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**Local, national and global Islam:  
Religious Guidance and European Muslim Public Opinion on Political Radicalism and  
Social Conservatism**

**Abstract:**

The attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine and Kosher supermarket in Paris in January 2015 as well as the announcement of a ‘Caliphate’ by radical Islamists of the so-called ‘Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’ (ISIS) in 2014 reignited the political and academic interest in the possible appeal of radical Islamism among young Muslims living in Western Europe. This analysis expands existing knowledge by adding a large-n, cross-country comparison to the small-n or single-case-study approaches dominating research on European Muslims over the last two decades. Moving beyond the examination of the interaction between European governments and groups claiming to represent European Muslims, this analysis takes into account the individualization of Muslim religious discourses, practices and identities. Binary logistic regression analyses challenge conventional wisdom emphasising discrimination and rejection of Western foreign policies in the explanation of political radicalism. Instead, religious guidance and socio-economic status emerge as consistent correlates of political and social attitudes among West-European Muslims. These findings not only add to a growing body of literature providing empirical evidence for the political impact of religious elites. They also have crucial policy implications for West-European governments working to maintain national security and social cohesion.

**1. Introduction**

The attacks on the Charlie Hebdo magazine and Kosher supermarket in Paris in January 2015 as well as the announcement of a ‘Caliphate’ by radical Islamists of the so-called ‘Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’ (ISIS) in 2014 reignited public and academic interest in radical Islamist ideology and its possible correlates. By examining specifically the interaction between religious guidance and European Muslim public opinion, the present analysis makes a number of crucial contributions to existing knowledge. First, it adds to a growing body of empirical studies highlighting the role which religious elites across religious and political contexts can have in shaping political conflicts in general and public opinion in particular. Second, it injects much-needed empirical evidence into the highly charged political and academic debate on the political

status and attitudes of European Muslims by adding a large-n, cross-country comparison to the predominantly qualitative, small-n or single-case-study approaches dominating research over the last two decades. Third, this paper's focus on Muslim public opinion responds to Jeldtoft's (2011) and Jones' et al (2014) criticism of the bias toward 'institutionalized Islam' in the academic study of European Muslims. Moving beyond the examination of the interaction between European governments and groups claiming to represent European Muslims, this analysis takes into account the individualization of Muslim religious discourses, practices and identities (Kaya 2010) which has been made possible via the increasing availability of an ever-expanding range of religious guidance in the context of a democratizing transnational religious sphere (Mandaville 2009).

While this analysis cannot compare across time, it offers broadly representative conclusions about the relationship between institutionalized or individualized religious guidance and high-profile political and social attitudes. This paper's joined analysis of radical political and conservative social viewpoints is not just a reflection of their political and academic salience. In her examination of Islam in Europe, Jocelyne Cesari (2008), saw a 'theology of intolerance' among various Islamist groups and ideologues, which places Islam at the top and often goes hand in hand with an extreme inflexibility with regard to the status of women, sometimes mutating into a 'theology of hate' which allows its followers to turn a sense of powerlessness and defeat into a call for violence against the 'infidels'. The analysis of the data presented here can thus allow us to draw conclusions about the possible overlap in the attitudinal and socio-economic profiles of those who sympathize with these two 'theologies'. The corresponding choice of dependent variables follows previous examinations of the political and social dimensions of public support for Islamist ideas (Tessler/Robbins 2007; Jamal 2006).

There are some obvious disclaimers to be made: First, operating at the level of public opinion, this paper cannot establish what the root causes of individual Islamist radicalization in Europe are. Yet, it can still shed light on the views of those sympathizers at the base of McCauley and Moskalenko's (2008) pyramid model of radicalization who might get drawn into radical circles for reasons beyond the scope of this paper. Second, the following analysis is *not* intended as offering general 'truths' about Islam and Muslims in Europe. On the contrary, the research presented here is informed by the view that, apart from the five pillars of Islam (belief in one God and Muhammad as final messenger, prayer, fasting, alms giving, pilgrimage to Mecca), there is not much that could be described as the 'essence' of Islam. Even a cursory look at the plurality of interpretations and manifestations of Islam from Paris to Peshawar, from Berlin to Bamako should make clear why any attempt to essentialize Islam is academically futile and politically dangerous.

At the same time, this analysis rests on the conviction that it is entirely possible to employ social science methods and theories to explain the rise and political implications of discourses which claim to represent a 'correct' or 'true' Islam (Halliday 1993). It is in this context that this paper seeks to broaden existing research by adding a cross-country, quantitative comparison of a subject, the interaction between religious guidance and European Muslim political and social attitudes, which has not yet received the level of academic attention it deserves.

## **2. Theory and Hypotheses**

This paper suggests religious guidance as a missing link between socio-economic explanations of radicalism among European Muslims and those focusing on religious identities and discourses. On the one hand, the choice of religious guidance takes place in a given social and political context. On the other hand, the decision to follow a certain authority can be a highly individualized choice particularly in the context of a religion such as Sunni Islam which has no clear religious hierarchy and which gives the individual believer much scope in choosing their source of religious inspiration, guidance and education (Warner and Werner 2006).

Academic research has long recognized the crucial role which religious elites play across religious and political contexts. They can contribute to the escalation of conflicts by persuading their followers of the necessity of political violence (De Juan 2008). They can also assist in conflict transformation by granting religious legitimacy to compromises reached by political elites (Sandal 2011). Studies of the role of religious elites in shaping public opinion have so far focused on the United States. Baumgartner et al (2008) showed that pro-Iraq war and anti-Islam cues in messages of US Evangelist leaders find reflection in the views of their followers. In experiments involving members of evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, Jewish and Muslim congregations in metropolitan Pittsburgh and northern New Jersey, Djupe and Calfano (2012) showed that priming exclusive values does reduce considerations about the values of the outgroup as measured in increased support for unqualified US interventions abroad. Exposure to messages from religious elites has also been shown to increase support for liberal immigration reform (Nteta and Wallsten 2012) and opposition to same-sex marriage (Ellison, Acevedo, Ramos-Wada (2011).

The most high-profile vehicle of religious guidance and education in Islam is, of course, the local mosque. The focus on recruitment through local mosques in government assessments of terrorist radicalisation (Home Office 2005) reflected the many terrorist investigations involving the

second, post-1992, generation of al-Qaeda which had centred around networks built around ‘radical’ mosques in Berlin, Hamburg, London, Madrid, Milan, Marseille or Paris (Nesser 2011; Roy 2003) and radical preachers such as Abu Qatada al-Filistini, Abu Hamza al-Masri, and Omar Bakri Mohammed (Pantucci 2010). These patterns are receiving renewed attention in the context of the January 2015 attacks in Paris (Pickles 2015) and the decision of substantial numbers of young Muslim men and women from Europe and North America to join radical Islamist groups like ISIS in Syria or Iraq (De Freytas-Tamura 2014). There is also a direct link with this paper’s second substantive interest as many mosques are accused of offering religious guidance which is out of touch with the needs of a younger generation of European Muslims (Brown 2008; Mirza, Senthilkumaran, and Ja’far 2007).

The following analysis will thus test:

Hypothesis 1: European Muslims who obtain their religious guidance from religious authorities at their local mosque are more likely to express support for a) radical political, and b) conservative social attitudes.

In dealing with Islamist political radicalism and the rights of Muslim women, Western governments have to cope with the challenge that Sunni Islam lacks a central authority comparable to the Catholic Church (Fuess 2007). Governments across Europe thus launched a process of creating national organizations such as the *Comision Islamica de Espana* (CIE, 1992) in Spain, the *Conseil Francais du Culte Musulman* (CFCM, 2003) in France and the *Deutsche Islamkonferenz* (DIK, 2006) in Germany that are all tasked with speaking for their country’s Muslim communities. Membership of such state-Islam consultation is, according to Laurence (2009), roughly split equally between ‘political Islam’, which is often in conflict with regimes in the Muslim world, individual Muslim intellectuals, and representatives of what he called ‘embassy Islam’, which is dominated by authorities in major sending countries such as Algeria, Morocco, or Turkey as well as financial donors such as Saudi Arabia and centres of scholarship such as Egypt.

This top-down approach is criticized, first, within Muslim communities for privileging organizations which often represent a conservative interpretation of Islam, thus mirroring the dominant role of old men in local mosque leaderships (Brown 2008: 485). Second, the inclusion in official frameworks comes at the cost of community influence for some of these groups. Stevens (2009) suggests that state-sponsorship actually leads to the decline of moderate groups because the privileges associated with such close links with the government (funds etc.) make

these groups less reliant on community support. In addition, the decentralized and non-hierarchical nature of Islam, particularly in its dominant Sunni variant, allows what Pfaff and Gill (2006: 809) term ‘spoilers’ to attack integrationist leaders for their attempts at promoting assimilation or even secularism, thereby reducing the appeal of these integrationist leaders among the wider Muslim community.

Third, the question arises to what extent these organizations, whose leaders are oftentimes still first generation migrants (Klausen 2005) are truly ‘national’ or simply representing the interests of foreign governments or foreign social movements. The Turkish-Islam Union of Religious Affairs (DITIB), for instance, which sends imams to half of Turkish mosques around Europe and controls one third of German mosques, represents the interpretation of Islam condoned and promoted by the Turkish government (Haddad and Golson 2007; Pfaff and Gill 2006; Yurdakul and Yuekleyen 2009). In France, the government worked together closely with the Moroccan and Algerian governments as well as the Saudi government via the World Muslim League to establish the CFCM as the central point of consultation between the French government and the French Muslim community (Haddad and Golson 2007; Warner and Werner 2006). The Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities, which the Spanish government established in 1989 out of associations of Spanish converts to Islam, received generous financial support from Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iran and Morocco (Moreras 2002). All of this has meant that European governments effectively facilitated

the reproduction within Europe of a church-state dynamic common throughout the Muslim world: the predominance of an ‘official Islam’ administered and controlled by government bureaucracies, in this case, geographically distant bureaucracies headquartered in Riyadh, Ankara, and Algiers (Haddad and Golson 2007: 491).

Even if truly national organizations existed that strove to present an interpretation of Islam acceptable to both the European governments they interact with and the Muslim communities they represent, they would still have to compete with transnational Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. As the oldest Islamist organization in the world, the Muslim Brotherhood has a long history of effectively mobilizing their supporters. This has allowed them to play an influential role in shaping Islamic discourses not just across the Arab world, but also across Europe where it is portrayed as closely shaping the policies of the Muslim Association of Britain (Vidino 2009), the Central Council of Muslims (ZMD) in Germany (Warner and Werner 2006), the Union of Islamic Organizations (UOIF) in France (Amghar 2008) and the Union of Islamic

Communities (UCIDE) in Spain (Moreras 2002). For Western governments, the advantage of interacting with the Muslim Brotherhood lies in the organization's credibility within Islamist circles and to some extent even within wider Muslim communities. Yet, there is the danger that such engagement comes at the cost of empowering political and social discourses at odds with the liberal values at the heart of Western democracy. Many representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood-founded Muslim Association of Britain, for instance, follow general Muslim Brotherhood policies by combining criticism of political violence in the West with praise for Hamas' actions and other violent acts of 'self-defence'. In Vidino's words (2009: 72):

it can be argued that they simultaneously play the role of arsonists, pushing a message that plays on the separate identity of Muslims as well as the alleged persecution to which Muslims are subjected in Europe and justifying violence in other circumstances.

This problem also extends into the realm of social attitudes. The Muslim Association of Britain and the Muslim Council of Britain both defended leading Islamist Youssef al-Qaradawi as a 'moderate', the same person whose 'antiliberal' and 'antimodern' views reminded Jytte Klausen of US Christian conservative Jerry Falwell (2005: 210). In 2005, the British government knighted the Muslim Council of Britain's long-standing Secretary General, Iqbal Sacranie, who is quoted as having once remarked of Salman Rushdie: "Death, perhaps is a bit too easy for him (quoted in Mirza, Senthilkumaran, and Ja'far 2007: 27)." In Germany, former ZMD leader Nadeem Elyas claimed that huddud punishments are only applicable in a perfect Islamic state, but maintained that Islamic sharia 'law' should be eventually applied to Muslims in Germany (Warner and Werner 2006: 467). In light of these controversies, it appears warranted to investigate whether the attempts of European governments to engage with national organizations representing Europe's Muslims paid off in the form of these organizations offering more 'acceptable' forms of guidance to their communities or, instead, helped provide more prominence to pro-violent and anti-liberal discourses.

Hypothesis 2 thus is: European Muslims who obtain their religious guidance from religious authorities representing national Muslim political organizations are more likely to express support for a) radical political attitudes and b) conservative social attitudes.

A third source of religious guidance for European Muslims which is receiving increasing academic attention are the religious discourses available via satellite TV and the internet. Individual Muslims are now less reliant on local imams or national religious authorities and simply pick whatever religious guidance appears to suit best their specific social, political and

cultural context, thereby engaging in various forms of *ijtihad*, i.e. independent religious reasoning (Kaya 2010). This challenge to their monopoly has led traditional religious authorities particularly in Saudi Arabia and Egypt to hit back with Egypt's state-appointed Grand Mufti, Ali Gomaa, calling for globally unified standards for issuing fatwas to 'stem the chaos and misinformation that the media circulate about religion' (quoted in Echchaibi 2011: 38). Whereas personalities like Amr Khaled combine the preaching style of US televangelists with an emphasis on integration into Western societies (Mushaben 2008), Islamist intellectual Yusuf al-Qaradawi uses his Al-Jazeera viewership of ten million to spread his criticism of Western materialism and secularism and what he regards the violent nature of Christianity and Judaism (Soage 2005). Some observers also pointed to the inspiration, which al-Qaradawi provided to those who, particularly since the latter half of 2013, decided to travel to Syria (Byman/Shapiro 2014).

Given the controversial nature of some of the content of this type of religious guidance, the present analysis answers Echchaibi's (2011) call for more empirical analysis into the actual impact of the new kind of Islamic discourse by testing

Hypothesis 3: European Muslims who obtain their religious guidance from religious authorities on TV are more likely to express support for a) radical political attitudes and b) conservative social attitudes.

As mentioned above, European governments have been involved in a process of producing a version of Islam which is less dependent on foreign influence via foreign funding or foreign-trained religious scholars. Opinions diverge on whether traditional Arab sources of religious guidance have a moderating or radicalizing effect on European Muslim public opinion. Maha Azzam (2007: 127-128) saw 'rigorously trained clerics from Middle Eastern seminaries, notably Egypt's al-Azhar' as 'the best advocates of non-violent interpretations of Islam' as opposed to the 'home-grown imams' favoured by Western governments. In contrast, Celso (2005: 96) blames Saudi-supported Islamic charities and community groups operating in Spain for creating 'a social buffer between the new immigrant and the Spanish state that threatens the assimilation process.' Schanzer and Miller's (2012) analysis of 40,000 Arab and English social media entries posted by and about officially sanctioned Saudi clerics and unsanctioned Saudi clerics during the first six months of 2011 showed that while the share of overtly violent messages is declining, fifty to seventy-five percent of the postings analysed still displayed a lack of respect for universal norms of women's rights, other religions and non-Wahhabi Muslims. In light of these debates



Hypothesis 4 is: European Muslims who obtain their religious guidance from religious authorities at institutions such as al-Azhar in Egypt or leading clerics in Saudi Arabia are more likely to express support for a) radical political attitudes and b) conservative social attitudes.

### **3. Data and Methodology**

#### **a. Dependent Variables**

Utilizing a multi-country dataset made available by the *Pew Research Center* (2006), the analysis presented here offers a cross-country comparison of possible correlates of European Muslim public opinion on political radicalism and social conservatism. The survey was in the field in April 2006. It was part of a 15 nation survey conducted on a regular basis within the Pew Global Attitudes Project. Interviews were conducted either via telephone (UK, Germany, and France) or face-to-face (Spain) and produced nationally representative probability samples. While more recent data is certainly desirable, the 2006 Pew data offers the advantage of having been gathered after, and indeed in response to, a number of high-profile events which further increased interest in the status and political and social attitudes of Europe's Muslims first sparked by the events of 9/11. Most importantly, the survey utilized here included questions on the sources of respondents' religious guidance which have not featured in other surveys. It also constitutes one of the very few data sets which allow a representative and in-depth comparison of European Muslim public opinion on a range of political and social attitudes. Indeed, apart from single-country surveys on Spain (Alonso 2012), Germany (Diehl, Koenig, Ruecktaeschel 2009) and the UK (Field 2011), most public opinion pollsters have largely focused on collecting information about Muslim majority countries (Pew 2013).

This article follows Pew (2011: 22) in adopting a broad definition of Muslim as everybody who, in the underlying survey, *self-identified* as Muslim, irrespective of the level of religiosity. This also reflects Brown's argument (2000: 89) that for many Muslims, Muslim identity is not just about religious practice, but also about a sometimes 'much looser attachment to a "cultural" or geographical place of origin.' Given the 'soft edges' of Muslim identity (Brown 2000: 89/90), which go beyond the strict observance of religious precepts of 'devout Muslims', to the more rudimentary observance of 'nominal Muslims' to non-practising 'sociological Muslims', the direct question (2000: 94) is thus preferable.

With France (4.7 million, 7.5 per cent of overall population), Germany (4.1 million, 5.0 per cent) and the United Kingdom (2.8 million, 4.6 per cent), the PEW survey covered the three largest Muslim communities in Europe after Russia (Spain ranks 8<sup>th</sup> with 1 million Muslims, 2.3 per cent). Equally important regarding the political relevance of this paper's findings is that, together with Russia and Italy, all four countries belong to the six European countries with the largest projected increase in the absolute number of Muslims (Pew 2011: 126). In addition, according to analysis (Neumann 2014) produced by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR), France (1,200), Germany (500-600), and the United Kingdom (500-600) are the countries with the largest number of foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria (see also Byman/Shapiro 2014: 14).

The fact that the data covers a range of institutional contexts would make the unearthing of consistent attitudinal patterns even more noteworthy. In general religious terms, France follows the model of strict religious neutrality. The British model does not cover the official recognition of religious communities. Germany and Spain follow the model of official recognition (Fuess 2007). Regarding the interaction with Muslim communities specifically, France and Germany employ the statist or corporatist models mentioned above while the United Kingdom relies more on civil negotiations, particularly at the local level (Kaya 2010). Spain differs from the other European countries by having the country of origin of most of its Muslim residents (Morocco) as a direct neighbour. As Fidel Sendagorta (2005: 64), Head of Policy Planning at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, put it: 'Imagine for a moment how Britain's world view would change if Pakistan were on the other side of the Channel.'

The following analysis employs four models, each with a categorical variable as the dependent variable. The first model captures the differences between those who, in the 2006 Pew survey, saw 'suicide bombings against civilians in the name of defending Islam' as 'rarely', 'sometimes' or 'often' justified (all coded '1') and the vast majority of those who considered this tactic as 'never' justified (coded '0') (Table 1).

Insert TABLE 1 here

Some might question the choice of support for suicide bombing as a proxy for radical political viewpoints given the widespread support for this tactic among Arab publics in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The fact that majorities of Egyptians (53 per cent) and Jordanians (57 per cent) can think of situations in which they would view suicide bombings against civilians as justified reflects the reluctance among Arab opinion makers to criticize what they regard as

‘legitimate methods of resistance’ against Israel and its occupation of Palestinian territories as opposed to the illegitimate use of the very same tactic by al-Qaeda and affiliates (Berger/Behr 2009). At the same time, the delegitimization of suicide bombings and political violence against civilians irrespective of any political context has long been regarded as a crucial element of Western counterterrorism policies (Simon and Martini 2004). In addition, the survey data was collected in early 2006 and thus a couple of months after suicide terrorism had struck London in July 2005. Its results are also broadly in line with similar surveys of Muslim publics reported by Alonso (2012), Field (2011), and Mirza, Senthilkumaran, and Ja’far (2007). The consistency of a radical core of militant endorsement of political violence against civilians makes the analysis of potential correlates all the more pressing.

The second model captures differences between those who have ‘not too much’, ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ of confidence in Osama Bin Laden (all coded ‘1’) and those who have ‘none at all’ (coded ‘0’) (table 2). This model serves as an additional measure of political radicalism insofar as the then-Al-Qaeda-leader had, by the time of the survey, expressed his support for the acts of Islamist terrorism which had occurred in Europe (Nesser 2011). It also follows previous examinations of public support for Islamist violence in Muslim-majority countries which utilized similar questions about Osama Bin Laden (Tessler/Robbins 2007).

Insert TABLE 2 here

The third and fourth models use replies reported in tables 3 and 4 to construct categorical variables comparing those expressing concerns about ‘Muslim women taking on modern roles in society’ and about the ‘influence of music, movies and television on Muslim youth’ with those not concerned about these developments. Attitudes on women’s rights have featured prominently in previous examinations of Muslim public opinion (Jamal 2006; Norris/Inglehart 2002). Attitudes toward Western mainstream culture were the subject of analyses of Muslim communities in Western Europe more specifically (Mandaville 2009; Roy 2003).

Insert TABLE 3 here

Insert TABLE 4 here

Table 3 reveals a noticeable popularity of conservative viewpoints on women’s rights among British and French Muslims when compared with German and Spanish Muslims. Interestingly, continental European Muslims are also much more relaxed about the impact of Western popular culture than their British counterparts. This is in line with the findings of Klausen’s small n-

surveys of European Muslim elites, in which British respondents demonstrated greater conservatism than their Muslim counterparts in other parts of Europe (2005).

A binary logistic regression is the most appropriate instrument for both methodological and substantive reasons. Initially, a dependent variable based on a 4-point Likert scale would make ordered logit regression a suitable choice. However, a test of parallel lines confirmed that the assumption of a monotonic effect, which is central to ordered logit regression, had to be rejected. Using a binary variable which merges responses is also acceptable from an analytical point of view as this paper is particularly interested in what sets apart those who hold more sympathetic views toward political violence or conservative ideas from the rest (see Tessler/Robbins 2007 for a similar approach).

#### **b. Independent Variables**

Reflecting this paper's main interest, the following models include dummy variables which allow a comparison of those who either cite the local imam, national groups, religious figures on TV or religious authorities from Egypt and Saudi Arabia as their main source of religious guidance as opposed to reference category of those who do not follow any specific form of religious guidance (table 5).

Insert TABLE 5 here

Existing research on radical Islamism among Western Muslims is marked by the tension between those who focus on socio-economic inequalities, discrimination, racism, generational conflicts, cultural tensions and those who emphasize religious practices, identities, and discourses in shaping political and social attitudes (Jordan and Boix 2004; Mullins 2010; Roy 2003). The following models test the impact of socio-economic marginalisation by including variables which measure educational achievement and income with higher values representing greater success in these areas. Added to these are dummy variables controlling for the potential impact of gender, marital status, place of birth and a continuous variable measuring age. Additional robustness checks which controlled for Arab ancestry did not produce different results.

Somehow related to structural factors, but often receiving separate treatment in assessments of Islamist radicalization (Boukhars 2009; Wilner and Dubouloz 2010) are experiences with discrimination. The numbers from the 2006 Pew data set analysed here (table II, online appendix)

resemble those presented by the 2009 European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights which established that 34 per cent of Muslim men and 26 per cent of Muslim women reported having experienced discrimination in the previous twelve months (Fundamental Rights Agency 2009). This means that in France (37 per cent), the UK (28 per cent), and Spain (25 per cent), but not in Germany (19 per cent), the numbers are higher than in a Gallup Poll (2008: 46) conducted on behalf of the European Commission according to which 19 per cent of EU citizens claimed they or a member of their family and friends had ever been discriminated against on the basis of religion, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnic origin. The following models thus include dummy variables comparing those who experienced discrimination and racism with those who did not.

The fact that high-profile terrorist attacks such as on 7 July 2005 were led by apparently well-integrated individuals like Mohammad Siddique Khan have led many to follow Khan's suicide video and the arguments frequently put forward by leaders of national Muslim groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain and the Muslim Association of Britain (Klausen 2005; Woodward and Bates 2006) and emphasize objections over Western foreign policies as the main cause of Islamist terrorism in Europe (Azzam 2007; Boukhars 2009; Haddad and Golson 2007; Stevens 2009). Others were more sceptical (Mirza, Senthilkumaran, and Ja'far 2007). In the first broad based examination of Muslim attitudes toward terrorism which sufficiently disentangled support for violence against civilians from violence against military targets and perceptions of US culture from perceptions of US foreign policy, Berger (2014) could not find any evidence for a link between radical political views and perceptions of US foreign policies.

The impact of attitudes toward Western foreign policy (in models 1 and 2 only) is measured via the question about confidence in U.S. President George W. Bush (table III, online appendix). This variable has the advantage that President Bush's name is not only widely associated with controversial Western foreign policies, but also elicits a much smaller number of missing responses. Robustness checks featuring questions about perceptions of the US-led war in Iraq, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Global War on Terror (tables IV, V, VI, online appendix) did not produce different results.

Finally, in his speech on Islamist terrorism to the Munich Security Conference in early 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron pointed to the building up of a 'feeling of belonging in our countries' (Cameron 2011) as a key practical step of any counterterrorism policy. While Roy (2003) and Alonso (2012) consider the identification among some European Muslims with a

global ‘umma’ as problematic due to exploitable ‘them and us’-mentalities, Mandaville (2009) points out that the emphasis on Muslim identity can cover a range of attitudes from the Communal-Pluralists’ insistence on co-existence to the anti-systemic violence of radical Salafis within al-Qaeda’s ideological orbit. Among those polled by Pew in 2006, France was the only country where a majority of respondents saw themselves as either French first (42 per cent) or equally French and Muslim (10 per cent) (table VII, online appendix). This stands in startling contrast to the overwhelming preference for exclusive Muslim identity in the UK (83 per cent), Spain (70 per cent), and Germany (69 per cent).

#### 4. Analysis

The most astonishing finding, clearly, is that institutionalized forms of religious guidance exhibit a statistically significant relationship with at least one of the two dependent variables capturing political radicalism in every country under consideration.<sup>1</sup> This effect comes into even sharper focus if the regression models 1 and 2 are employed to calculate estimated probabilities. For a median<sup>2</sup> respondent in France, the estimated probability of finding suicide bombings justified at least sometimes jumps from 26.1 per cent if he follows no religious guidance whatsoever to 43.5 per cent if he follows the local imam and to 46.9 per cent if he follows religious elites in the Arab world as his main religious guidance. In Spain, this probability even increases from 28.1 per cent to 55.1 per cent if he follows religious elites in the Arab world and to 67.2 per cent if he follows national religious leaders.

Insert MODEL 1 here

Even more consistent is the cross-country impact of religious guidance on views of Osama Bin Laden. For the median Spanish respondent, the likelihood of having at least some confidence in Osama Bin Laden increases from 12.5 per cent if he does not follow any religious guidance to 33.7 per cent if he follows religious elites in the Arab world and to 39.8 per cent if he follows national religious leaders. In Germany, this likelihood increases from 0.2 per cent to 8.8 per cent for national leaders, to 20.6 per cent for the local imam, to 28.9 per cent for foreign religious

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<sup>1</sup> Classification tables and goodness-of-fit tests (table VIII, online appendix) increase confidence in the robustness of the findings analysed here.

<sup>2</sup> In all four countries the median respondent is a single male who was not born abroad, has completed secondary school, sees himself as Muslim first, has not experienced any racism, is very worried about unemployment, and has no confidence whatsoever in President Bush. Differences exist only in terms of age (France: 33 years, Spain: 32, Germany: 37, UK: 33) and monthly income (France: €1450-1900, Spain: €601-1200, Germany: €1450-1900, UK: £1,666-2,499).

guidance, and to 30.0 per cent for religious figures on TV. In France, the likelihood increases from 6.3 per cent to 19.7 per cent if he follows a religious figure on TV. In the UK, the likelihood increases from 5.9 per cent to 24.3 per cent for the local imam and to 22.6 per cent for foreign guidance.

Insert MODEL 2 here

In line with the inconclusive academic debate about their relevance, the impact of demographic controls in models 1 and 2 is rather mixed. While place of birth does not have any impact in any country, the variables for gender and marital status are only significant in Germany where singles and men are more likely to express confidence in Osama Bin Laden. The lack of any statistical impact of the gender variable in the United Kingdom in models 1 and 2 supports Brown's scepticism (2008) regarding the idea of encouraging the participation of women in mosques so that they can use their increased religious knowledge as a way of discouraging their sons and brothers from adopting or spreading radical ideas. While age emerges as significant in three out of four countries, the impact is not uniform. Younger Muslims are more likely to support suicide bombings in the British sample and have more positive views of Osama Bin Laden in the Spanish sample, but are less likely to express confidence in al-Qaeda's former leader in the German sample. Further research will have to answer whether these differences might be a reflection of a more successful integration of younger generations of Muslims in Germany when compared to the UK and Spain.

The impact of socio-economic status is roughly in line with expectations. Particularly pronounced is the impact of education. In Spain, the likelihood of seeing suicide bombings as at least sometimes justified decreases from 61.2 per cent if the respondent has no formal education to 25.6 per cent if he is educated to university level. In France and the UK, the likelihood of having at least some limited confidence in Osama Bin Laden decreases equally dramatically from 40.7 per cent and 50.3 per cent per cent respectively if the respondent has no formal education to 7.5 per cent and 24.3 per cent per cent if he has a university degree. This link between lack of educational opportunities and radicalism is also reflected in the biography of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks in January 2015 (Yardley 2015). These findings have important implications for government policies aimed at tackling the threat posed by violent Islamist groups. They corroborate Bueno de Mesquita's (2005) assumption that the over-representation of highly educated individuals in terrorist organizations should not be construed as refuting the dampening effect education can have on radical views, because such over-representation is simply the result

of selection bias of terrorist groups interested in recruiting the most capable from a much larger pool of sympathizers with diverse educational backgrounds.

In Germany, the likelihood of having at least some sort of confidence in Osama Bin Laden decreases from 58.0 per cent if the respondent earns less than 500 Euro per month to 4.6 per cent if he earns 4000 Euros or more. A similar pattern in France narrowly misses conventional levels of significance. Greater worries about unemployment among Spanish supporters of suicide terrorism corroborate previous analyses which located Spanish Jihadi networks and sympathizers in the realm of socio-economic precarity (Celso 2005; Jordan and Horsburgh 2005). In an apparent contrast, wealthier British Muslims are more likely to be able to think of situations in which they would consider suicide terrorism as justified.

Quite remarkably, the only two variables which fail to reach statistical significance in any countries across the two models are those which capture experiences of racism and discrimination as well as attitudes towards Western foreign policies. The present analysis thus confirms previous findings (Berger 2014) that negative perceptions of Western foreign policies and support for Islamist extremism are not linked. Equally noteworthy is the almost complete absence of a relationship between Muslim identity and radical political views. The sole exception is Spain where defining oneself as Muslim first modestly increases the probability of viewing Osama Bin Laden positively from 6.7 to 12.8 per cent.

Insert MODEL 3 here

Models 3 and 4 resemble models 1 and 2 insofar as variables capturing religious guidance offer a more consistent picture than those capturing socio-economic variables. Foreign religious guidance, in particular, shapes social attitudes in every country apart from France. In the UK, the likelihood of being at least sometimes worried about Muslim women taking on modern roles in society increases from 23.5 per cent if the respondent follows no religious guidance to 57.6 per cent if he follows the local imam, to 57.3 per cent if he follows foreign religious guidance and to 58.7 per cent if he follows national groups as his main religious guidance. In Germany, this likelihood increases from 30.7 per cent to 67.2 per cent if he follows foreign religious guidance. Interestingly, religious guidance from authorities on TV is associated with lower concern about women's roles in society in France (54.8 per cent versus 24.9 per cent).

In France and Germany, the likelihood of expressing concerns about Western culture increases from 42.8 per cent to 60.6 per cent and from 36.6 per cent to 62.0 per cent respectively if the



respondent follows the local imam. In Spain and Germany, the likelihood of holding such views increases from 34.5 per cent to 50.6 per cent and from 36.6 per cent to 72.2 per cent respectively if the respondent follows foreign religious elites.

The impact of age is only noticeable in Germany where older respondents are more likely to express concern about Muslim women taking on modern roles in society, thereby confirming Diehl, Koenig, and Ruckdeschel's finding (2009: 286-287) of a generational effect on gender attitudes among Turkish Germans. In Spain, men and those married were more likely to express concern on the same question. Norris and Inglehart's (2012) finding on the assimilation of social attitudes among Muslim migrants finds support in model 4 where Muslims born in France and Germany are less likely to express concern about the impact of Western popular culture than Muslims born abroad. In the UK, the likelihood of being at least sometimes worried about Muslim women taking on modern roles in society decreases dramatically from 70.0 per cent in the lowest annual income category (less than £10,000) to 24.6 per cent in the highest (more than £50,000). In France, the likelihood of expressing concern about Western culture decreases from 77.3 per cent for those without formal education to 47.5 per cent among those who hold a university degree. A similar pattern in Germany narrowly misses conventional levels of significance. These findings suggest that the link between education and support for women's rights confirmed by Jamal (2006) for Egypt and Jordan also applies to European Muslim public opinion.

Remarkable is the almost consistent impact of concerns about unemployment in models 3 and 4 which suggests that more conservative social norms are more pronounced among those at the economic margins of society. The nearly complete lack of impact of experiences of racism and discrimination (with Spain being the sole exception) contrasts starkly with the correlation of Muslim identity with views on women in every country and with views on Western popular culture in the United Kingdom and Spain. Interestingly, Muslim identity decreases a Spanish respondent's likelihood of expressing concern about Western culture. These findings suggests that contrary to above-mentioned assumptions about its security dimension, Muslim identity makes itself felt more in social, rather than political attitudes.

Insert MODEL 4 here

## **5. Conclusion**

The statistical analysis presented here unearthed evidence for the persistent relevance of religious guidance and socio-economic status in explaining political and social attitudes among Muslim

publics in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain. This has important implications for the future study of Muslim public opinion, of the differences between organized and individualized manifestations of religion as well as of the transnational exchanges of religious and political ideas brought about by the processes of globalization.

First, the present analysis makes a broader contribution to the academic literature insofar as it demonstrates that findings from the US-dominated body of empirical research on the role of (Christian) religious leaders in shaping public opinion find further support in the context of survey research involving European Muslim respondents. It thus adds empirical evidence to suggest that further research into the political influence of religious elites is warranted.

Second, the statistical impact of educational achievement points to a direct way in which Western governments and civil society actors can address the prevailing influence of discourses that could pose threats to community cohesion or even national security. While the call to emphasize education almost appears as a cure-all for many social phenomena defined as problematic by state authorities, the statistical analyses presented here show very clearly that educational achievement can help bring Muslim political and social attitudes in line with liberal, democratic norms in more than one European country.

Third, institutionalized interpretations of Islam, whether at the local, national, or transnational level appear more closely linked with interpretations of Islam that lend themselves to the justification of political violence and extremism and less flexible attitudes towards the role of women in society and the impact of Western popular culture. The similarity of these patterns across local, national and transnational sources of religious guidance raises the question to what extent these sets of religious discourses are really different. In other words, the data and their analysis presented here seem to indicate that a 'European Islam' which is supported through independent discourses at the local and national level had, at least by the time the underlying survey was conducted in 2006, not yet fully emancipated itself from the religious discourses occurring in the traditional centres of religious learning and discourse in the Muslim world. It thus appeared that, for reasons to be discussed and researched separately, the favourable opportunity structures offered by Europe's freedom of expression, religion and assembly have not yet been translated into a European Islamic discourse as opposed to the Islamic discourse which is produced and maintained in the oftentimes highly problematic political settings of the Arab and Muslim world.

Finally, the statistical significance of foreign religious guidance should not distract attention from the equally profound impact of local religious guidance across the political and social models in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Given the strong influence foreign governments and

private actors still maintain in many parts of Europe on choosing local religious leaders local discourse might thus just be another expression of the enduring influence of discourses found in migrant communities' countries of origin. In the case of the UK, France and Germany, specifically, the question arises why local religious guidance can support radical political views *and* conservative social attitudes. This apparent contradiction does, of course, disappear when we remind ourselves of the potential overlap between 'theologies of intolerance' and 'theologies of hate' (Cesari 2008) discussed above. If conservative Islamic discourses that frame Western mainstream society as inferior or threatening can also serve as a stepping stone toward the development of a more fully fledged hostility toward Western society which countenances political violence then the question of how to deal with these discourses becomes more than just a question of social cohesion.

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