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Roots of Prejudice: The Influence that Western Standards of Secularism have on the Perceived (In)compatibility of Islam with the Western World

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Keywords

Islamophobia, secularism, race, ethnicity

Cover Page Footnote

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Roots of Prejudice:

The Influence that Western Standards of Secularism have on the Perceived (In)compatibility of Islam with the Western World

Rula Issa

Rula Issa is now a graduate student at the London School of Economics and Political Science, studying a Masters in Development Studies. This article was written for her senior thesis at Skidmore College in the Sociology Department. The project was inspired by her professor, Catherine Berheide, in the Sociology Department, as well as professor Jennifer Mueller and Pushkala Prasad in the Sociology and International Affairs Departments at Skidmore.

Over the past four years, the increase in terror attacks and the influx of refugees has created a crisis of secularism in many parts of Western Europe (Modood 2012:5; Torpey 2010:288). This is the result of what Modood (2012:6) describes as the reversal of population flows of European colonialism. At the same time, the presence of religion in many Western European countries, while still evident, has become increasingly invisible. The gradual secular nature of many Western European countries, alongside an increasing presence of Muslims settling in these nations, has contributed to this so-called identity crisis. Consequently, there has been recent attempts to prevent the use of overt symbols of religiosity in open spaces (Modood 2015:5). This was evident within the recent attempts in France to ban the burqa, and the even more recent “burkini” ban (Davis 2011:119). This paper attempts to question whether this Islamophobic rhetoric that has become widespread throughout Western Europe and the United States is a result of the increasingly secular nature of many countries within the Western world, and whether gender plays a role in this relationship. Most of the existing literature that questions the relationship between secularism and Islamophobia focuses solely on the relationship within the context of France and other Western European countries. However, it is important to question whether this relationship between Islamophobia and secularism exists in the United States, a country which simultaneously contains a secular and a strong religious presence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand whether secularism has played a role in the increasingly prevalent Islamophobic rhetoric within Western Europe and the United States, a conceptualization of Islamophobia is needed. Put simply, Islamophobia is described as the stereotypical generalizations about Islam and Muslims that can result in discrimination or harassment (Moosavi 2015:41). Hatred against Muslims appears in both overt and subtle forms. When

speaking of Islamophobia, most think of overt discrimination taking the form of physical abuse. However, the subtle and less transparent forms of Islamophobia are equally as important, through which Muslims are confronted with hostility and exclusion in their day-to-day lives, without it being obvious (Moosavi 2015:48). Additionally, a number of scholars have emphasized the historical roots of Islamophobia rather than framing it as a new phenomenon (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:2; Kayaglu 2012:611; Soyer 2013:400).

Historical Roots of Islamophobia

Islam has been categorized as “other” or inferior to other religions since the 1400s (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:2; Kayaglu 2012:611). The struggle between Christian Spain and Islam formed part of a longer imperial battle in the Mediterranean that dates back to the crusades. In 1492, the Christian Spanish monarchy re-conquered Islamic Spain, forcing Jews and Arab Muslims from the area, while simultaneously “discovering” the Americas and conquering various parts of the world (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:2). As a result, a division of labor was created, privileging populations of European origin over the rest. At the same time, Jews and Muslims became the internal “Other” within Europe (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:2; Soyer 2013:402; Mingolo 2006:18). In the late 15th century, Jews and Muslims were divided even further and were classified as practicing the “wrong religion,” placing them as “savage” and “primitive” people. Grosfoguel and Mielants (2006:8) describe this as the subalternization and inferiorization of Islam, based on the idea of “pure blood.” This classification promoted the idea that Islamic civilizations were inferior and uncivilized. However, Andalusian, Mughal, and Ottoman experiences show that Islamic civilizations were more structured and refined than Western nations (Şentürk and Nizamuddin 2008:519). This category of “otherness” has continued to grow and has transformed into a type of cultural racism that frames itself in terms of

inferior habits, beliefs, behaviors, or values of a group of people (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:4). What is seen as the “right” religion is those only supported by a Judeo-Christian culture, and what is seen as “inhuman” follows from a departure of that culture (Butler 2008:12). Islamophobia continues to be framed in this way; transformed as a type of colonial racism to a newly formed cultural racism that targets Muslims as being inherently different and inferior to white Europeans. While Islamophobia is a form of discrimination against Muslims, it is important to understand the ways in which gender plays a role within this form of cultural racism as well.

Muslim Women and Islamophobia

The intersection of religion and gender is important to discuss when conceptualizing discrimination against Muslims. Veiled women living in Western Europe have been increasingly classified as inferior because of the overt “Islamic marker” that they wear (Afshar 2008:421). While all Muslims are subjected to forms of discrimination, Muslim women’s experiences should be categorized as a different form of exclusion that is not only based on race and religion, but also gender. The discrimination faced by Muslim women takes both physical and subtle forms. Drawing off of Edward Said’s iconic work, it is important to conceptualize the subtle forms of discrimination faced by Muslim women as orientalism (Said 1978:10). This form of discrimination operates through the eroticization of Muslim women (Said 1978:10; Afshar 2008:421). If Muslim women are not seen as threatening, they are perceived as being exotic and submissive to their faith (Afshar 2008:421). These assumptions promote the idea that the West must rush to liberate Muslim women from the "oppression" that is imposed on them by their faith (Abu-Lughod 2002:789; Afshar 2008:420). This white “savior” mentality and the image of Muslim women as being “oppressed” works to justify cultural racism that ultimately targets

Muslims, constructing them as “inferior” and “uncivilized” people who do not belong in the West (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:6). The headscarf, in particular, plays an important role in the construction of this imagery because it is seen as a "subversive force when it emerges in the secular public sphere, asserting its own unconventional and nonsecular (Islamic) norms of privacy" (Çindar 2008:903). As a result, when Muslim women wear headscarves in public spaces, the piece of clothing imposes an Islamic frame and labels the women as being inherently different, and therefore a threat to secularism (Çindar 2008:903). The increasingly secular nature of Western Europe and the United States may have further promoted this cultural racism that classifies Islam as being incompatible with the West.

Secularism

Peter Berger’s (2012) revised secularization theory helps conceptualize the ways in which secularism is framed within many Western European countries and in the United States as well. Berger (2012:313) argues that while there are many forms that secularism can take, it operates through a decline of religion. This decline of religion is experienced on both micro and macro levels, encompassing not only individuals being less religious, but also social institutions separating themselves from religion as well (Berger 2012:314). Berger argues that, “There is indeed a secular discourse resulting from modernity, but it can coexist with religious discourses that are not secular at all” (2012:314). This idea is extremely applicable to the United States formation of secularism that coexists with religious discourses at the same time.

Other scholars have questioned the relationship between secularism and Islamophobia, specifically within Western European countries (Torpey 2010:280; Modood 2011:5). There are two ways of looking at secularism that have been previously overlooked: active and latent religiosity (Torpey 2010:280). Active religiosity refers to people who practice their religions in

public spheres. Conversely, latent religiosity manifests itself more subtly (Torpey 2010:280).

This latent form of religion can spark an identity crisis when confronted with groups that practice their religions openly as a result of the increasing secular nature of many parts of Western Europe (Modood 2011:5). For example, surveys in London show that immigrant groups that settle in London become increasingly secular, while for Muslims, the reverse tendency applies (Laitin 2010:431). Consequently, some Europeans question whether or not Muslims should be allowed to practice their religions openly in a country that emphasizes secular values (Laitin 2010:431).

In order to understand the relationship between secularism and Islamophobia within the context of the United States, this paper draws on Annalisa Frisina's (2010) two frameworks of Islamophobia: the new orientalist and security frames. The new orientalist framework is related to the work cited above, portraying Islam as the cultural and religious opposite of the West, therefore classifying it as incompatible to Western values and cultures (Frisina 2010:560). Additionally, the security frame is important because it is based on a sort of shifting form of orientalism that promotes ideas of Muslims as dangerous because they are likely to be "terrorists" (Frisina 2010:560). In this case, Islamophobia is most often justified due to this idea that Muslims are a threat to "national security" (Frisina 2010:560). While the literature I have included above are extensive investigations on secularism and its relationship with Islamophobia, only a few sources discuss secularism and Islamophobia in the United States. Drawing from the literature above, this paper attempts to understand the relationship between secularism and Islamophobia in the United States utilizing quantitative data analysis.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is based on the data provided by the Public Religion Research Institute's (PRRI) survey on Pluralism-Immigration-&-Civic-Integration, conducted in 2011 (PRRI 2011). The data set is composed of a random sample of American adults, 18 years or older, totaling 2,450 respondents. The unit of analysis in this data set is individuals. The data was collected through phone interviews under the supervision of Directions in Research. The responses were weighted in two stages. The first stage of weighting corrected for different probabilities of selection associated with the number of adults in each household and telephone usage patterns of each respondent (PRRI 2011). Additionally, in the second stage sample, demographics were balanced by form to match target population parameters for gender, age, education, race, region, population density, and telephone usage (PRRI 2011). The margin of error is +/-2.0 percentage points for the general sample at the 95 percent confidence interval. Additionally, the response rate is 5.67 percent (PRRI 2011). The survey asked questions about political climate in the United States, including questions about discrimination, September 11 attacks, religion, and questions about race. For more information about data collection, see the 2011 Pluralism-Immigration-&-Civic-Integration online.

Independent Variable

Using the Pluralism-Immigration-&-Civic-Integration Survey, I formed the independent variable from the question that asks whether one completely agrees, mostly agrees, mostly disagrees, or completely disagrees that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state. I used this variable to operationalize secularism, which takes the form of the separation of church and state in the United States. I recoded this variable to give the highest value to a respondent who completely agrees with maintaining a separation of church and state. The coding of the variable follows this order: completely disagree (1), mostly disagree (2), mostly agree (3), and

completely agree (4). Additionally, I used three dependent variables to measure discrimination against Muslims and Muslim women.

Dependent Variables

The first dependent variable asks whether someone completely agrees, mostly agrees, mostly disagrees, or completely disagrees that the values of Islam, the Muslim religion, are at odds with American values and culture. I used this variable to operationalize a form of Islamophobia because it relates to the idea that Islam is incompatible to Western values, and therefore, justifies the exclusion of Muslims. I also had to recode this variable to make completely agree the highest value. The coding of the variable follows this order: completely disagree (1), mostly disagree (2), mostly agree (3), and completely agree (4).

The second dependent variable asks whether someone is very comfortable, somewhat comfortable, somewhat uncomfortable, or very uncomfortable with a mosque being built near their home. I used this variable to operationalize a form of Islamophobia based on the security frame that labels Muslims as threats to democracy and secularism. If people believe that Muslims are threats and are incompatible with American values, they may feel uncomfortable with mosques being built near their homes. I did not recode this variable because the highest value measures feeling very uncomfortable. The coding of the variable follows this order: very comfortable (1), somewhat comfortable (2), somewhat uncomfortable (3), and very uncomfortable (4).

The last dependent variable asks whether someone is very comfortable, somewhat comfortable, somewhat uncomfortable, or very uncomfortable with Muslim women wearing clothing that covers their whole bodies, including their faces. I used this variable to operationalize another form of Islamophobia. When people see the Islamic veil on Muslim

women, they may feel uncomfortable around them due to the perception of Muslims as threats and as inherently different to Western forms of modernity. The coding of the last dependent variable follows this order: very comfortable (1), somewhat comfortable (2), somewhat uncomfortable (3), very uncomfortable (4).

Control Variables

In addition to the independent variable and the three dependent variables, I included two control variables in the analysis. The first control variable is religion because I wanted to know whether a respondents' religious affiliation has an effect on their perceptions of Muslims. I dummied this variable to measure whether someone is Roman Catholic (1) or not Roman Catholic (0). It was necessary for me to categorize the religion variable as Roman Catholic or not in order to achieve an 80 to 20 percent distribution. Respondents who reported not being Roman Catholic consisted of people who identified as Protestant, Mormon, Orthodox, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Unitarian, Atheist, Agnostic, nothing in particular, and something else. I excluded Muslims, which consisted of only seven cases from the analysis because I wanted to know how non-Muslims felt about Muslims in the United States.

The second control variable was age because it is said that older generations hold strongly to religious beliefs, while younger generations have more secular beliefs. The survey's age range is from 18 to 94 years (PRRI 2011). Through the analysis, most of the variables I used are ordinal variables. As a result, I understand that I am violating assumptions by treating ordinal-level variables as interval level.

FINDINGS

Table 1 reports the means, medians, and standard deviations for all of the variables. The distribution of the independent variable can be seen in Figure 1. The histogram shows that about

70 percent of the respondents reported that they agree with the separation of church and state, suggesting that a majority of the respondents favor having a strict separation of church and state in the United States. Table 1 also reports that the mean is 2.9 and the median is three. This suggests that the average level of agreement and the middle value is mostly agreeing with maintaining a strict separation of church and state. The standard deviation for the independent variable is one, meaning that there is slight deviation in the variable, however, the standard deviation is close to zero making the mean more reliable.

Table 1: Means, Medians, and Standard Deviations for All Variables

Variables	Mean	Median	SD	(N)
Separation of Church and State	2.93	3.0	1.028	(2097)
Islam at odds with Amer. values	2.55	3.0	0.991	(2033)
Mosque being built near home	2.55	3.0	1.115	(2078)
Muslim women covering bodies	2.51	3.0	1.102	(2102)
Roman Catholic/ Not	0.75	1.0	0.432	(2134)
Age	53.25	55.0	18.777	(2134)

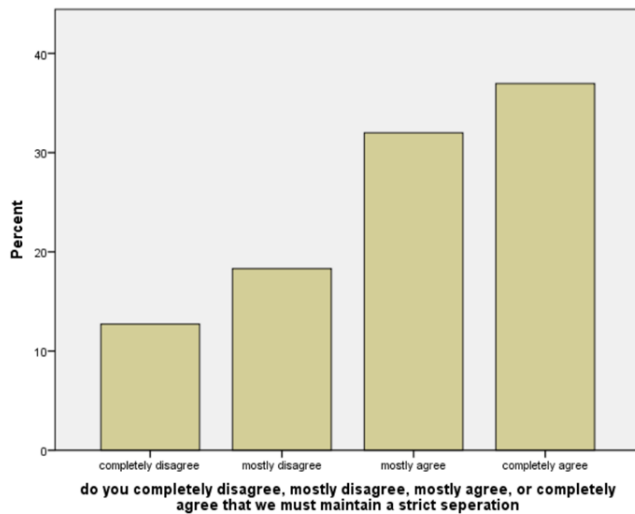


Figure 1. Histogram of “We Must Maintain a Strict Separation of Church and State”

The survey asked the respondents' level of agreement with the question, "Islam is at odds with American values and culture." The distribution of the variable can be seen in Figure 2. The histogram shows that there is almost an even number of respondents who agree with the above statement and the number of respondents who disagree with the above statement. This suggests that respondents both disagree and agree that Islam is at odds with the values and culture of the United States. Additionally, Table 1 reports that the mean of this dependent variable is 2.6, which shows that the average level of agreement is mostly agreeing with Islam being at odds with American values and culture. Table 1 also reports that the standard deviation of this dependent variable is one. Since the standard deviation is close to zero, there is slight distribution in the variable, but not significant skew. Also, the standard deviation suggests that the mean is more reliable.

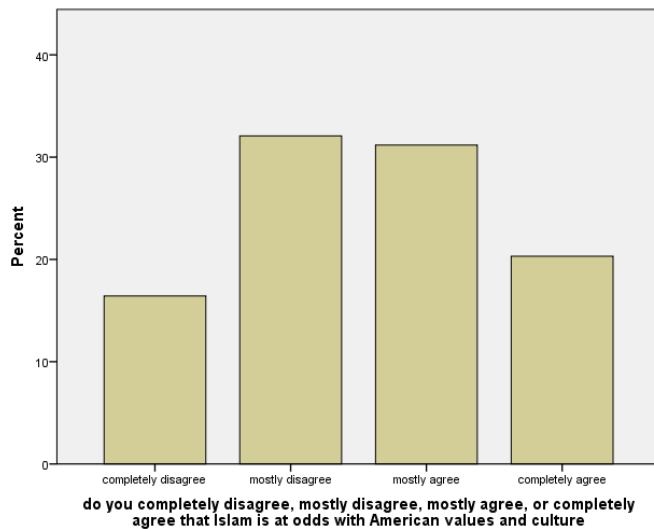


Figure 2. Histogram of Islam at Odds with American Values and Culture

Additionally, the survey asked the respondents' level of comfort with "A mosque being built near your home." Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents who felt comfortable or

uncomfortable with a mosque being built near their homes. There is an even distribution between respondents who felt comfortable about a mosque being built near their home and respondents who felt uncomfortable. Table 1 also reports the mean of this dependent variable as 2.6, suggesting the average level of comfort is somewhat uncomfortable with a mosque being built near their home. The median is two, which means that the middle value is somewhat comfortable with a mosque being built near their home. The standard deviation is 1.1, which shows that there is slight distribution in the variable, but the standard deviation makes the mean more reliable because it is close to zero.

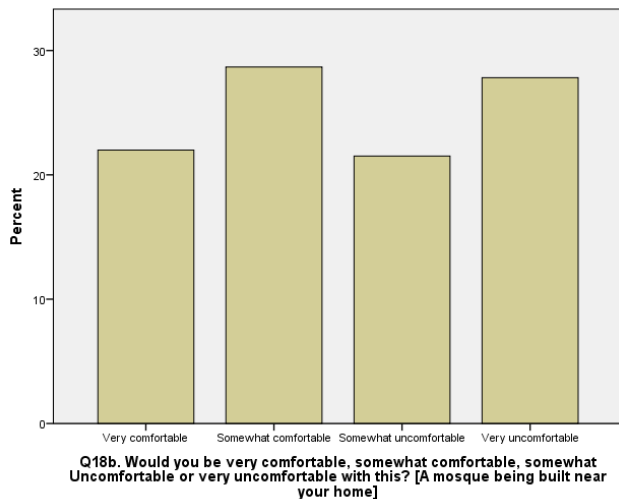


Figure 3. Histogram of Mosque Built Near Home

The survey asked the respondents' level of comfort to the question, "Muslim women wearing clothing that covers their whole body, including their faces." Figure 4 shows that there is an even distribution of the respondents' who feel comfortable and uncomfortable with the above statement. The percentage of respondents who are comfortable is almost equal to the percentage of respondents who are uncomfortable with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. Table 1 reports the mean for this variable as 2.5 while the median is three, suggesting

that the average level of comfort is somewhat uncomfortable with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. The standard deviation is reported as 1.1, which shows that the mean is reliable and there is only slight distribution in the variable.

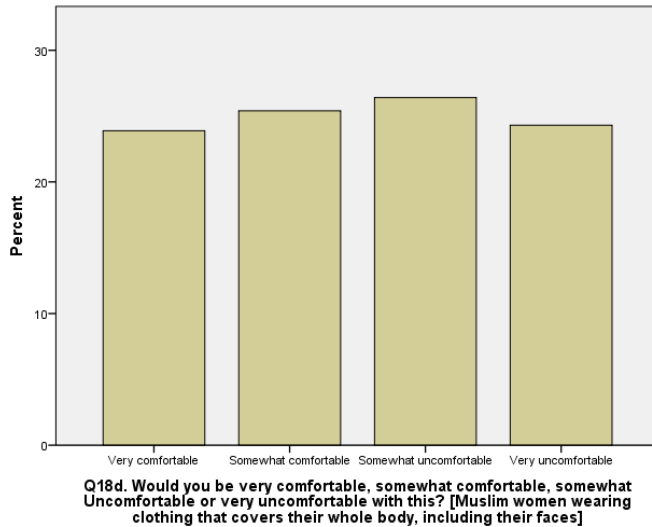


Figure 4. Histogram of Muslim Women Covering their Bodies

The survey asked about the respondents' religious affiliation. I dummied this variable and only showed which respondents identified as being Roman Catholic and which respondents identified as something else. Around 25 percent of the respondents identified as Roman Catholic, while about 75 percent of the respondents identified as not being Roman Catholic. Table 1 shows that the mean for the control variable is .24, meaning that most of the respondents are not Roman Catholic. Additionally, the standard deviation of this control variable is .43, suggesting that there is little deviation and the mean is more reliable since the standard deviation is close to zero.

The survey also asked a question about the age of the respondents. The survey consists of adults ranging from 18 to 94 years. Figure 6 shows the distribution of respondents' ages, suggesting that most of the respondents were between 50 to 70 years old. About ten percent of the respondents are 80 years and older. Additionally, about twenty-five percent of the

respondents are 20 to 40 years old. Table 1 reports that the average age of the respondents is 53. The median age is about 54, and the standard deviation is 18 years. The standard deviation suggests that the respondents' ages ranged from 34 to 72, which makes up about 60 percent of the respondents. Because the standard deviation is 18, there is significant skew in the variable.

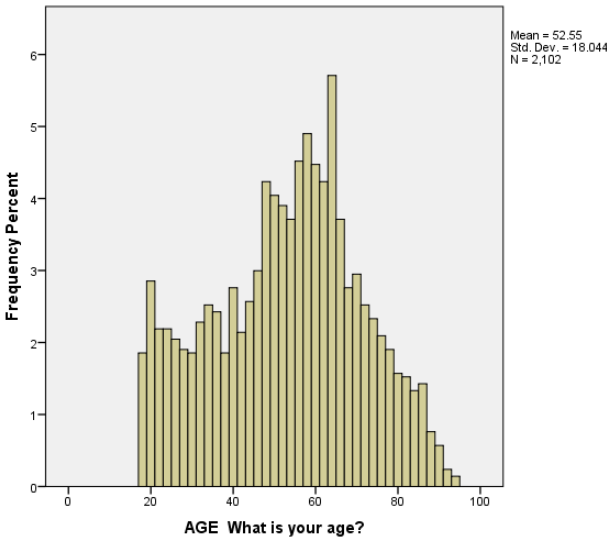


Figure 5. Histogram of Age

Bivariate Results

Table 2 shows the results of the bivariate analysis between the dependent variables, independent variable, and control variables. The bivariate results indicate a moderate, positive, statistically significant relationship ($r = .324$) between the two dependent variables, indicating that the more a respondent agrees that Islam is at odds with American values and culture, the more uncomfortable a respondent feels with a mosque being near their home. Additionally, the bivariate results indicate a weak to moderate, positive, statistically significant relationship ($r = .225$) with the other dependent variable, suggesting that the more a respondent agrees that Islam is at odds with American values and culture, the more uncomfortable a respondent feels with Muslim women covering their bodies including their faces. The bivariate results also indicate a

moderate to strong, positive, statistically significant relationship ($r = .494$) between the other two dependent variables, suggesting that the more uncomfortable a respondent feels with a mosque being built near their home, the more uncomfortable they feel with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces.

In terms of the first dependent variable (Islam at odds) and the independent variable, Table 2 indicates a weak, negative, statistically significant relationship ($r = -.130$), suggesting that the more a respondent agrees that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state, the more a respondent disagrees with Islam being at odds with American values and culture. For the second dependent variable, which asks respondents' level of comfort with a mosque being built near their home, the bivariate results indicate a weak, negative, moderate, and statistically significant relationship ($r = -.271$), suggesting that the more a respondent agrees that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state, the more comfortable a respondent feels with a mosque being built near their home. Additionally, the bivariate results indicate that there is a negative, weak, and statistically significant relationship ($r = -.101$), between the third dependent variable, Muslim women covering their bodies, and the independent variable. As a result, the more a respondent agrees that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state, the more comfortable a respondent feels with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces.

Table 2. *Correlations (r) between Separation of Church and State and Dependent Variables*
(listwise deletion, two-tailed test, N=1932)

Variables	Mosque	Covering	Church and State	Roman Catholic	Age
Islam at odds	.322**	.226**	.129**	-.067**	.106**
Mosque		.496**	-.270**	.036	.243**
Covering Bodies			.101**	-.014	.242**

Church and State	-.043	.020
Roman Catholic		-.045

** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows the bivariate results for the control variables as well. The bivariate results indicate no relationship between respondents who are Roman Catholic and whether a respondent agrees that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state. The Roman Catholic variable has no relationship with a respondents' level of comfort with a mosque being built near their home and with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. However, the bivariate results indicate a negative, weak, statistically significant relationship ($r = -.067$) between one of the dependent variables, suggesting that if a respondent is Roman Catholic, the respondent is less likely to agree that Islam is at odds with American values and culture.

The bivariate results indicate statistically significant relationships between the three dependent variables and respondents' ages. Table 2 shows that there is a weak, positive, statistically significant relationship ($r = .106$) between age and the Islam at odds variable, suggesting that the older a respondent is, the more the respondent agrees that Islam is at odds with American values and culture. Additionally, the bivariate results indicate a weak but almost moderate, positive, statistically significant relationship ($r = .243$) between age and a respondents' level of comfort with a mosque being built near their home, meaning that the older a respondent is, the more uncomfortable they feel with a mosque being built near their home. Lastly, the bivariate results in Table 2 indicate a strong, weak but almost moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship ($r = .242$) between age and Muslim women covering their bodies, suggesting that the older a respondent is, the more uncomfortable the respondent feels

with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. The bivariate results indicate no relationship between age and whether a respondent agrees that we must maintain a strict separation of church and state.

Multivariate Findings

The multiple regression analysis reported in Table 3 shows that 3.3 percent of the variance in the separation of church and state, while holding constant Roman Catholic and age, is explained by a respondents' level of agreement with Islam being at odds with American values and culture. Additionally, the multiple regression demonstrates that 13 percent of the variance in a respondents' agreement with the separation of church and state, while holding constant Roman Catholic and age, is explained by a respondents' level of comfort with a mosque being built near their homes. Lastly, the multiple regression portrays that 6.5 percent of the variance in a respondents' level of agreement with the separation of church and state, while holding constant Roman Catholic and age, is explained by a respondents' level of comfort with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. While the R squared values are small, the F-test shows that all three of the regressions are significant. Of the three dependent variables, the independent variable has the most effect on a respondents' level of comfort with a mosque being built near their home (Beta = -.266). The independent variable has the second strongest effect on a respondents' level of agreement with Islam being at odds with American values and culture (Beta = -.127). Additionally, the independent variable has the least effect on the level of comfort with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces (Beta = -.097).

The first control variable, whether a respondent is Roman Catholic, is only significant with one of the dependent variables, a respondents' level of agreement with Islam at odds with American values and culture (Beta = -.070). While Roman Catholic is only significant with one

dependent variable, the second control variable, age, is significant with all three dependent variables. Age has the most effect on a respondents' level of comfort with a mosque being built near their home (Beta = .249). Additionally, age has the second strongest effect on a respondents' level of comfort with Muslim women covering their bodies (Beta = .239). Age has the least effect on a respondents' level of agreement with Islam being at odds with American values and culture (Beta = .113).

Table 3. *Regression of Dependent Variables and Separation of Church and State, Roman Catholic, and Respondent's Age*

Variables	Islam at Odds β	Covering Bodies β	Mosque β
Church and State	-.127**	-.097**	-.266**
Roman Catholic	-.070**	.016	-.031
Age	.113**	.239**	.249**
R^2	.033	.065	.130
$F(2, 2072)$	22.709**	47.677**	100.501**

$p < .01$

DISCUSSION

These findings are not consistent with the large body of literature on the relationship between secularism and Islamophobia in Western Europe. Secularism does in fact have a relationship with Islamophobia, but within the context of the United States, the relationship is negative. The results suggest that the more secular an individual is, the more open they are to Muslims being in the country. The results specifically report that the more a respondent agrees with the separation of church and state, the less they agree that Islam is at odds with American values and culture. Additionally, the more a respondent agrees with the separation of church and state, the more comfortable a respondent feels with a mosque being built near their homes and

with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. This may be due to the fact that while there is an increase in secularism in the United States, religion still has a strong presence within the country.

Berger (2012:4) describes this phenomenon by saying that secularism coexists with religion in the United States. In fact, he goes against his former theory of secularism by stating that with modernity comes pluralism. Berger (2012:4) states that Western Europe is unique because the countries were created by a state church, where the two were not separate, whereas the United States started out with pluralism (Berger 2012:4). As a result, people with secular values can be religious at the same time, because the form that secularism takes in the United States is based on promoting liberty for citizens to practice religions freely. While the United States promotes freedom for practicing religions, pluralization can become a challenge when there are too many different forms of religions that coexist in a single space (Modood 2012:5). As a result, when Muslims are viewed through this oriental frame and are seen as a threat, non-Muslims may feel conflicted when they are exposed to Muslims practicing their religions in the public sphere (Modood 2012:5).

The multivariate results also report that age forms a positive relationship with all of the dependent variables. The older a respondent is, the more a respondent agrees that Islam is at odds with American values and culture, the more uncomfortable a respondent is with a mosque being built near their home, and with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. Older generations may hold increasingly prejudiced beliefs against Muslims due to the ways in which Islam has been portrayed throughout the United States. Additionally, it may be because the Muslim population has increased in recent years and older generations may not have been exposed to Muslims practicing their religions openly. As a result, older generations may rely

more on stereotypical beliefs of Muslims. The multivariate findings show that the Roman Catholic variable is related to only one of the dependent variables (Islam at Odds), suggesting that if a respondent is Roman Catholic, they are less likely to believe that Islam is incompatible with American values and culture. This may be due to the fact that Roman Catholics are diverse and come from other parts of the world. While Roman Catholicism is not the biggest religious sect in the United States, Roman Catholics make up about 22 percent of the United States population (PRRI 2011). Additionally, younger generations of Roman Catholics may have been raised in households where Roman Catholic values have been passed down. As a result, they may be more accepting of Muslims.

While the results turned out to show a negative relationship with variables that operationalized Islamophobia, the bivariate results portray that Islamophobia is prevalent in the United States. In fact, each variable that operationalized Islamophobia was positively and almost moderately related to one another. As a result, the new oriental and security frames apply in the context of the United States. Through the new orientalist frame, the main reason why Muslims experience discrimination is because of the idea that Islam is incompatible with Western forms of modernity (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:4; Frisina 2010:560). The security frame perpetuates the belief that Muslims are threats to American democracy (Frisina 2010:560). These two frames can create the perception that the Islamic headscarf is threatening and places Muslim women as cultural inferior because it is a “subversive force” when it appears in the public sphere (Çindar 2008:903). Similarly, mosques can be perceived as threatening in Western Europe and the United States because Islam is seen as the cultural opposite of Western cultures and values, therefore people can react negatively to mosques and may feel uncomfortable having one built near their home. Afshar (2008:413) states, “Clearly Orientalism is not merely part of a forgotten

past; it remains very much at the core of the current history of race and gender in the West and current wars in the Middle East.” The perception of Muslim women as uncivilized and “oppressed” has been used to justify United States’ foreign policy and ongoing interference in the Middle East (Afshar 2008:415; Abu-Lughod 2002:789). Islamophobia is continuously justified in the United States because of the depiction of Muslims as “backward” and threats to national security (Frisina 2010:560).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I attempted to understand the relationship between Islamophobia and secularism within the context of the United States, and tried to see how gender plays a role in this relationship. I also attempted to conceptualize how Islamophobia functions through Frisina’s (2010) new orientalist and security frames. Using the data from the 2011 Pluralism-Immigration-&-Civic-Integration survey created by the Public Religion Research Institute, the proceeding analysis displayed a negative relationship between a respondents’ level of agreement with maintaining a strict separation of church and state and a respondents’ level of agreement with Islam being at odds with American values and culture. Additionally, the analysis showed a negative relationship between a respondents’ level of agreement with maintaining a strict separation of church and state and whether a respondent was uncomfortable with a mosque being built near their home, and with Muslim women covering their bodies, including their faces. Secularism in the United States is particular in that it promotes the separation of church and state but there continues to be a strong religious presence within the country. Consequently, this may have played a role in the negative relationship between secularism and Islamophobia in the United States displayed in the multivariate analysis.

While this paper portrays important implications regarding the ways in which Islamophobia functions in the United States, there were a number of limitations in this study. One important limitation is the data set that was used. The data set had a very small response rate of 5.67%, which means that it may not be generalizable to the United States population. Consequently, further research using a different data set is needed in order to formulate results that are generalizable to the United States population. Another limitation has to do with the type of variables that were used in this study. Because I used data provided by the Public Religious Research Institute, the type of questions asked were out of my control. I used ordinal variables, and as a result, had to make assumptions regarding the responses that were reported in the survey. While there are limitations in this paper, the results provide an important insight on the ways in which Islamophobia functions in the United States.

While the results showed that there was a negative relationship between secularism and Islamophobia, the results displayed the fact that Islamophobia has a presence in the United States. In light of recent political events that have taken place in the country, it is important to think about Islamophobia not solely as hatred against Muslims due to the idea that they pose a threat to security and democracy, but also to view Islamophobic rhetoric as directly related to orientalist ideas that depict Muslims as “backward” and “uncivilized.” For example, when thinking of Islamophobia through these two frameworks, it is easier to understand why and how the recent Travel Ban in the United States was justified. Most of the discourse surrounding this ban was on the idea that Muslims from “certain countries” should be restricted from entering the United States due to national security reasons (Laughland 2017). However, embedded within this rhetoric are orientalist tropes that depict Muslims as “backward” and “uncivilized” people that are incompatible with the United States’ form of democracy and secularism. In order to

understand the ways in which Islamophobic rhetoric functions within the two frames, placing Islamophobia in a historical context is essential (Grosfoguel and Mielants 2006:3). Additionally, thinking about gender and the way it intersects with Islamophobia emphasizes the need to challenge Western feminist discourse that reproduces the image of a “Muslim women” as one that needs “saving” (Abu-Lughod 2002:784). If we continue to think of how Islamophobia operates through the new orientalist and security frames that are often deployed to justify discrimination and the exclusion of Muslims, we will be able to challenge Islamophobic rhetoric and create a more understanding and open community.

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