

Cultural Threats and Islamophobia in American News Media

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Abstract

Public hostility towards Muslims appears to be on the rise in the United States. One common explanation for growing antipathy is the perceived link between Muslims and terrorism. Many blame the media in reinforcing this association in American public consciousness. However, recent findings suggest that the perception of Muslims as a *cultural* threat may generate more anti-Muslim hostility than their association with political violence. Public opinion data reveal growing anxiety about Islam's compatibility with "Western" values such as tolerance, equality, and civility. This study examines the role of cultural threat in anti-Muslim attitudes using a two-pronged approach. First, a survey experiment provides tentative evidence that framing Muslims as a cultural 'other' drives anti-Muslim attitudes. Interestingly, framing Muslims as a cultural other was just as deleterious as framing Muslims as terrorists. Second, we use a large-scale media analysis to track this framing as it occurs in real-world portrayals. While the analysis is still in its early stages, we describe our preliminary findings and plans for future work.

Paper prepared for the June 6, 2018 NCAPSA American Politics Workshop

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Introduction

The Muslim population in the United States is rapidly growing, with an estimated 3.45 million adherents in the United States in 2017 (Lipka 2017). However, American attitudes toward Muslims remain largely negative. For example, Pew Research Center reports that, although the average thermometer rating of Muslims raised 8 points between 2014 and 2017, the mean rating still comes in on the cool end of the scale (48), and behind every other major religious group, including atheists.

The most common explanation for this disfavor centers on the perceived link between Muslims and terrorism. However, recent findings suggest that the perception of Muslims as a *cultural* threat may be more deleterious than their association with terrorism. Public opinion data reveal growing anxiety about Islam's compatibility with "Western" values of tolerance, acceptance and civility (Panagopoulos 2006, 613), and people who believe that Muslims remain culturally distinct are more likely to have negative attitudes about them (Ciftci 2012, 303). More generally, there is compelling evidence that symbolic threats trump physical or realistic concerns in determining people's attitudes towards immigrants and ethnic minorities (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). However, few studies have systematically examined the role of cultural or symbolic threat in shaping American attitudes towards Muslims.

This study identifies an key mechanism – symbolic threat – driving hostility towards Muslims and Islam, and examines its origins and consequences. Drawing on theories of immigration threat and symbolic boundaries, we formulate three hypotheses on the role of symbolic threat in anti-Muslim attitudes. First, American antipathy towards Muslims is driven as much by perception of symbolic threat as physical (i.e. terrorist) threat. Second, media discourse activates this symbolic threat through selective portrayals of Muslims. And third, the perception of symbolic threat shapes understandings of "American" identity, emphasizing particular norms – e.g. gender equality – that are supposedly antithetical to Islam and "Muslim culture."

Furthermore, attitudes about Islam are increasingly associated with partisan identity, so we consider the interactive role of political partisanship on each of our hypotheses.

We test these predictions through a multi-method research design that combines survey experiments with large-scale text analysis. First, a survey experiment provides tentative evidence that framing Muslims as a cultural ‘other’ has the potential to shape anti-Muslim attitudes. Furthermore, framing Muslims as a cultural other can be just as deleterious as framing Muslims as terrorists. Second, we use a large-scale media analysis to track this framing as it occurs in real-world portrayals. Preliminary findings suggest that...

This project aims to make several contributions. First, we add to growing debates about Islam in the American public sphere by demonstrating the role of symbolic threat. Second, we make a theoretical contribution to political science literature on immigration, race and public opinion by revealing a mechanism by which symbolic threats are produced and activated through media discourse. Finally, our methodological contribution demonstrates the complementarity of large-scale text analysis and experimental methods.

Terror, culture, and prejudice towards Muslims

Although prejudice towards minority groups has declined in recent decades, Americans continue to view Muslims much less favorably than other religious and racial minorities (Pew Research Center 2017). The most common explanation for this disfavor centers on the perceived link between Muslims and terrorism, and the role of mass media in solidifying this association in public consciousness. The attacks on 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror led many to view Islam as a threat to national security. Mass media reinforce this stereotype by portraying Muslims as violent, aggressive, and drawn to terrorism (Alsultany 2012; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Powell 2011; Shaheen 2003). Correlational and experimental studies demonstrate the negative impact of such media portrayals on public opinion towards Muslims and related policies (Das et al. 2009; Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009; Nisbet, Ostman,

and Shanahan 2008; Saleem and Anderson 2013; Saleem et al. 2015; Saleem, Yang, and Ramasubramanian 2016).

However, while the majority of research on anti-Muslim attitudes has focused on the association of Muslims with terrorism, recent findings question the dominance of this view. For instance, Kalkan, Layman and Uslaner (2009) posit that terrorism plays a secondary role in driving hostility towards Muslims. Rather, American views of Muslims are driven primarily by a “sense of affect for groups that fall outside of the cultural mainstream,” a trend that holds before and after 9/11 (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009, Abstract). Indeed, the aversion to Muslims has held relatively steady, despite the waxing and waning of terrorist threats. Further, this aversion appears to be driven in large part by the perception of Muslims as a *cultural*, not necessarily physical or political, threat. Despite these findings, the link between cultural threat and anti-Muslim attitudes remains understudied.

Symbolic threats and symbolic boundaries

Realist v. Symbolic Threats

In order to formulate hypotheses on the role of cultural threat in anti-Muslim views, we draw from two related literatures: one from political science on public attitudes towards immigrants, and another from sociology on symbolic boundaries.

The literature on anti-immigration attitudes features two broad paradigms based on interests and identities, respectively (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Newman, Hartman, and Taber 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). Both interest-based and identity-based theories posit that hostility to immigration is driven by a sense of threat (Sides and Citrin 2007). They differ, however, in the nature of that threat, and whether it originates in material self-interest (“realistic threat”) or sociotropic concerns over culture and identity (“symbolic threat”).

Realistic threat is rooted in concerns for one’s material self-interest. In the debate over immigration, economic well-being is the most commonly invoked realist threat, although crime is also salient. With regards to attitudes towards Muslims, terrorism

represents a realist threat insofar as it harms one's physical security. In contrast, symbolic threats concern violations to a group's core set of beliefs, values, cultural norms, or identities (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990). Unlike realistic threats, symbolic threats address intangible social constructs that pertain to the nation as a whole (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 225). Anxiety towards Islam's compatibility with "Western" values such as religious tolerance and gender equality relate to perception of symbolic threat.

Despite standing at the forefront of public debates, interest-based theories achieve little support in the empirical literature. In a comprehensive review of over 100 studies, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) find scant evidence that immigration attitudes are driven by material self-interest or realistic threats. Instead, the overwhelming consensus is that people oppose immigration due to perceptions of *symbolic* threats to national and communal identity. Furthermore, this "primacy of cultural over economic concerns" (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 231) is remarkably durable across context, and can be observed in both European (McLaren and Johnson 2007; Sides and Citrin 2007; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004) and American (Burns and Gimpel 2000) settings.

There is also evidence that Americans and Europeans perceive Muslims as particularly salient symbolic threats. In the United States, public opinion data reveal growing anxiety about Islam's compatibility with Western values of tolerance, acceptance and civility (Panagopoulos 2006, 613). In the British context, McLaren, and Johnson (McLaren and Johnson 2007) find that British citizens express significant concern about threats to shared customs and traditions posed by Muslim immigrants. Anti-Muslim bias also plays a significant role in structuring European attitudes on asylum seekers (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016). Together, this discussion motivates our first hypothesis, which predicts that framing Muslims as a *cultural* threat drives anti-Muslim attitudes as much as (or more than) framing Muslims as a *terrorist* threat.

H1: Framing Muslims as a cultural threat increases anti-Muslim attitudes, as much as or more than framing Muslims as a terrorist threat.

Partisanship and Attitudes toward Muslims

Attitudes towards Islam and support for policies that affect Muslims vary substantially by political party, and are growing more partisan in recent years (Pew Research Center 2017).¹ Overall, Republicans have lower ratings of Muslims and prefer policies that are more restrictive of Islam than Democrats. In the 2016 ANES, the average thermometer rating of Muslims among Democrats was 64.2, whereas Republicans rated Muslims almost 20 points cooler, at 44.7.² Similarly, Republicans in the 2016 ANES rate Muslims almost a full point higher on 7-point stereotype scales measuring perceptions that Muslims are violent and unpatriotic. Pew Research Center further reports that Republicans are substantially more likely than Democrats to believe that Islam encourages violence more than other faiths (R: 63%; D: 26%), and that there is a natural conflict between Islam and democracy (R: 65%; D: 30%), among other attitudes (Pew Research Center 2017).

In addition to aggregate differences, there is reason to believe that different threat frames resonate differently across party lines. Typically, in the current context, national security, restrictions on immigration, and increased support for the military are issues associated with the Republican Party. By contrast, the Democratic Party is often associated with prioritizing free expression and women's rights. If these characterizations hold true, we expect security threat frames to be more prevalent and more powerful among Republicans, and cultural threat frames to be more influential among Democrats.

How do symbolic threats form?

The literature provides strong evidence for the role of symbolic threats in

¹ Although it is worth noting that, while other scholars invariably find significant party differences, they also find that other factors related to partisanship - such as authoritarianism, patriotism, religious traditionalism, and ethnocentrism - are more predictive of attitudes towards Muslims than party identification (Sides and Gross 2013; Kalkan et al. 2009).

² Based on unweighted cell counts in the 2016 Time Series Study, retrieved from sda.berkeley.edu.

influencing attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. However, this insight raises questions about the specific ways symbolic threats are constructed and activated. Why are certain groups, e.g. Muslims, perceived as threatening to American identity?

In political science, symbolic threat is thought to emerge from (perceptions of) cultural differences and violations of communal norms. People hold particular conceptions of national community and national identity, and behaviors that violate such conceptions can generate symbolic threat (Schildkraut 2005). Norms regarding assimilation into host society are particularly powerful. Immigrants who refuse to assimilate to American society – for example by not speaking English – are seen as more threatening. Further, people who hold more assimilationist conceptions of American identity (as opposed to an ethnocultural view) tend to be more restrictionist in their views towards immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014, 235).

Such theories assume that people hold relatively stable and coherent views of national identity, which in turn drive their evaluation of immigrants and minorities. While rarely said explicitly, it is often presumed that such views originate in established cultural mores that uphold feelings of national belonging. Many scholars explain hostility towards Muslims by referencing similar notions of cultural distance. For instance, Kalkan and coauthors argue that “mainstream” society views Muslims as a cultural outgroup because their “religious practices and teachings are clearly ‘strange’ from the standpoint of the Judeo-Christian tradition” and “many Muslims are reluctant to accommodate themselves to American secular society” (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009, 849).

In contrast, sociological theories of symbolic boundaries challenge the view of national identity based on a reified culture. Instead, they stress a relational approach emphasizing the active construction of “symbolic boundaries” separating “us” and “them.” Symbolic boundaries are “conceptual distinctions made by social actors ... [that] separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership” (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). In other words, feelings of communal identity emerge *in opposition to* the perceived identity of outsiders (Lamont and Molnár

2002, 175).

The literature on symbolic boundaries contributes two critical insights on the origins of symbolic threat. First, symbolic threats do not emerge naturally out of cultural differences, but are constructed through a process of symbolic boundary-making. For example, the veil is not a symbolic threat by itself – as demonstrated by the relative apathy towards nuns’ habits. Rather, the veil assumes a threatening connotation through the designation of cultural distinction and hostility in its (Muslim) wearers. Media and elite discourse play especially important roles in this process. Both political science studies on immigration (Hopkins 2010; Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013) and sociological work on symbolic boundaries (Bail 2014) agree that media activate symbolic threat through selective portrayals of particular immigrant groups.

This point is particularly salient for Muslims, who tend to be cast negatively in a wide range of media outlets. In fact, media exerts a stronger influence on public attitudes of Muslims than other informational sources, which is unsurprising considering that most Americans do not have direct contact with Muslims in their daily lives (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009, 859; Saleem, Yang, and Ramasubramanian 2016). While most studies of Muslim representations emphasize the theme of terrorism, there is some evidence that media coverage is increasingly turning toward stories focusing on religious and cultural differences between Islam and Western culture (Moore, Mason, and Lewis 2008). This leads to our second hypothesis on the role of media in the construction of Muslims as a symbolic threat:

H2: Media discourse activates symbolic threat through selective portrayals of Muslims.

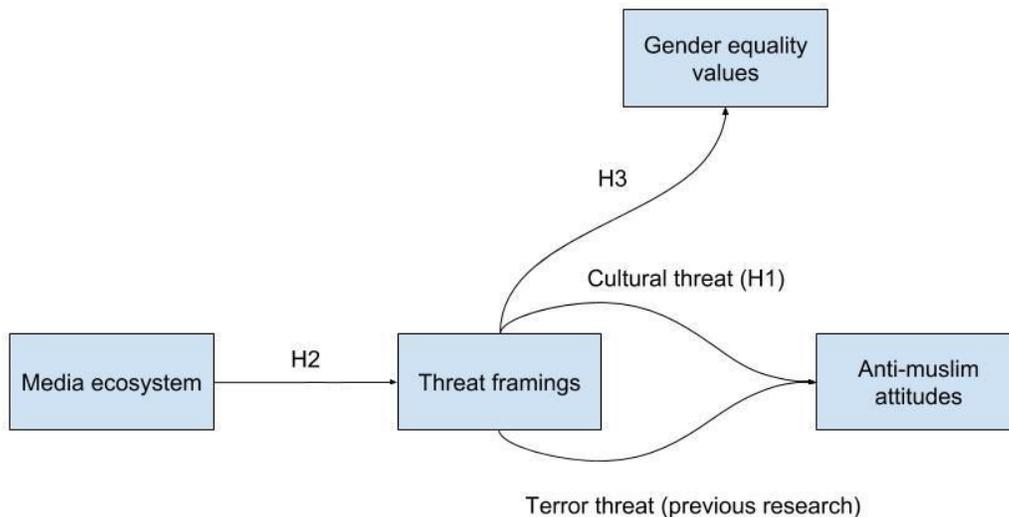
Finally, the process of symbolic boundary-making constructs not only *threats*, but the *object that is threatened*. In other words, the conception of one’s social identity – i.e. the values, norms, and practices defining one’s group – is as much a *result* of intergroup conflict as it is a driver. This approach reverses the causal arrow found in conventional accounts, whereby pre-established understandings of American identity drive hostility

of Muslims. Here, perceptions of symbolic *others* – e.g. Halal food or the Muslim women's hijab – work to construct understandings of the symbolic *self* -- elevating pork and revealing clothes as essential group markers. Gender equality is particularly salient to this discussion due to its historic role in stigmatizing Muslims as antithetical to Western values of civility, tolerance, and equality (Terman 2017). This motivates our final hypothesis:

H3: Identifying gender inequality in Muslim communities, but not Christian communities, increases respect for gender equality in the respondent.

In sum, we draw on literatures in political science and sociology to suggest three hypotheses: First, American antipathy towards Muslims is driven as much by perception of symbolic threat as physical (i.e. terrorist) threat. Second, media discourse activates this symbolic threat through selective portrayals of Muslims. And third, the perception of symbolic threat shapes understandings of “American” identity, emphasizing particular norms – e.g. gender equality – that are supposedly antithetical to Islam and “Muslim culture.” These hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1



Study I: Survey experiment on cultural threats

Experimental Design and Data Collection

We test the first and third hypotheses using an online survey experiment. On March 8, 2018, 919 respondents were contacted through an online survey panel recruitment firm and given monetary incentives to complete the 10-minute survey. Using a quota system in the recruitment process, the sample was matched to the Census distribution of gender and age (18 and up), and was distributed among Republican (40%), Democratic (40%), and Independent (20%) party identifiers.³

We use two experimental questions embedded in the survey to examine how concerns about terrorist and symbolic threats affect attitudes towards Muslims. The survey also includes pre-treatment measures of attitudes that prior literature demonstrates are predictive of attitudes toward Muslim immigration, including authoritarianism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Kinder and Kam 2010). After the experimental questions, we ask a variety of political and demographic questions.

In the first experiment, respondents are given a brief vignette about attitudes towards Muslim immigration. The treatment consists of a brief statement providing a security-threat justification, a cultural-threat justification, or no justification for restricting Muslim immigration to the United States. The treatment question then asks respondents to express their support for restricting Muslim immigration, followed by a thermometer rating question on the subsequent survey screen.

After several more questions about perceptions of and policies toward Muslims and Islam, respondents are asked the second experimental question, which is randomized independently of the first. In this experiment, we provided the treatment groups with a brief vignette describing ways religious groups - either Muslims or

³ The quotas were implemented by the recruitment firm based on their standard demographic panel information. Respondents who initially identify as Independent, but “lean” towards one party are counted as partisans.

Evangelical Christians - might espouse more conservative gender dynamics than the norms of mainstream American society. We then ask respondents how important they think gender equality is to the religious group (i.e. Muslims or Evangelicals), themselves personally, and most Americans.

Results

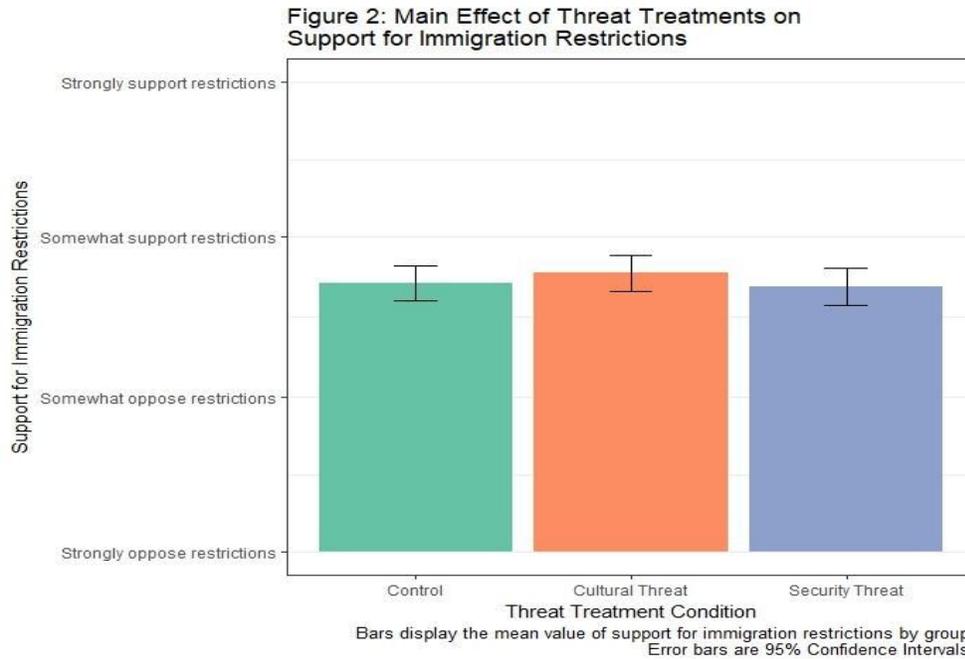
Hypothesis 1: Realistic vs. Symbolic Threat

Our first hypothesis expects that framing Muslims as a *cultural* threat will increase antipathy towards Muslims, and is as deleterious as framing Muslims as a *terrorist* threat. We test this using the first experimental treatment question in the survey. The treatment vignettes suggest that Muslim immigration should be restricted because “immigrants from these countries could be violent terrorists, and we should protect the safety and security of Americans” (*Security Threat Condition*), or because “immigrants from these countries do not share American values, and we should protect the exceptional culture of America” (*Symbolic Threat Condition*), or they are given no justification (*Control Condition*). These vignettes were then followed by the question: “Do you support or oppose restricting immigration from Muslim countries?” The next page of the survey asks respondents for, and by a thermometer rating of Muslims, immigrants, Atheists, and Christians.

The treatment effects on attitudes toward immigration restrictions are in Figure 2 below. We find that the cultural threat condition results in a small, but not statistically significant increase in support for restrictions on Muslim immigration. The security frame likewise has no effect.⁴ It is important to note that restrictions on Muslim immigration was a highly salient and politicized policy proposal at the time in which the survey was fielded. We therefore expect respondents to have well-developed attitudes and frames for understanding the topic, which are resistant to experimental

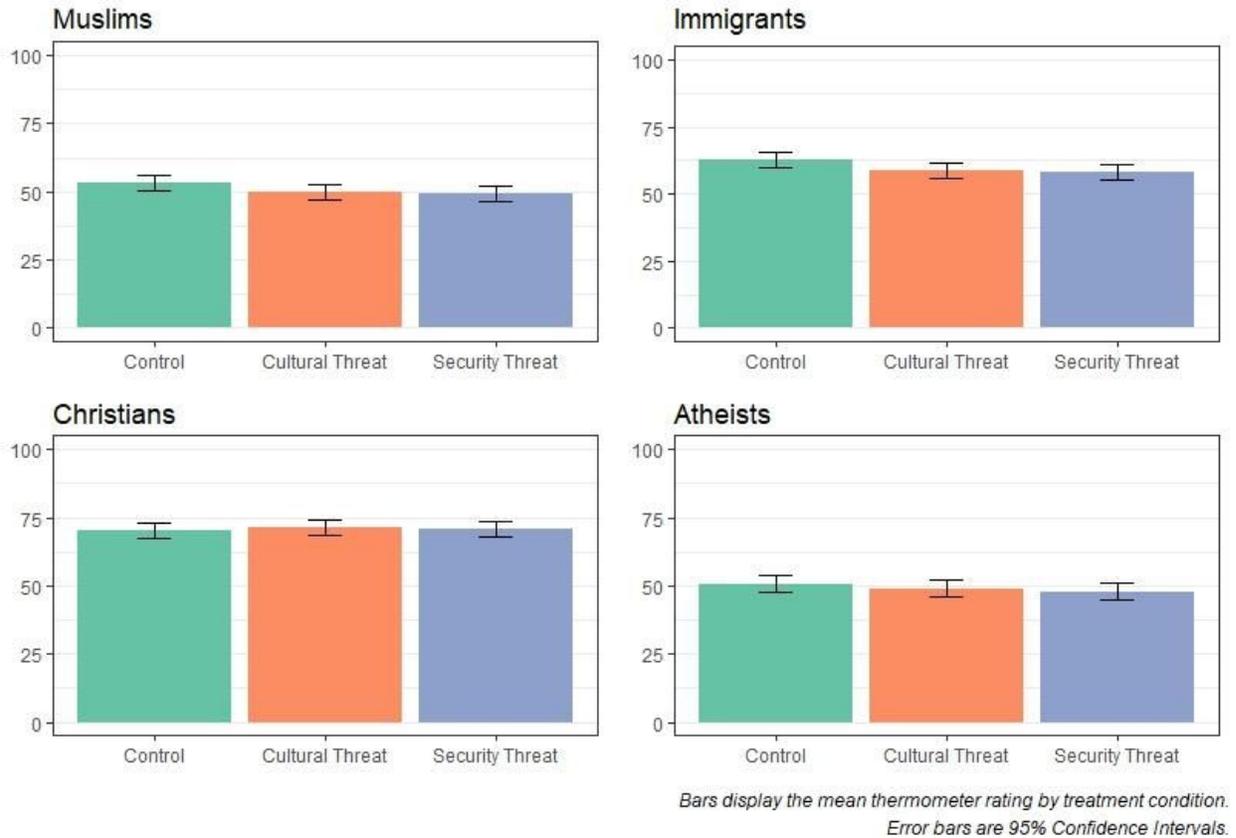
⁴ Note that the immigration restriction question only provided four response options: strongly support restrictions, somewhat support restrictions, somewhat oppose restrictions, and strongly oppose restrictions. This may have been too limited of an outcome range to detect movement in attitudes as a result of the treatment.

manipulation (see Zaller 1992). Consequently, we are unsurprised to find few treatment effects on this measure.



As a second outcome, we examine the effects of the treatment conditions on thermometer ratings of Muslims, Christians, Atheists, and immigrants. We expect the thermometer rating of Muslims to be more likely to reveal anxieties or antipathies towards the outgroup than the partisan policy-based measure. The main effects of the security and cultural threat conditions on the various thermometer score ratings are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Main Effects of Threat Experiment on Thermometer Ratings



We find that both the cultural threat and security threat frames reduce the thermometer score rating of Muslims and Immigrants, relative to the control condition. In the aggregate, only the reduced rating for immigrants is statistically significant, and represents a decrease of about 4 points on the 100-point thermometer scale. The Atheist and Christian ratings serve as placebo tests, and the null results for these groups confirm that the treatment is not shifting attitudes about religion generally.

Interactions of Treatment with Party ID

Muslim immigration and integration into American cultural life is a highly salient and politicized issue. Previous studies show that anti-Muslim views are more prevalent among those who affiliate with right-leaning political ideologies (Bansak, Hainmueller, and Hangartner 2016; Telhami 2015). Thus we expect that Democrats and Republicans may exhibit different reactions to the narratives provided on this topic. While the analysis in the previous section looked at treatment effects in the aggregate,

here we consider the possibility of differential treatment effects based on the respondents' party identification. Figure 4 shows the effects of the treatment conditions on support for restrictions on Muslim immigration, thermometer ratings of Muslims, and thermometer ratings of immigrants, separately by the respondent's party identification.⁵

There are some notable differences in the treatment effects across party identification. Although Democrats exhibit little change in their support for immigration restrictions as a result of the treatment, their thermometer ratings of both Muslims and immigrants decline by approximately 9 points in the symbolic threat condition (roughly .5 standard deviations, $p < .01$). The security threat condition also reduces thermometer ratings of Muslims and immigrants, but the magnitude is approximately half the size, and it is only significant in the rating of immigrants ($p < .05$). At least among the Democratic respondents in our sample, we find evidence that cultural threat frames can depress evaluations of Muslims and Immigrants, and that the effect is stronger than a security threat frame.

While none of the effects are significant among Republicans,⁶ both treatment conditions increase support for immigration restrictions and decrease thermometer ratings of Muslims and immigrants. The security threat frame does appear to have a larger-magnitude effect than the culture threat frame in moving thermometer rating attitudes, suggesting it might be a more powerful threat frame among Republicans.

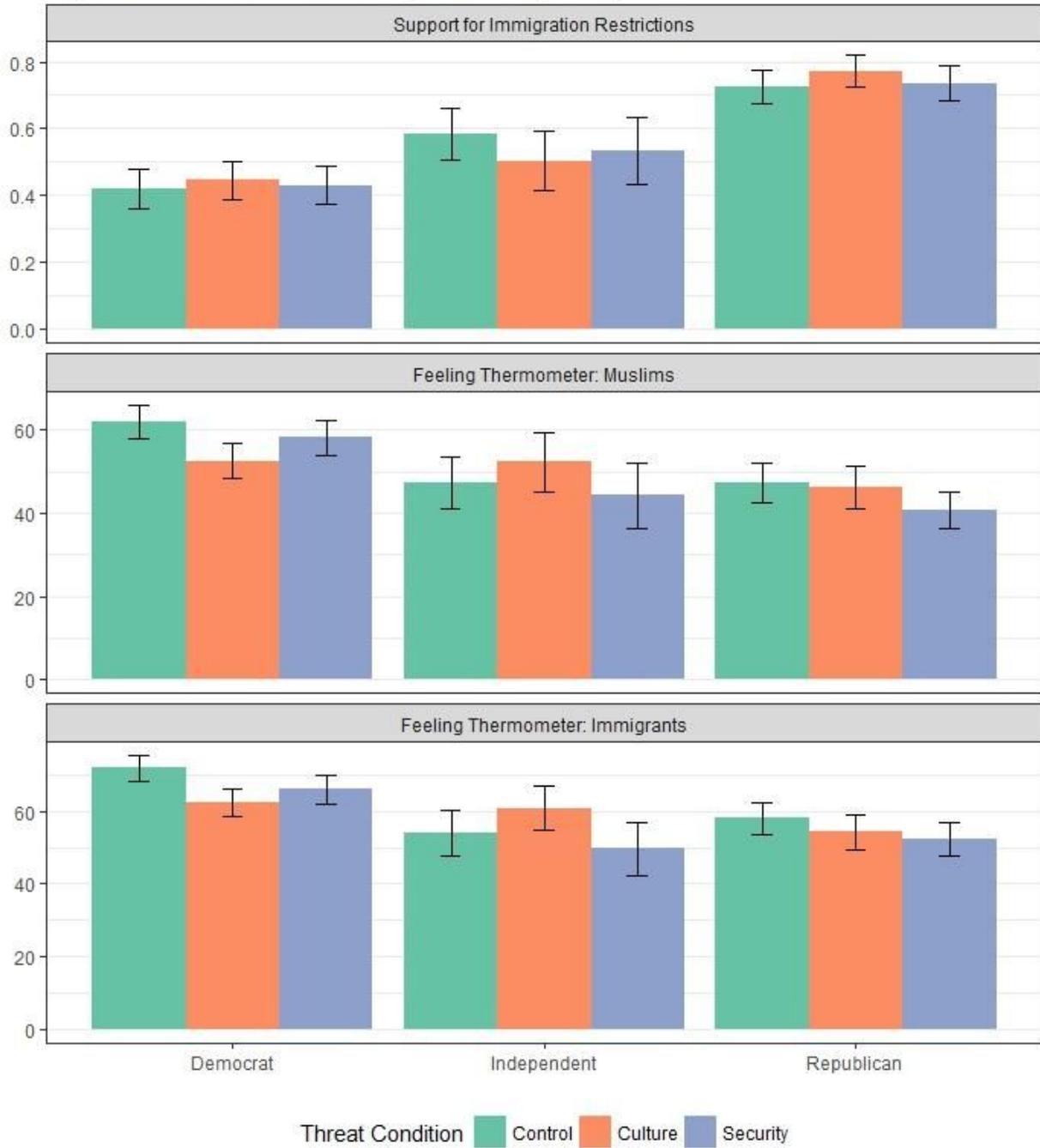
Independents provide a lingering puzzle. In all three outcomes the cultural threat frame induced backlash and *reduced* negativity toward Muslims. While none of the effects are significant (likely due to a smaller sample of independents and greater variance in their views), there is a large magnitude decrease in support for immigration restrictions. Independents who received the cultural threat frame rated Muslims 5 points higher and immigrants 7 points higher on average than their counterparts in the control condition. The security threat frame did not elicit this backlash among political

⁵ Independents who "lean" toward one party are included as party identifiers in this analysis.

⁶ With the caveat that, if we introduce additional covariates, Republicans who are low on the nationalism scale and/or high on the ethnocentrism scale are significantly more supportive of immigration restrictions in the cultural threat condition.

independents, and marginally reduced thermometer ratings.

Figure 4: Effects of Threat Experiment, by Party ID



Hypothesis 3: Gender Equality in Self and Others

We next turn to a more specific dimension of perceived conflict between Islam and Western values: gender equality. In this experiment, respondents are again presented with a brief vignette before answering the outcome questions. In the *Muslim Gender Equality* condition, respondents read that

“Some people criticize the Muslim community for being sexist and patriarchal. For example, Muslim women must dress modestly and obtain permission from their fathers to date. Some Muslims think married women should stay at home and obey their husbands. Other people think these are rare situations and most women are treated fairly in the Muslim community.”

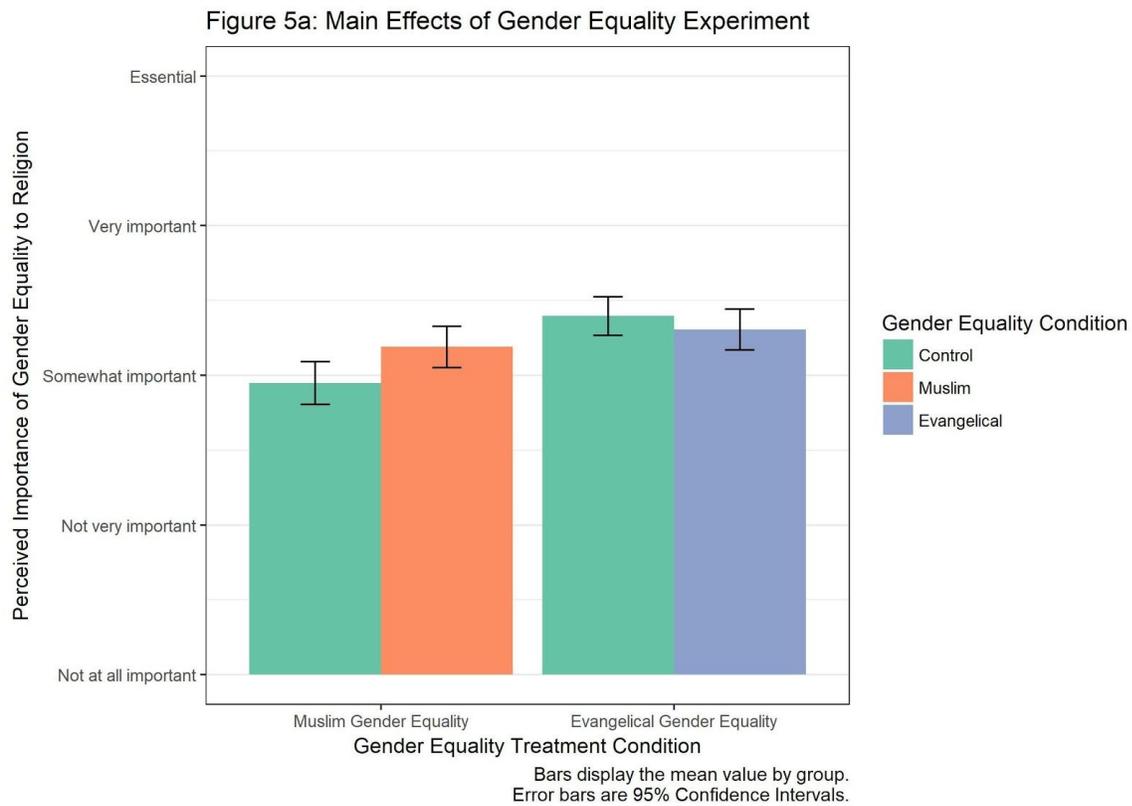
Respondents are then asked how important gender equality is to the Muslim community in America and to them personally. In the *Evangelical Gender Equality* treatment condition, the text is the same, but references to Muslims are replaced with “Evangelical Christians.” In the control condition, there is no introductory text, and respondents are asked about the importance of gender equality to both Muslims and Evangelical Christians.⁷

We expect that demonstrating cultural differences between Muslims and mainstream Americans will exacerbate the perceived distance between Muslims and respondents - either personally or through their identity as Americans. We hypothesize that two simultaneous mechanisms are responsible for this expected effect: respondents confronted with these inter-group differences will be less likely to describe Muslims as prioritizing gender equality, and they will increase the importance they place on the value. In this way, respondents establish symbolic boundaries and increase social distance between Muslims and themselves. We include Evangelical Christians as a comparison group because, although similar criticisms about gender equality are sometimes levied against Evangelicals, they share Christian values and are widely

⁷ The two experiments were randomized independently of each other, and appeared in the survey with 17 questions displayed on 5 screens between them. Using a regression that included indicators for both treatments and an interaction of the two to predict the main outcome variable in this experiment (perception of gender equality in the religion), we do not find evidence of an interaction between the two treatment conditions.

accepted into mainstream American society. Unlike with Evangelicals, gender (in)equality in Muslim communities is often viewed as marker of cultural distance and incompatibility with American society. Therefore, we do not expect the same effects in the Evangelical treatment condition.

Contrary to our main hypothesis, we find that gender is rated as a higher priority for Muslims by respondents in the Muslim treatment condition (see Figure 5a) than by respondents in the control ($p < .05$). We find no effect of the treatment on the perceived importance of gender equality for Evangelical Christians. And, although respondents in the Muslim treatment condition rate gender equality as marginally more important to themselves personally and to most Americans, neither effect is statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.



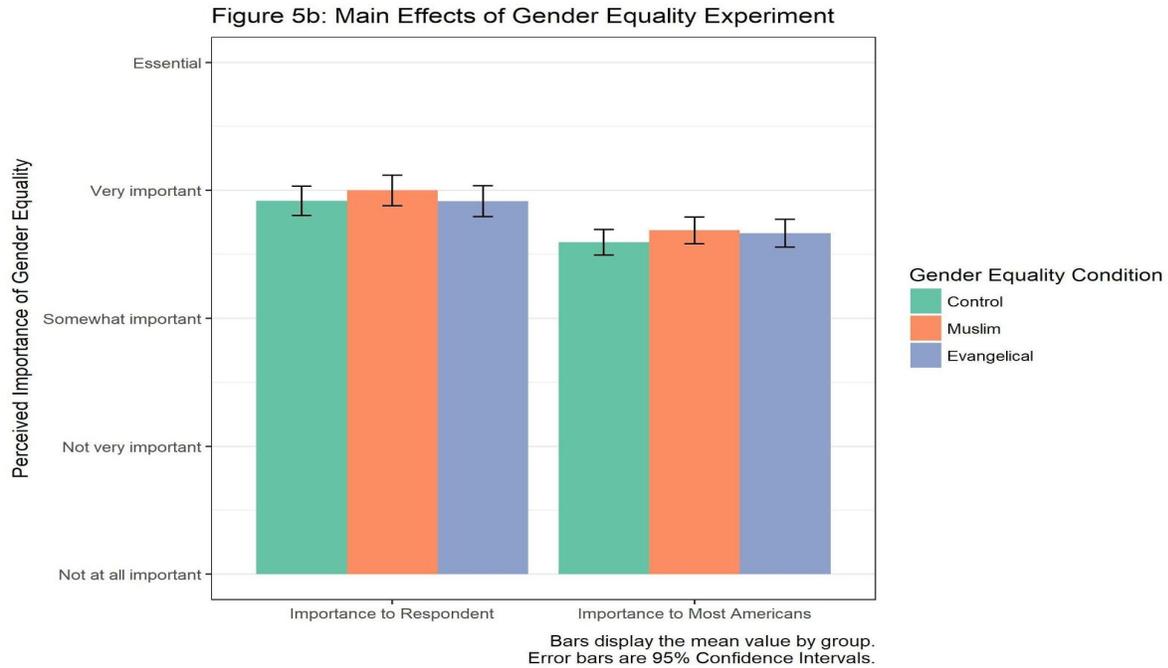
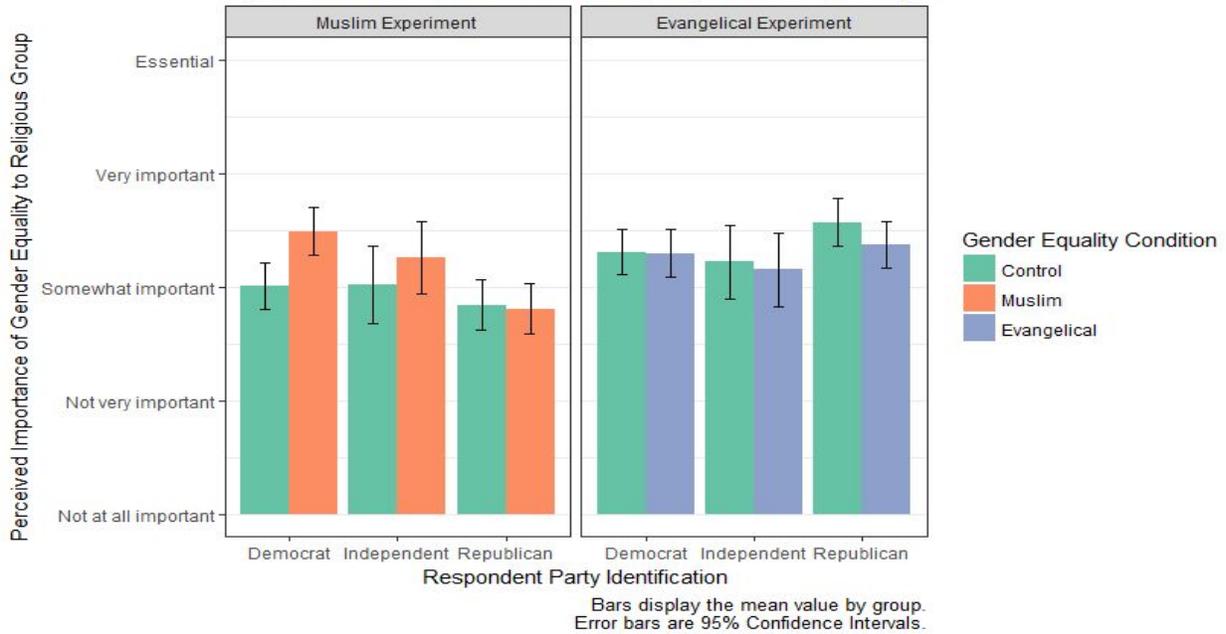


Figure 6 shows the treatment effects on the perceptions of both Muslim and Evangelical gender equality, interacted with party. Nearly all of the positive effect of the treatment on the perceptions of gender equality among Muslims comes from Democrats, with a small but not statistically significant difference among Independents. As expected, there are not differential treatment effects by party identification in perceptions of the importance of gender equality among Evangelical Christians in America.

Figure 6: Effects of Gender Equality Experiment, by Party ID



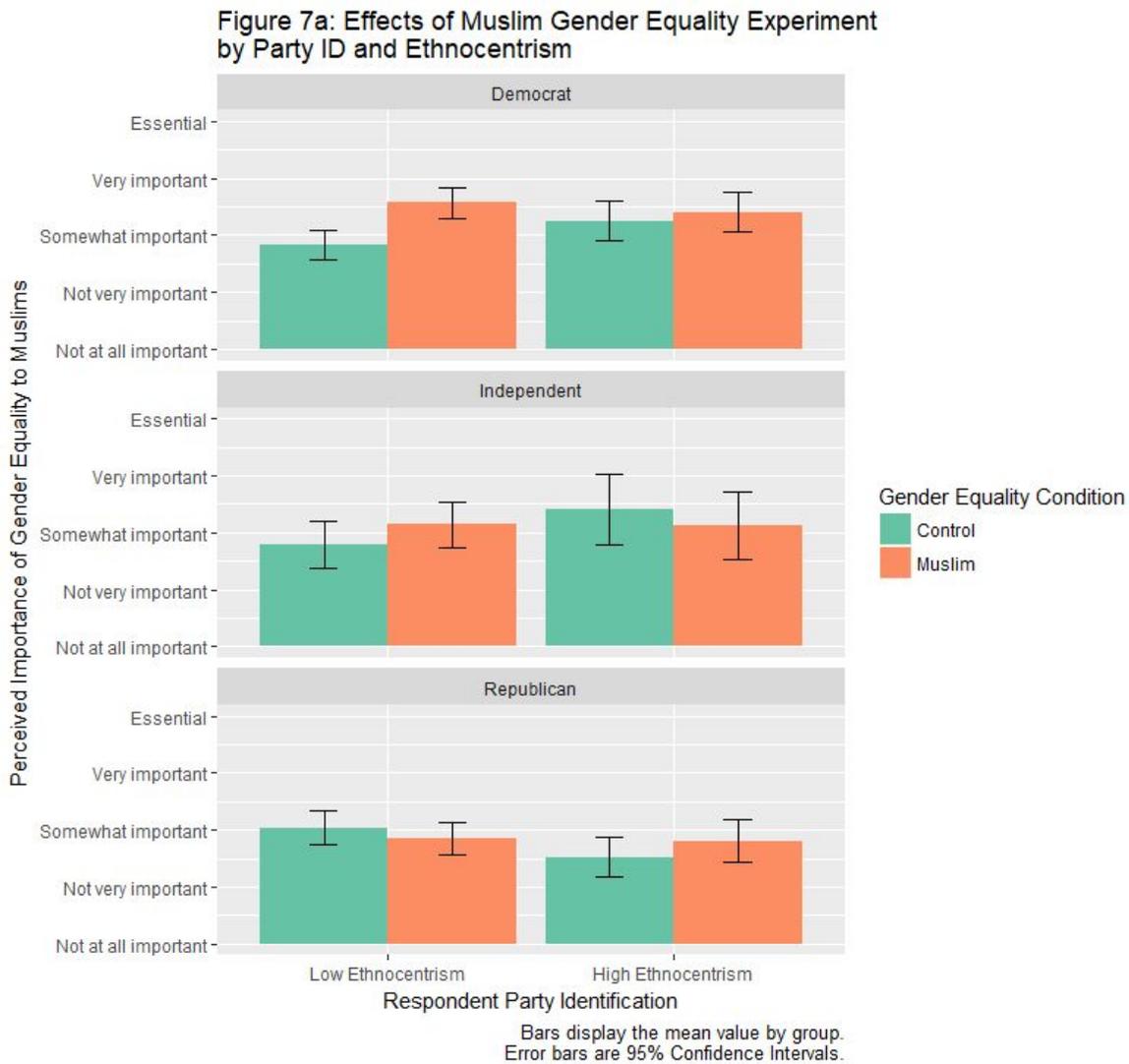
Contingent Effects of Ethnocentrism

These results prompt consideration of a puzzle: why do Democrats show the largest negative treatment effect on the thermometer ratings in the first experimental treatment, and also the largest positive findings in this experiment? We have already suggested that highly politicized and well-considered opinions will demonstrate less of an effect than knee-jerk reactions. It is possible that the introduction of the vignette into the question prompted Democratic respondents to more carefully consider their response than those in the control condition.

Furthermore, we know from prior research that Americans that are highly ethnocentric are more likely to rely on anti-Muslim bias when forming political opinions (Kam and Kinder 2007; 2012). Ethnocentrism describes a worldview in which people see a division between virtuous in-group members and nefarious out-group members. Consistent with our hypothesis about social distance, people who score high on ethnocentrism should be more likely to create symbolic boundaries between themselves and Muslims. Prior to the treatments, we included a survey measure of generalized ethnocentrism (see Kam and Kinder 2012).⁸ Figure 7a below compares the

⁸ The ethnocentrism measure is the average of the ratings of racial outgroups (i.e. Blacks,

triple interaction of treatment with party identification and ethnocentrism, on the outcome of the importance of gender equality to *Muslims*. Figure 7b provides the same comparison, on the outcome of the importance of gender equality to the *respondent* themselves. Symbolic boundary construction could manifest in lower ratings of the importance of a key cultural value - gender equality - among the out-group members (Figure 7a), or a higher rating of the importance to the respondent personally (Figure 7b).



Asian-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans) on two seven-point scales of intelligence and laziness, divided by the in-group average rating (i.e. Whites), on the same measures. The models are run using a binary indicator of any score above 0, which indicates that the in-group is rated more favorably than the average of the outgroups.

Ethnocentrism is not a significant predictor of either treatment assignment or party identification.

Democrats who were low on the ethnocentrism scale were more likely to exhibit a backlash and rate gender equality as *more important to Muslims* after viewing the treatment text, relative to the control condition ($p < .05$). A similar dynamic occurs for Independents, although it is not statistically significant. However, there is no statistically significant difference between treatment and control for those high on the ethnocentrism scale for any party affiliation. This indicates that the primary driver of the unexpected positive outcome in Figure 5a is Democrats who score low on the ethnocentrism scale.

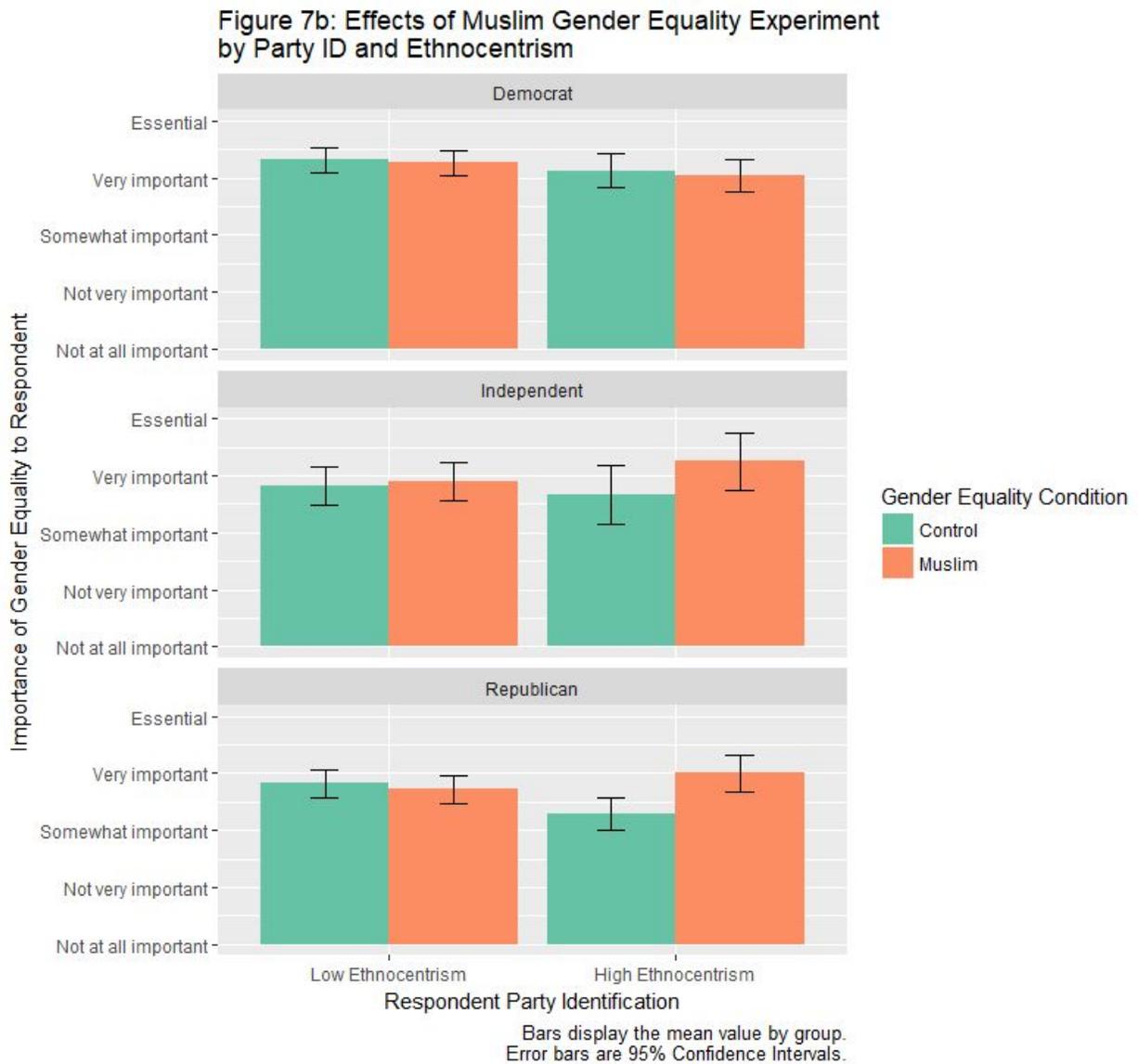


Figure 7b, by contrast, provides some tentative evidence that some respondents do construct symbolic boundaries through the alternate process of inflating their own symbolic value status. Specifically, Republicans with a high score on the ethnocentrism scale (bottom right frame) rate gender equality as significantly more important to themselves personally when they have been exposed to the information about Muslim gender equality compared to those in the control group. Independents with high degrees of ethnocentrism exhibit a similar dynamic, although it is not a statistically significant difference.

Discussion

The results of the survey experiment demonstrate the potential for messages about cultural threats to have both negative and positive effects on different audiences. These effects are contingent on the partisan background of the survey respondent, the respondent's propensity to create symbolic boundaries between ethnic groups, and the particular nature of the message and attitude. Although the results from the relatively weak and limited interventions undertaken in this experiment are somewhat mixed, they nevertheless demonstrate the potential for symbolic threat messaging to affect attitudes toward Muslims, which may even be more powerful than messaging about terrorism or security threats.

To more fully understand the real-world impact of such messages, it is important to also evaluate the scope and prevalence of such messages in the news media. In the next section, we evaluate the content of news media and describe how different media sources portray Muslim threats to different audiences.

Study II: Media framings of Muslims

As discussed above, media plays a critical role in constructing symbolic threats through selective representation of different groups. While a number of studies have examined negative portrayals of Muslims in Western media, few have focused directly and systematically on symbolic threat. This gap motivates us to investigate threat frames in coverage of Muslim minorities. While this portion of the study is still in its early stages, this section describes our data collection, preliminary findings, and strategies for future analysis. We hope that by outlining our proposed plan, we can receive useful feedback for improving this portion of the study.

Data

While all sampling is question-dependent, researchers studying the national-level media landscape tend to select highly-respected and/or highly-consumed outlets (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017). Likewise, previous research on media coverage of Muslims have focused on cable news outlets (Lajevardi 2016), and widely-read newspapers (Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Powell 2011; Samaie and Malmir 2017). Following these approaches, we collected data from a range of highly-consumed outlets, including network television (*ABC News*, *CBS News*, and *NBC News*); cable news (*Fox News*, *MSNBC*, and *CNN*); and widely-circulated newspapers (*USA Today* and *The New York Times*). While inferences from these data cannot be applied to American media writ large, they provide a sufficiently broad perspective on the majority of media consumers.

Using the LexisNexis database, we downloaded all documents containing the term “Islam” or “Muslim” in above outlets from 2013 to 2017. We then limited the sample to select only those articles in which Muslims/Islam reflect a significant theme, as opposed to a passing mention. Most of these documents concern foreign affairs, particularly events occurring in Muslim-majority countries. However, our study concerns American views of Muslim minorities in the United States. Because American

attitudes of Muslim-Americans are most directly influenced by coverage of events in the United States or countries with similar demographics, we subsetted this collection to include only news pertaining primarily to the United States, Canada, or a European country.⁹ This is not to say that Americans are uninfluenced by foreign news; indeed, previous research suggests media consumers generally do not differentiate between Muslims at home and Muslims abroad (Sides and Gross 2013, 588). Still, we maintain that limiting the sample to portrayals of Muslim minorities in Western countries enables a more direct analysis of our research question.

The final sample included 5,585 documents from the last 5 years (2013-2017). We chose a relatively short time horizon to start, but hope to expand our data to include earlier coverage in later iterations of this project.

ABC	239	CNN	2,207	New York Times	1,691
CBS	339	Fox News	345	USA Today	352
NBC	170	MSNBC	242		

Methods

Previous research on media portrayals of Muslims and immigrants employs qualitative methods to identify general frames in coverage (Bleich et al. 2015; Bleich, Nisar, and Abdelhamid 2016; Powell 2011; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Moore, Mason, and Lewis 2008). Unfortunately, applying similar qualitative techniques to our corpus would be prohibitively costly due to its size. Fortunately, recent advances in computational text analysis enable new tools to categorize and compare texts on a large

⁹ We rely on subject and country terms provided by LexisNexis to identify the theme and geographic location, respectively, of the news material. Documents are assigned terms along with a relevance score that calculates how important or salient each term is to a document. Scores of 85 percent or higher indicate a major term. For location, we assign each article to a single country using its most salient country term, if that term has a relevance score of 85 percent or higher. Articles with missing major country terms were discarded. For subject, we select articles where the term “Muslims & Islam” constituted a major term.

scale (Grimmer and Stewart 2013).¹⁰

We employed two widely-used computational methods to identify and compare substantive themes in the corpus. First, we estimated a probabilistic topic model (Blei 2012), an algorithm used to code the content of a corpus of texts into substantively meaningful categories, or “topics,” using the statistical correlations between words in a corpus (Mohr and Bogdanov 2013). Topic modelling has been increasingly applied in social sciences study frames and themes in large text corpora (Mohr and Bogdanov 2013; Lucas et al. 2015).¹¹ It is a mixed membership model, meaning that it considers each document to be a mixture of (i.e. a distribution over) many topics. Although there are many variants, we employed the Structural Topic Model (STM), developed by social scientists to facilitate the analysis of metadata and topics in text corpora (Lucas et al. 2015, 2). STM extends the popular topic modeling tool Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) by incorporating document-level metadata into the analysis as covariates. This allows scholars to measure systematic changes in topical prevalence according to changes in metadata, similar to a regression framework (Roberts et al. 2014, 5). After preprocessing our data using the standard recipe,¹² we estimated 73 topics by regressing topic prevalence on date (by month) and publication covariates. We chose to estimate 73 topics because it had the highest statistical fit for our data.

We also employed a supervised approach using dictionary methods. Dictionaries are lists of keywords that relate to a particular theme, tone, or class. The method then calculates the rate at which these terms appear in the text to measure the extent to which documents belong to a particular class (Grimmer and Stewart 2013: 8-9). Unlike topic models, which “discover” topics without much input from the researcher,

¹⁰ Some examples of text analysis methods in social sciences include: PCA (Greussing and Boomgaarden 2017); factor analysis (McLaren, Boomgaarden, and Vliegthart 2017), clustering techniques (Lawlor 2015), and examined word co-occurrences (Samaie and Malmir 2017).

¹¹ The main benefit of this method lies in its ability to infer and analyze substantively meaningful categories (topics) with minimal assumptions and expense (Quinn et al. 2010). Unlike human-coder approaches, an automated topic model estimates topics from the observed data without assuming the substance, division, or keywords of topics beforehand. Thus it ameliorates the potential for confirmation bias. It is also fully replicable because it is fully automated, which is an important validity concern for content analysis (Neuendorf 2011).

¹² Including stemming and removing stop words as well as names of anchors and other commonly used words in the news context (e.g. “say”, “now”).

dictionary methods allow us to measure and compare specific categories of interest. We develop simple dictionaries that pertain to 1) *women, gender and sexism* and 2) *sharia*. The goal at this point is not to precisely estimate the prevalence of these topics, but rather to establish plausibility for the claim that media discourse activate various kind of threats through selective portrayals of Muslims.

Results

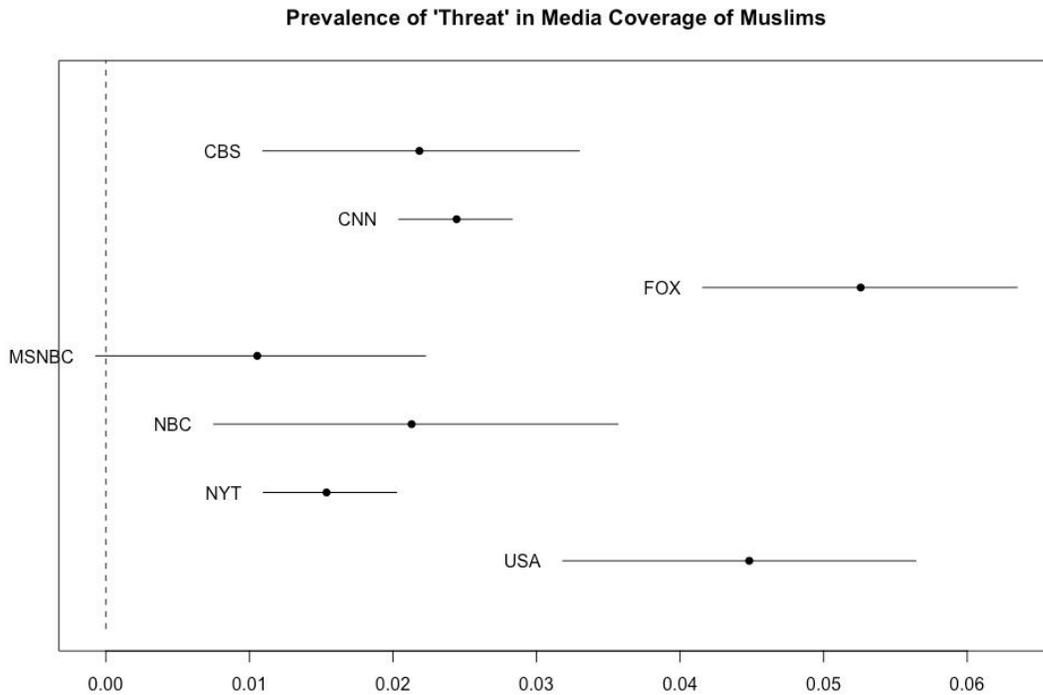
Different media outlets use different language when discussing Muslim minorities in the West. Specifically, we find that more conservative outlets display greater prevalence of language pertaining to *threat*. The results from the STM contained one clearly discernible topic pertaining to threat, as inferred by its top (stemmed) words. Figure 8 displays the most common words (*Highest Prob*) and most distinctive words (*FREX*, or frequency-exclusivity) for this topic. Note that this topic reflects the *general* theme of threat; a closer inspection of top words and representative documents reveals that this topic captures both physical (e.g., terrorism) and symbolic (e.g., ideology) dimensions.

Figure 8: Islamic Threat Topic Keywords

Topic 56: Islamic Threat
Highest Prob:
terror, terrorist, attack, radic, threat, presid, islam, secur, war, obama, peopl, american, ideolog, fight, kill, state, unit, estrem, problem, homeland
Highest FREX:
terror, radic, ideolog, threat, homeland, terrorist, enemi, defeat, estrem, extremist, strategi, recruit, johnson, counterterror, intellig, violent, qaeda, oversea, lone, isi

Comparing this topic’s prevalence across outlet reveals significant variation in the degree to which different outlets emphasize threat when covering Muslim minorities (Figure 9). STM allows one to plot the relationship between topical prevalence and metadata in a regression-like framework. Specifically, the model estimates the expected proportion of an unseen document devoted to a topic as a function of when and where it was published. As shown in Figure 9, Fox News and USA Today were more likely to emphasize this theme in their coverage of Muslim minorities, holding time constant, while CBS, CNN, MSNBC NBC and New York Times had less prevalence on this topic. Indeed, MSNBC, the most liberal outlet in our sample, was the least likely to use threat frames.

Figure 9: Prevalence of ‘Threat’ in Media Coverage of Muslims

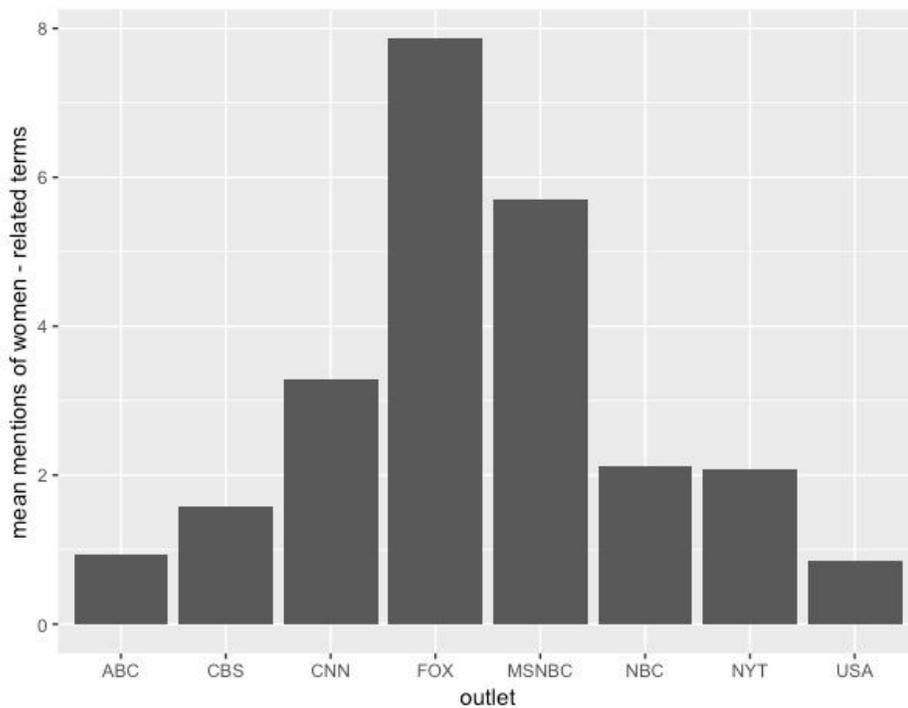


This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that more conservative individuals and outlets display greater antipathies towards Muslims than liberal outlets. The results in Figure 9 also provide tentative support for our hypothesis (H2)

claiming that media outlets activate perceptions of threat through selective coverage of Muslims as it shows variation in the use of these frames across news outlets. .

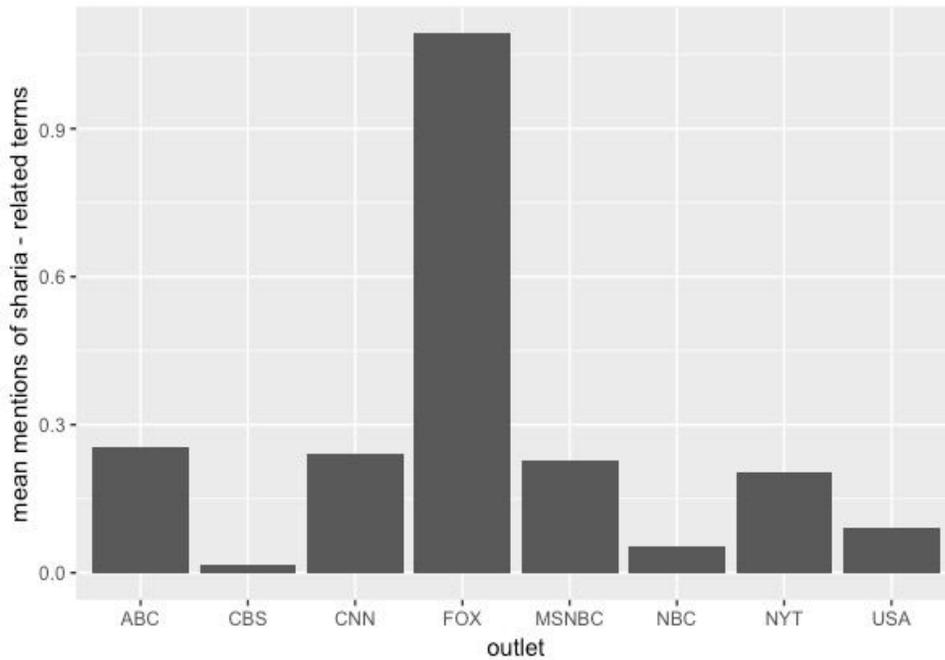
Additionally, we address H2 by examining the use of symbolic threat in the media samples. While the above analysis pertains to threat generally, we were interested to know how and to what degree *symbolic* threat, specifically, varied in this corpus. Our topic model generated no clearly discernible topics related to symbolic threat, but dictionary methods enable a more fine-grained exploration of specific subject matter. We built simple, dichotomously-scored dictionaries on two subjects -- gender and sharia -- that represent instantiations of symbolic threat vis-a-vis Muslims. The figures below represent the average number of mentions of words pertaining to gender and sharia, respectively, normalized by the number of documents from each outlet.¹³ Fox News displayed higher prevalence on both dimensions, particularly with regards to *sharia*.

Figure 10a: Use of Gender-related Terms by Outlet



¹³ We also normalized by number of mentions of “Muslim,” which produced substantively similar results.

Figure 10b: Use of Sharia-related Terms by Outlet



It is important to note that dictionary methods measure the relative frequency of words without capturing the context in which the word is used. As a result, we are unable to directly observe whether this language reflects symbolic threat or some other frame. For example, a story about women and Muslims might be contained within a broader narrative of Islam’s inherent sexism, or it may be about Muslim women challenging Islamophobic stereotypes. The high prevalence of gender-related terms in both Fox and MSNBC coverage suggests variation in the use of messaging around Muslim women. As such, the results above should be interpreted with caution as further research is needed to validate and expand them. That said, we find it unlikely that Fox News is covering Muslim gender relations or sharia in a positive and non-threatening way. The more likely possibility is that these stories activate a symbolic threat frame by emphasizing group-specific stereotypes that trigger the perception of social distance. Given our experimental results discussed above, the salience of these themes in real-world media coverage suggests a significant and deleterious effect on viewers’ attitudes towards Muslims.

Future Research

Moving forward, we plan to expand and deepen our analysis of threat frames in American media coverage of Muslims. One strategy we are currently exploring is estimating STM with a larger number of topics to identify more specific event-based stories in our sample, and then classify those stories based on the type of threat they correspond to: realist (e.g. terrorism, political violence), or symbolic (e.g. cultural differences, gender inequality, language use, mosque construction). We will then compare the prevalence of these themes across two sources of variation: time, and outlet. Two preliminary expectations guide our analysis: First, we expect the symbolic threat theme to increase over time since 9/11. Second, we expect the the symbolic threat to be particularly pertinent in conservative outlets given the association between right-wing politics and anti-Muslim views. However, we remain tentative about these predictions, especially given the results suggesting the susceptibility of Democrats to symbolic threat messaging.

Conclusion

In this study, we examine the role of symbolic threat in driving anti-Muslim attitudes in the American public sphere. We put forth three hypotheses: First, American attitudes towards Muslims are shaped by perception of symbolic threat, as much as physical (i.e. terrorist) threat. Second, media discourse activates this symbolic threat through selective portrayals of Muslims. And third, the perception of symbolic threat shapes understandings of "American" identity, emphasizing particular norms -- e.g. gender equality -- that are supposedly antithetical to Islam and "Muslim culture."

Our research design involves both survey experiments and large-scale media analysis. The results of the experimental data suggest that messages about cultural threats exert heterogeneous effects on different audiences. Specifically, we find that presenting Democrats with a symbolic threat frame reduces the average thermometer rating of Muslims by nearly 10 points. However, when the messaging was more extensive and targeted toward a particular issue - gender equality - we find that

Democrats who are low in ethnocentrism drive a substantial backlash effect and have a more positive evaluation of gender equality among Muslims. Republicans who are high in ethnocentrism, by contrast, are more likely to say gender equality is important to them personally when faced with negative information about gender equality in the Muslim community, indicating a process of social distancing. Even with relatively weak treatments, our findings demonstrate the potential for symbolic threat messaging to affect attitudes toward Muslim immigrants, and suggest these messages may even be more powerful than messaging about terrorism or security threats. We plan to conduct additional experiments to refine our results (see Appendix 3).

The second portion of our study involves large scale text analysis of the ways in which Muslims are portrayed in American media. We collected over 5,500 documents from 8 outlets over 5 years, and conduct a systematic analysis on the ways in which Muslims are portrayed in national newsmedia. We find that more conservative outlets - Fox News in particular - are most likely to use threat frames in their coverage of Muslims and Islam, and most likely to use words associated with the specific cultural threats of gender equality and sharia law.

This project makes three main scholarly contributions. First, our findings add to growing debates about Islam in the American public sphere by demonstrating the role of symbolic threat in driving anti-Muslim views. Second, we make a theoretical contribution to the literatures on immigration, race/ethnicity, and public opinion by demonstrating how symbolic threats are activated through media discourse to shape conceptions of national identity (and its outsiders). Finally, we speak to the growing interest in large-scale text analysis by demonstrating the complementarity of computational text analysis and experimental methods in identifying media effects.

Acknowledgements

Funding for this study was generously provided by the Russell Sage Foundation, via the 2017 Summer Institute in Computational Social Sciences. Matti Nelimarkka also thanks the Academy of Finland (project: HYBRA) for additional funding.

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Appendix 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean Value	Unique Values
Security Threat Indicator	0	1	0.33	2
Cultural Threat Indicator	0	1	0.33	2
Evangelical Gender Equality Indicator	0	1	0.50	2
Muslim Gender Equality Indicator	0	1	0.50	2
Independent Indicator	0	1	0.15	2
Republican Indicator	0	1	0.41	2
Democrat Indicator	0	1	0.43	2
High Ethnocentrism Indicator	0	1	0.38	2
Exp 1: Immigration Restriction	0	1	0.58	4
Thermometer: Muslims	0	100	50.81	101
Thermometer: Christians	0	100	70.79	93
Thermometer: Atheists	0	100	49.15	100
Thermometer: Immigrants	0	100	59.91	101
Exp 2: Muslim Gender Equality	0	1	0.52	5
Exp 2: Evangelical Gender Equality	0	1	0.59	5
Personal Gender Equality	0	1	0.74	5
American Gender Equality	0	1	0.66	5
Female Indicator	0	1	0.52	2
Age	18	65	40.42	48

Appendix 2: Regression Estimates for All In-Text Figures

Table A1: Main Effects of Threat Experiment

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Immigration Restrictions (1)	Therm: Muslims (2)	Therm: Immigrants (3)	Therm: Christians (4)	Therm: Atheists (5)
Culture Threat	0.023 (0.028)	-3.310 (2.148)	-4.157* (2.027)	1.265 (1.945)	-1.827 (2.235)
Security Threat	-0.006 (0.028)	-3.840 (2.148)	-4.546* (2.027)	0.759 (1.945)	-2.794 (2.237)
Constant	0.571*** (0.019)	53.190*** (1.519)	62.807*** (1.433)	70.121*** (1.374)	50.693*** (1.580)
Observations	919	918	918	919	917
R ²	0.001	0.004	0.007	0.0005	0.002
Adjusted R ²	-0.001	0.002	0.005	-0.002	-0.0004
Residual Std. Error	0.342 (df = 916)	26.563 (df = 915)	25.074 (df = 915)	24.074 (df = 916)	27.645 (df = 914)
F Statistic	0.588 (df = 2; 916)	1.878 (df = 2; 915)	3.090* (df = 2; 915)	0.214 (df = 2; 916)	0.805 (df = 2; 914)

Note:

* p < 0.05
** p < 0.01
*** p < 0.001

Table A2: Effects of Threat Experiment by Party ID

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>				
	Immigration Restrictions	Therm: Muslims	Therm: Immigrants	Therm: Christians	Therm: Atheists
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Culture Threat	0.028 (0.039)	-9.306** (3.280)	-9.597** (3.090)	0.167 (2.941)	-1.242 (3.461)
Security Threat	0.012 (0.038)	-3.672 (3.180)	-5.875 (2.995)	5.178 (2.851)	1.536 (3.360)
Independent	0.166*** (0.049)	-14.682*** (4.039)	-17.798*** (3.805)	3.402 (3.625)	-7.438 (4.262)
Republican	0.306*** (0.040)	-14.719*** (3.307)	-13.838*** (3.115)	14.853*** (2.966)	-5.406 (3.489)
Culture X Independent	-0.109 (0.070)	14.381* (5.855)	16.453** (5.515)	0.431 (5.258)	4.147 (6.177)
Security X Independent	-0.063 (0.072)	0.671 (5.989)	1.537 (5.642)	-10.971* (5.378)	-3.094 (6.322)
Culture X Republican	0.020 (0.056)	8.338 (4.635)	5.852 (4.367)	1.455 (4.161)	-3.201 (4.891)
Security X Republican	-0.0005 (0.055)	-2.736 (4.607)	0.275 (4.340)	-6.861 (4.136)	-10.836* (4.865)
Constant	0.419*** (0.028)	61.927*** (2.319)	71.847*** (2.185)	63.680*** (2.076)	54.306*** (2.447)
Observations	918	917	917	918	916
R ²	0.180	0.066	0.072	0.078	0.038
Adjusted R ²	0.173	0.058	0.064	0.069	0.029
Residual Std. Error	0.311 (df= 909)	25.826 (df= 908)	24.329 (df= 908)	23.207 (df= 909)	27.250 (df= 907)
F Statistic	24.974*** (df= 8; 909)	7.995*** (df= 8; 908)	8.797*** (df= 8; 908)	9.551*** (df= 8; 909)	4.421*** (df= 8; 907)

Note:

* ** *** p < 0.001

Table A3: Main Effects of Gender Equality Experiment

	Importance of Gender Equality to:			
	Muslims (1)	Evangelicals (2)	Respondent (3)	Americans (4)
Muslim Condition	0.060* (0.025)		0.020 (0.021)	0.023 (0.019)
Evangelical Condition		-0.023 (0.024)	-0.001 (0.021)	0.018 (0.019)
Constant	0.487*** (0.018)	0.599*** (0.017)	0.730*** (0.015)	0.649*** (0.013)
Observations	614	612	918	916
R ²	0.009	0.001	0.001	0.002
Adjusted R ²	0.008	-0.0002	-0.001	-0.0004
Residual Std. Error	0.312 (df = 612)	0.295 (df = 610)	0.264 (df = 915)	0.234 (df = 913)
F Statistic	5.766* (df = 1; 612)	0.891 (df = 1; 610)	0.635 (df = 2; 915)	0.830 (df = 2; 913)

Note:

* ** *** p < 0.001

Table A4: Effects of Gender Equality Experiment, by Party ID

	Importance of Gender Equality to:			
	Muslims (1)	Evangelicals (2)	Respondent (3)	Americans (4)
Muslim Condition	0.119** (0.037)		-0.022 (0.031)	0.036 (0.028)
Evangelical Condition		-0.003 (0.037)	-0.013 (0.033)	0.037 (0.029)
Independent	0.001 (0.051)	-0.022 (0.049)	-0.121** (0.043)	-0.054 (0.039)
Republican	-0.044 (0.038)	0.066 (0.037)	-0.146*** (0.032)	0.021 (0.029)
Muslim X Independent	-0.058 (0.070)		0.091 (0.059)	0.018 (0.053)
Muslim X Republican	-0.126* (0.055)		0.071 (0.046)	-0.038 (0.042)
Evangelical X Independent		-0.013 (0.069)	0.035 (0.061)	0.002 (0.055)
Evangelical X Republican		-0.046 (0.052)	0.035 (0.046)	-0.047 (0.041)
Constant	0.504*** (0.026)	0.577*** (0.025)	0.806*** (0.022)	0.649*** (0.020)
Observations	614	612	918	916
R ²	0.042	0.011	0.043	0.009
Adjusted R ²	0.034	0.003	0.034	0.0002
Residual Std. Error	0.307 (df = 608)	0.295 (df = 606)	0.260 (df = 909)	0.234 (df = 907)
F Statistic	5.305*** (df = 5; 608)	1.338 (df = 5; 606)	5.068*** (df = 8; 909)	1.028 (df = 8; 907)

Note:

* ** *** p < 0.001

Table A5: Effects of Gender Equality Experiment, by Party ID and Ethnocentrism

	Importance of Gender Equality to:			
	Muslims (1)	Evangelicals (2)	Respondent (3)	Americans (4)
Muslim Condition	0.185*** (0.048)		-0.013 (0.040)	0.022 (0.037)
Evangelical Condition		0.004 (0.050)	-0.007 (0.044)	0.022 (0.040)
Independent	-0.009 (0.062)	-0.011 (0.060)	-0.123* (0.052)	-0.067 (0.047)
Republican	0.054 (0.050)	0.118* (0.048)	-0.123** (0.042)	0.058 (0.038)
High Ethnocentrism	0.107 (0.056)	0.094 (0.053)	-0.047 (0.047)	0.015 (0.043)
Muslim X Independent	-0.099 (0.087)		0.029 (0.074)	0.050 (0.067)
Muslim X Republican	-0.235*** (0.071)		-0.013 (0.059)	-0.062 (0.054)
Evangelical X Independent	-0.148 (0.079)		-0.008 (0.067)	0.015 (0.061)
Evangelical X Republican		0.019 (0.085)	0.018 (0.075)	0.031 (0.068)
Muslim Condition X Ethnocent		-0.094 (0.071)	-0.032 (0.062)	-0.076 (0.056)
Evangelical Condition X Ethnocent		-0.053 (0.077)	-0.011 (0.067)	-0.002 (0.061)
Independent X Ethnocent	0.045 (0.110)	-0.038 (0.105)	0.008 (0.092)	-0.003 (0.084)
Republican X Ethnocent	-0.237** (0.080)	-0.178* (0.077)	-0.086 (0.067)	-0.139* (0.061)
Muslim X Independent X Ethnocent	-0.007 (0.154)		0.138 (0.129)	-0.077 (0.117)
Muslim X Republican X Ethnocent	0.270* (0.114)		0.212* (0.096)	0.098 (0.087)
Evangelical X Independent X Ethnocent		-0.161 (0.155)	-0.075 (0.137)	-0.016 (0.124)
Evangelical X Republican X Ethnocent		0.177 (0.108)	0.182 (0.095)	0.113 (0.086)
Constant	0.457*** (0.034)	0.555*** (0.032)	0.829*** (0.028)	0.655*** (0.026)
Observations	585	580	871	870
R ²	0.062	0.026	0.070	0.020
Adjusted R ²	0.044	0.007	0.051	0.001
Residual Std. Error	0.305 (df = 573)	0.292 (df = 568)	0.257 (df = 853)	0.233 (df = 853)
F Statistic	3.450*** (df = 11; 573)	1.386 (df = 11; 568)	3.779*** (df = 17; 853)	1.030 (df = 17; 852)

Appendix 3: Experimental Treatments for Second Survey Experiment

In June 2018 we are planning to run a second, large-scale survey experiment (approximately 1000 participants, recruited through an online survey firm). We are planning to include stronger treatments, in which respondents read actual news articles (edited for length, not content). Below are the draft treatments - we welcome any feedback!

Comparison of Treatment Text Length and Readability:

	Terrorism	Swimming	Pizza
Words	296	307	295
Characters	1411	1540	1508
Paragraphs	13	9	11
Sentences	16	13	17
Sentences/ Paragraph	1.2	1.4	1.5
Words / Sentence	18.5	23.6	17.3
Characters / Word	4.6	4.8	4.9
Flesch Reading Ease (Higher = more readable)	55.4	47.3	52.1
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	10.1	12.1	10.2
Passive Sentences	12.5%	7.6%	17.6%

Key Outcome Measures:

- [Open Text] In a few sentences, using your own words, please describe what the article was about.
- [Open Text] How do you feel about Muslim Americans after reading the article?
- Feeling Thermometer
- Attitudes about Islam (Islam is violent / supports terrorism/ oppresses women/ incompatible with American values /etc.)
- Attitudes about policies that affect Muslims (monitoring / immigration restriction / etc.)
- Importance of gender equality to Muslims & respondent

Treatment 1: Terrorism / Violent Threat

<http://www.wsocvtv.com/news/local/morganton-teen-with-ties-to-isis-to-be-sentenced-on-terrorism-charge/540419739>

Judge says Morganton man tied to ISIS is 'cold, calculated, cowardly'

June 28, 2017

ASHEVILLE, N.C. - A judge sentenced a Morganton man to life in prison Tuesday morning at the federal courthouse in Asheville.

Justin Sullivan, who was 19 years old when he was first arrested in 2015, pleaded guilty last November to one count of attempting to commit an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries.

He told the FBI he was a converted Muslim and wanted to kill 1,000 people by using cyanide-laced bullets and vehicles filled with bombs. Sullivan wanted to get an AR-15 from a gun show in Hickory to kill a large number of U.S. citizens, according to court documents.

But what he didn't know was that he was corresponding with an undercover FBI agent.

During the sentencing, Sullivan told the court that he was not a bad person and that a life sentence was not justified at all.

Prosecutors said in September of 2014, Sullivan converted to Islam, became a violent Islamic extremist and watched ISIS videos, wanting to create his own Islamic state in the United States.

"He planned to attack a concert or a club, places that we would call soft targets, places where people would be about enjoying their lives and not expecting acts of violence," said U.S. Attorney Jill Westmoreland Rose.

The judge said that it was an act of terrorism and that Sullivan was cold, calculated and cowardly.

Sullivan stood up and told the judge it was a lie to describe him as a cold-blooded murderer.

After his sentencing, Sullivan's father spoke to Channel 9.

"As parents, we're not happy, but as Americans, I accept it," Rich Sullivan said. "Of course, he is still my son and I still love him."

Channel 9 reporter Dave Faherty asked Rich Sullivan if he forgives his son.

"No, I can't," Rich Sullivan said.

Treatment 2: Cultural Threat: Halal Pizza

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/2017/05/26/pepperoni-lawsuit/347564001/>

Muslim man sues Little Caesars, claiming 'halal' was a lie in Dearborn

May 25, 2017

A Muslim man is suing Little Caesars for \$100 million after he says he was served and then accidentally ate pepperoni made with pork, a food prohibited by Islamic law.

The complaint says Mohamad Bazzi of Dearborn ordered halal pizza twice from the shop on Schaefer in Dearborn. The boxes were labeled "halal," but the pies inside were topped with regular pepperoni.

Majed Moughni, Bazzi's attorney, said he rushed to file the lawsuit Thursday, the eve of Ramadan, so no other Muslims would accidentally eat pork from the pizza shop during the holiday.

"It's really upsetting," Moughni said. "My clients want the public to know. Especially during Ramadan, it would be a travesty if Muslims ... in Dearborn bought pizza from Little Caesars and discovered they were eating pork."

He added that for a Muslim, consuming pork is "one of the worst sins you can do."

Jill Proctor, a spokeswoman for Little Caesars said in a statement that the company believes the claim "is without merit."

"Little Caesars cherishes our customers from all religions and cultures, and the communities we serve are very important to us. While we can't comment on pending litigation, we take this claim very seriously," Proctor said.

Halal is the Muslim equivalent of Judaism's kosher and requires that meat be prepared according to Islamic guidelines, such as reciting a prayer while the animal is cut.

"There's different schools of Islamic law that allows for the eating of chicken and beef, but there is no such thing as halal pork. The pork itself is forbidden," Moughni said.

The lawsuit alleges breach of contract, negligent misrepresentation, unjust enrichment and fraud. The case is against Little Caesars Pizza, Little Caesars Enterprises and the employees of the shop.

Moughni is seeking class-action status for the case.

Treatment 3: Cultural Threat: Women-Only Swim Times

<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/women-only-swim-times-spark-emotional-debate/>

Women-only swim times spark emotional debate

Nov. 25, 2013

A 90-minute time slot on Sunday afternoons, when women can swim at a public pool in Tukwila removed from men, has led to some awkward conversations around gender and Islam in one of the region's most diverse cities.

In recent months, some Tukwila residents and City Council members have raised concerns that the women-only swims amount to gender inequality — with some going as far as to call it reminiscent of the Jim Crow era of separate accommodations.

It all came to a head last week when about 40 people attended a sometimes emotional meeting of the Tukwila Pool Metropolitan Park District to urge commissioners, who are also the City Council members, to keep the gender-separate swims — even though there was no specific proposal on the table to end it.

Jacque Carroll said she wants city officials to consider whether separating women represents their “further marginalization.”

“I’m concerned that launching evermore segregation of women in our society will cause women to be more marginalized than they are right now,” she said.

But such legal matters were far from the minds of the more than two dozen women — many dressed in the Islamic hijab — and a handful of men as they spoke emotionally to commissioners in Tukwila about how they and their families use the pool.

“This isn’t just something I’m doing,” Farole said. “It’s a commandment from God; men and women are not to mix together. That’s my religious belief.”

At that meeting, Councilmember Dennis Robertson said while he understood the need for the single-gender swim times, city officials needed to be careful not to contribute to gender inequality. “It’s not what this country is about,” he said.

The arguments being used to support single-gender swim times were used to justify racial segregation in the South, he said. “We are walking on dangerous grounds here,” he said.