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Multiculturalism and Muslim Accommodation: What Reaction Among the Mainstream?

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Abstract

This paper assesses the apparent effect of political multiculturalism on tolerance of Muslim accommodation among native-born majority members. We do so by examining responses to a pair of survey experiments embedded in surveys conducted in Canada and the United States. Our unique contributions to the empirical literature on this topic are as follows: first, we move the focus away from general attitudes about immigration and diversity, and put it squarely on the most contentious issue: religion and religious accommodation; second, and beyond highlighting religion *per se*, we employ novel survey experiments to disentangle the issue of Muslim exceptionalism from other conflating factors including religious conservatism, socio-economic status, and race. In general, we find little in the way of policy effects, and substantially less tolerance of Muslim accommodation than for similar demands made by other religious groups.

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This paper explores the attitudinal implications, among mainstream native-born populations, of political multiculturalism. Using national surveys from two countries and contrasting three "nations", we ask whether multiculturalism ameliorates ethnic tensions, heightens them, or indeed has no apparent effect at all. Our unique contributions to the empirical literature on this topic are as follows: first, we move the focus away from general attitudes about immigration and diversity, and put it squarely on the most contentious issue: religion and religious accommodation; second, and beyond highlighting religion *per se*, we employ novel survey experiments to disentangle the issue of Muslim exceptionalism from other conflating factors including religious conservatism, socio-economic status, and race.

Our main policy leverage lies in the comparison of "strongly" multicultural Canada with the rather more assimilationist U.S. There is in addition variance within Canada, and we take advantage of this by analyzing two Canadian samples, one of Francophone Quebecers, and the other of Anglophones in the "Rest of Canada" (ROC). In general, national-level "policy effects" are small, with non-Quebecois-Canadians exhibiting essentially similar levels of support for various aspects of religious accommodation than native-born Americans. Differences within Canada are more marked, however, where French Quebeckers are consistently the least tolerant group. We also find strong evidence across contexts for Muslim exceptionalism; that is, regardless of place or issue, we find respondents more hostile to demands made by Muslims than other religious groups. This latter finding supports work that emphasizes relatively unique hostility to that group (e.g. Sides and Gross forthcoming) versus other work that holds anti-Muslim sentiment as some form of ethnocentrism (e.g. Kalkan et al., 2009; others).

Theory

Religious Accommodation in Liberal Democracies

In some sense the challenge of maintaining solidarity is endemic to democracy. No society is or has ever been so homogeneous in interests and values to achieve perfect harmony; it has always been the case that individuals and groups in society identify only weakly with (or express hostility to) others, and that such conflicts work themselves out in the political arena. That said, the past few decades have witnessed a series of largely immigration-driven demographic changes that have prompted many to worry that liberal democracies will soon reach their breaking point (see Harell & Stolle 2010 for a review).

From among the many sources of tension, an especially thorny problem occurs when minority groups express values or make demands perceived as incompatible with the liberal values pre-eminent among Western democracies. Other examples exist, but the most salient in today's politics center on Islam and the accommodation of Muslim immigrants. For example, demands to shield Mohammed from public mockery clash with liberal notions of free expression, and political elites in Quebec and France have sought to ban religious headgear associated with Islam in the name of individual rights and gender equality.

Such cases augur a hostile response from the majority population, likely stemming from some combination of ideological secularism, ethnocentrism, perceived security threat, and so on. What unites these explanations, for the most part, is perceived threat to deeply held cultural values. Where these values themselves come from is a somewhat murkier issue,

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though it is fairly common to attribute their origin to national founding myths, and their propagation to civic education, and government policies dealing with cultural rights and privileges. The last of these is what occupies our focus here.

The Role of Multiculturalism

While "multiculturalism" is invoked in a purely demographic sense, our interest here is more policy-oriented. Specifically, we want to understand the effect of government policies, laws, and programs specifically designed to celebrate and accommodate immigrant minorities (e.g. Kymlicka, 1995). After a decades-long and often spirited debate among political philosophers, interest in cataloging and measuring such policies empirically has grown rapidly in the last decade (e.g. Helbling & Vink, 2013). For example, Ruud Koopmans and colleagues identify a set of policies across 10 West European countries at four points in time (1980, 1990, 2002 and 2008) to assess "differential rights based on group membership," distinguishing approaches based on "cultural monism" from those allowing "cultural pluralism" (2005: 51, 73; 2012). Along similar lines, Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka have constructed a Multiculturalism Policy Index (MCP Index) that measures eight types of policies across 21 Western nations at three time points (1980, 2000, and 2010) as indicators of "some level of public recognition and support for minorities to express their distinct identities and practices" (2013: 582). For countries included in both indices, values are highly correlated (Helbling, 2013).

We follow this policy-based approach here, and ask whether multicultural policies increase the sense, among majority-group members, of political cohesion with immigrant-origin minorities. They should, proponents argue, because cultural recognition is aimed explicitly at fostering and sanctioning norms that support respect, interaction, cooperation, and cultural equality. By acknowledging culture on an equal basis, the threats posed by ethnic pluralism should decrease, and the failure to do so will serve only to alienate minorities and, more importantly for my purposes here, provoke nativism and intolerance from the majority (e.g., Kymlicka, 1995; Parekh, 2006; Taylor, 1992). Successfully-implemented multiculturalism, then, should reduce boundaries that exist among ethnic groups in society and thus promote increased contact and, eventually, social harmony through the "recategorization" of all into a broader common national identity (Pettigrew, 2009). Some have also put forward a democratic learning model along the lines of Almond and Verba's original *Civic Culture* study, whereby official multiculturalism socializes tolerance through education, by broadening notions of national identity to include ethno-cultural minorities (Weldon, 2006).

Others have argued that multiculturalism can actually have negative effects on attitudes towards diversity – that multiculturalism might produce unproductive, even dangerous, backlash, undermining collective solidarity and feeding anti-immigrant populism. Social psychology, most notably the social identity perspective (Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979), emphasizes an innate human tendency to value group memberships, and to produce we/them distinctions on even the slimmest bases. It follows from this that multiculturalism policies, by both officially sanctioning the boundaries between ethnic groups in society and elevating their salience, exacerbates group distinctions and in so doing impedes the formation of "superordinate" identities (e.g., Brewer, 1997; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Transue, 2007). Furthermore, multiculturalism is potentially identity-threatening for the

majority group, as it involves the de-emphasis of established "national values" broadly concordant with majority cultural norms, in favor of cultural recognition with respect to minorities (e.g., Verkuyten, 2005). If this is indeed the case, then policies promoting cultural recognition (rather than cultural assimilation) could encourage narrower, more ascribed notions of who qualifies as a member of the national in-group. If multicultural discourse and policies highlight, and even reify, group differences, intergroup relations might suffer.

Beyond tolerance, trust and participation, some worry that multiculturalism might affect policies of social redistribution. In putting the spotlight on difference, diversity policies may undermine cohesion, which is posited as necessary to bolster public support for taxation and the provision of public resources to those in need, a hypothesis that has been called the "progressives' dilemma" (Barry 2001; Goodhart 2004a, 2004b; Miller 1995). Generous welfare states in Scandinavia, it is argued, were founded in homogeneous populations; the longstanding diversity of the United States, in contrast, plays into a weak welfare state.

Most of this work takes the inherent difficulty of maintaining cohesion in diverse (e.g. demographically multicultural) settings as real. The underlying question, then, and the one upon which observers tend to disagree most fiercely, is whether or not political multiculturalism salves these tensions or exacerbates them.

Few empirical studies evaluate this question. Examining national identity across 18 democracies, Wright finds that more open citizenship regimes and high levels of social spending are related to more immigrant-inclusive definitions of the national community. However, he also finds evidence that citizens in more multicultural nations have moved to more ascriptive—and exclusionary—conceptions of national identity, raising backlash concerns (Wright 2011). There is also some evidence, based on longitudinal analysis of 16 European countries, that among those strongly opposed to immigration, such attitudes become more strongly tied to distrust of parliament, politicians, the judicial system and police in places with more multicultural policies (Citrin, Levy & Wright, 2014). The authors speculate that a hardening between opposition to immigration and political distrust could facilitate the rise of far-right parties.

At the same time, Citrin, Levy and Wright (2014) find no evidence of an effect of multiculturalism on net political trust in the general population, suggesting a countervailing dynamic. This result is consistent with a study of 19 Western nations that finds more extensive multicultural policies appear to mitigate or reverse the erosion of aggregate trust or political participation that can occur with demographic change; multiculturalism might even reverse the relationship in some cases, such that rising migration correlates with more organizational membership in multicultural policy contexts (Kesler & Bloemraad 2010; see Crepaz 2006). Weldon (2006) similarly underscores how policy context affects tolerance. In countries where the policy regime institutionalizes, through laws, rules and norms, a single dominant ethnic tradition, he finds that individuals are more like to express political and social intolerance for minorities, even controlling for individual-level demographic, political and personality variables. Finally, Citrin and colleagues (2012) argue, based on a U.S./Canada comparison similar to ours, that in the Canadian (e.g. more multicultural) context national

identity is associated with pro-immigrant and pro-diversity sentiment where the relationship is negative in the U.S.

In terms of support for the welfare state, Alesina and Glaeser (2004) find evidence of a negative relationship between ethno-racial diversity and redistribution, but it is less clear is whether multicultural policies aggravate or ameliorate this relationship. Banting and colleagues (2006) find, on average, no greater erosion of the welfare state, as measured by social spending, the redistributive impact of taxes and transfers, and levels of child poverty or income inequality, in places with stronger multiculturalism policies.

Multiculturalism and Tolerance of Muslim Immigrants

A glaring omission in the empirical literature has been an explicit consideration of multiculturalism in light of what has unquestionably been its greatest political challenge: the accommodation of Muslim immigrants (e.g. Triandafyllidou et al., 2012). This is a critical issue for several reasons. First, these immigrants tend to be disproportionately less affluent, of ethnic minority status, and relatively poorly off in terms of human capital. Thus all of the threats triggered by perceived social distance from the mainstream – both in ethnic and economic terms – are present. Second, Muslims tend to be disproportionately associated with security and threats and terrorism. Finally, there is the widespread belief that Islam is, from the standpoint of dogma, intrinsically illiberal and thus makes demands for accommodation that are unacceptable to liberal societies.

None of this is meant to suggest that anti-Muslim sentiment and its putative roots have gone unexamined by scholars of public opinion (see, e.g., Helbling, 2012 for a review). Indeed, lines of research exist tracing attitudes about Muslims to perceived terrorist threat (Davis, 2007; Panagopolous, 2006; Traugott et al., 2002), general ethnocentrism (Kinder & Kam, 2011; Kalkan et al., 2009), authoritarianism (Sniderman et al. 2004), and negative stereotypes of Muslims as violent and untrustworthy (Sides & Gross, forthcoming).

Nevertheless, our emphasis here is unique in two critical ways. First, extant studies typically probe general sentiment about Muslims (using feeling thermometers and the like); where they do tackle policy attitudes, attention has focused almost exclusively on either general immigration policy or support for aspects of the "War on Terror". By contrast, the crux of the tension between multiculturalism and classical liberalism, at least insofar as Muslims are concerned, lies in the issue of religious accommodation. Exactly what kinds of demands can Muslims make on religious grounds, and how likely are these to be tolerated by mainstream society? We focus our attention on this as-yet-unexamined question. Second, we depart from most extant work by explicitly consider how responses to these kinds of questions vary across contexts that differ in terms of multiculturalism policy. In short, we are among the first to ask whether policies designed to increase tolerance among majority populations of religious diversity (and religious claims-making) actually do so.

Taken together the arguments broached so far suggest two different kinds of policy "effects" we might look for. First, people in more thoroughly multicultural contexts might be more (or less) tolerant of religious accommodation in general, an effect that would manifest itself as statistically-significant differences across context regardless of denomination. Second, in

priming religious differences multiculturalism policy might disproportionately influence response to Muslims.

Approach and Data

A Three-Nation Contrast

Our primary lever on the "policy effect" question lies in a contrast between Canada and the U.S. (Citrin et al 2012; Wright & Bloemraad 2012), the power of which stems largely from their similarity in many other key respects (Bloemraad, 2011). Both countries are former colonies, peopled by waves of immigrants from abroad; both are federal regimes with similar electoral rules; and both are influenced by British legal traditions. They both have similar, largely successful histories of immigration, and in both countries the proportion of the migrant population is many times above the global average of 3 per cent. Moreover, as both countries have combined the transition toward a more diverse society with significant economic development, there can be no plausible argument that immigration is a significant cause of economic distress.

But the two countries have diverged in their ideological response to diversity. Since the late 1960s Canada has pronounced itself a mosaic: two official languages, asymmetrical federalism, and—most critically for this paper—multicultural. The official line in relation to new Canadians is that to be a Canadian is to be tolerant of diversity and to welcome and celebrate new minorities. By contrast, the American response to immigration is to welcome diversity as such but to expect immigrants to assimilate to a common culture. Dual loyalties, the failure to learn English and a reluctance to embrace the dominant political values are disapproved. The ideal of assimilation is manifest in the many official reports about what to do about the rising tide of immigration (Fuchs, 1990). In contrast with Canada, claims for special accommodation for newcomers, or for recognition of a linguistic minority and its home ground as a "distinct society," are almost entirely absent from the public discourse in the United States. In more concrete terms, Banting and Kymlicka's MCP index (scored from 0-8, with 8 indicating highest level of multiculticulturalism) rates Canada 7.5 since 2000, with the U.S. at 3 over the same period (Banting & Kymlicka, 2013).

Another major difference, of course, is that the formative ethnic divide in the United States centers on race (Smith, 2003; Theiss-Morse, 2009), while in Canada the main fault line has historically between English and French, and more recently between Quebec and the rest of Canada (hereafter, "R.O.C."). Beyond the simple reality that Canada is comprised of two "national minorities" (Kymlicka, 1995) and the U.S. only one, we note that at the level of official ideology, Quebec now – in explicit contrast with the rest of Canada – rejects multiculturalism and instead espouses "interculturalism," with a clearly articulated priority for the majority language. In practice it is not entirely clear what difference the terminology makes nor even what is made of it by the intelligentsia (Labelle, 2008; Modood & Meer, 2012). But it is intended to signal that recognition of difference is not to derogate from the prior claim of the founding culture. Quebec has taken a different tack from the rest of the country on, for example, public wearing of the niqab or treatment of the Sikh kirpan as a dangerous weapon.

We thus focus here on what we regard as a three-nation, rather than a two-country,

comparison. Our data are drawn from the Identity Diversity and Social Solidarity (IDSS) survey, an online survey fielded simultaneously in Canada and the US. The survey includes three separate samples: roughly 1,000 French-language respondents in Quebec, 1,000 English- language respondents in the Rest of Canada, and 2,000 respondents in the US. Samples are reasonably representative of the three populations.

The survey includes a battery of questions on forms of solidarity and trust, and on support for immigration and multiculturalism policies. Most importantly for our purposes here, it contains two experiments designed to assess the effects of different kinds of religion-based claims-making on majority populations. We present each experiment, alongside results, in the sections that follow.

The Niqab Experiment

The first experiment is as follows. Each respondent gets the following question battery:

> As you may know, many countries are trying to decide whether or not to limit peoples' right to wear religious symbols such as **a large Christian crucifix** in public places. Do you think people should be allowed to wear a large crucifix:
> …when voting? [yes/no]
> …as a teacher in the classroom? [yes/no]
> …as a student in the classroom? [yes/no]
> …while walking in the street? [yes/no]

Respondents are however assigned to one of three treatments. One group responds to a battery, as above, focused on "a large Christian crucifix"; another gets the same battery focused on "a Muslim hijab (head covering that leaves the face exposed)"; and another gets a battery focused on "a Muslim niqab (head and face covering that leaves the eyes exposed)." All treatments are accompanied by morphed female image wearing the relevant religious symbol; these pictures are included in Figure 1.[1]

[Figure 1 about here]

The images are used here to make very clear the kind of religious headgear to which the question applies. They make much more likely that respondents understand what a crucifix, hijab and niqab are; they also increase (greatly) the likelihood that respondents are focusing on this part of the text as they respond to questions. Our use of a single morphed female also allows us to hold skin tone and physiognomy constant, while manipulating only religious symbols.

Another key advantage of this approach is that respondents' attention is fixed to a relatively narrow issue that arguably holds a consistent meaning across national contexts. This is a particularly thorny problem in work on multiculturalism, because responses to survey questions about "cultural diversity", "minorities", and the "mainstream" likely depend quite strongly on factors idiosyncratic to context. Here, the claims being made are expressed in

[1] The morphed image is drawn from work by Allison Harell, Stuart Soroka and Shanto Iyengar, though the application of the religious headgear was done specifically for this study.

concrete terms, and we need not assume that respondents interpret vague referents consistently. Finally, the use of different religious groups (Christian and Muslim) is helpful because they help isolate the effect of Muslim affiliation from broader notions of religious conservatism and ethnocentrism.

We analyse results here using a very simple ANOVA model in which a summed index of the four questions listed above (rescaled from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates high levels of support) is model as a function of (a) sample (/nation), and (b) treatment. We allow sample and treatment to interact – so that treatment effects can be different in Quebec, the ROC, and the US. ANOVA results are included in the Appendix; we illustrate them here in a more readily-interpretable fashion in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 about here]

Figure 2 show estimated mean levels of support (with 95% confidence intervals) across all combinations of treatment and sample. The figure makes clear the major difference in levels of support in Quebec versus the other two samples. There is almost no support for wearing a niqab in Quebec; and support for hijabs is lower as well. Importantly, so too is support for wearing a crucifix. This is an important finding: it suggests that Quebecers' particular antipathy towards Muslim headgear is at least partly a function of their lack of support for religious symbols in general – even those from the majority, Catholic religion.

This is not to say that there isn't less support for Muslim headgear – there clearly is. But this is relatively consistent across all three samples. The crucifix always receives the highest level of support, followed by the hijab and then the niqab. The steepest drop comes with the niqab, as we might expect.

[Figure 3 about here]

Figure 3 shows the same results but broken down by question. The figure makes clear that the same basic dynamic is apparent across voting, attending or teaching class, or being out on the street. We thus lose little by relying on the combined index. There are differences in levels of support, roughly as we might expect. Religious symbols are most contentious for teaching.

What do Figures 2 and 3 tell us about support for religious diversity across countries with different commitments to multiculturalism? The absence of major differences between the ROC and US highlights for us the difference between policy commitment and public tolerance of diversity, at least where this (highly salient) form of diversity is concerned. The US quite clearly has invested less in multiculturalism policy than has Canada. But public tolerance of this type of religious diversity is no less. There is no signal here that levels of multiculturalism policy are related to Canada-US differences in tolerance for this kind of religious diversity.

We take one additional step here, however, and add a survey measure of multiculturalism support to our analyses. The survey includes one question that speaks directly to issues of difference versus assimilation:

> Some people say that it is better for a country if different racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions. Others say that it is better if these groups adapt and blend into the larger society. Using the slider below, please indicate which is more important.
> Maintain distinct cultures and traditions… Blend into larger society

Responses where captured on an 11-point slider (0-10). We rescale those responses from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates the greatest degree of support for maintain distinct cultures and traditions; and we then add this as an independent variable to our ANOVA (now, ANCOVA). We allow for interactions between all three variables. We summarize results in Figure 4.

[Figure 4 about here]

Figure 4 includes a panel for Quebec, the ROC, and US. Each panel shows estimated levels of support for each of the three treatments (cross, hijab, niqab), across the entire range of self-reported support for multiculturalism. Results are roughly as we should expect: those with the highest levels of support for multiculturalism (at the right side of each figure) show higher levels of support for all manners of religious headgear. Indeed, the difference between the crucifix and the hijab entirely disappears for those with high levels of support for maintaining distinct cultures. The picture is of course rather different for those with low levels of support for multiculturalism: to the left of the figures, there are real differences in support across the three treatments.

Perhaps most interestingly, tolerance for the niqab is significantly lower, even for those with high support for multiculturalism. This is true in the ROC and the US, and it is especially the case in Quebec, where increasing levels of support for multiculturalism appear to have no effect whatsoever on (the very low) tolerance for niqabs.

Multiculturalism policy regimes may not be clearly connected to results for this experiment, then; but attitudes towards multiculturalism quite clearly are. A tolerance for diversity is quite clearly (positively) related to reactions to religious headgear. If there is an impact of multiculturalism policy, then, it may be indirect. To the extent that multiculturalism policy affects attitudes towards religious diversity, it may be by affecting general attitudes about maintaining cultures versus assimilation. But there is not much evidence for this either: the US average for the scale capturing for maintaining distinct cultures and traditions is .42, while the Canadian average is .35. There just is not strong evidence here that support for religious headgear is in line with levels of multiculturalism policy in Canada and the US.

The Accommodation Experiment

A second experiment, designed to capture quite a different kind of tolerance of religious diversity, took the form of the following two questions:

> Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:
> Newspaper stories or cartoons that mock or denigrate [Mohammed/ the Star of David/ Jesus/ religious symbols] should be banned.

> Public swimming pools should be required to set aside times for female-only swimming with female lifeguards as [Muslims/ Orthodox Jews/ Conservative Christians/some religious groups] demand.

Responses for the two questions were recorded using a five-point scale from agree strongly to disagree strongly. As the above question wording suggests, respondents received one of four treatments – for Muslims, Jews, Christians, and an unspecified religion. A respondent always received the same treatment for each of the two questions. Each is intended to capture levels of support for a specific (and salient) form of accommodation for religious diversity.

Our analysis of these results is the same as above. We analyze each question, rescaled from 0 to 1 where 1 indicates high levels of tolerance, using an ANOVA that models responses as a function of sample and treatment. Results for no specific religion are illustrated in Figure 5. These capture the basic trend from one sample to the next. Figure 6 then show results across each of the three specific religions

[Figures 5 and 6 about here]

Results for this question are not fundamentally different from what we have seen in the Niqab Experiment. Levels of support for these accommodations of diversity are lowest in Quebec, and highest in the US. Limiting newspaper stories and cartoons receives higher levels of the support than does accommodating single-sex swimming sessions. And, in Figure 6, it is clear that accommodating Muslims receive the lowest levels of support. This is clearest where newspaper stories and cartoons are concerned. (An irony, given that Islam is the religion which is most in need of accommodation in this way.) For swimming, levels of support are low all-round, and there are few if any differences in support across religions.

Results for this Accommodation Experiment thus largely confirm what we have seen in the Niqab Experiment. We discuss results from both experiments further below.

Conclusion

All in all, our findings are suggestive in several ways. If the key contrast is between American and ROC respondents, multiculturalism policy in the sense employed here appears largely unrelated to tolerance for religious accommodation, even when the religious denomination associated with the demand for accommodation is varied experimentally. Combined with Quebeckers' unique hostility to religious accommodation of any kind, this suggests that the roots of religious tolerance lie deeper than policy in the sense explored here.

Another consistent finding is the disproportionate lack of tolerance for Muslim accomodation regardless of policy context. Because these effects did not extend to another religious "out-group", orthodox Jews, this finding supports a stereotype view (Sides and Gross) rather than one of anti-Muslim as generalized ethnocentrism (Kinder & Kam 2009, Kalkan et al., 2009).

Much remains to be done. For instance, there are a variety of other individual-level moderators, besides principled support for multiculturalism, that may condition response:

religion and religiosity are obvious candidates in this context, as is national identity (Citrin et al 2012). Furthermore, it would be enormously useful to gain policy leverage by extending this limited comparison to additional countries.

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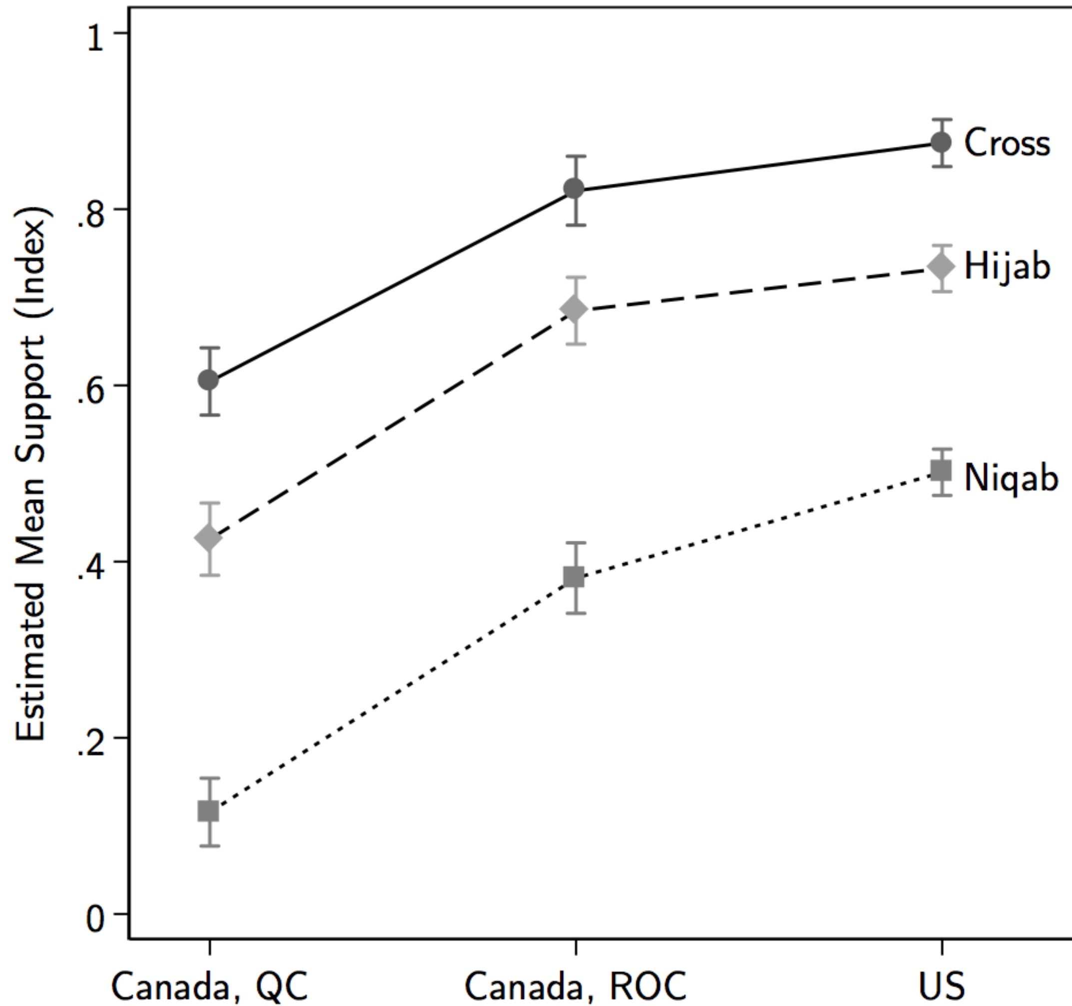
Figures

Figure 1: The Niqab Experiment

1. Christian Crucifix 2. Hijab

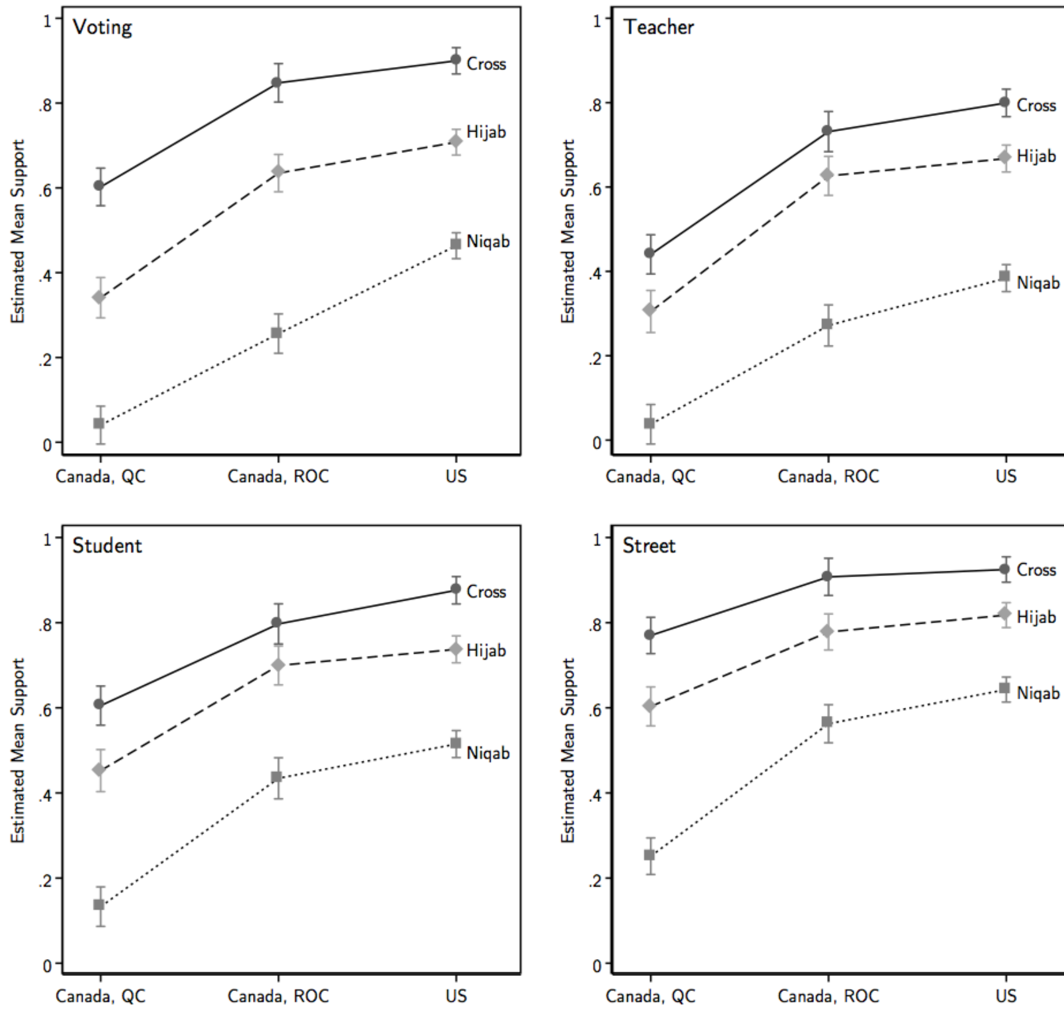
3. Niqab

Figure 2



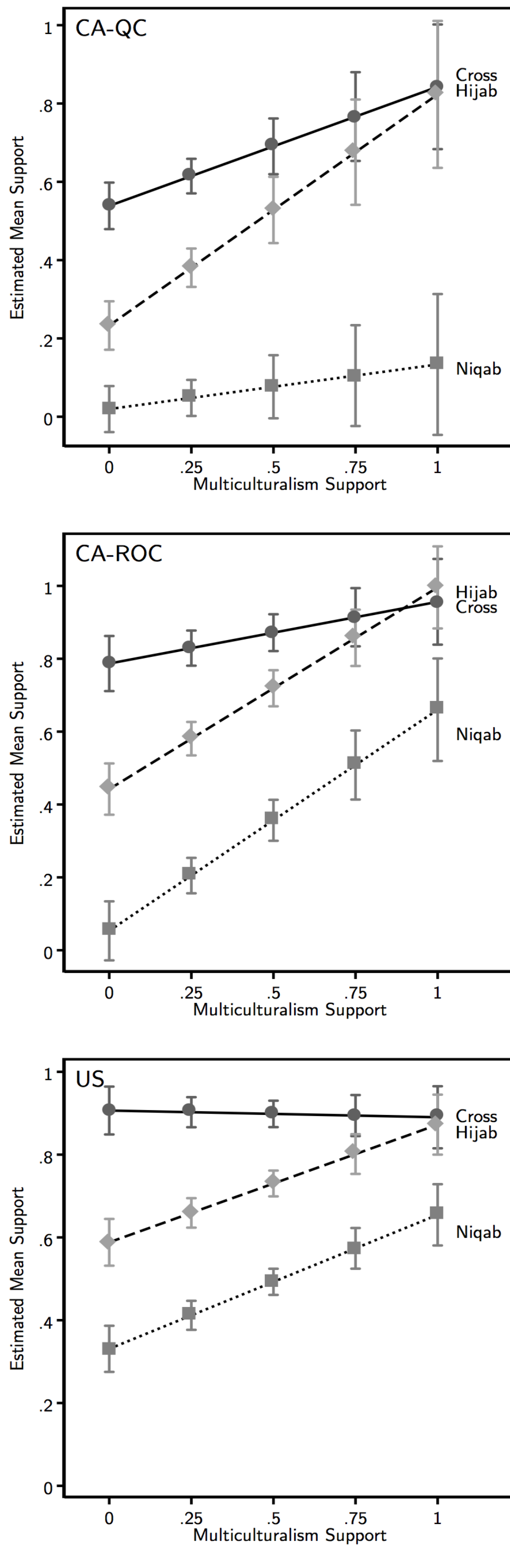
Based on an ANOVA, using unweighted data, including country and treatment, N=4220.
Means, with 95% confidence intervals

Figure 3



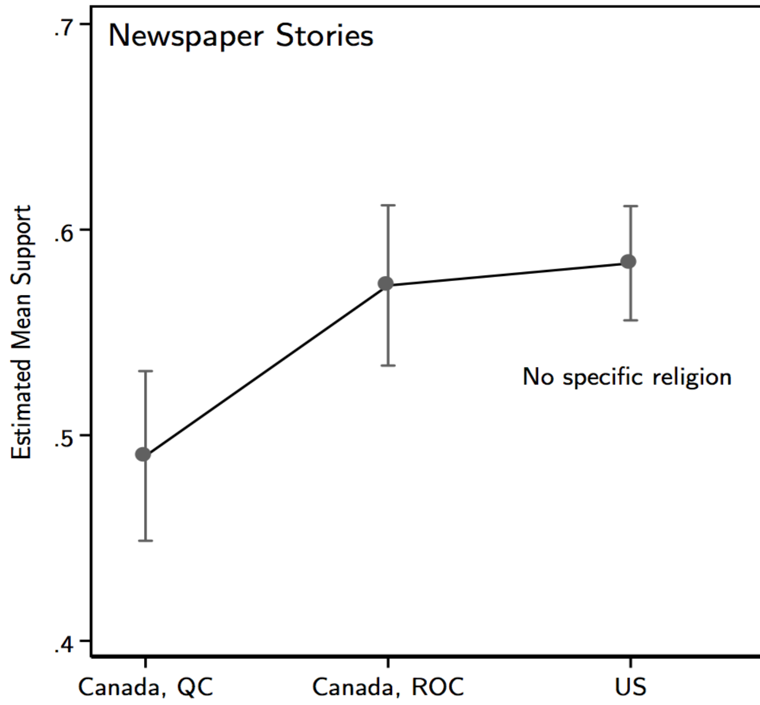
Based on an ANOVA, using unweighted data, including country and treatment, N=4220.
Means, with 95% confidence intervals

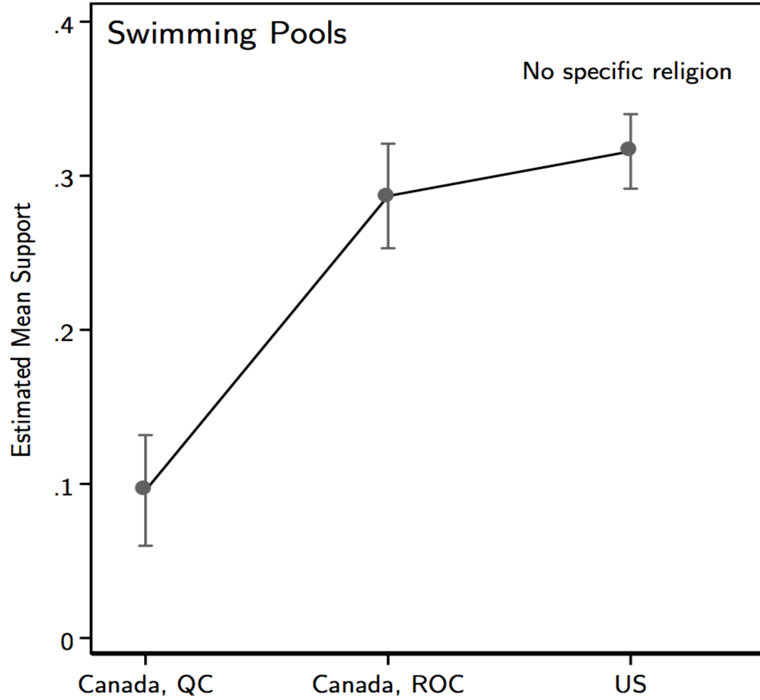
Figure 4



Based on an ANOVA, using unweighted data, including country * treatment * MC support, N=4220.
Means, with 95% confidence intervals

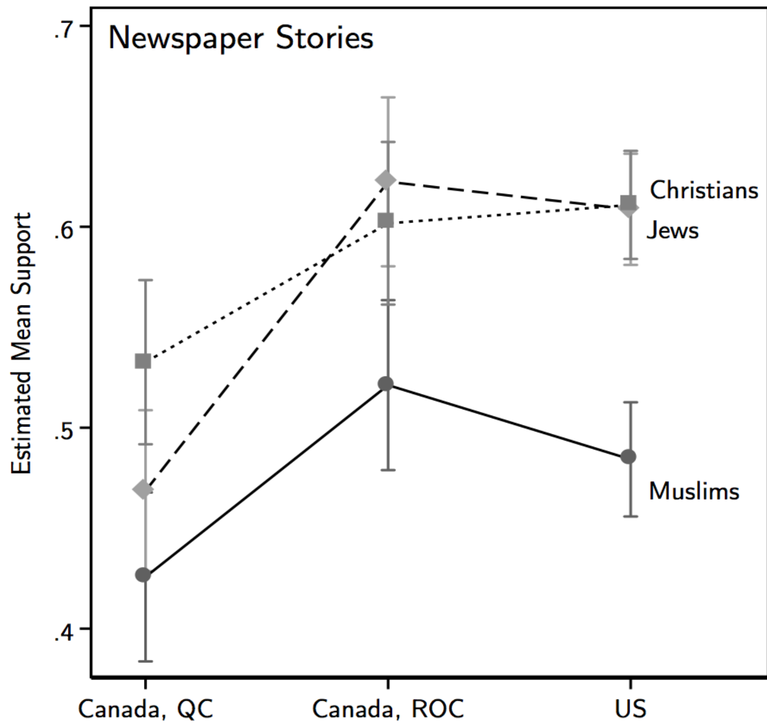
Figure 5

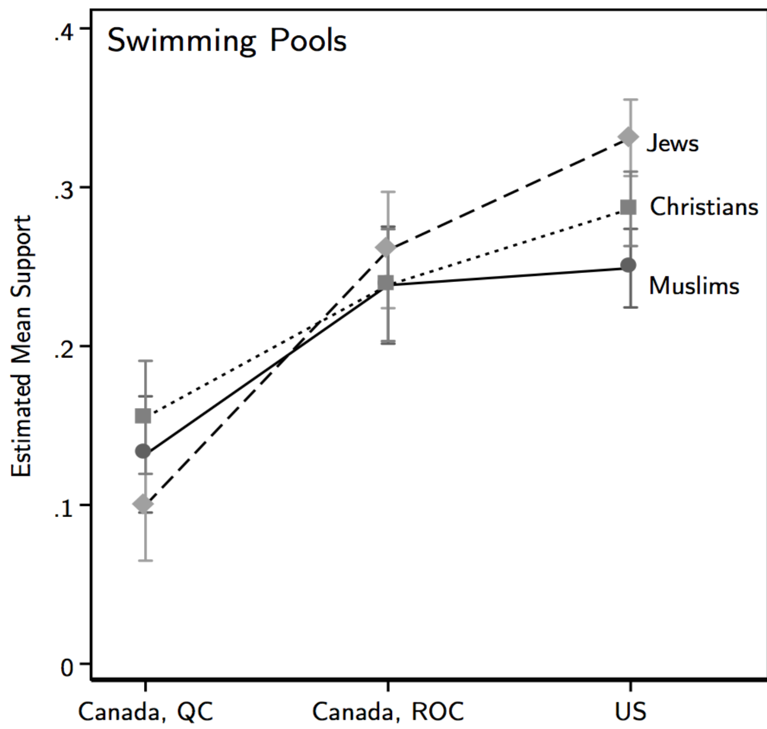




Based on an ANOVA, using unweighted data, including country * treatment, N=4220.
Means, with 95% confidence intervals

Figure 6





Based on an ANOVA, using unweighted data, including country * treatment, N=4220.
Means, with 95% confidence intervals