

Racial, Religious, and Civic Dimensions of Anti-Muslim Sentiment in America

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines anti-Muslim sentiment in America. Existing research has documented rising hostility to Muslims in Western countries, but has been much less clear about what drives such sentiments or exactly what sort of “other” Muslims are understood to be. Our interest is in the cultural construction of Muslims as a problematic or incompatible “other.” We explore the extent, content, and correlates of such views. Building from recent work in critical race theory and the study of cultural boundaries in national belonging, we argue that Muslims are distinct in being culturally excluded on religious, racial, and civic grounds at the same time. Using nationally representative survey data with specially designed measures on views of Muslims and other groups, we show that nearly half of Americans embrace some form of anti-Muslim sentiment, and that such views are systematically correlated with social location and with understandings of the nature of American belonging.

KEYWORDS: Muslims; race; religion; boundaries; culture.

Muslims have long served as a cultural “other” to the West (Grosfoguel 2012; Said 1979), but in recent years there has been a new breadth and intensity to anti-Muslim beliefs and actions, a phenomenon that many have labeled “Islamophobia” (Allen 2010; Helbling 2012). Public polling data suggest that Americans have less warm feelings about Muslims than about any other group measured, despite the fact that Muslims comprise only 1 percent of the population (Pew Research Center 2014, 2017). Hate crimes and other bias incidents are now reported at higher levels than they were in the years immediately after 9/11 (Bail 2015; Peek 2011). Hostility toward Muslims has also become part of public and political discourse. Many state legislatures have introduced bills to ban Sharia law (Ali 2012), and calls for control and surveillance of American Muslims became a central component of the 2016 Presidential campaign (Braunstein 2017). Among the first actions of the Trump administration was a declaration of sweeping travel restrictions that the president himself referred to as a “Muslim ban,” leading to repeated review by federal courts before its final approval by the Supreme Court in June 2018 (Husain 2018).

These statements and actions are part of a broader public discourse about whether Muslims belong in American life (Selod 2015), and thus about the boundaries of American belonging

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(Edgell et al. 2016; Kroneberg and Wimmer 2012; Lamont and Molnár 2002). Cultural boundaries matter for at least two reasons. Cultural belonging rests upon recognition and acceptance, which, in turn, can shape access to resources such as citizenship and civic inclusion for marginalized groups (Alexander 2006; Braunstein 2017; Glenn 2011; Massey and Sanchez 2010). Analytically, claims about who *does not* belong also reveal much about the dominant conceptions of who *does* belong, and can help illuminate deep cultural assumptions which would otherwise remain latent (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Lamont and Molnár 2002).

This paper provides an analysis of anti-Muslim attitudes in the United States. We make three main contributions to existing research. First, we use data from a nationally representative survey which included measures specifically designed to allow us to investigate the extent and structure of anti-Muslim sentiment in American opinion. To what degree do Americans see Muslims as an incompatible “other” and in what ways? We show that nearly half of Americans claim that Muslims do not fit into their vision of the country, and that Muslims are consistently associated with a range of public problems, particularly those regarding safety, morality, and politics.

Second, we explore which boundaries are invoked in the construction of Muslims as “other.” Existing research has documented rising hostility to Muslims in Europe and the United States, but has been much less clear about exactly what sort of “other” Muslims are understood to be. Building from recent work in critical race theory and the study of cultural boundaries in national belonging, we argue that Muslims are distinct in being excluded on racial, religious, and civic grounds at the same time. In multivariate models, we show that Americans’ views of Muslims are predicted by their social locations and by their different ideologies about what it means to be American, particularly how race and religion are understood in relation to civic forms of belonging.

Third, we engage other strands of research on the boundaries of American belonging by showing how anti-Muslim sentiment compares with opinions about other marginalized racial and religious groups. Anti-Muslim sentiment correlates strongly with negative views of other groups, but Americans see Muslims as especially problematic. Even when respondents’ reactions to other groups are controlled for, restrictive religious and civic definitions of belonging remain significant predictors of anti-Muslim sentiment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Edward Said defined Orientalism as a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction” between the East and the West (Said 1979:2, see also Said 1985). This deep cultural distinction has particularly attached to Muslims as an “other” against whom the Western, rational “we” is defined. Indeed, scholarship from Said onward has shown this relationship to have long historical roots, developing alongside colonialism and capitalism (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008; Grosfoguel 2012). Yet the “otherness” of Muslims has been more visible at some moments than others, rising and falling with migration patterns and with political events on the world stage. In the United States, the OPEC oil embargo of 1973, the Iran hostage crisis of 1979, and the first Gulf War were moments when Muslims were framed as enemies in public discourse (Love 2017; Naber 2000; Peek 2011).

Anti-Muslim rhetoric in the United States and Europe in recent years has seemed to be different from these earlier moments – politicized, sustained, and highly salient (Love 2017:92–3; Selod 2018). Social science research on what many have come to call “Islamophobia” increased in step with this heated public rhetoric. Various research traditions have developed quite distinct perspectives on how to understand the phenomenon, however. Here we review existing work, highlighting two key distinctions: whether anti-Muslim sentiment is understood as a property of individuals or society, and whether it is best defined as a form of religious or racial prejudice. In particular, we examine research on the racialization of religion that informs our approach.

Individual Prejudice vs. Social Context

The term “Islamophobia” initially gained traction in both social scientific and lay discourse as a way to frame anti-Muslim feelings and expressions as a form of individual prejudice. The term was popularized with a widely cited British report, which defined Islamophobia as a “closed” (rather than open or cosmopolitan) view of Islam (Runnymede Trust 1997). Research in social psychology has followed this lead by defining Islamophobia as an affective dimension of personality. Much of the research has been devoted to the development of standardized scales to capture this affective dimension, leading to a number of competing instruments to measure the same concept (Bleich 2011, 2012; Echebarria-Echabe and Guede 2007; Imhoff and Recker 2012). This prejudice framing puts the focus on individuals, and thus finds the root of such anti-Muslim feeling in irrational, fear-based feelings rather than in broader cultural narratives or ideologies. In a typical example, Lee et al. built their Islamophobia measure on the use of “fear-related terms such as *anxious, uncomfortable, dread*” (2009:94, emphasis in original).

The focus on individual affect ignores much of the social context that sociologists would find important. Yet the social psychology research offers some findings about the correlates of such prejudice that are important to consider. First, these analyses suggest that opinions vary with social location: whites, conservatives, and older people exhibited higher levels of prejudice toward Muslims (Echebarria-Echabe and Guede 2007; Lee et al. 2009). Second, prejudice also correlated with political and civic views, notably about the basis of social order and belonging. Anti-Muslim prejudice appeared to co-vary with views of other marginalized groups and with “right wing authoritarianism” – a demand for social order, moral uniformity, and traditionalism (Imhoff and Recker 2012; see also Echebarria-Echabe and Guede 2007). Imhoff and Recker argued that rejection of Muslims could also be based on either a Christian worldview, or on a secular vision of civil society (Imhoff and Recker 2012), a finding echoed by some research on religion and outgroup attitudes in the United States (Stewart, Edgell, and Delehanty 2018).

Research in sociology, political science, and related fields has taken a more contextual approach than the social psychological research, locating the phenomenon at the social rather than individual level. Much of the survey-based research on public attitudes has focused on Europe, especially the UK and Scandinavia (see Helbling 2012), where discussion of Muslims is often framed in terms of immigration. As a result, sociological work in Europe has often tied anti-Muslim prejudice to perceptions of material competition, a link that may or may not hold for the United States (Ciftci 2012; Kanas, Scheepers, and Sterkins 2015; Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014; Strabac and Listhaug 2008; see Ali and Hartmann 2015).

Empirical research centered on the United States has explored the political context of Islamophobia, including the experiences of Muslims with both subtle and overt forms of hostility and suspicion and with state-driven forms of surveillance (Bayoumi 2015; Peek 2011; Selod 2018) and the role of movements and organizations in shaping broader narratives about Muslims (Bail 2015; Love 2017). Bail (2012, 2015) demonstrated that “fringe” civil society organizations with negative messages about Muslims gradually gained American media attention, in part because of the emotional nature of their message (see also Bowe and Makki 2016; Hatton and Nielsen 2016; Lean 2012). The number of such organizations expanded after 9/11, but so also did the range of interests they represented, with conservative Protestant critiques of Islam joining neo-conservative ones (Bail 2015; Cimino 2005). Earlier political discourse had focused on global politics, but after 9/11 the message increasingly turned to Muslims as an enemy within, one in the process of infiltrating American political institutions (Bail 2015). For Evangelicals, this political message dovetailed with a conception of Islam as a demonic and violent religion (Cimino 2005; Kidd 2009).

Closer to our own approach, Kalkan, Layman, and Uslander (2009) used survey data to explore patterns of anti-Muslim sentiment in the American public. They argued that outgroups in American society may be seen as “other” in terms of either cultural or “ethno-racial” differences. To the degree

that Muslims are seen as different from other groups, they suggest it is because Muslims are thought to “play in both bands” (Kalkan et al. 2009). As the authors put it:

Americans may actually see two ‘bands,’ with racial and religious minority groups such as Jews and African Americans in one, and cultural minority groups such as illegal immigrants and gays and lesbians in another that white Americans view far more negatively. Muslims thus may be distinctive. Because they are a religious minority group with cultural practices that are very different from mainstream conventions, they may be associated with both bands. (Kalkan et al. 2009:848)

Religion and Race

There has been substantial disagreement over the relationship between race and religion in anti-Muslim sentiment. As the term “Islamophobia” suggests, anti-Muslim sentiment or action has often been understood as a reaction to religious difference, even if it may also correlate with attitudes or motivations tied to race. For Kalkan et al. (2009), the distinction does not ultimately matter, since both race and religion are conceptualized as ontologically pre-existing forms of difference, in contrast with “cultural” differences which attach to other groups, such as sexual minorities. Other researchers take pains to distinguish between the two, sometimes going so far as to offer different terms or measures for “Islamophobia” and “Muslimphobia” (Larsson and Sander 2015).

Critical race scholarship has taken a very different approach, seeking to understand how a religious group such as Muslims has been culturally “racialized” (Akhtar 2011; Bayoumi 2015; Garner and Selod 2015; Love 2017; Meer 2013a; Naber 2000; Selod 2018, 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013; Semati 2010). Authors developing this argument often begin with Omi and Winant’s concept of racial formation to indicate the way that “race” exists as a set of historical and cultural configurations rather than something “fixed, concrete, and objective” (Omi and Winant 1994:54). As these scholars argue, racial status is tied to the way that either physical appearances or cultural traits come to be embodied, and thus are seen as immutable (Garner and Selod 2015). Religious markers such as a hijab or a Muslim name can work in the same way as skin color, serving to “darken” (Cainkar and Selod 2018:270–271). Thus Islamophobia can itself be analyzed as a form of racism. When used as a racial term, Muslim “has the unfortunate confounding effect of ascribing both a religious and a racial identity to a seemingly indiscriminate collection of communities,” as Erik Love has pointed out (Love 2017:5; cf. Guhin 2018). Indeed, the essentializing quality of such a racialized understanding suggests that other kinds of difference – of origin, ideology, or theology – are also flattened out in the eyes of most Americans.

Racialization scholarship points to three additional insights that are important for the present study. First, the configurations of anti-Muslim sentiment are themselves historically specific and contextual. Just as racial formations are historically fluid, so are forms of Islamophobia, which take shape in particular historical eras and national contexts (Garner and Selod 2015; Selod 2018). Rather than looking for a universal definition or theory of Islamophobia, we should look, instead, to how social narratives take shape in a given era and context. Second, such racialized distinctions are tied to social power and to exclusions. Qualitative research has explored the experiences of Muslims both before and after 9/11 as they confronted what Safer Selod (2018) has called “citizen surveillance,” including verbal and physical harassment, intimidation, and discrimination in education and work environments (Peek 2011). Muslims have also faced more formal surveillance by the CIA, FBI, and police agencies, travel restrictions for passengers with Muslim names, and curtailed immigration from many majority-Muslim countries (Bayoumi 2015; Peek 2011; Selod 2018).

Finally, these narratives of belonging pertain not just to race (or religion), but also to civic belonging. Critical race scholars have long understood how racialized understandings of belonging have

served as a basis for claims to citizenship, in both a legal and a cultural sense (Gerstle 2001; Gerteis 2007; Marx 1998; Roediger 2005; Saxton 1990; Takaki 2000). The racialization scholarship makes the same point about Muslims. Moustafa Bayoumi (2015) has examined how the recent civic exclusion of Muslims has paralleled other earlier moments of racialized group exclusion in American history. Saher Selod has also emphasized the importance of broader cultural notions of citizenship as a key element of exclusion, as Muslims have been seen as outside of, and incompatible with, American national identity (Selod 2015; Selod and Embrick 2013; see also Naber 2000).

CULTURAL BOUNDARIES OF RACE, RELIGION, AND CITIZENSHIP

We argue that race, religion, and civic boundaries are conceptually distinct but empirically interconnected ways of defining belonging. The insight that Muslims can be “raced” is deeply important. Yet to say that Muslims are raced in a particular context is not to say that religious differences do not also matter in their own right. As Selod notes, “Muslim” and “Arab” are sometimes used interchangeably by scholars working on Islamophobia, making it difficult to assess how race and religion may independently contribute to, or intersect within, a given configuration (Selod 2015:79). Likewise, race and religion may both intersect with civic distinctions that separate those who are seen as “good citizens” from those who are not.

In making this claim, we build upon a cultural boundaries perspective, which foregrounds how issues of belonging and exclusion are understood and expressed. In adopting this boundary perspective, we seek to connect the study of anti-Muslim sentiment to a broader range of work on American national identity and the deeper cultural distinctions that have historically been used to define it. Boundaries are distinctions that include some and exclude others. Where social boundaries may be observed from patterns of association (for example, in who marries or forms friendships with one another), cultural or symbolic boundaries “are conceptual distinctions made by social actors [which] separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership” (Lamont and Molnár 2002:168; see Bail 2008). Such boundaries are cultural in the sense that claims about any particular group are rooted in broader discourses of belonging. They are also relational, since the meanings attached to a given group are not just about them but also speak to the distinction between an “us” and an “other.”

Scholars have usefully applied a cultural boundaries perspective to the study of race (Wray 2006), religion (Braunstein 2017) and citizenship (Glenn 2002, 2011). We take our cues from recent research that has brought a boundaries perspective to the study of American national identity and popular nationalism (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016), and particularly to the intersections of racial, religious, and civic distinctions (Edgell et al. 2016; Glenn 2011). From this perspective, Muslims exist not only as a social group but as a cultural category in public discourse (see Brubaker 2013:6). Anti-Muslim opinions do not tell us about Muslims themselves, but rather about the dominant understandings of the cultural boundaries of belonging. Cultural distinctions around racial, religious, and civic boundaries are different, though they can and do co-occur in social narratives about whether a given group belongs or not.¹ We argue that where boundary dimensions intersect, particularly powerful forms of exclusion occur. Muslims are distinct, and perhaps unique, in modern America in the sense that they are thought to not belong on racial, religious, and civic dimensions all at once.

The sociological and historical literatures on American national identity suggest that these distinctions – and the narratives and ideologies which support them – have been central to the inclusion or exclusion of various groups throughout the country’s history in various combinations. For example, historical scholarship on racial formation in America has long observed that racial distinctions occur in conjunction with civic boundaries (Gerstle 2001; Gerteis 2007; Glenn 2011). In a landmark book, Rogers Smith (1997) studied the way that citizenship laws in the United States rely upon “civic

1 Our focus on Muslims and cultural boundaries is thus different from one that might explore the experiences of Muslims themselves, for example in relation to migration and transnational ties (see Levitt and Glick-Shiller 2004).

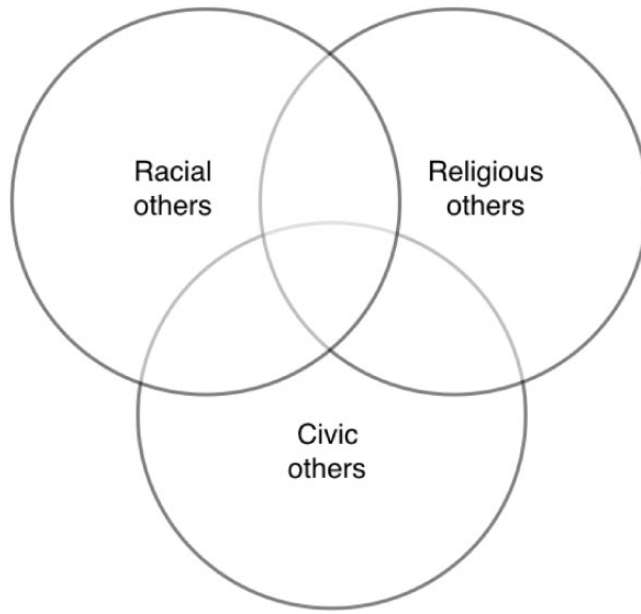


Figure 1. Intersecting Forms of “Otherness”

myths” which identify who is “eligible for membership, who is not and why” (Smith 1997:33).² Importantly, those myths have historically rested upon a host of racialized (as well as gendered) exclusions and have continued to do so, even as the laws have become more nominally democratic (Glenn 2002; Smith 1997). Indeed, this is crucial to understanding the concept of racial nationalism: being a “good American” has been historically defined on whiteness (Kaufmann 2004; Saxton 1990).³ The same point may be made about Muslims. Racialized understanding of Muslims can be encoded into discriminatory public policy and legal frameworks that can deny Muslims the civic status of “American” (Ali 2012), and also into cultural exclusions that can effectively accomplish the same thing.

Likewise, the concept of religious nationalism points to the way claims of religious belonging – and specifically Christianity – have been connected to cultural understandings of civic belonging. This is a point central to debates about American “civil religion” (Gerteis 2011; Gorski 2017; Williams 2013) and those excluded from it. For example, research has pointed to the fact that atheists are seen as problematic not only because of their lack of religion, but because this lack is thought to disqualify them from full civic belonging (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Edgell et al. 2016). Religious and civic boundary claims may overlap in similar ways in Americans’ views of Muslims (Braunstein 2017; Razack 2008). In some moments in American history, the three boundary distinctions have been invoked at the same time. Research on the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s points to the way the group defended its vision of civic belonging by appealing to both whiteness and Protestantism as foundations for civic inclusion (Blee 2009; McVeigh 2009). Work on the contemporary United States has similarly shown how civic boundaries can have racial and religious dimensions (Frost and Edgell 2017; Perry and Whitehead 2015).

In short, racial, religious, and civic understandings of belonging can overlap in complex ways. We suggest that what may be most distinctive and complicated about Islamophobia in the American

2 In a parallel formulation, Benedict Anderson (1991) has emphasized that nationalisms rest upon an imagined civic community which includes and excludes, often on the basis of race and/or religion.

3 The cultural and legal exclusions applying to African Americans have been the classic example, but other work has explored the similar exclusion of Asians (Lee 2015; Takaki 2000).

context is precisely the way in which race, religion, and civic distinctions come together to create a vision of belonging that uniquely marginalizes Muslims. As Saher Selod (2018) has argued, Muslims are denied access to cultural citizenship on the basis of both racial and religious distinctions. Below, we show that the rejection of Muslims is predicted not only by civic claims about who belongs, but by racial and religious ideologies of belonging as well, a fact that distinguishes opinions about Muslims from those about other marginalized groups.

DATA AND METHODS

Our data are from the Boundaries in the American Mosaic survey (BAM 2014, $n=2,521$), a large, nationally representative survey with several questions specially designed to assess responses to social and cultural outgroups. The BAM survey sample was recruited from the GfK Group's KnowledgePanel, a probability-based online panel consisting of approximately 50,000 adult members.⁴ The GfK KnowledgePanel is designed to be nationally representative. Approximately 97 percent of American households are covered by KnowledgePanel's current sampling methods.⁵ The survey sample was drawn from panel members using a probability proportional to size (PPS) weighted sampling approach. KnowledgePanel members received an email link to the web survey from GfK to participate in the BAM Survey, followed by email and phone reminders after three days of non-response. Of the 4,353 people that were contacted, 2,521 completed the survey for a completion rate of 57.9 percent. The median survey completion time was 28 minutes. Data in the BAM Survey are weighted using base and stratification weights from the KnowledgePanel sample combined with survey specific weights for the BAM sample to account for survey non-response and the oversampling of African American and Hispanic respondents.

Analytic Strategy

Our analysis proceeds in three stages. We first leverage the broad range of measures in the nationally representative Boundaries in the American Mosaic survey data to explore attitudes about Muslims as compared with other groups. We investigate the degree to which respondents reject the idea that members of a given group agree with the respondents' own "vision of American society," a central measure of cultural belonging that has previously been used in work on attitudes regarding atheists (Edgell et al. 2006, 2016). We also use a set of questions about social problems to which Americans think Muslims and others contribute.⁶ We then model rejection of Muslims with a series of logistic regressions. We assess three measures of anti-Muslim sentiment: broad cultural belonging (Muslims agree with my vision of American society "not at all"), security and order ("Muslims are a threat to public order and safety"), and political threat ("Muslims want to take over our political institutions"). Finally, we extend our models to compare anti-Muslim sentiment with rejection of other marginalized groups.

- 4 The combination of a web-based survey interface and the GfK Knowledge Panel offers a number of advantages over other survey methods. Web-based survey interfaces are advantageous in that people may report sensitive information more accurately versus telephone surveys (Tourangeau and Yan 2007), and because they allow researchers to quickly ask comparative questions about multiple groups, a strategy used for collection of some of the data explored below.
- 5 From 1999 to 2008, KnowledgePanel recruited participants through random digit dialing sampling methods based on a sampling frame of US residential landline telephones. After 2009, KnowledgePanel adapted an address-based sampling (ABS) technique. Telephone surveys continue to increase substantially in operational costs due to difficulties in reaching respondents to complete surveys (Curtin, Presser, and Singer 2005), making panel surveys increasingly common. Research on non-response bias in KnowledgePanel samples has found no significant differences in respondents and non-respondents related to the goals of the survey (Heeren et al., 2008). Studies using Heckman selection procedures have shown that self-selection bias is not an important factor in participating in KnowledgePanel surveys (Cameron and DeShazob 2013).
- 6 The American society question was worded as follows: "Here is a list of different groups who live in this country. For each, please say how much you think this group agrees with YOUR vision of American society." The social problems wording was: "Here is a list of potential problems in American society. For each problem, please mark all of the groups that contribute to them."

Independent Variables

Demographic and economic. We include controls for gender, age, conservative political ideology, and education level, which prior research has found to be correlated with anti-Muslim views. Since theories of economic threat have been central to work on public opinions about immigration (Massey and Sanchez 2010; Timberlake et al. 2015; Timberlake and Williams 2012), and since this framework is central to research on Muslims in Europe, we also include measures of objective and subjective economic position (household income and feelings of financial stress).

Religious identities and beliefs. To the extent that religious boundary distinctions are driving anti-Muslim sentiment, we should expect respondents' religious beliefs and identities to be correlated with such views. We include indicator variables for two distinct religious identities capturing the poles of religious division in American life: conservative Protestants and the religiously unaffiliated. Conservative Protestants may reject Muslims because they are not Christian (Edgell and Tranby 2010; Cimino 2005; Jung 2012). The religiously unaffiliated may be inclined to reject Muslims on the basis of what Imhoff and Recker (2012) called a "secular Islam critique," and what others have termed a rejection of "public religious expression" (see Evans and Evans 2008; Stewart et al. 2018). In the baseline category are mainline Protestants and others whose identities do not clearly place them in a cultural struggle over the definitions of belonging (Putnam and Campbell 2010). We include the frequency of religious attendance as a test of the strength of institutional forms of belonging. We also include two items that together capture how religious distinctions are understood to link to civic belonging: the view that increasing numbers of religiously unaffiliated Americans is a bad thing, and the view that being a Christian is important for being American. Together these beliefs index what Kalkan et al. (2009) called "religious traditionalism" and what others have understood as Christian nationalism (Jones 2016; Perry and Whitehead 2015).

Racial identities and beliefs. In a parallel way, if racial boundaries (and the racialization of Muslims) are driving anti-Muslim sentiment, we should expect respondents' racial identities and attitudes to correlate with such views. Since roughly 20 percent of U.S. Muslims are black, white and black Americans may view Muslims quite differently. We thus include indicator variables for racial and ethnic identification, with white as the baseline category. We also include measures to capture how racial and civic boundaries are understood to coincide: belief that "racism is a thing of the past" and that "Americans value racial diversity." The former is a measure of belief in colorblind liberalism (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Manning, Hartmann, and Gerteis 2015) while the latter indicates a commitment to a multi-racial society, and a rejection of white nationalism.

Civic boundaries. Key measures of the racial and religious dimensions of civic belonging are already included above (being Christian is important for being American; Americans value racial diversity). Here we include items that gauge views of civic boundaries on other dimensions — acceptance or rejection of community diversity ("I value having people who are different from me in my community"), moral diversity (thinking it important that "Americans share a basic set of moral values"), and linguistic diversity ("speaking English is important for being American"). Exclusive responses on these measures suggest a restrictive definition of civic boundaries that may lead to rejection of Muslims — and indeed other groups. Those in this restrictive position have been variously termed "cultural preservationists" (Edgell and Tranby 2010) and "restrictive nationalists" (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016). In contrast, those with a more inclusive ideology may be less likely to see Muslims as a threat to civic life and belonging.

Outgroup controls. In the last set of analyses, we introduce covariates to index other forms of outgroup exclusion. These use the same questions that form our measures of anti-Muslim sentiment, but these capture responses about a range of other marginalized groups defined on racial, religious, and civic grounds: African Americans, Hispanics, immigrants, and atheists. The variables thus allow us to assess the relationship between anti-Muslim sentiment and other forms of outgroup antipathy.

Table 1. Description of Variables in the Analyses

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Vision of society	2432	0.45	0.50	Muslims agree with my vision of society “not at all.”
Threat to order	2521	0.22	0.42	Muslims are a threat to order and public safety.
Take over politics	2521	0.18	0.39	Muslims want to take over our political institutions.
<i>Demographic/Economic</i>				
Male	2521	0.50	0.50	R’s sex (1=Male).
Age	2521	50.14	16.85	R’s age in years (18-94).
Conservative ideology	2466	0.36	0.48	R identifies as political conservative.
Education level	2521	2.77	1.01	R’s education level (1= Less than HS to 4=BA or higher).
Household Income	2521	3.83	1.93	R’s household income (7 categories, <\$25,000 to \$150,000 or more).
Financial stress	2454	2.50	0.86	Subjective rating of finances (1=excellent to 4=poor)
<i>Religious identities/beliefs</i>				
Religiously unaffiliated	2471	0.30	0.46	R identifies as religiously unaffiliated.
Conservative Protestant	2471	0.24	0.43	R identifies as conservative Protestant.
Religious attendance	2479	3.51	2.21	Religious service attendance (1 = “Never” to 7 = “More than once a week”).
No religion bad	2461	0.40	0.49	Increasing numbers of religiously unaffiliated Americans is a bad thing.
Christian belonging	2503	2.59	1.13	Being a Christian is important for being American (1=Not at all to 4=V. important).
<i>Racial identities/beliefs</i>				
Black	2521	0.17	0.38	R identifies as Black/African American.
Hispanic	2521	0.17	0.38	R identifies as Hispanic/Latino.
Other race	2521	0.04	0.21	R identifies as another race (not Black, Hispanic, or White).
Racism in the past	2449	2.09	0.87	Racism will soon be a thing of the past (1=SD to 4=SA).
Racial diversity	2507	3.44	0.77	Americans value racial diversity (same as above).
<i>Civic boundaries</i>				
Value diversity	2464	3.19	0.74	I value having people who are different from me in my community (1=SD to 4=SA).
Shared morality	2507	3.49	0.70	Americans share a basic set of moral values (same as above).
Speak English	2504	1.54	0.77	Speaking English is important for being American (same as above).
<i>Outgroup controls</i>				
Vision outgroups	2521	0.94	1.20	Select outgroups agree with vision of society “not at all” (0-4).
Safety outgroups	2521	0.38	0.86	Select outgroups are threat to safety and order (0-4).
Politics outgroups	2521	0.33	0.79	Select outgroups want to take over our political institutions (0-4).

MUSLIMS AND OTHER GROUPS AS SOCIAL PROBLEMS

One central finding can be stated directly and succinctly: Muslims are now a central outgroup in American life. The “vision of society” item is important to consider because it is a broad, general indicator of inclusion or exclusion in American life. Using nationally representative data from 2003, Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann (2006) found that it was atheists who were least accepted on this measure, and by a relatively wide margin. The acceptance of atheists has not changed much since (Edgell et al. 2016), but a very large proportion of respondents now respond “not at all” when asked whether Muslims share their vision of American society (45.5 percent).

Groups may be perceived as problematic on many dimensions, however. A separate set of items in the BAM survey presented respondents with a set of groups and a set of social problems. Respondents were asked to identify the social problems to which they felt each group contributed, if any:

- They are a threat to public order and safety.
- They don’t share my morals or values.
- They take jobs and resources that should go to others.
- They are dependent on welfare and government assistance.
- They are intolerant of others.
- They want to take over our political institutions.
- They don’t contribute to my community.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of Americans who identify each group as problematic on a given item. It is clear that Americans identify Muslims as at or near the top of “problematic” groups on many items, but not all. Economic factors have played a prominent role in European studies of anti-Muslim sentiment, and continue to be central to studies of race in the American context. Yet these dimensions are not the ones on which Muslims stand out for Americans. On the job and welfare items, Muslims are at or below the average of “problematic” groups, while immigrants (and in the case of welfare, African Americans) are at the top. In sharp contrast, Americans see Muslims as a significant source of problems when it comes to safety, morality, intolerance and community.

REJECTION OF MUSLIMS IN AMERICAN LIFE

Table 2 presents results of logistic regressions of our measure of broad public rejection of Muslims, regressed on the demographic and economic variables along with the variables indexing race (model 1), religion (model 2), civic boundaries (model 3), and finally with the full model (model 4). Tables 3 and 4 present equivalent models for claims about Muslims as a threat to public order and safety, and wishing to take over political institutions. Model fit, as indicated by the AIC and BIC statistics, is generally best for the full model in each case.⁷ Wald tests on the full models indicate that the demographic and economic variables together have predictive power only in the “takeover political institutions” model (see Table 4).

Visions of American Society

Table 2 presents the models for our broadest measure of anti-Muslim sentiment, the claim that Muslims do “not at all” share one’s own vision of American society. People with higher educational achievement are less likely to reject Muslims on this dimension. Political conservatives, on the other hand, are much more likely to say that Muslims do not share their vision of American society. These effects are consistent for models 1–3; in the full model, only education level is significant. Notably, the economic variables were not significant in any of the models.

7 For the regressions using the “threat to order and safety” measure, the two statistics diverge, with the full model preferred by the AIC statistic.

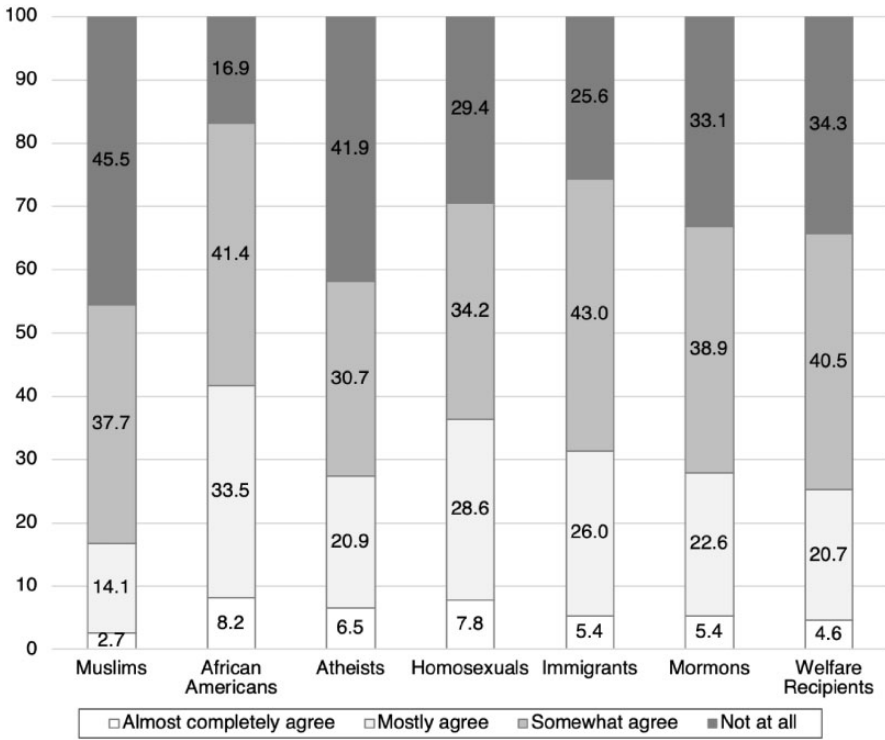


Figure 2. Agree with Vision of American Society (Percent)

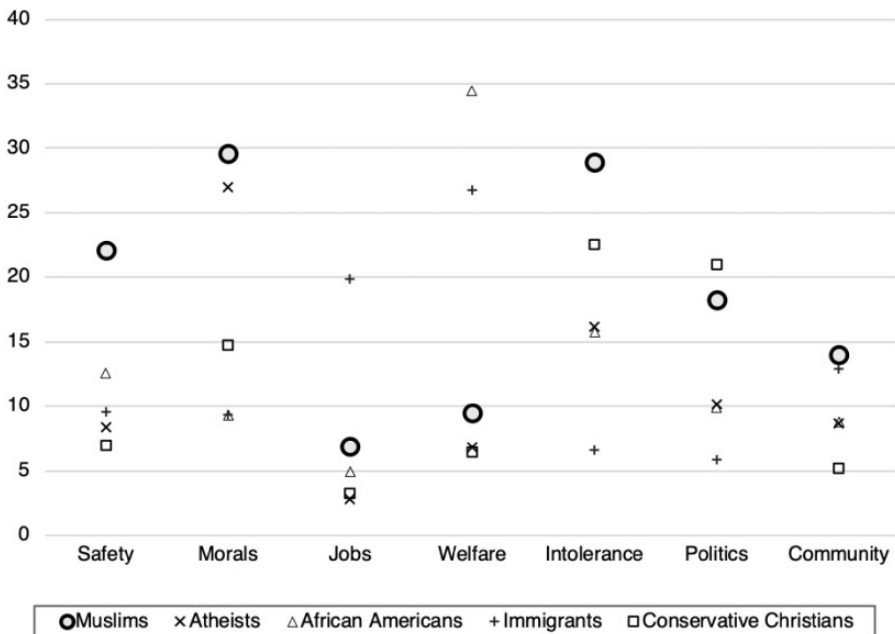


Figure 3. Groups and Social Problems (Percent)

The religiously unaffiliated are far more likely than others to reject Muslims on this measure (odds ratios 1.84 in model 1 and 1.82 in model 4). Religious attendance is associated with slightly lower likelihood of rejection in model 1, though the effect was not significant in the full model. The attitudinal variables are also linked with rejection of Muslims — those who say that increasing numbers of non-religious Americans is a bad thing and those with stronger levels of agreement that being a Christian is important for being American are more likely to reject the idea that Muslims fit with their idea of America. In this, we see the effect of the continued politicization of religion in the way Americans draw social boundaries (Hout and Fischer 2014; Stewart, Edgell, and Delehanty 2018).

Racial identifications are not associated with rejection of Muslims in the public sphere in the full model, but racial attitudes are strongly predictive. The more Americans embrace colorblind liberalism and reject racial nationalism, the less likely they are to reject the idea that Muslims belong in the public sphere. In particular, stronger agreement with the statements “Americans value racial diversity” and “racism will soon be a thing of the past” are strongly and negatively associated with rejection of Muslims. These effects remained significant in model 4.

Views of civic boundaries are strongly and stably associated with rejection of Muslims as well. Those who say they value diversity in their community are much less likely to say that Muslims did not fit with their vision of American society (about 65 percent as likely, for each level of agreement). By contrast, thinking that speaking English is important for being American correlates with higher likelihood of rejection of Muslims, net of other variables (roughly 36 percent increase with each level of agreement).

Threat to Public Order and Safety

What predicts the claim that Muslims are a threat to public order and safety? Again, the economic variables are not significant predictors of anti-Muslim sentiment, though some of the other control variables are. Conservative ideology (models 5-7) and education level (model 6) are statistically significant in some of the models. In the full model, only gender remains significant. Specifically, men are nearly 40 percent more likely than women to say that Muslims are a threat to order and safety.

Similarly, the indicator variables for religious and racial identifications are not significant predictors on this item. Rather, the predictive power lies in religious and racial beliefs, especially as these relate to how religion and race operate in the public sphere (cf. Stewart, Edgell, and Delehanty 2018). Those who see no religion as a bad thing and those who claim Christian belonging as central to American identity are more likely to see Muslims as a threat to safety (OR 1.46 and 1.25 respectively in model 8). By contrast, those who claim racism is past and who see racial diversity as important for American life are less likely to do so (OR 0.86 and 0.76 in model 8).

The civic boundaries measures are all strong and statistically significant predictors of the order and safety claim as well. The more strongly Americans say they value diversity in their community, the less likely they are to claim that Muslims are a threat to public safety. Views about moral and linguistic homogeneity are positively associated with this position.

Take Over Political Institutions

Table 4 presents the models predicting the claim that Muslims want to take over American political institutions. As above, some of the demographic and economic variables are predictive, although the patterns are somewhat different. In the full model (model 12), men are more likely than women to connect Muslims to the idea of political takeover. Political conservatives are also more likely to say so — over twice as likely in the first set of models, though the effect is attenuated somewhat in the full model. Respondent’s age is predictive in models 9–11, though not in the full model. Once other variables are accounted for, household income also becomes statistically significant.

Among the variables indexing religious identities and beliefs, members of conservative Protestant denominations are more likely to worry about Muslim political threat, as are those who see lack of religion in America as a bad thing. Similarly, strength of conviction about the Christian basis for

Table 2. Vision of Society (Logistic Regressions)

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<i>Demographic/Economic</i>								
Male	1.04	(0.11)	0.95	(0.10)	0.95	(0.10)	0.95	(0.11)
Age	1.01	(0.00)	1.01	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)
Conservative ideology	1.40**	(0.17)	1.57***	(0.18)	1.33*	(0.16)	1.10	(0.14)
Education level	0.86*	(0.05)	0.78***	(0.05)	0.89*	(0.05)	0.88*	(0.05)
Household Income	1.00	(0.03)	0.98	(0.03)	0.98	(0.03)	0.98	(0.03)
Financial stress	0.95	(0.07)	0.98	(0.07)	0.96	(0.07)	0.94	(0.07)
<i>Religious identities/beliefs</i>								
Religiously unaffiliated	1.84***	(0.27)					1.82***	(0.28)
Conservative Protestant	1.14	(0.15)					1.09	(0.15)
Religious attendance	0.92**	(0.03)					0.96	(0.03)
No religion bad	1.92***	(0.25)					1.66***	(0.23)
Christian belonging	1.37***	(0.09)					1.31***	(0.09)
<i>Racial identities/beliefs</i>								
Black			0.80	(0.12)			0.77	(0.13)
Hispanic			0.61**	(0.10)			0.74	(0.13)
Other race			1.08	(0.30)			1.11	(0.32)
Racism in the past			0.75***	(0.05)			0.75***	(0.05)
Racial diversity			0.72***	(0.05)			0.80**	(0.07)
<i>Civic boundaries</i>								
Value diversity					0.57***	(0.04)	0.65***	(0.05)
Shared morality					1.11	(0.10)	1.15	(0.11)
Speak English					1.47***	(0.13)	1.36***	(0.13)
N	2321		2321		2321		2321	
McFadden's pseudo R ²	0.057		0.048		0.065		0.104	
AIC	3016.4		3046.2		2987.5		2884.7	
BIC	3085.4		3115.2		3045.0		2999.7	

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

American belonging is positively associated with likelihood of claims about Muslim takeover of political institutions. By contrast, racial minority status and stronger commitment to diversity as an American ideal reduce likelihood of this claim. In particular, black Americans are only 36 percent as likely as whites to say that Muslims want to take over American politics.

Visions of other civic boundaries matter as well. Commitment to diversity in one's community decreases likelihood of seeing Muslim political takeover as a problem (OR 0.74) while commitment to linguistic homogeneity increases likelihood of the same claim. The strength of the latter effect is worth remarking upon: each additional degree of agreement (on a four-point scale) that speaking English is important for being American is associated with more than a doubled likelihood of seeing Muslims as a political threat.

Extension and Comparison Models

The models above have demonstrated that anti-Muslim sentiment is driven by ideologies of belonging. Considering racial, religious, and civic ideologies together, we can predict the probability of anti-Muslim views based on broad positions: a closed view of belonging (Americans value racial diversity "strongly disagree," speaking English and being Christian important for being American "very

Table 3. Threat to Order and Safety (Logistic Regressions)

	(5)		(6)		(7)		(8)	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<i>Demographic/Economic</i>								
Male	1.48**	(0.19)	1.35*	(0.17)	1.36*	(0.17)	1.39*	(0.18)
Age	1.01	(0.00)	1.01*	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)
Conservative ideology	1.69***	(0.22)	2.01***	(0.26)	1.72***	(0.22)	1.32	(0.19)
Education level	0.97	(0.07)	0.87*	(0.06)	0.98	(0.07)	0.99	(0.07)
Household Income	1.02	(0.04)	1.01	(0.04)	1.00	(0.04)	0.99	(0.04)
Financial stress	1.06	(0.09)	1.09	(0.09)	1.07	(0.09)	1.07	(0.09)
<i>Religious identities/beliefs</i>								
Religiously unaffiliated	0.99	(0.17)					0.99	(0.18)
Conservative Protestant	1.26	(0.19)					1.24	(0.19)
Religious attendance	0.91**	(0.03)					0.95	(0.03)
No religion bad	1.70***	(0.25)					1.46*	(0.22)
Christian belonging	1.34***	(0.10)					1.25**	(0.10)
<i>Racial identities/beliefs</i>								
Black			0.67*	(0.14)			0.66	(0.14)
Hispanic			0.67*	(0.13)			0.77	(0.16)
Other race			1.16	(0.37)			1.37	(0.46)
Racism in the past			0.85*	(0.06)			0.86*	(0.07)
Racial diversity			0.77***	(0.06)			0.76**	(0.07)
<i>Civic boundaries</i>								
Value diversity					0.68***	(0.06)	0.78**	(0.07)
Shared morality					1.33**	(0.15)	1.34**	(0.15)
Speak English					1.71***	(0.22)	1.54***	(0.20)
N	2354		2354		2354		2354	
McFadden's pseudo R ²	0.066		0.050		0.074		0.102	
AIC	2384.5		2425.1		2360.6		2309.9	
BIC	2453.7		2494.3		2418.2		2425.2	

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

important”), and an open view (Americans value racial diversity “strongly agree,” speaking English and being Christian important for being American “not at all”). Holding all other variables at their means, anti-Muslim responses vary widely between these positions. A person with an open ideology, all else equal, has a probability of holding anti-Muslim views on the “shares my vision of America” measure of just under 0.2 and on the safety and politics measures of less than 0.1. Someone with a closed ideology has a probability of over 0.7 for the vision measure, and about 0.46 on the safety and politics measures.

We also explore two extensions to the main models presented above. Table 5 presents a graphic comparison of the direction and significance levels for models of all of the social problem items. This table includes all of the same items which formed the basis for Figure 3 (from which we selected the safety and political threat items analyzed above). It is clear that whether we examine the political and safety measures we have already seen, or the more broadly cultural ones (morals, intolerance, community), the same variables predict these outcomes in roughly the same ways across the models. Particularly consistent are the effects of the two religious belief items indexing commitment to a Christian basis for American belonging (no religion bad, Christian belonging), commitment to racial diversity, and commitment to linguistic homogeneity (speaking English) – all of which point to a

Table 4. Take Over Political Institutions (Logistic Regressions)

	(9)		(10)		(11)		(12)	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<i>Demographic/Economic</i>								
Male	1.48**	(0.20)	1.31*	(0.18)	1.33*	(0.18)	1.38*	(0.19)
Age	1.02***	(0.00)	1.02***	(0.00)	1.01*	(0.00)	1.01	(0.00)
Conservative ideology	2.04***	(0.29)	2.40***	(0.34)	2.06***	(0.29)	1.44*	(0.22)
Education level	0.98	(0.07)	0.89	(0.06)	1.02	(0.07)	1.04	(0.08)
Household Income	0.94	(0.04)	0.94	(0.04)	0.92	(0.04)	0.91*	(0.04)
Financial stress	1.03	(0.09)	1.09	(0.10)	1.05	(0.10)	1.04	(0.10)
<i>Religious identities/beliefs</i>								
Religiously unaffiliated	0.95	(0.18)					1.00	(0.21)
Conservative Protestant	1.43*	(0.22)					1.42*	(0.24)
Religious attendance	0.87***	(0.03)					0.94	(0.04)
No religion bad	2.03***	(0.33)					1.65**	(0.28)
Christian belonging	1.36***	(0.11)					1.27**	(0.11)
<i>Racial identities/beliefs</i>								
Black			0.38***	(0.10)			0.36***	(0.10)
Hispanic			0.52**	(0.13)			0.63	(0.16)
Other race			0.48	(0.20)			0.57	(0.24)
Racism in the past			0.84*	(0.07)			0.85	(0.08)
Racial diversity			0.68***	(0.06)			0.69***	(0.07)
<i>Civic boundaries</i>								
Value diversity					0.61***	(0.06)	0.74**	(0.08)
Shared morality					1.21	(0.16)	1.19	(0.16)
Speak English					2.51***	(0.44)	2.29***	(0.43)
N	2354		2354		2354		2354	
McFadden's pseudo R ²	0.105		0.097		0.125		0.174	
AIC	2065.7		2082.8		2016.1		1923.3	
BIC	2134.9		2151.9		2073.7		2038.6	

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

restrictive vision of American belonging. By contrast, the same variables not consistently or strongly predict views of Muslims as an economic threat.

Table 6 presents regressions on the same three outcomes we used before, but these models also include controls measures to test the effects of seeing other groups as problematic on the same dimensions. Effectively, these models show the predictors of anti-Muslim sentiment, net of other kinds of out-group sentiment. The measures include rejection of outgroups defined on the basis of ethnic/racial difference (Hispanics, African Americans), religion (atheists), and citizenship (immigrants). These measures are domain-specific, as they referred to the same “problems” that form our dependent variables and so we include a separate summary outgroup measure for the regressions on each measure of political threat: vision, safety, and politics.

Two important findings emerge from this table. First, Americans' opinions about Muslims are not independent of their views of other groups. The more a person rejects other groups, the more likely that person is to reject Muslims as well. Second, several key variables remain statistically significant predictors of anti-Muslim sentiment even net of these outgroup controls. Importantly, it is not just individual attributes but ideologies of belonging that matter. Commitment to Christianity as a basis

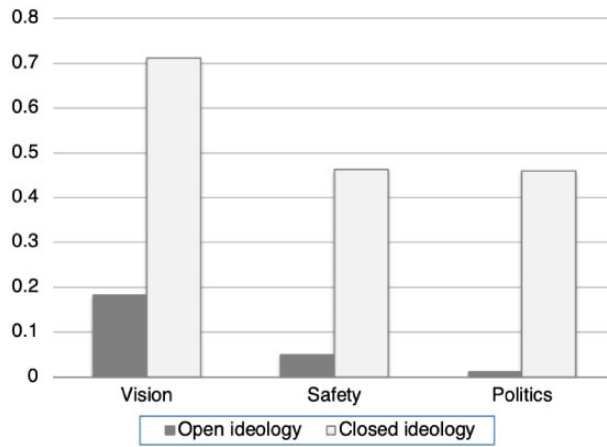


Figure 4. Closed and Open Ideologies (Predicted Probabilities)

Table 5. Problems Associated with Muslims (Logistic Regressions)

	<i>Safety</i>	<i>Politics</i>	<i>Morals</i>	<i>Intol.</i>	<i>Comm.</i>	<i>Jobs</i>	<i>Welfare</i>
<i>Demographic/Economic</i>							
Male	+	+		++	+++		
Age				+	+		
Conservative ideology		+	+++	+		-	
Education level				++			
Household Income		-					
Financial stress							
<i>Religious identities/beliefs</i>							
Religiously unaffiliated							
Conservative Protestant		+	++	+++	+		+
Religious attendance				+			
No religion bad	+	++	+	+++			
Christian belonging	++	++	+		+++	+	
<i>Racial identities/beliefs</i>							
Black		-	-	-			
Hispanic			-				
Other race						+	
Racism in the past	-			-	-		
Racial diversity	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<i>Civic boundaries</i>							
Value diversity	-	-	-				
Shared morality	++			+			
Speak English	+++	+++	+++	+++	++		++
<i>N</i>	2354	2354	2354	2354	2354	2354	2354
McFadden's pseudo R^2	0.102	0.174	0.116	0.099	0.122	0.094	0.055
<i>AIC</i>	2309.9	1923.3	2595.3	2633.7	1743.3	1150.5	1473.4
<i>BIC</i>	2425.2	2038.6	2710.6	2749.0	1858.6	12675.	1588.7

Symbols indicate direction and significance level of effects + or - corresponds to $p < .05$, ++ or - corresponds to $p < .01$, +++ or - corresponds to $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Table 6. Outgroup Controls (Logistic Regression)

	<i>Vision</i>		<i>Safety</i>		<i>Politics</i>	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<i>Demographic/Economic</i>						
Male	1.05	(0.14)	1.44*	(0.21)	1.21	(0.19)
Age	1.01	(0.00)	1.00	(0.00)	1.01	(0.01)
Conservative ideology	1.16	(0.18)	1.36	(0.21)	1.33	(0.23)
Education level	1.00	(0.07)	0.98	(0.08)	1.05	(0.09)
Household Income	1.00	(0.04)	0.99	(0.05)	0.88*	(0.04)
Financial stress	0.90	(0.08)	1.10	(0.11)	0.96	(0.10)
<i>Religious identities/beliefs</i>						
Religiously unaffiliated	1.52*	(0.27)	1.01	(0.20)	0.89	(0.21)
Conservative Protestant	1.01	(0.16)	1.16	(0.20)	1.19	(0.22)
Religious attendance	0.96	(0.04)	0.99	(0.04)	0.92	(0.04)
No religion bad	1.30	(0.20)	1.33	(0.22)	1.78**	(0.34)
Christian belonging	1.21*	(0.10)	1.20*	(0.11)	1.24*	(0.13)
<i>Racial identities/beliefs</i>						
Black	0.58**	(0.12)	0.57*	(0.14)	0.41**	(0.12)
Hispanic	0.95	(0.20)	0.89	(0.19)	0.80	(0.22)
Other race	0.97	(0.31)	0.99	(0.40)	0.38	(0.21)
Racism in the past	0.85*	(0.06)	0.98	(0.09)	0.92	(0.09)
Racial diversity	0.84	(0.08)	0.81	(0.09)	0.76*	(0.08)
<i>Civic boundaries</i>						
Value diversity	0.73***	(0.07)	0.81	(0.09)	0.78*	(0.10)
Shared morality	1.25*	(0.13)	1.37*	(0.17)	1.28	(0.18)
Speak English	1.22*	(0.12)	1.33*	(0.18)	1.97***	(0.39)
<i>Outgroup controls</i>						
Vision outgroups	3.53***	(0.34)				
Safety outgroups			3.19***	(0.28)		
Politics outgroups					3.48***	(0.35)
<i>N</i>	2321		2354		2354	
McFadden's pseudo <i>R</i> ²	0.306		0.246		0.312	
<i>AIC</i>	2245.3		1947.6		1610.1	
<i>BIC</i>	2366.0		2068.7		1731.1	

Exponentiated coefficients; Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

for American belonging has a consistent and positive effect on the likelihood of anti-Muslim sentiment, for example. The items indexing other civic boundary claims — and particularly commitment to linguistic homogeneity — also remain predictive of anti-Muslim sentiments.

DISCUSSION

This paper has analyzed the level, the nature, and the correlates of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States. Using extensive new data, we have shown that Muslims stand out as a clear “other” in American opinion. Nearly half of Americans say that Muslims do not at all fit with their view of American society, and Americans link Muslims to a range of cultural and political problems. Even compared with other marginalized groups, Muslims stand out in the degree to which Americans exclude them and in the breadth of this response. Most prominently, Muslims are thought to be a

threat to public order and safety, a challenge to collective morality, and an “enemy within” (Bail 2015:49), taking over American communities and political institutions.

We have argued that such claims about Muslims are embedded within broader discourses of belonging. To understand these findings, researchers must, therefore, be attuned to cultural boundaries of inclusion and exclusion – that is, to the ways that Americans make sense of who “belongs” and who does not. We have also argued that racial, religious, and civic boundary distinctions all play into such judgments. Prior research from critical race scholars and from scholarship on nationalism and American national belonging has shown how these boundary distinctions may overlap in variable ways.

Cultural distinctions can be especially salient, durable, and difficult to overcome when they do overlap, as when atheists are seen as not only religious outsiders but as unworthy citizens (at least by Christians), or when white nationalist movements seek to link race to restrictive notions of citizenship and patriotism. Religious forms of difference can be racialized, and both racial and religious forms of difference have often corresponded with cultural assessments about what kinds of people are capable of being worthy or capable of good citizenship.

Most centrally, we have argued that Muslims are distinct, and perhaps unique, in the context of modern America for being seen as outsiders on all three of these boundary dimensions at the same time. Americans view Muslims as a racial other – but not *only* as a racial other. We find evidence of racial and religious antipathy toward Muslims, driven by social positions. Whites and conservative Protestants are far more likely than others to reject Muslims on a range of measures. But we also find strong evidence of racial and religious antipathy toward seeing Muslims as Americans, driven by ideologies of belonging. This is reflected in measures such as accepting or rejecting the notion that racial diversity is an American value, or one’s stance on the idea that being Christian is important for being a good American. Muslims are “out” in terms of religious as well as civic boundaries for those who see Christianity as the basis for being a “good American.” They are likewise rejected on both racial and civic dimensions by those who define American belonging in racial terms. Other dimensions of civic belonging consistently predict anti-Muslim sentiment as well, especially one’s commitment to moral and linguistic unity.

It is also important to consider how the “othering” of Muslims compares to that of other marginalized groups. We have shown that even when responses to a range of other marginalized groups is controlled for, anti-Muslim views are predicted by restrictive ideologies linking race and religion to civic belonging (especially the view that being Christian is central to being a good American), and by the civic dimensions themselves (such as attitudes about linguistic and moral diversity). As we noted above, this is consonant with other work on nationalism and cultural boundary distinctions which have linked those with restrictive views of belonging – sometimes termed “cultural preservationists” (Edgell and Tranby 2010) or “restrictive nationalists” (Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016) – to a range of other opinions.

The configuration of boundary dimensions upon which groups are othered is historically and socially variable, because cultural definitions of collective identity and belonging operate differently across historical moments and national contexts. Muslims are seen as a central “other” in Europe and in the United States, but not in the same way. Survey-based research in Europe has shown that Muslims are associated with economic problems, such as labor market competition and pressures on social services (cf. Strabac et al. 2014; Timberlake et al. 2015). We find that economic problems are widely associated with immigrants and with some racial groups in the United States, but not with Muslims. In particular, Americans see “immigrants” and “Muslims” very differently on these grounds. In the context of the post-9/11 United States, Muslims are seen as culturally problematic for the way that they are thought to challenge the civic belonging rather than as a threat to economic well-being.

We thus agree with a growing number of scholars of national identity and nationalism that a boundary perspective is crucial for understanding how exclusive cultural distinctions are drawn (Bail 2008; Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Brubaker 2013; Wimmer 2008). This perspective is

compatible with work of critical race scholars who see racialization as a cultural process of category construction, and with that of scholars of religion who emphasize that “religion” exists not just a set of beliefs but also as cultural repertoires that are constructed and change over time (Edgell 2012). Yet distinctive as they may be in the current American period, the position of Muslims in America is not historically unique. The boundary distinctions around race, religion, and political or civic solidarities (Meer 2013b; Smith 1997) that define Muslims in the modern American moment have also been applied to other groups in other moments (Glenn 2011; Smith 1997). In this way, anti-Muslim sentiment is a reminder of older, enduring forms of nativism and xenophobia, and of earlier scholarly discussions of the “politics of unreason” in the United States (Lipset and Raab 1970).

Finally, we have argued that boundary distinctions ultimately speak not just about the groups who are excluded, but also about the often-implicit cultural assumptions about who *does* belong. Civic distinctions are especially important to consider in a liberal democracy like the United States, since they can seem open and cosmopolitan relative to other ways of invoking peoplehood – think, for example, of how invocations to moral or linguistic unity can seem open to all, in contrast to calls for racial or religious unity. But all boundaries both include and exclude (Brubaker 1999), and in practice civic belonging is often conflated with the “primordial qualities” of race and religion (Alexander 2006).

In short, we think research on Americans’ attitudes about Muslims should be a central part of the ongoing discussion of the cultural construction of solidarity and belonging in the United States (Lichterman 2008; Williams 2013; Winchester et al. 2011). Anti-Muslim sentiments are a contested but powerful cultural phenomenon in the context of a society that is increasingly socially diverse and culturally, as well as politically, divided. Again, race and religion have played a prominent role in this (Hartmann 2015), but race and religious distinctions have been reinforced by more general but no less deeply felt unease about who fits into the dominant cultural vision of civic belonging (Edgell et al. 2006; Legewie 2013). It is thus important to understand anti-Muslim sentiment not simply as a religious or even racial form of prejudice, but as part of a discourse of national belonging in which religion and racial distinctions are intertwined with understandings of civic life, American identity, and the assumed cultural bases of citizenship.

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