Religious minorities and secularism: an alternative view of the impact of religion on the political values of Muslims in Europe

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ABSTRACT
This paper proposes an alternative explanation of Muslims’ endorsement of secular values based on their belonging to religious minorities. We argue that, contrary to what is often asserted in both the academic literature and the public debate, Muslims’ endorsement of secular values is not simply a matter of strong individual religiosity, but may also result from belonging to a religious minority. We suggest that this group-level variable may explain differences in the support for democratic values by Muslims in Europe, in addition to the individual-level variable pertaining to individual religiosity. Our findings show that belonging to a religious minority in the country of origin positively affects the degree of support of secularist values. More generally, they suggest that denominational Muslim identities should be investigated by taking into account the role of belonging to religious minorities. Moreover, the article will show how belonging to a religious minority can moderate the negative effect of religiosity on secular values.

In line with a multiculturalist backlash (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2009), during the last decade many have argued that it is now time to strictly limit the recognition of cultural practices which are seen as being at odds with the ‘Western values’ (Barry 2001; Parekh 2008; Sartori 2002). According to this view, ‘multicultural countries have become “too diverse,” and the presence of communities adhering to values at odds with those of “Western” secular society threaten cohesion’ (Grillo 2007, 979). Some—for example British Prime Minister David Cameron—have stressed the need for a more ‘muscular liberalism’ to cope with such a ‘threat’.

One of the issues at stake in this context pertains to secular values. Secularism is a fundamental feature of liberal democracies, in particular of European democracies. Although European countries have established different institutional arrangements (Bader 2007) to deal with the relationships between the state and the church—going from France’s full explicit separation to more ambivalent situations such as Italy hosting the Vatican state or the British Queen embodying the head of the Anglican church—to some extent all liberal democracies foresee some degree of autonomy of the secular powers from the religious powers.
Religion is often at the core of recurrent controversial and heated debates about the Muslims’ presence in European societies, in particular with regard to the extent to which they endorse secularism. The compatibility between Muslims’ religious beliefs and secular values has become a key concern in many Western societies in recent years. Religion—or rather a different view on the role of religion in the social and political life—is seen as the main obstacle to the integration of Muslims’ immigrants and the main cause of an irreconcilable cleavage between them and the host societies. In this paper we wish to investigate the relationship between Muslims and secularism (Levey and Modood 2009). To what extent do Muslims in Europe support secularism? Do we observe differences among Muslims as to their degree of adherence to secularism? And if so, how can we explain them?

The recurrent argument for the weaker support of secularism by Muslims is that religious values are seen as potentially conflicting with secular values. More generally, Muslims are expected to display greater distance towards democratic values than non-Muslims, who in contrast would have a more secularist, egalitarian, and liberal view of democracy. While we do not contest the inverse relationship between religiosity and support for secularism, in this paper we would like to suggest an alternative view of the role of religion by focusing on a group-level variable instead of an individual-level one. In our view, too often have scholars studied the democratic values of Muslims—including secularism—by overestimating individual religiosity, while neglecting other explanatory factors. We suggest that religion may exert an important influence on secularist values through belonging to religious minorities. More specifically, we aim to show that not only individual religiosity, but also belonging to a religious minority has an impact on support to secularism and other political values. However, while the effect of individual religiosity is negative, as shown by previous studies as well as by our own analysis, we expect the impact of belonging to a religious minority to be positive, enhancing support for secularism. In the end, we hope to show on an empirical basis that the interaction between secularism and religion cannot be apprehended only in the light of individual religious practices or beliefs. The collective dimension is also important. For example, one needs to take into account the religious collective identity, especially for religious minority groups. In some specific cases, religious minorities strengthen their identity through collective experiences of discrimination, and this can have an impact on support for secularism.

Our argument runs as follows: certain Muslims—for example Alevis in Turkey and Ahmadis in Pakistan—belong to religious minorities which tend to be the object of exclusion and discrimination in their country of origin. In both cases, belonging to a discriminated religious minority leads members of such a minority to endorse a secular view of institutions. The stigmatisation of these religious minorities prompts them to support the religious neutrality of state authorities. The religious neutrality of people holding public offices can be seen by members of these groups as a guarantee of institutional respect towards religious minorities and against religious persecutions. If our hypothesis is correct, therefore, we should find two contrasting effects depending on whether we consider individual-level religiosity or group-level belonging to a religious minority. Furthermore, we will show that group-level belonging may moderate the negative effect of individual religiosity on support for secular values.
Muslims and secular democratic values

Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations thesis has largely contributed to spread the idea that Islamic and democratic values oppose each other. In his view, ‘the most dangerous cultural conflicts are those along the fault lines between civilizations. […] It is now the line separating people of Western Christianity, on the one hand, from Muslim and Orthodox peoples on the other’ (1996, 28). Besides its specific content, it seems quite evident that this thesis has had strong performative effects: several works have shown that, especially since 9/11, public and political discourses mainly depict Islam and Muslims as a threat to both democratic values and social stability. In Western public discourse Muslims have become the main figure of otherness in contemporary democratic polities (Gianni and Clavien 2012; Modood, Triandafyllidou, and Zapata-Barrero 2006; Parekh 2008; Razak 2008), and reference is often made to the Clash of Civilizations thesis. Moreover, past and recent terrorist acts as well as the fear of new ones and the increasing public visibility of some rigorist groups (Klausen 2005) have brought to the fore the idea that democratic institutions are under the threat of political Islam and that Muslims are becoming a political force in Europe (Fukuyama 2006). The social perception of this threat results from representations of Muslims which performatively contribute to their construction as figures of otherness. The underlying logic of representation of Islam and Muslims is very much based on portraying them as possessing fixed cultural-religious attributes, as being deeply opposed to the ethos of democracy and gender equality, and as being against secularism.

What emerges from such debates is indeed the essentialisation of Muslim religiosity. This is well described by Brubaker (2013, 5, emphasis in original), who argues that ‘[t]he making of European Muslims has involved not only a re-labelling of populations previously identified and categorized in other terms as Muslims, but also the representations of Muslims and the generation of knowledge about Muslims’. This leads to an ‘over-religiosisation’ of Muslim’s agency. In this regard, it is worth stressing that ‘Muslims’ designates not a homogeneous and solidary group but a heterogeneous category’ (Brubaker 2013, 6, emphasis in original). Indeed, Muslim immigrants in Western Europe differ in terms of ethnic background, economic integration, juridical status, and religiosity (Allievi 2005). Moreover, many religiously unobservant or even irreligious individuals nonetheless identify themselves as Muslim because of their family background, personal attachment, ethnic and group allegiance, or the social and cultural environment in which they were raised. Ruthven (1997) has called them ‘cultural’ or ‘nominal’ Muslims.

It is therefore not surprising that Huntington’s thesis has been widely criticised on several grounds. Among the most relevant ones are, on the one hand, its essentialist understanding of civilisations and, on the other, the (often implicit) idea of a path-dependency between Christian values and democratic values (Chirot 2001; Esposito 1997; Esposito and Voll 1996; Said 1978, 1994). These studies have paved the way to many empirical studies of cross-cultural differences in democratic attitudes between Islamic and Western countries (see, e.g. Norris and Inglehart 2004) and more recently between Muslim immigrants and non-Muslim populations (see, e.g. Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007).

This is also related to the specific situation of Muslim immigrants in the host society, in particular with reference to first- and second-generation immigrants. Scholars have stressed that first-generation immigrants who come from non-democratic countries are
less pro-democratic (Bueker 2005; Ramakrishnan 2005). In contrast, second- or in-
between-generation immigrants who have been socialised in Western countries display
similar democratic values as autochthonous individuals (Maxwell 2010). Grundel and
Maliepaard (2012) examined the impact of religiosity on civic competences among
non-religious, Christian, and Muslim teenagers in the Netherlands. Their findings show
that Christian and Muslim teenagers score higher than non-religious adolescents in
terms of democratic competences. They also show that Muslim teenagers know less
about democracy than their Christian counterparts, but belonging to Islam or Christianity
has no statistically significant effect on democratic practices. The authors illustrate how
second-generation immigrants learn democratic values from their social experiences in
the host country.

Following-up on these works, we examine the impact of religiosity on the secular values
of Muslims living in Europe. Specifically, we look at the effect of belonging to a religious
minority in the home country. In doing so, we propose an alternative theoretical frame-
work to understand Muslims’ endorsement of secular values and show that one needs
to look beyond the individual level to explain such an endorsement.

**Contrasting effects of religiosity and religious belonging on secular
democratic values**

Recent studies show that the role of religion for democratic attitudes is ambivalent,
depending on which dimension of religion one looks at (Ben-Nun Bloom 2014). Based
on data from the World Values Survey, Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan (2013a), for
example, argue that religiosity as a personal value system and religion as a social expe-
rience have diverging effects on democratic values: religious beliefs weaken support for
democracy, while social religious experience encourages it. In their view, therefore, Chris-
tian and Islamic traditions are not at odds with the promotion of democratic values
because of their alleged pro-democratic or anti-democratic ‘nature’. They maintain that
the psychological and sociological mechanisms of mediation between religiosity and
democratic support are similar in different religious traditions, including Christianity
and Islam. The same can be said of other religions. Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan
(2013b) have indeed tested elsewhere a similar hypothesis on Turkish Muslims and
Israeli Jews, obtaining similar results: religious social behaviour fosters support for demo-
cratic values while religious belief discourages it in both groups. Yet their most relevant
contribution for our present purpose lies in their comparative study of 45 democratic
countries, in which they show that a personal belief system weakens support for demo-
cratic principles. However, at the group level, religion increases support for democratic
values: ‘This double-edged sword effect explains the mixed results currently found in
the literature on religiosity and democracy, and clearly illustrates the multidimensionality
of religiosity’ (Ben-Nun Bloom and Arikan 2012, 249).

Other authors have tried to explain the composite effects of religion and religiosity on
democratic values in a comparative perspective. For example, Filetti (2013) compares the
influence of religiosity and religion on political attitudes in Georgia and Azerbaijan,
showing divergent effects on support for democratic values. The author shows that reli-
gion affects democratic values differently according to the way in which it is related to
a given cultural heritage. Comparing Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Palestine, Tessler
(2002) shows that people supporting ‘Islamic guidance’ in political affairs appear to have less influence on democratic attitudes than it is often suggested by scholars. Furthermore, he maintains that Islamic beliefs need to be associated to other contextual factors (such as country of residence or gender) in order to understand their impact on political values.

A further study of the impact of religious beliefs, behaviour, and belonging on secular attitudes was recently proposed by Forbes and Zampelli (2013). They focus on the religious impact of the propensity towards a secular or religious charitable contribution. As participation to religious activities positively influences religious forms of charity, the importance of religion in one’s life affects negatively secular expressions of charity. The authors show that participation to religious activities positively impacts religious and secular charitable behaviour. However, the intensity of religious beliefs increases the religious charitable contribution while weakening the secular one.

By limiting their analysis to Islamic religiosity, Nagel and Staeheli (2011) investigate the political values and secular attitudes of Muslim activists in the West. Their results point to a large variety of attitudes towards secular values. Some Muslim activists consider Islam a private faith and an identity issue, and mobilise in the political arena only for secular reasons; some others support a comprehensive political idea of Islam by diminishing their support to secular values. These findings support our hypothesis that attitudes towards secular values are not homogeneous within a specific Muslim sample.

Alevis, Ahmadis, and support for secular democratic values

In the literature on religion and democracy, secular values have often been associated to democratic values, as secularism is against intolerant ideas undermining egalitarian policies and rejects preference for, or persecution of, different groups of the population who have a different faith or different moral customs (Mahmood 2012). Especially for a group that has suffered from religious-based repression, secular values can be a stronghold against religious discrimination. Thus, the relationship between minority and majority Muslim groups can be addressed by investigating the support of secular values by different believers. Heterodox Muslim groups have often experienced religious persecution in Sunni-majority countries. This holds in particular for Alevis in Turkey (Massicard 2012; Özyürek 2009; Shankland 2003; Ulusoy 2013; White and Jongerden 2003) and Ahmadis in Pakistan (Grigoriadis 2006; Nijhawan 2010; Saeed 2007; Sanni 2014; Stoop 2012).

Karolewski (2008) maintains that the old resentment against Alevis was resumed in the 1970s and 1980s by state actors willing to repress young Alevi activists of the leftist movements. Attitudes against Alevis in the twentieth century were also rooted in the anti-kızılbas Ottoman repression of the sixteenth century. However, they still experienced discrimination after 1923 and especially in the 1990s (Grigoriadis 2006). In the past two decades, the Alevi identity has witnessed a renewal (Özyürek 2009), becoming more urban and more secular (Shankland 2003). This process strengthened the democratic identity of Alevis, both in Turkey and abroad. After the military coup d’état of 80, Alevis started to distinguish themselves from Sunni Muslims, more in terms of religious beliefs than in terms of social position. This trend paved the way to the so-called Alevi Revivalism that polarised anti- and pro-Alevi positions around religious collective identities. Anti-Alevi pogroms such as Maraş Çorum and Sivas (Şahin 2001) intensified the religious and
cultural claims of Alevis. These claims concern in particular the lack of religious neutrality vis-à-vis religious minorities shown by Turkish institutions (Karolewski 2008).

The Alevi religious minority was formed before the Ahmadi minority. In fact, only in the late nineteenth century, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founded the Ahmadi movement in India. Sufi and Christian traditions influenced Ahmadis, and for this reason other Muslim groups persecuted them. Pakistan persecuted Ahmadis in 1984, forcing the leader of their community to emigrate in the UK. The Ahmadiyya influenced certain groups of European Muslims with its liberal and modernist interpretation of Islam (Shearmur 2014). Ahmadis are present in the majority of European countries and play an increasingly relevant role by interacting with non-Muslim actors (Nijhawan 2010).

Scholarship suggests that both groups are distinguished from the majority Muslim groups because of their pro-democratic orientations (Allenbach and Sökefeld 2010; Köse 2012, 2013). Taking into account this literature, we examine the degree of support of secular values by Muslims belonging to one of these two groups in the European diaspora. We hypothesise that Alevi and Ahmadi immigrants will be more secular than other Muslims because they conceive of secularism as an institutional instrument contrasting the repression of religious minority identity by state authorities in the name of the majority’s religious beliefs. Just as Alevis and Ahmadis are persecuted by other Muslims in their homeland, they are also discriminated by other Muslim organisations in the host society. For this reason, they often adopt an ‘atypical Muslims’ identity, trying to distance themselves from a negative public representation of Islam. More generally, we suggest that heterodox Muslim immigrants with pre-migrant experiences of repression as a religious minority group—in this case, Alevis and Ahmadis—have developed a specific secular counterculture as a consequence of their persecuted religious identity. We therefore expect them to adhere to a greater extent to secular values than other Muslims. In other words, we hypothesise that Muslims belonging to religiously persecuted heterodox groups support religious neutrality in public institutions to a greater extent than orthodox Muslim groups.

In order to strengthen the test of our hypothesis, we use a ‘control group’ composed by Berbers and Kurds, two other Muslim minority groups that are discriminated in the country of origin on the basis of their ethnic belonging rather than on the basis of their religious belonging. Most Muslims in Morocco were connected to Berber-speaking communities before the independence. After independence, a process of Arabisation took place and the Berbers were marginalised. Globalisation has enhanced Berbers’ sympathetic attitudes towards democratic values (Maddy-Weitzman 2006). The Berber/Amazigh culture movement addresses state institutions in the Maghreb as well as in Europe in order to have Amazigh/Berber rights acknowledged. The relation between Berbers and the state, however, is less confrontational in Morocco than in Algeria. Moroccan Berbers are sympathetic to humanist values ‘such as the promotion of human rights, democracy and freedom, within a pluralist, multicultural order, and strongly condemnation of the predominant hegemonic, monocultural order based on Islam and Arabism’ (Maddy-Weitzman 2006, 73). The Berberist movement supports democracy in all its different aspects: family democracy, democratic rights for linguistic and religious minorities, and political democratic principles. In Morocco and Algeria as well as in Europe, Berberists present themselves as pro-democratic activists. In Morocco, in particular, the Berber culture movement has raised its voice successfully by endorsing a strong
democratic engagement. Furthermore, the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 also point to Amazigh identity as westward-oriented. In this context, transnational ties play a relevant role (see Van Amersfoort and van Heelsum (2007) for an analysis of transnationalism and Berberist identity).

Like Berbers, Kurds also developed a pro-democracy identity. The pro-Kurdish movement has integrated Kurdish claims for political and cultural rights in a broader democratic and egalitarian framework. The pro-Kurdish democratic discourse was able to universalise Kurdish claims for democracy by joining workers, women, and other minorities persecuted by Turkish institutions (Gunes 2012). In Europe, the Kurdish movement addresses European institutions by embodying a new and avant-gardist democratic concept of transnational citizenship. The Kurdish movement has transformed the Kurdish diaspora in an opportunity to empower its universalistic identity by exploiting the European democratic channels of expression (Rumelili, Keyman, and Isyar 2011). Since 1999, even the KKP (Partiya Komunistê Kurdistan, Communist Party of Kurdistan) movement has reframed its political discourse by stressing radical democracy. Scholars agree that the Kurdish movement moves from the need for a pluralistic, democratic system of governance (Akkaya and Jongerden 2012).

Even though Berbers and Kurds have historically shown a real support for multicultural and democratic values, we suggest that they do not support the religious neutrality of institutions to the same extent that other Muslim religious minorities. Since they experienced discrimination based on ethnic identity rather than religion identity, they are less concerned about public institutions endorsing strong religious beliefs. Therefore, we expect that Berbers and Kurds do not support secular values to the same extent than Ahmadis and Alevis.

Data and operationalisation

Our analysis is based on original survey data gathered in the EU-funded project ‘Finding a Place for Islam in Europe’ (EURISLAM), a research aimed to investigate cultural patterns and relations between Muslims immigrants and host society in a number of European countries. The survey was conducted between 2010 and 2011, and includes random samples of Muslims from four national origins (Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, and former Yugoslavia). All respondents were retrieved from the latest electronic phonebooks. However, while natives were randomly sampled from the phonebooks, Muslims were sampled on the basis of first and family names indicating their ethnicity (onomastic sampling). Respondents were then screened by excluding individuals under 18 years and by including individuals having Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, and former Yugoslavia as a country of origin (born there) and a self-defined Muslim background, as well as individuals having at least one of the parents born in the country of origin and a self-reported Muslim background. Respondents were left the choice between the language of the host country and their native language. The data include four countries (Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK). While we are not conducting a genuine comparative study—we only use the country variable as a control—this allows us to generalise our findings beyond a specific national case. Appendix 1 gives the sample sizes by country and national origin.

Support to secularism is measured through an ordinal variable based on the following question: ‘How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following? Please answer
on a scale from 1 = “Agree strongly” to 5 “Strongly disagree”. ‘It would be better for <Belgium/ France/Germany/the Netherlands/Switzerland/the United Kingdom> if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office.’

It is important to stress that our indicator only captures a part of the broader concept of secularism. It refers to the separation of state and church in terms of public officials being lay persons rather than strong religious believers. This, however, albeit limited, is an important indicator of secularism, which should give us important insights into the impact of religion on the adherence to secular values by Muslims.

Our main independent variable is an indicator of belonging to a religious minority. We operationalised it as a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for those respondents who are either Alevi or Ahmadi and the value 0 for all other respondents. In addition, in order to strengthen our test, we also test for the effect of belonging to an ethnic group. We expect this effect not to be significantly different from zero. Ethnic belonging is operationalised through a dummy variable that take the value 1 for those respondents who are either Berbers or Kurds and the value 0 for all other respondents.

The regression models shown below also include the following control variables: age (in years), gender (male), education (ISCED 5-point scale), religiosity (scale), first generation (dummy) and second generation (dummy), and feeling of discrimination (dummy). Religiosity is a scale made of four items: frequency of prayer, frequency of attending a place of worship for religious reasons, self-definition as a Muslim, and expression or display of religious beliefs (Cronbach’s alpha for the sample included in the analyses = .79). Discrimination is a dummy variable distinguishing between Muslims who have been discriminated in the host country based on the following question: ‘Have you ever experienced hostility or unfair treatment towards you by people of <Belgian/British/Dutch/French/German/Swiss> origin.’ We recoded the original response items (never, rarely, occasionally, frequently) by collapsing the first two, respectively the last two items (coding: has experienced discrimination = 1). Appendix 2 describes all the variables included in the analyses.

The next section describes our dependent variable. Then we show the results of regression analysis predicting support to secularism as a function of our indicator of belonging to a religious minority as well as of the measure of belonging to an ethnic minority, under control of the variables mentioned earlier. One of the models also includes an interaction term aimed to examine whether belonging to a religious minority moderates the impact that religiosity has on secularism. In the last step of our analysis we show graphically the relationship between these two measures of religion. Since we are dealing with an ordinal dependent variable, we estimate coefficients by means of ordinal logit models. The analyses were performed with Stata 12.

**Findings**

**Support for secularism**

Our data allow us to test hypotheses on a sample of respondents who said they have direct (self-defined Muslim background) or indirect (a parent with defined-by-respondent Muslim background) ties with Islam. Therefore, they allow us to investigate the impact of various criteria such as national origins or a variety of individual characteristics on differences among denominational Muslims in their degree of adherence to specific
democratic values such as secularism. Here we focus on one specific aspect: self-identification with a Muslim religious minority group.

Table 1 shows the distributions of responses to the question dealing with the extent to which Muslims adhere to secular values. It compares respondents who belong to a religious minority (Alevis and Ahmadis) and those who do not (all the other Muslims). A number of remarks can be made regarding these distributions. Firstly, at the most general level, there are a fair amount of respondents who show adherence to secularism, regardless of whether one belongs to a religious minority or not. Thus, in general, both for religious minorities and for the other Muslims in our sample, having more people with strong religious beliefs holding public office is something that can be called into question.

Secondly, we do observe differences across the two groups. The share of those who disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that it would be better for the country of residence if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office—that is, those who support secular values—is larger among Muslims who belong to a religious minority than among the other Muslims. Furthermore, since the middle category (neither agree nor disagree) contains more or less the same proportion of responses, these results are mirrored among those who rather support this statement. Thus, the share of those who agree or strongly agree with this statement is larger among other Muslims than among Muslims who belong to a religious minority. The difference, however, is not very large and is slightly short of reaching statistical significance at the 5% level. But the main question here is: How does belonging to a religious minority impact on agreement or disagreement with this statement, under control of a number of other characteristics of respondents? The next section tries to answer this question.

Impact of belonging to a religious minority on support for secularism

The bivariate approach followed so far simply shows us the (rather small) differences in the support of secular values displayed by religious Muslim minorities and other Muslims, and whether these differences are statistically significant or not. Our main goal, however, is to test the hypothesis of an impact of religious minority belonging on support for secularism by Muslims in the four countries included in our study, under

Table 1. Support for secularism depending on belonging to a religious minority (percentages).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious minority</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree strongly</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree strongly</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>3124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Question wording: How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following? It would be better for <Belgium / Germany / Switzerland / the United Kingdom> if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office.

*p ≤ .05.

**p ≤ .01.

***p ≤ .001.
control of a number of individual-level variables. To test this hypothesis, we ran three ordinal logistic regressions. The first model (Model 1) includes our indicator of religious minority belonging and the controls. The second model (Model 2) refers to the effect of ethnic minority belonging, again under control of the other variables. The third model (Model 3) includes an interaction term of religious minority belonging and religiosity in order to investigate the potential moderating effect of the former. Table 2 shows the results of these analyses.

Before we address our main concern, let us first discuss the control variables. Some of the controls show a statistically significant effect, consistently so across the three models. Firstly, among the sociodemographic characteristics, education has a strong positive effect: quite unsurprisingly, more educated Muslims tend to support democratic values to a greater extent than less educated ones. Secondly and most importantly for our present purpose, religiosity has an effect on support for secularism, but a negative one: the more one is religious, the less he or she supports secular values, at least according to our indicator. This is consistent with previous studies looking at the impact of religion on democratic values (Levey and Modood 2009). Thirdly, we also observe a significant, albeit not systematic, effect of generation: the in-between generation is more supportive of secular values than first-generation migrants (the reference category). We observe, however, no statistically significant difference between first and second generations. Fourthly, the feeling of discrimination also positively affects support to secularism.

| Table 2. Effect of selected variables on support for secularism (ordinal logit coefficients). |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Belonging to religious minority | 0.457 (0.121)*** | – | 0.385 (0.124)*** |
| Belonging to ethnic minority | – | 0.075 (0.117) | – |
| Controls | | | |
| Age | 0.005 (0.003) | 0.005 (0.003) | 0.006 (0.003) |
| Male | 0.038 (0.065) | 0.027 (0.065) | 0.040 (0.065) |
| Education | 0.231 (0.032)*** | 0.225 (0.032)*** | 0.226 (0.033)*** |
| Religiosity | –0.548 (0.044)*** | –0.548 (0.044)*** | –0.590 (0.046)*** |
| Generation (ref.: first) | | | |
| In-between | 0.168 (0.085)* | 0.176 (0.085)* | 0.172 (0.085)* |
| Country (ref.: UK) | 0.131 (0.093) | 0.109 (0.092) | 0.145 (0.093) |
| Belgium | –0.585 (0.099)*** | –0.579 (0.099)*** | –0.586 (0.099)*** |
| Germany | –0.549 (0.084)*** | –0.525 (0.086)*** | –0.556 (0.084)*** |
| Switzerland | –0.533 (0.093)*** | –0.509 (0.093)*** | –0.524 (0.093)*** |
| Interactions | | | |
| Religious minority * religiosity | – | – | .356 (0.135)*** |
| Cut 1 | –1.094 (0.191) | –1.148 (0.190) | –1.094 (0.189) |
| Cut 2 | 0.309 (0.189) | 0.251 (0.188) | 0.311 (0.187) |
| Cut 3 | 1.110 (0.190) | 1.049 (0.189) | 1.113 (0.188) |
| Cut 4 | 2.440 (0.193) | 2.376 (0.192) | 2.443 (0.193) |
| Log-likelihood | –4852.017 | –4859.349 | –4848.348 |
| N | 3162 | 3162 | 3162 |

Notes: Robust standard errors between parentheses.
*p ≤ .05.
**p ≤ .01.
***p ≤ .001.
These findings contribute to the discussion about diverging results in research on this issue (Cesari 1994; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2005). Finally, age and gender do not seem to significantly affect Muslims’ support to secularism.

The country variable deserves special attention, as it captures contextual effects. In all three models, there is a significant effect of the country dummies. This means that Muslims living in Belgium, Germany, or Switzerland position themselves differently with respect to their support to secular values than their counterparts in the UK, which is the category of reference. Thus, context matters not only for the political claims making of migrants and Muslims at the collective level (Cinalli and Giugni 2013; Koopmans et al. 2005) or their political participation at the individual level (Cinalli and Giugni 2011), but also for their adherence to democratic values, in this case their support of secularism. More specifically, Muslims in Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland are consistently less supportive of secularism than in the UK (all the signs of the coefficients are negative). Although we do not explore this point further here, this might be related to differences in citizenship regimes across these four countries, in particular between the multicultural context of the UK and the more assimilationist context of the other three countries (Koopmans et al. 2005).

Moving now to our main concern, Model 1 includes our indicator of belonging to a religious minority. The analysis provides strong evidence for an impact on this variable on support to secularism. The coefficient is statistically significant and shows a substantial effect. Thus, net of the degree of religiosity—as measured through a scale that includes a variety of aspects—and other things being equal, the fact of being part of a Muslim religious minority discriminated in the home country makes one more incline to support secular values. Our main hypothesis is therefore confirmed by this analysis.

Model 2 tests for the effect of belonging to an ethnic minority. This is aimed to strengthen the explanation stressing the role of religious-based minority belonging. If we observe no effect of this variable, then we have a more solid ground to conclude that our hypothesis about the role of belonging to a religious minority on support for secular values. The results are as straightforward as the previous ones: our indicator of ethnic-based minority belonging displays no statistically significant effect. All the controls have effects similar to the previous model. This finding, we believe, is important insofar as it suggests that, in this context, what matters is religion rather than ethnicity.

**Interaction of belonging to a religious minority and religiosity**

One of our main arguments is that religion may have a different impact on adherence to democratic values, and more specifically secularism, depending on which dimension we look at. More specifically, we argued—and now showed—that individual-level (religiosity) and group-level (belonging to a religious minority) dimensions may play out differently: while the former is negatively associated to secularism, the latter may display a positive effect under certain circumstances (namely, the fact that the minority at hand has been discriminated or persecuted in the home country). To conclude our analysis, we would like to explore in some more detail the relationship between these two dimensions of religion. To do so, we have included an interaction term in Model 3 which tests for a potential moderating effect of religious minority belonging.
As we can see, the interaction term is significant and positive, showing that these two variables interact in some way. Interactions are usually difficult to interpret by looking only at the regression coefficient. Therefore, to have a better grasp of what is going on here, we estimated predicted probabilities (based on the ordinal logistic model). Since we are dealing with an ordinal dependent variable, we should show the interactions for each category of the variable. However, to simplify the reading of the findings, we only show the interactions of the two religion-based variables for the two extreme categories of the dependent variable, namely for those who display strong secular values (strongly disagree) and those who display strong religious values (strongly agree) with regard to the question used to build our indicator. Figures 1 and 2 show the results.

Figure 1 shows the effect of the interaction term on the predicted probability to strongly support secularism for Muslims who belong to a religious minority and for the other Muslims at different degrees of religiosity. As we can see, in both cases the higher the degree of religiosity, the more likely that one is strongly in favour of secular values. This simply reflects the negative coefficient seen in the regression models. But the most important finding here is that the two lines follow different paths, as the line for Muslims who belong to a religious minority is flatter than the one for the other Muslims. This means that religiosity plays out differently to predict support to secular value depending on religious minority belonging. In other words, belonging to a religious minority has a moderating effect on how religiosity impinges upon support for secularism. The effect is not very strong, but clearly visible.

We observe a similar effect if we look at the predicted probabilities of not supporting secularism, as shown in Figure 2. Obviously, the lines here are reversed, as we are explaining the opposite of support of secular values, but the trend is the same. Again, an increase in the degree of religiosity is positively associated with an increase in the predicted probabilities not to support secularism. Most importantly, the two lines diverge, attesting to a

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1.** Predicted probabilities of strongly supporting secularism depending on degree of religiosity. Notes: Predictive margins with 95% confidence intervals based on ordinal logistic regressions with interactions shown in Table 1 (Model 2). Other variables are set at their means.
moderating effect of belonging to a religious minority on the relationship between religiosity and support to secular values.

Conclusion

This paper looked at the impact of religion on the political values of Muslims in Europe. More specifically, we tested the hypothesis that belonging to a religious minority that has been discriminated or persecuted in the home country may foster support for secularism. We provided evidence that two kinds of religious indicators—a group-level indicator relating to belonging to a religious minority and an individual-level indicator concerning the degree of religiosity—impact differently on Muslims’ support of secular values. Belonging to a religious minority that has experienced religious persecution in the home country affects ones’ view about the religious neutrality of institutions of certain groups within the Muslim population, as compared to Muslims who do not belong to those groups. Among our respondents, Alevi and Ahmadi thus strengthen their secular identity in the host society. Furthermore, we showed that belonging to an ethnic-based minority does not have the same effect on support for secular values. This is the case, among our respondents, for Berbers and Kurds. Thus, endorsement of the religious neutrality of institutions depends on specific religious minority experiences.

Our analysis suggests that religiosity needs to be analysed as a multifaceted phenomenon in relation to other religious collective identities. For example, we showed how, under certain circumstances, belonging to a persecuted religious minority may increase support for secular values, while at the same time religiosity has a negative impact on attitudes towards secularism. Furthermore, we showed that religious minority identities interact with religiosity by moderating the negative effect of the latter on support for secular values.
Our findings challenge the representation of an essentialised view of Muslims’ religion in the public debate. According to Brubaker (2013, 5):

“identifying one’s object of analysis as “Muslims”, for example, highlights religious affiliation and, at least implicitly, religiosity; it also marks the population of interest as different from the surrounding population in both religion and religiosity. This risks foregrounding religion (and religious difference) as a frame of reference at the expense of alternative and possibly more relevant frames of reference.”

Our analysis shows that there are differences among Muslims with regard to endorsing secular values and that religious variables explaining such differences are often related to previous historical and social experiences suffered by Muslim immigrants, in particular the fact of perceiving to be the object of religious discrimination or persecution. This suggests that general denominational Muslim identities do not offer a clear understanding of the differences observed within the Muslim population. In other words, the supposed ‘over-religiosisation’ of Muslims must be reconsidered by bringing into the picture the influence of historical and collective experiences. Our study provides evidence that certain socialising experiences, such as being victim of religious discrimination, need to be taken into account when explaining the degree of adherence to democratic values.

To conclude, we would like to stress some limitations of our study. Firstly, our sample excludes respondents under 18 years, hence underestimating the effect of perceived discrimination of second-generation Muslims on their endorsement of secular values. Secondly, our findings have limited external validity with regard to the latter aspects. This is due to the fact that our analysis only includes two groups who are religiously discriminated in their home country, as most of our respondents who meet these criteria are either Alevis or Ahmadies.

In spite of these limitations, however, we believe that our analysis opens up a new avenue for research on the presence of Muslims in Europe. In particular, it shows that thinking in terms of an essentialised view of ‘Muslimness’ as the natural ‘other’ in democratic settings is clearly misleading. What is at stake, rather, is subjective stance of Muslims towards democratic values. Muslims are not just religious beings; they are also social and cultural beings whose experiences affect what they think about democracy.

Notes

1. Given the limited number of respondents who belong to a religious minority (either Alevis or Ahmadies) and the equally low number of respondents who belong to an ethnic minority (either Berbers or Kurds), we prefer to keep these two variables in separate models.

2. We have set the UK as the category of reference because this is the most multicultural country among the four included in our study in terms of citizenship regimes (Koopmans, Michalowski, and Waibel 2012), which have been shown in previous research to influence to an important extent the ways in which migrants interact with the host society (Koopmans et al. 2005).

3. It should be stressed that in the analysis of Koopmans, Michalowski, and Waibel (2012), Belgium is closer to the UK in terms of multicultural policies, whereas Germany and Switzerland are on the opposite corner of the typology of citizenship regimes, both in terms of individual equality rights and cultural group rights.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
References


Bader, Veit. 2007. Secularism or Democracy? Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.


Appendix 1: Sample sizes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
<th>UK</th>
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<td>152</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>857</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moroccans</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>892</td>
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<td>Turks</td>
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<td>355</td>
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<td>350</td>
<td>1239</td>
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<tr>
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<td>144</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>806</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>1028</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>3794</td>
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Appendix 2: Descriptives

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<th>n</th>
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<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
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<td>Belonging to ethnic minority</td>
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<td>38.338</td>
<td>13.363</td>
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<td>In-between generation</td>
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<td>Second generation</td>
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