Identifying barriers to Muslim integration in France
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Social and political relations between Europe and the Muslim world are fractious (1, 2). Attacks in Madrid (March 2004) and London (July 2005) were perpetrated by Muslim radicals. Political parties in Europe have mobilized opinion against a Muslim threat. Relations between the countries and societies of the European Union and the Muslim world have become politically consequential on a number of dimensions: foreign policy in regard to the Middle East, membership into the European Union, and the vast migration of Muslim populations into European Union states.

Surprisingly, several recent studies have found that there are no special problems for Muslims in Europe. The Pew Global Attitudes Project poll of 2006 established that “while there are some signs of tension between Europe’s majority populations and its Muslim minorities, Muslims there do not generally believe that most Europeans are hostile toward people of the Muslim faith” (3). Furthermore, “[s]ubstantial majorities of Muslims living in the European countries surveyed say that [in the 2 years after bombings in Spain and London, and the Cartoon Crisis in Denmark (4)] they have not had any personally bad experience attributable to their race, ethnicity, or religion” (3, 5). More recently, the 2009 Open Society Institute multicountry study of Muslim and non-Muslim attitudes toward immigration and social cohesion reveals that Muslim respondents are as likely as non-Muslim respondents to report that people in their neighborhood are willing to help each other; only 10% of Muslim respondents reported discrimination by the police, and a similar proportion of Muslims (29.2%) and non-Muslims (31.1%) reported trust in the government (6).

At the same time, European states are defined by their historic nationalities, all of them in the Christian tradition, and are seen as having a special problem with Islam going back to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans and the reconquest of Spain in the 15th century. Thus, throughout the continent, there is a myth of a “Christian Europe” that is maintained despite its virtually complete secularization in the past century. It manifests itself in recent political events as well as in individual attitudes and perceptions of discrimination. Suspicions run high in the debate over the application of Turkey into the European Union (as opposed to Bulgaria) (7).

Local issues, such as permits to build minarets in European cities or prohibitions on women wearing the burqa, transmogrify into continental causes célèbres. The 2009 Open Society Institute study paints a deteriorating picture of religious and racial discrimination: 55.8% of Muslim respondents and 43% of non-Muslim respondents, representing a plurality, claim that there is more racial prejudice today than there was 5 y ago; 68.7% of Muslim respondents and 55.9% of non-Muslim respondents make that claim with regard to religious prejudice, and more than 90% of both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents agree that Muslims are the ones experiencing this religious prejudice (6).

Thus, conventional wisdom points both to a cosmopolitan Europe open to Muslim immigrants and a closed Europe suspicious of these immigrants. Despite the sound and fury, the question of whether there is a special Muslim problem for Europe in general remains unclear. What is absent is a data-driven answer that can accurately identify and measure Muslims’ failure/success in economic integration into Europe.

The National Academies’ National Research Council’s Committee on National Statistics identified this problem on a broader scale when it convened a panel of scholars in 2001 to provide a comprehensive review of the major methods used to measure racial discrimination, including statistical analysis of observational data, laboratory experiments, and field experiments (8). Although the panel argued that no one method can solve all the troubling inferential problems for this notoriously complex issue, the difficulties of relying on observational data, including omitted


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2For example, the Front National in France, which runs an anti-European Union, antiglobalization, and anti-immigration platform, placed second in the presidential elections of 2002 and showed renewed strength in the regional elections of 2010.

3The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press is a public opinion research organization that studies attitudes toward politics, the press, and public policy issues. This and subsequent quotations can be found at the Pew Global Attitudes Project Web site (3).

4Cartoons in a Danish newspaper that depicted the prophet in an unflattering manner set off a wave of protests throughout the Islamic world as well as crystallizing anti-Muslim feelings, to the benefit of a right-wing party (the Danish People’s Party) that evokes anti-Muslim sentiments.

5Work by Laurence and Vaisey (5) in France reports similar results. Muslim immigrants, they find, are not all that different from the historic nationalities of European states. In general, they find that the degree of anti-Islamism in police-reported incidents in France is much lower than anti-Semitic ones, with a much larger Muslim population in France. Those who are Islamophobic tend also to be anti-Semitic and antimigrant in general. They conclude, at least for France, that there seems to be no specific anti-Islamic public feeling.

6This study (6) defines a Muslim as any respondent who self-identifies as Muslim, including Muslims who view themselves in a cultural rather than religious context. Similarly, non-Muslims are respondents who do not define themselves as belonging to the Islamic faith.

7The New York Times reports that the European Union has officially pictured Europe on its Euro currency, including (Christian) Belarus, Moldova, and parts of Russia but not Turkey, which officials admit was stricken from the map (7).

8For other non-Muslim responses on racial prejudice: 34.4% claimed that racial prejudice is about the same today as it was 5 y ago, 15% claimed that racial prejudice is less today than it was 5 y ago, and 7.6% do not know.
variable and sample selection bias, received special attention, perhaps because at the time of writing, reliance on observational data was thought to be used most often. Laboratory studies received much of the attention and compared the relative success of two identical candidates who differ only in their religious affiliation, this paper identifies significant anti-Muslim discrimination, controlling for a factor (i.e., country of origin) that has confounded results in previous work. Its principal finding is that, all other things being equal, a Muslim candidate is 2.5 times less likely to obtain a job interview than is his or her Christian counterpart. A high-n survey of immigrants selected via the same matching strategy (e.g., immigrants from the same ethnic group but divided by religion) provides evidence for a substantial income effect consistent with the expectations derived from the correspondence test.

**Previous Research on Employment Discrimination in France Among Workers from Immigrant Families**

Correspondence testing allows researchers to measure labor market discrimination based on specific characteristics, such as gender, age, race, or religion. A wide range of correspondence testing has been conducted beyond the United States, starting with the experiment of Jowell and Prescott-Clarke (9), which tested whether applicants from Asian backgrounds were discriminated against in labor market. Our knowledge of labor market discrimination has focus on discrimination against immigrants in the French labor market (10–13). These studies compare the response rate received by a CV with a Maghrebi-sounding first and last name with the response rate received by a CV with a French-sounding first and last name, with all other characteristics being equal across these CVs. Applicants from a Maghrebi background were found to be strongly discriminated against in the French labor market compared with those from an “authentic” French background. For instance, Duguet et al. (11) compute that for every 100 positive responses for the authentic French candidate, the Moroccan candidate received only 35, with the difference statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.

Although these studies reveal substantial discrimination against applicants of Maghrebi background, they do not allow us to isolate the source of this discrimination. Two confounding factors are at stake: do employers discriminate against Maghrebs or against Muslims?

The difficulties in identifying a religious effect as demonstrated in the CV experiments performed so far are not easily resolved, and this is all the more so in surveys. Data on Muslims in France are hard to get. A 1978 law set prohibitions on the collection of data on the racial, religious, or ethnic identity of its citizens, creating challenges for demographic research. For instance, in a leading sociological study of the economic success of different immigrant groups, researchers could not distinguish the children of Algerian migrants into France from the children of the pieds noirs, those of European parentage who left after the independence of Algeria in 1962 (14). Although the law was partially relaxed in 2007, this type of data collection has remained stringently limited (15–17). Equally important for the problem of statistical analysis, those available mass surveys exempt from state oversight rarely (with the Pew Global Attitudes Project poll being the partial excep-
The survey also contains key in-
Furthermore,
Muslims because they know
without other
effect, suggesting that the religious effect we measured in model
country or region of origin, we are unable to identify a Muslim
origin. The Muslim effect previously identi-

to study the retirement decisions of immigrants, but
between homeland and religion.
Consider Fig. 1, which analyzes these data, where models 1, 2,
3 illustrate the problem (the three statistical models are
between the ages of 45 and 70 y at the time of the survey administration. The resulting
sample comprises 6,211 respondents, 46.4% of whom are women, with a mean of 55.8 y
of North African life distinct fro
The real killer for identifying a Muslim effect is that most Muslim
immigrants to each of the major European states come from
a single country or world region. In Germany, nearly all Muslims
are from Anatolia; in the United Kingdom, the same is the case
with South Asians; and in France, nearly all Muslims are from the
Maghreb. In each of these cases, it is nearly impossible to de-
termine conclusively whether any additional problems that these
immigrant populations and their descendants have had in economic
mobility beyond the problems faced by non-Muslim immigrant
families are attributable to the fact that they are Muslim. For ex-
ample, nearly all immigrants to France from Portugal are Catholic,
and nearly all immigrants to France from Algeria are Muslim: once
they control for homeland, statistical models cannot disentangle
a religion from a country effect on outcomes. To look at the in-
ferential problem another way, any special problems in economic
advance faced by children of North African immigrants to France
may be attributable to their Muslim religion, the fact that they were
a colonized people from a geographic area where the major state
fought an insurgency against French imperialism, or some aspects of
North African life distinct from those of Europe or America (e.g., language, educa-
tional systems, history of authoritarian political rule).
To illustrate one aspect of the inferential problem, we draw
from a large-n survey of 12,010 randomly selected households
with an immigrant then (2002–2003) living in France, one of the
few large-n surveys in France in which a self-reported question
on religion was posed (19). The survey also contains key in-
frastructure variables such as gender, education, region of
origin, and income of immigrants and children. These data
were collected to study the retirement decisions of immigrants, but
they allow us to illustrate the problem of trying to infer the
effects of religion on income when there is a high correlation
between homeland and religion.
Consider Fig. 1, which analyzes these data, where models 1, 2,
and 3 illustrate the problem (the three statistical models are
described in the legend for Fig. 1). Model 1 estimates the
respondent’s income as a function of his or her religion, con-
trolling for gender, age, education, and length of stay in France.
With dummies for all religions (and Christianity the omitted
category, thereby serving as the point of comparison), we find
that Muslim immigrants are significantly poorer than Christian
immigrants. To control for a country fixed effect in model 2, we add a statistical technique that allows us to control for the immi-
grant’s homeland. In model 3, we do the same for region of
origin. The Muslim effect previously identified in model 1 loses
statistical significance in models 2 and 3. Once we control for
country or region of origin, we are unable to identify a Muslim
effect, suggesting that the religious effect we measured in model
1 may actually be driven by some other cause related to a
respondent’s home country or region of origin rather than his or
her religion. If the goal is to identify an independent Muslim

According to the “Detroit Arab American Study” (21), Christian Lebanese immigrants
arrived in the United States, on average, 10 y earlier than Muslim Lebanese immigrants.
Furthermore, 58% of Christians of Lebanese origin were born in the United States com-
pared with a mere 18% of Muslims of Lebanese origin.
We include Manjaks, a closely related linguistic group, with the Joolas (22).
From the 2002 Senegalese census (23), 25% of the Joolas and 11% of the Serers are
Christian, whereas only 5% of the Senegalese population as a whole is Christian (24). It is
doubtful that these Christians are ethnically Senegalese, and the study did not ask their
parents’ religion. The small number of Christians in the survey makes it impossible to
distinguish whether this is due to a religion that is uncommon in Senegal or to the
small number of Christians in their family.
This study was conducted in 2009 under contract by CSA France, in a project in which
David Laitin, Yann Algan, and Vincent Tiberj were the principal investigators. There were
511 respondents from Serer or Joola backgrounds (with 509 giving a clear indication as to
whether their household is Muslim or Christian). The survey had 29% Christian respondents
and 71% Muslim respondents. Descriptive statistics of the survey are provided in Table S2.
Below, this survey will be referred to as the Laitin/CSA survey.
population less spontaneously associated with Islam in the French collective imagination, however, would lead to an underestimation of anti-Muslim discrimination. Our results should thus be interpreted as a lower bound on the magnitude of anti-Muslim discrimination: levels of discrimination among Maghrébins, the real Muslims who are at the center of public debates about the role of Islam in France, would almost certainly be even higher than those we find for Senegalese Muslims.

Keeping with the matching strategy outlined above to separate out region of origin and religion, our experimental design demanded three comparable CVs, two of them from women with an obvious Senegalese surname (Diouf) but one with a well-known Muslim first name (Khadija) and the other with a well-known Catholic first name (Marie). The third CV was from a woman with a typical French republican name, with no religious connotation (Aurélie Ménard). In addition to differences in the first names, we introduced two signals of religious identity related to the work and volunteer experiences of our fictitious candidates. One of Khadija’s past positions was with Secours Islamique and one of Marie’s was with Secours Catholique, whereas Aurélie worked solely in secular firms. Also, Khadija did voluntary work for the Scouts Musulmans de France, whereas Marie did the same for the comparable Catholic organization, Scouts et Guides de France.

The remaining qualifications and backgrounds were identical for all three applicants: all were single French citizens, 24 y of age, and had 2 y of postsecondary education and 3 y of experience on the job market in either secretarial or accounting sectors. We deliberately chose occupations that entailed interaction with clients or company partners, such that recruiters would be paying greater attention to the expected reactions of these potential clients to their employees.

The non-governmental organization, Inter Service Migrants - Centre d’Observation et de Recherche sur l’Urban et ses Mutations (ISM-CORUM), collected job announcements nation-wide for both types of occupations published on the Pôle Emploi Web site (the French national employment agency) during the spring of 2009. For each pair of job announcements matched by region, sector, company size, and position, ISM-CORUM administrators sent the Aurélie/Khadija candidate pair to one and the Aurélie/Marie candidate pair to the other. Aurélie Ménard was used principally as the “reference” candidate: her CV allowed us to avoid sending Marie and Khadija’s applications for the same position. Because these applications were identical in both form and content (except for the religious identity signals), sending both CVs would have inevitably awakened suspicion among recruiters.

Fig. 2 summarizes our results. We first observe that the reference candidate, Aurélie Ménard, received the same positive response rate from employers who received Marie’s CV and from employers who received Khadija’s CV (27% and 25% respectively, with no statistically significant difference between the two). This indicates that the companies receiving Marie’s CV were, on average, similar to those receiving Khadija’s CV, thus lending greater confidence to our comparison of Marie and Khadija’s positive response rates.

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The first two organizations are both independent nongovernmental organizations in France with extensive international networks dedicated to the eradication of poverty. Neither has an obvious religious agenda. Their Web sites are http://www.secours-catholique.org and http://www.secours-islamique.org. As for the volunteer work, the two organizations are listed as religiously affiliated branches of an international scouting federation (http://www.sgdf.fr and http://scoutsmusulmans.fr/).

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Exemplars of the three CVs are available in “Les Français musulmans sont-ils discriminés dans leur propre pays?” (http://frenchamerican.org/cms/webfm_send/164).
The difference between Marie and Khadija’s positive response rates is striking. Although Marie Diouf received a positive response rate of 21%, Khadija Diouf received a positive response rate of only 8% (Fig. 2A). This 13-percentage point difference is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level and indicates that for every 100 positive responses received by Marie Diouf, Khadija Diouf received only 38 positive responses, or 2.5 times less. Furthermore, these results hold in a multivariate regression controlling for regional differences, employment sector, company size, occupation, contract type, and whether or not the CV included a photograph. Notably, the first 214 applications we sent had no pictures of the candidates. The next 61 included a photograph. The results with and without the photographs, indicating to recruiters that Khadija Diouf is not an orthodox Muslim. The results with and without the photographs were not statistically different from each other. This experiment thus provides a clear indication that in at least one sector of the French labor market and controlling for the candidate’s ethnicity among other characteristics, there is significant religious discrimination.

**Consequences of Religious Discrimination**

Does the discrimination experienced by Muslim candidates in the French labor market correspond to an economic disadvantage on the part of Muslim immigrants relative to their Christian counterparts? To answer this question, we rely on the Laitin/CSA survey of 511 Senegalese Christians and Senegalese Muslims living in France in 2009. We previously established that these two groups immigrated into France in a single wave during the 1970s. To ensure a fair comparison, we must also ask whether the first immigrants of respondent families to France started out on equal footing. The only critical difference on the arrival in France of Senegalese Muslims and Senegalese Christians relates to education. Senegalese Christians were slightly more educated than Muslims: whereas the probability of having a secondary or a post-secondary education is 36% among Senegalese Christians, it is 27% among Senegalese Muslims (a difference that is significant at the 95% confidence level). These results are consistent with ethnographic accounts of Senegalese Christians’ access to better education.

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*We code a response as positive when the candidate receives a call or an e-mail back from the employer inviting her for an interview, and we code a response as negative when a candidate receives no response from the employer or when the employer calls her back to turn her down. Our focus on callbacks as the outcome of interest may lead us to underestimate the extent of anti-Muslim discrimination in this context, if we believe that French companies face pressure to demonstrate that they are not discriminating against minorities: Muslims may receive callbacks so that the firm appears not to discriminate against them. This bias, if true, would work against finding an anti-Muslim effect, thus reinforcing our confidence that our result represents a lower bound on the extent of anti-Muslim discrimination.*

*The ordered probit estimation is not shown but is available from the authors.*

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Fig. 2. (A) Substantive effect of Khadija Diouf vs. Marie Diouf. (B) Statistical significance of the Khadija Diouf effect. This figure is based on results in Table S3 from Dataset S1. In B, the dot represents the difference in response rates, the horizontal line marks the 95% confidence level, and the two vertical lines mark the 90% confidence level.
quality education through their religious network (i.e., Catholic schools). A proper matching strategy between Senegalese Christians and Senegalese Muslims thus requires that we control for the first migrant’s level of education, which, given their high overlap in educational achievement, is statistically feasible.

We can now ask, controlling notably for the educational level of the first migrant, whether Senegalese Christians have been more successful in breaking through social and economic glass ceilings in France than have Senegalese Muslims. With this procedure, we are confident that any differences found between the two groups are the result of some aspect of their religious upbringing or practice, because geographic origin does not vary and initial human capital is controlled for.  

We estimate the determinants of immigrant income in France today via an ordered probit regression with robust SEs, with the current monthly household income as the dependent variable. The explanatory variables are the religious tradition of the household, the head of household’s gender and educational level, and the educational level of the head of household’s ancestor who was the first to come to France. (Recall that there is no need for a second model with country fixed effects because all respondents are from Senegal. This is the key to our matching strategy.) As illustrated in Table S4, we find that households with a Christian religious tradition are significantly richer than households with a Muslim religious tradition (significant at the 99% level). More precisely, when we estimate marginal effects and hold all other explanatory variables in the model at their predicted sample mean, the results indicate that Muslim households make, on average, 400 Euros less than Christians each month, the equivalent of 15% of the average monthly income or 17% of the median monthly income for France in 2007 (26).  

Fig. 3 further illustrates the effect of household religion for each income category: it indicates that Muslim households are more likely to fall into lower income categories, whereas Christian households are more likely to fall into higher income categories. In sum, even controlling for the educational level of the first migrant to France, there is a significant negative Muslim effect on present day household income. We can therefore infer that the job discrimination revealed in the section on our matching strategy has broad implications for differences in today’s household income for Muslims.

Summary and Extensions

In this paper, we have shown that both public debate and previous research on the implications of religious difference for integration into Europe, and France in particular, have yielded ambiguous results. Relying on a matching strategy and replicating well-understood CV experiments, we have been able to identify a statistically and substantively strong level of religious discrimination in at least one sector of the French labor market. Relying on that same matching strategy but now through a large-n survey of the descendants of Senegalese migrants into France, we are able to show one potential implication of job discrimination, namely, that over two generations Muslims have done less well economically than comparable Christians.

Some big questions remain unanswered, however. We still have not identified the mechanisms by which Muslims face relative economic failure. Consider the results on job discrimination. They may reflect a “taste” that français de souche (rooted French), those with four grandparents born within the French hexagon, have for fellow Christians. They may reflect instead an ability of Senegalese Christians to communicate trust and desire to succeed better than Senegalese Muslims, who lack comparable civic connections (e.g., through the Church) with French people. Alternatively, they may reflect cultural practices of Muslims that signal to French employers a lower commitment to the job.

To address these core questions on mechanisms and relying on the same matching strategy, we have conducted a range of ethnographic interviews and experimental game-theory interventions focusing on the behavior of Senegalese Christians and Senegalese Muslims toward the French and vice versa. Our
subsequent papers for this project will assess the explanatory power of these different mechanisms. Future research ought also to compare matched populations in other European states to see if state policies (e.g., multiculturalism vs. republicanism) differ in their success in fostering the integration of Muslim populations.

In this paper, relying on models that combine the controlled conditions of an experiment with a large-N survey, we have established a clear, albeit uncomfortable, finding. All other things being equal, Muslims have faced barriers to economic integration in France that are higher than they would have been if everything about them were the same save for their religion.

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