreigners and who did not spontaneously associate foreigners with Muslims in the open question. This finding is consistent with what the literature suggests. Attitudes are more negative with regard to Muslims than with regard to foreigners. This turns out to be particularly the case when people spontaneously define being foreign as being Muslim.

**Table 2.** Comparison responses to 13 statements concerning Muslims and foreigners in the split-sample experiment among Flemish university students ( $N = 522$ )

Statements were rated on 5 point scale range ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)	Group I		Group II				Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>			Overall differences <sup>b</sup>
	I ( $n = 266$ )		IIa ( $n = 106$ )		IIb ( $n = 150$ )		Ia & IIb	I & IIa	I & IIb	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	$p$	$p$	$p$	$p$
In some neighborhoods the public authorities do too much for the [Muslims/foreigners] and too little for the Belgians	3.02	0.06	3.24	0.09	2.66	0.07	0.000	0.054	0.000	0.000
Belgian should never have let [Muslims/foreigners] in	2.23	0.06	2.46	0.09	1.89	0.06	0.000	0.030	0.000	0.000
If we want a peaceful society we should let no more [Muslims/foreigners] in	2.27	0.06	2.38	0.09	1.82	0.06	0.000	0.299	0.000	0.000
Our elites downplay the problems with [Muslims/foreigners]	2.84	0.06	3.00	0.09	2.50	0.07	0.000	0.138	0.000	0.000
[Muslims/foreigners] are shown preferential treatment by the social services	2.72	0.06	2.89	0.10	2.33	0.08	0.000	0.136	0.000	0.000
[Muslims/foreigners] are all too often the victim of discrimination	3.16	0.06	2.92	0.10	3.25	0.08	0.011	0.042	0.372	0.034
We should devote more resources to helping [Muslims/foreigners] advance socioeconomically	2.99	0.06	2.72	0.08	2.89	0.07	0.127	0.009	0.295	0.032
I am in favour of positive discrimination for [Muslims/foreigners], for instance as concerns hiring	2.04	0.05	1.95	0.08	1.91	0.06	0.673	0.313	0.100	0.226
It would be more pleasant to live in this country without [Muslims/foreigners]	2.33	0.06	2.71	0.10	2.15	0.07	0.000	0.001	0.072	0.000

(continued)

**Table 2.** Continued

Statements were rated on 5 point scale range ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)	Group I		Group II				Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>			Overall differences <sup>b</sup>
	I (n = 266)		IIa (n = 106)		IIb (n = 150)		Ia & IIb	I & IIa	I & IIb	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	p	p	p	p
Many criminals turn out to be [Muslims/ foreigners]	3.21	0.06	3.33	0.10	2.64	0.08	0.000	0.308	0.000	0.000
I have already many posi- tive encounters with [Muslims/foreigners]	3.49	0.07	2.91	0.12	3.51	0.08	0.000	0.000	0.845	0.000
I have many friends among [Muslims/ foreigners]	3.21	0.07	2.51	0.11	3.03	0.08	0.000	0.000	0.094	0.000
I would like my children at school to also have a [Muslim/foreigner] as teacher	3.19	0.06	2.63	0.12	3.08	0.08	0.001	0.000	0.298	0.000

## Notes:

Group I: subject of statements was Muslims; Group IIa: subject of statements was foreigners and respondents associated foreigners spontaneously with Muslims; Group IIb: subject of statements was foreigners and respondents did not associate foreigners with Muslims.

<sup>a</sup>LSD post hoc tests based on a one way ANOVA.

<sup>b</sup>F-test based on a one way ANOVA.

Muslims, both in the group that reacted to statements in which the Muslims were explicitly mentioned and in the group that spontaneously associated Muslims with foreigners, score more negatively for 9 out of the 12 statements for which there are significant differences between the group scores. More than in the case of foreigners who are not seen as Muslims, the students tend to think that Muslims are privileged by the authorities and the social services, should never have been allowed into the country and should not be allowed in any longer if we want a peaceful society. They think that problems with Muslims, more than with foreigners in general, are trivialized or covered up by the authorities; that Muslims are less the victims of discrimination than foreigners in general and that it would be more pleasant to live in a country without Muslims. The average score (minimum 1 and maximum 5) for the statement that many criminals are foreigners equals 2.6 and for the statement that many criminals are Muslims the score is 3.2. In the group that defines being foreign as being Muslim the score is 3.3. Those observations are consistent with the extensive evidence from discourse analysis, as well as with the findings pointing to an association between Islam and violence in the discursive justifications of anti-Muslim feelings (Allen and Nielsen, 2002; Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007; Strabac and Listhaug, 2008).

There are, however, three statements to which the responses are more positive for 'Muslims' than for 'foreigners'. For the statement 'I have a lot of friends among Muslims/foreigners', the response is more positive in the case of Muslims. The same is true for the statements 'I would like my children to also be taught by Muslims/foreigners at school' and 'We should do more to help advance Muslims/foreigners socioeconomically', although for this last statement the differences are small. These items, for which Muslims are evaluated more positively than 'foreigners', seem to indicate that they are considered more as members of the societal community: the respondents have more friends among Muslims than among foreigners, show less resistance against having their children taught by Muslim teachers than by teachers considered as foreigners, and are more ready to support efforts to improve the socioeconomic situation of Muslims. However, for these three items the responses are much more negative in the group that reacted to statements about foreigners but spontaneously define foreigners as Muslims (Group IIa). This observation again indicates that this group has a particularly negative attitude towards Muslims, and underlines the importance of taking into account the meaning given to 'foreigner'.

Overall, though, from this first experiment one must conclude that negative feelings towards Muslims are, at least in our research population, much more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings. For the 12 statements in which there are significant differences between the split samples, the attitude is always more negative for the respondents who reacted to statements about 'foreigners' but who spontaneously associate 'foreigner' and Muslim.

A second experiment was conducted to see whether these three observations could be replicated: (1) attitudes are more negative with regard to Muslims than with regard to foreigners in general; (2) this holds for all statements except for those that seem to suggest that Muslims, although the victims of more negative attitudes, are more accepted as members of the societal community (i.e. having friends among the target group, accepting the members of the target groups as teachers of one's children, being willing to help advance the target group socioeconomically); and (3) attitudes are particularly negative when respondents react to statements about foreigners but are those who spontaneously associate foreigners with Muslims.

## Experiment 2

The second experiment differed in two ways from the previous one. First, we wanted to see whether the three observations still hold when the number of statements submitted to the participants is increased and is made to cover a broader range of themes (Table 3). This broader range of items was inspired by the discourse analysis of critique of Islam and Muslims (see references elsewhere in this article) but formulated by the authors. Instead of 13 items, now 33 items concerning 11 different themes were submitted to the subsamples. Between the two experiments there is an overlap of seven items.

**Table 3.** Comparison responses to 33 statements concerning Muslims and foreigners in the split-sample experiment among Flemish university students (N = 317)

Items	Group I (n = 163)		Group IIa (n = 73)		Group IIb (n = 81)		Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>			Overall differences <sup>b</sup>	
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Ia & IIb	I & IIa	I & IIb	p	p
							p	p	p		
1. Equality of man and woman (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.807$ )											
[Muslim/immigrant] men repress their women	3.75	0.07	3.26	0.11	2.77	0.10	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
The principle of equality between men and women in our society is threatened by the presence of [Muslims/foreigners]	2.81	0.08	2.75	0.13	2.41	0.09	0.683	0.003	0.030	0.030	0.010
[Muslims/foreigners] will always believe that women are inferior to men	3.33	0.07	3.12	0.12	2.39	0.10	0.120	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
2. Education, upbringing of children ( $\alpha = 0.820$ )											
[Muslims/foreigners] do not place enough importance on the school results of their children	2.38	0.08	2.60	0.12	2.13	0.10	0.113	0.049	0.002	0.002	0.009
A lot of problems with [Muslims/foreigners] are related to the way they raise their children	3.05	0.08	3.15	0.11	2.82	0.12	0.490	0.105	0.048	0.048	0.119
[Muslims/foreigners] let their children hang around too much on the streets	3.17	0.08	3.18	0.11	2.76	0.11	0.925	0.004	0.012	0.012	0.009
3. Cultural threat ( $\alpha = 0.868$ )											
The West-European way of life is incompatible with the life of [Muslims/foreigners]	2.96	0.09	2.88	0.12	2.28	0.10	0.560	0.000	0.001	0.001	0.000

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Items	Group I (n = 163)		Group IIa (n = 73)		Group IIb (n = 81)		Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>				Overall differences <sup>b</sup>
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Ia & IIb	I & IIa	I & IIb	p	
							p	p	p	p	
[Muslims/foreigners] do not have much to offer to the Belgian culture	2.70	0.08	2.53	0.12	2.12	0.10	0.228	0.000	0.009	0.000	0.000
[Muslims/foreigners] are a threat to our culture and customs	2.60	0.09	2.45	0.13	2.14	0.11	0.307	0.002	0.069	0.007	0.007
4. Contact and encounters ( $\alpha = 0.763$ )											
I have already many positive encounters with [Muslims/foreigners]*	3.18	0.09	3.37	0.13	3.75	0.09	0.194	0.000	0.028	0.001	0.001
It would be more pleasant to live in this country without [Muslims/foreigners]*	2.59	0.08	2.42	0.12	2.08	0.10	0.224	0.000	0.033	0.001	0.001
I would like my children at school to also have a [Muslim/foreigner] as teacher**	2.61	0.08	2.93	0.11	3.41	0.10	0.021	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.000
5. Violence and criminality ( $\alpha = 0.763$ )											
Every [Muslim/foreigner] is a potential terrorist	1.73	0.08	1.82	0.11	1.48	0.07	0.546	0.025	0.015	0.030	0.030
Many criminals turn out to be [Muslims/foreigners]*	2.73	0.08	3.06	0.12	2.73	0.12	0.035	0.956	0.059	0.080	0.080
If we want a peaceful society we should let no more [Muslims/foreigners] in*	2.17	0.08	2.25	0.12	1.86	0.09	0.619	0.018	0.015	0.025	0.025
6. Social profiteering and work ethic ( $\alpha = 0.858$ )											
Most [Muslims/foreigners] are lazy and try to avoid heavy and tiring work	2.18	0.08	2.47	0.13	1.94	0.10	0.042	0.057	0.001	0.003	0.003

(continued)

**Table 3.** Continued

Items	Group I (n = 163)		Group IIa (n = 73)		Group IIb (n = 81)		Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>				Overall differences <sup>b</sup>
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Ia & IIb	I & IIa	I & IIb	p	
[Muslims/foreigners] take advantage of our social security system	2.65	0.08	2.81	0.13	2.35	0.12	0.321	0.035	0.008	0.023	
[Muslims/foreigners] always know where to get money	2.78	0.09	2.75	0.13	2.25	0.11	0.792	0.000	0.003	0.001	
7. Conspiracies and plots ( $\alpha = 0.880$ )											
You have to be very careful when doing business with [Muslims/foreigners]	2.67	0.08	2.86	0.11	2.54	0.10	0.173	0.304	0.040	0.119	
Most [Muslims/foreigners] are more willing than other people to use shady practices to get ahead in life	2.50	0.08	2.68	0.11	2.30	0.11	0.217	0.113	0.016	0.052	
[Muslims/foreigners] are often involved with secretive practices and conspiracies	2.47	0.08	2.68	0.10	2.16	0.10	0.114	0.014	0.001	0.002	
8. The privileged stranger ( $\alpha = 0.590$ )											
Our social services favour [Muslims/foreigners]	2.60	0.08	2.81	0.14	2.19	0.10	0.157	0.003	0.000	0.001	
We should devote more resources to helping [Muslims/foreigners] advance socioeconomically <sup>c</sup>	2.77	0.07	2.86	0.11	3.21	0.10	0.437	0.001	0.024	0.003	
[Muslims/foreigners] are not receiving enough opportunities and resources to fully participate in our society	2.52	0.07	2.79	0.12	3.22	0.11	0.039	0.000	0.006	0.000	
9. Social dominance ( $\alpha = 0.912$ )											
Most [Muslims/foreigners] think they are superior to other people	2.84	0.08	2.79	0.12	2.29	0.10	0.730	0.000	0.002	0.000	

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Items	Group I (n = 163)		Group IIa (n = 73)		Group IIb (n = 81)		Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>				Overall differences <sup>b</sup>
	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	Ia & IIb	I & IIa	I & IIb	p	p
[Muslims/foreigners] want to dominate everything	2.78	0.09	2.63	0.13	2.14	0.10	0.271	0.000	0.004	0.000	0.000
[Muslims/foreigners] always want to be proven correct	2.85	0.08	2.66	0.12	2.27	0.11	0.161	0.000	0.016	0.000	0.000
10. Loyalty ( $\alpha = 0.688$ )											
Most [Muslims/foreigners] are more loyal to their country of origin than to the country they live in.	3.61	0.07	3.85	0.08	3.52	0.10	0.037	0.457	0.015	0.037	0.037
Most [Muslims/foreigners] shut themselves off from the rest of society	3.03	0.08	3.01	0.10	2.59	0.09	0.889	0.000	0.004	0.001	0.001
In case of war [Muslims/foreigners] will turn against Europe	3.10	0.074	2.79	0.12	2.18	0.09	0.017	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
11. Victimization ( $\alpha = 0.804$ )											
[Muslims/foreigners] always present themselves as victims	2.91	0.09	2.83	0.13	2.23	0.10	0.593	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Many [Muslims/foreigners] are inclined to label each criticism of themselves as a manifestation of [Islamophobia/racism]	3.59	0.08	3.78	0.12	3.13	0.12	0.205	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000
[Muslims/foreigners] often attempt to set communities against each other	2.54	0.08	2.51	0.12	2.15	0.08	0.802	0.002	0.018	0.007	0.007

Note:  
<sup>a</sup>Item was also used in the first experiment.  
<sup>a1</sup>LSD post hoc tests based on a one way ANOVA.  
<sup>b</sup>F-test based on a one way ANOVA.



Second, we now split the research population three ways. For one group ( $n=158$ ) the 33 statements referred to Jews; for the second group ( $n=163$ ) to Muslims; and for the third ( $n=154$ ) to foreigners. In this analysis we shall use only the last two groups.<sup>1</sup> The research population is selected as in the first experiment and on the basis of the same open question concerning the meaning of foreigner. Again three groups are distinguished: the respondents who reacted to statements referring to Muslims ( $n=163$ ), the respondents who reacted to statements referring to foreigners but indicated that they associate foreigners with Muslims ( $n=73$ ) and a third group that reacted to statements about foreigners and did not associate foreigners spontaneously with Muslims ( $n=81$ ).

At the level of the items (Table 3) and using the 0.10 level of significance there are significant differences between the three groups for 31 out of the 33 items. The statement that 'A lot of the problems with Muslims/foreigners are a consequence of how they educate their children' does not discriminate between the groups, neither does the statement 'When doing business with Muslims/foreigners one has to be extra careful'. Using the 0.05 level of significance, two other statements do not discriminate between the two groups: 'Many criminals turn out to be Muslims/foreigners' and 'More than other people Muslims/foreigners seek advancement by deviant means'. So, even with a level of significance that, given the size of the groups can be considered severe, there are significant differences for 29 out of the 33 statements. Moreover, those differences are always to the disadvantage of Muslims.

While in the first experiment the most negative attitude was often expressed by the students who reacted to statements about foreigners but indicated in the open question that they spontaneously associate Muslim with foreigners, this is no longer the case in 2010. In general, the difference between that group and the respondents who reacted to statements about Muslims, are not very substantial and in some cases even more negative for statements with an explicit reference to Muslims compared to statements with an explicit reference to foreigners but an implicit association of foreigners and Muslims.

The 33 items cover 11 themes. For each theme a summation scale is estimated and standardized to range from 0 to 10. The Cronbach's alphas are given in Table 4. For 9 of the 11 scales they are higher than 0.7 and range from 0.76 to 0.91. Two scales fall below that threshold. The scale measuring the perceived lack of loyalty of Muslims/foreigners has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.69 and the scale measuring the extent to which people believe that Muslims/foreigners are privileged by social services and should be helped to advance socioeconomically has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.59. This last scale will not be considered in the analysis (but the values for that scale are presented in Tables 3 and 4).

When comparing the scale values for the group who reacted to statements about Muslims to those for the group who reacted to statements about foreigners but not spontaneously associating foreigners with Muslims, it turned out that 8 out of the 10 differences are highly significant. The remaining two are significant at the 0.059 level. All of the differences are to the disadvantage of Muslims. Most of the

**Table 4.** Group differences on 11 attitudes scales concerning Muslims and foreigners in the split-sample experiment among Flemish university students ( $N = 317$ )

Scales	Group I ( $n = 163$ )		Group II				Pairwise comparison <sup>a</sup>			Overall difference <sup>b</sup>
	Mean	S.E.	IIa ( $n = 73$ )		IIb ( $n = 81$ )		I & II	I & IIa	IIb & IIa	$p$
			Mean	S.E.	Mean	S.E.	$p$	$p$	$p$	
1. Equality of man and woman	5.75	0.15	5.09	0.24	3.78	0.22	0.000	0.018	0.000	0.000
2. Education, upbringing of children	4.67	0.17	4.94	0.25	3.85	0.24	0.006	0.370	0.002	0.003
3. Cultural threat	4.38	0.19	4.06	0.28	2.96	0.23	0.000	0.316	0.002	0.000
4. Contact and encounters	4.84	0.18	4.27	0.26	3.25	0.20	0.000	0.060	0.002	0.000
5. Violence and criminality	3.05	0.16	3.46	0.25	2.52	0.18	0.059	0.163	0.002	0.012
6. Social profiteering and work ethic	3.85	0.18	4.19	0.29	2.96	0.24	0.004	0.316	0.001	0.002
7. Conspiracies and plots	3.87	0.17	4.32	0.24	3.31	0.23	0.059	0.150	0.003	0.012
8. The privileged stranger	5.26	0.14	5.13	0.24	3.96	0.20	0.000	0.583	0.000	0.000
9. Social dominance	4.57	0.19	4.24	0.28	3.09	0.24	0.000	0.286	0.002	0.000
10. Loyalty	5.63	0.15	5.56	0.20	4.43	0.17	0.000	0.776	0.000	0.000
11. Victimization	5.04	0.17	5.09	0.27	3.81	0.20	0.000	0.875	0.000	0.000

Notes:

<sup>a</sup>LSD post hoc tests based on a one way anova.<sup>b</sup>F-test based on a one way anova.

differences are quite sizable and some are huge. Compared to foreigners not implicitly regarded as Muslims, Muslims are particularly blamed for the following: unequal gender relations and the repression of women; being disloyal to the countries of residence; being pretentious and domineering; misuse of the social security provisions; always posing as victims and construing every criticism as an expression of racism; and having a way of life that is incompatible with the western European one. Similar differences, though not always that pronounced, are found between the two subgroups that responded to items about foreigners with one group implicitly defining foreigners as Muslims.

Between the group responding to items explicitly about Muslims and the group associating foreigners with Muslims there arose fewer differences, as observed already at the level of specific items. For 8 out of the 10 scales, the differences are clearly insignificant. In one case – the evaluation of contact – the difference is borderline significant, and the evaluation somewhat more positive in the group that reacts to statements about ‘foreigners’ associating them with Muslims compared to the group that reacts to statements explicitly about Muslims. The only truly significant, and somewhat sizable, difference is observed for gender relations. Here the judgment is more negative when Muslims are explicitly mentioned. This is also the

item for which the evaluation of Muslim attitudes differs most from that of the 'foreigners'. Gender relations clearly are one of the core foci of anti-Muslim feelings.

The second experiment strongly confirms one of the conclusions of the first experiment: anti-Muslim feelings are more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings or, phrased differently and more precisely, negative attitudes are more pronounced when the target group is identified as Muslim than when it is identified as foreigner.

The two other conclusions or unanticipated findings from the first experiment are not confirmed in the second experiment, highlighting the virtues of replication. While in the first experiment the most negative feelings were often expressed by the respondents who reacted to statements about 'foreigners' but spontaneously associate foreigners with Muslims, this is no longer the case in 2010. Also, the impression created by the observations in 2009 that, although Muslims are more negatively evaluated than foreigners, they are considered more as members of the societal community than foreigners (accepted as teachers of children and friends) is not corroborated by the 2010 experiment. The 2010 experiment simply indicates that, for the 10 themes for which adequate scales could be constructed, the evaluation is always (much) more negative for Muslims.

## Conclusion

Both of the experiments confirm the thesis that anti-Muslim feelings, sometimes equated with Islamophobia, are (much) more widespread than anti-foreigner feelings, sometimes described as xenophobia.

The discourse analysis of the critique of Islam and Muslims suggests that this can be explained because criticism of Islam and of Muslims is formulated as a defence of important, consensual values, particularly liberal and/or Enlightenment ones. The discourse of Islam scepticism legitimates itself as a defence of tolerance (Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007), democratic citizenship, individual rights and free speech (Bilsky, 2009). Fernandez (2009) identifies three basic themes in such discourses: (1) threats to the position and rights of women (see also Gottschalk and Greenberg, 2008; Ho, 2007); (2) threats to security; and (3) threats to the separation of Church and State.

While our split-sample experiment cannot test the validity of those explanations it is, to a very large extent, consistent with them. Gender relations, the position and rights of women, discriminate very strongly between the attitudes against foreigners and Muslims. We also observe a substantial difference between foreigners and Muslims in terms of the extent to which their culture is deemed compatible with western culture. That could, in part, be because people associate Muslims with specific cultural patterns, which they probably do not do in the case of foreigners. Yet, this could also relate to conflicts between the liberal and Enlightenment values that the discourse of Islam scepticism has emphasized.

There are, however, also some possible differences between the findings of the discourse analysis and the conclusions from our experiment. Islam and Muslims are also frequently associated with violence (Bilsky, 2009; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007; Strabac and Listhaug, 2008). There is evidence from qualitative research that the association between Islam and violence effectively exists in the mind of people (Pevey and McKenzie, 2009; see also Falk, 2008). Yet in the split-sample experiments that association is not very strong; the difference between Muslims and foreigners with regard to violence is not as pronounced as some of the other stereotypes gauged in the second experiment.

The experiments, and particularly the second one, also revealed a number of other stereotypes that are much more frequently associated with Muslims than with foreigners. Muslims are, compared to foreigners, very strongly associated with arrogance, the desire to dominate, always considering themselves right, posing as victims, countering every criticism with the accusation of racism, misusing social security provisions, and disloyalty to their new countries. These stereotypes are less present in the discourse of the critique of Islam and Muslims. Two explanations can be suggested for this finding. The first holds that, besides this discourse, there is a broader social symbolic text about Muslims, made up of judgements/clichés/stereotypes that, even among university students, also contribute to anti-Muslim feelings over and above the prejudices that can be attributed to general anti-foreigner feelings and to the positions commonly defended in the discourse of Islam scepticism. The second, directly derived from the stepping-stone theory and which does not contradict the first explanation, is that people who hold negative feelings toward an outgroup tend to agree with nearly every negative statement about that group (Hagendoorn and Sniderman, 2001:21). If this explanation were to hold, it would illustrate how easily criticism of out groups for specific reasons can turn into more encompassing forms of prejudice (the danger about which the stepping-stone theory warns).

The use of open questions has shown quite convincingly that people give different meanings to the label 'foreigner' and express significantly different attitudes depending on the groups they think of when confronted with the denotative meaning 'foreigner'. Today, underdefined, broad categories such as 'foreigners' or 'immigrants' are commonly used in survey research (e.g. the European Social Survey). It is obvious that the variation observed in the responses to such items is influenced by the specific groups that respondents are thinking of when reacting to the statements presented to them. This becomes particularly problematic when those statements are used to evaluate cross-national differences in levels of prejudice. In those cases it is very likely that the observed differences not only, probably not even mainly, measure cross-national differences in levels of prejudice, but express differences in the specific kind of 'foreigners' people are thinking of, as a consequence of the immigration history and population composition of their country. It is highly recommended to measure the meaning respondents give to 'foreigner', 'immigrant' or 'stranger' before using statements about such categories in order to compare levels of prejudice between groups and countries.

## Note

1. The responses to statements about Jews were more positive for all themes than the responses to statements about Muslims, except for 'encounters'. For 7 out of the 10 themes the difference was significant at the .05 level. These results provide further support for the central claim of this article and are available upon request. Negative feelings are more pronounced with regard to Muslims, not only when compared to the broad category of foreigners, but also when compared to Jews.

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