

Backlash to Policy Decisions

A New Democratic Dilemma of Muslim Integration

Focusing on one particular aspect of Muslim political integration - how authorities deal with this group's political right to demonstrate - we provide evidence from a survey experiment and show that liberal policy decisions lead to a polarization in attitudes toward Muslim immigrants: Citizens who agree with a liberal policy stance become more sympathetic, while those in favor of a restrictive policy become more critical of Muslim immigrants. This notion of opinion backlash to policy decisions adds a new perspective to the literature on immigration attitudes which has either assumed a congruence between public opinion and policy regimes or ignored political sources of anti-immigrant sentiment altogether. By exploring the unintended consequences of policy decisions we provide an alternative view and demonstrate the inherent democratic dilemma of balancing citizen opinion and minority rights.

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Introduction

Democratic politics means that all groups have the right to publicly advance their values and goals – as long as these groups respect the rights of others and follow the rules of the democratic game. This principle puts high demands on citizens' ability to tolerate and extend political rights to groups they may dislike or even find dangerous (Stouffer 1955, Sullivan et al. 1982, Marcus et al. 1995). Currently, this democratic challenge presents itself in Western democracies that seek to politically integrate Muslim immigrants – a group of increasing political importance but whose traditional religiosity is sometimes viewed as a detrimental to Western liberal values, secularism, and maybe even democracy itself (Adida et al. 2016, Sniderman & Hagendorn 2007, Sniderman et al. 2014, Norris & Inglehart 2004, Helbling & Traunmüller 2018).

In this paper we argue that democratic states face a new dilemma with Muslim integration, because in enacting the policies to incorporate Muslim immigrants into public life, they also have to take into account public opinion and in particular their less tolerant citizens' reaction. In line with the notion of “opinion backlash” (Bishin et al. 2016), we view liberal policy decisions concerning the political rights of Muslim immigrants as events that cause a negative reaction among some citizens which in turn triggers negative attitudes and increases the intolerance toward this group. Thus, the dilemma of liberal democracy is that it may bring about and foster the very conditions that undermine it. By devising liberal policies and extending rights it may actually decrease tolerance and breed illiberalism amongst parts of its population.

Of course, our argument is descriptive, rather than normative or prescriptive in nature. We are certainly not suggesting that yielding to the opposition of some and restricting the political rights of religious groups presents a viable solution to this democratic dilemma. Apart from being dubious on normative grounds, this option would just result

in the other side of the dilemma. Restricting the rights of Muslim immigrants or creating a hostile environment may itself lead to a reactive effect, expressed in higher rates of traditional or even radical religiosity as well as lower willingness to adapt to or to identify with the values of the host society (Connor 2010, Foner and Alba 2008, Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larkin 2011, Carol and Koopmans 2013, Voas and Fleischmann 2012). This way, a 'discriminatory equilibrium' (Adida et al. 2014) is maintained where Muslim immigrants perceive discrimination and are reluctant to assimilate, whereas members of the majority identify the lack of assimilation and express a distaste for Muslim immigrants.

While we cannot offer a way out of this democratic dilemma, our paper adds to its better understanding. Several recent studies have suggested that citizens' tolerance and attitudes towards immigrants depend on the nature of policy regimes and thus on the political and cultural rights granted to immigrants (e.g. Weldon 2006, Wright 2011, Wright and Bloemraad 2012). According to this line of research, liberal policies have a socializing effect and foster liberal attitudes among citizens whereas restrictive policies correspond to more critical feelings towards immigrants. The backlash argument presented here challenges and qualifies this optimistic view.

Backlash may mean that public opinion as a whole turns against the thrust of a policy decision (e.g. Abrajano and Hajnal 2015). Or, as in this paper, it can refer to an increasing polarization where the opinion of those who agree and those who disagree with a policy are pushed in opposite directions (e.g. Aaroe 2012; Hersh and Schaffner 2013). We show that attitudes concerning Muslim immigrants and their rights result from an interaction between specific policy decisions and individual differences in policy preferences. Citizens who agree with a liberal policy stance become more sympathetic, while those in favor of restrictive policy become more critical of Muslim immigrants. This psychological process which we describe closely resembles what Stenner (2005)

has called “the authoritarian dynamic”, where instances of “normative threat,” such as controversial policy decisions that grant political rights to controversial groups, both activate and interact with authoritarian predispositions which then go on to produce expressions on intolerance (see also Feldman and Stenner 1997 and Haidt 2016).

Focusing on one very specific aspect of the regulation of Muslim integration – how authorities deal with this group’s political right to hold public demonstrations – we empirically investigate the effects of policy decisions on citizens’ attitudes toward Muslim immigrants using a large-scale survey experiment with over 4000 respondents in the United Kingdom. There are at least three reasons why the United Kingdom is a well-suited case to study our backlash argument. *First*, its policy regime regarding immigrant integration and citizenship is usually described as “multiculturalist” or “individualistic-civic” with a liberal stance toward immigrants’ cultural and political rights (e.g. Weldon 2006, Koopmans et al. 2005). Resident immigrants from EU countries as well as from member states of the Commonwealth (which includes countries with large shares of Muslims such as Nigeria or even Muslim majority countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh) enjoy voting rights in local, European and in the case of Irish citizenship or qualifying Commonwealth members even in national parliamentary elections and referendums as well as the right to public office. The right to assembly, i.e. to hold public protests and demonstrations, is not tied to citizenship status. However, public demonstrations have to be registered with the local authorities in advance and may be banned if they endanger the public peace.

Second, due to immigration the UK has a large, growing and also politically active Muslim population. According to the official census data the Muslims population rose from 1.5 million or 2.8 percent in 2001 to 2.7 million or 4.8 percent in 2011 making it the second largest and fastest growing religious group in the UK (ONS 2015). Most Muslims in the UK are of South Asian decent (38% Pakistani and 15% Bangladeshi) and

concentrate in urban regions such as London and Birmingham. Importantly, they play an active role in British politics, with 14 Muslim MPs in 2017 and the first Muslim mayor in any Western capital.

Third, as many other Western democracies, the UK has experienced a surge in so-called “populist” sentiment and dissatisfaction with established politics. The most notable expression of this development is the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum where 51.9 percent of the voters had voted to exit the EU. Many observers agree that immigration was the key decisive issue for those citizens that voted “leave” in the referendum.

The results of our survey experiment broadly support the backlash argument and contribute to recent debates on public attitudes toward immigrants in general (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014) and Muslim immigrants in particular (Adida et al. 2016, Sniderman & Hagendorn 2007, Sniderman et al. 2014, Kalkan et al. 2009, Saroglou et al. 2009, Strabac and Listhaug 2008, Van der Noll 2010, Van der Noll et al. 2017, Spruyt and Van der Noll 2017, Wright et al. 2017).

Our finding has important implications because what citizens think about Muslim immigrants impacts several challenges facing Western democracies: concerns over civic cohesion (Kalkan et al. 2009), the acceptance of asylum policy regimes (Bansak et al. 2016), the political response to terrorism (Sides and Gross 2013, Dundwoody & McFarland 2017), and the support for right-wing populist parties (Norris 2005, Werts et al. 2013). The results of this paper open up a new way of understanding these attitudes because they focus on policy decisions of political actors. The current political conflict over Muslim integration then emerges not only as struggle between Muslim immigrants and their receiving society but between citizens and their political elites. We

believe that this paints a more realistic picture of current political challenges in Western democracies and of the inherent policy dilemma political elites face in the integration of Muslim immigrants.

How Does Integration Policy Affect Attitudes Toward Muslim Immigrants?

Recent studies have established a strong association between integration regulations and citizens' attitudes towards immigrants. All of these studies concur in the idea that integration policies have a direct influence on individual attitudes toward immigrants and that citizens tend to follow the general thrust of these policies. Weldon's (2006) study reports that countries with individualistic-civic regimes are more tolerant than collectivistic-ethnic regimes. Ariely (2012) suggests that individuals in countries with a *jus soli* regime express less xenophobic attitudes than individuals in countries with a *jus sanguinis* regime. Schlueter et al. (2013) find that more liberal citizenship regimes are related to lower levels of perceived immigrant threat. Finally, Wright (2011) argues that more immigrant-inclusive definitions of the national community are found in countries with a *jus soli* regime.

In sum, these studies adopt a socialization perspective, look at the average policy effects on the population and (at least implicitly) assume a consensus among citizens. After all, liberal regimes are supposed to breed liberal citizens whereas restrictive regimes lead to intolerant citizens. Clearly, this view leaves no place for disagreement and polarization over these policies. This strikes us as unrealistic given how polarized public debates over immigration are.

Instead of assuming citizen consensus, we build on studies showing that the general public holds conflicting views and often disagrees with the liberal policies implemented by political elites. Teney and Helbling (2014) show such attitudinal gaps for a range of

policy questions related to immigration, such as the opening of national borders. Similarly, Bansak et al. (2016) suggest that European publics have preferences for asylum policy that run counter to existing regulations. More importantly, this disconnect between citizen and political elites is a major source of citizen disaffection (Crouch 2004) and an important explanation for the raise of populist parties (Ignazi 1992; Mudde 2007).

We focus on the disagreement between citizens' preferences and elite decisions to understand citizens' opinions toward Muslim immigrants. The notion that policy decisions that are disliked or that threaten the status quo cause a negative reaction that adversely affects the group profiting from the policy is known as „opinion backlash“ (Bishin et al. 2016). Backlash reactions have been documented to affect several minority groups, including ethnic or racial groups (Bratton 2002, Preuhs 2007), women (Zagarri 2007), and sexual minorities (Fejes 2008, but see Bishin et al. 2016 and Fontana and Braman 2012).

We expect that similar mechanisms in public opinion will also apply to policy decisions regarding the rights of religious minorities such as Muslims in Europe. As Helbling and Traunmüller (2016a: 393) argue, accommodating Muslim immigrants' claims often “involves the changing of existing rules as well as the loss of longstanding traditions, valuable privileges, and maybe even everyday habits.” Some consider Muslims' cultural beliefs on gender roles or sexuality as incompatible with liberal and secular lifestyles (e.g. Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Saroglou et al. 2009; Van der Noll 2010; Helbling 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2014). Others argue that Muslim immigration threatens the collective identities in Europe because the latter are deeply rooted in a religious tradition of Christianity (Helbling and Traunmüller 2016). As a result, some citizens may view liberal policy decisions, which afford cultural or political rights to Muslim immigrants, as a threat to their own rights and identity.

Backlash to Policy Decisions

Following the idea of opinion backlash, our theoretical argument relates three variables to each other. We argue that *policy decisions* lead to a *reaction* among citizens, which then goes on to produce *feelings*, resulting in the following causal chain: Policy Decision (T) → Policy Reaction (M) → Feelings (Y). The key notion in our backlash argument is that it is citizens' *reaction* and more precisely their disagreement or rejection of a policy decision that triggers negative feelings toward groups benefitting from the decision.

To understand why this is the case and how we could think about the mechanism that produces this causal chain, we rely on what Stenner (2005: 13) has called “the authoritarian dynamic.” It describes a psychological process where an event *activates and interacts* with an individual predisposition which then goes on to produce an expression of intolerance (see also Feldman and Stenner 1997, Haidt 2016). A key feature of Stenner's (2005: 16) argument is to distinguish between the predisposition and its manifestations, or in terms of the causal chain, to separate M and Y. According to Stenner, a predisposition is simply a stable tendency to react in a particular way to certain objects or events. But this stable predisposition has to be “switched on” in order to manifest its effects. In this sense, it is itself a post-treatment variable. What makes the predisposition “authoritarian” is the preference for uniformity as well as the consequent preference for group authority over individual autonomy.

Now the question is when and under what conditions an authoritarian predisposition produces manifestations of intolerance. Here Stenner (2005: 17) argues that the predisposition is activated by “normative threat.” Normative threats are challenges to the existing order and in particular “questioned or questionable authorities and values” (Stenner 2005: 17). These threats – which may well include policy decisions that grant

political rights to groups with questionable values – trigger “authoritarian” preferences for conformity and the desire for restrictions of individual autonomy, including a ban of public demonstrations. Activated by normative threat the authoritarian predisposition then results in an increased rejection of and negative feelings toward out-groups, such as Muslim immigrants. Therefore, in a nutshell, “the authoritarian dynamic” describes a causal chain where normative threats (T) act as critical catalyst for the activation of authoritarian predispositions (M) which then in turn produce intolerant attitudes (Y).

An important assumption in this argument is that people vary in their predisposition so that different people react differently to instances of normative threat. Thus, we view feelings toward Muslim immigrants as resulting from an interaction between specific policy decisions and individuals’ policy preference. Negative feelings toward Muslims result when an individual disagrees with and rejects a liberal policy proposal and its expected consequences. Of course, the effect of policy decisions may also run in the opposite direction: Restrictive regulations which are viewed as being overly restrictive or even discriminating toward Muslims may evoke feelings of increased solidarity with this immigrant group. Either way, the effect of policy decisions on the attitudes toward Muslim immigrants will depend on citizens’ support or opposition of these decisions. This leads to the intricacy that the policy reaction (M) should be viewed as both, a mediator and a moderator at the same time: a *moderating mediator*.

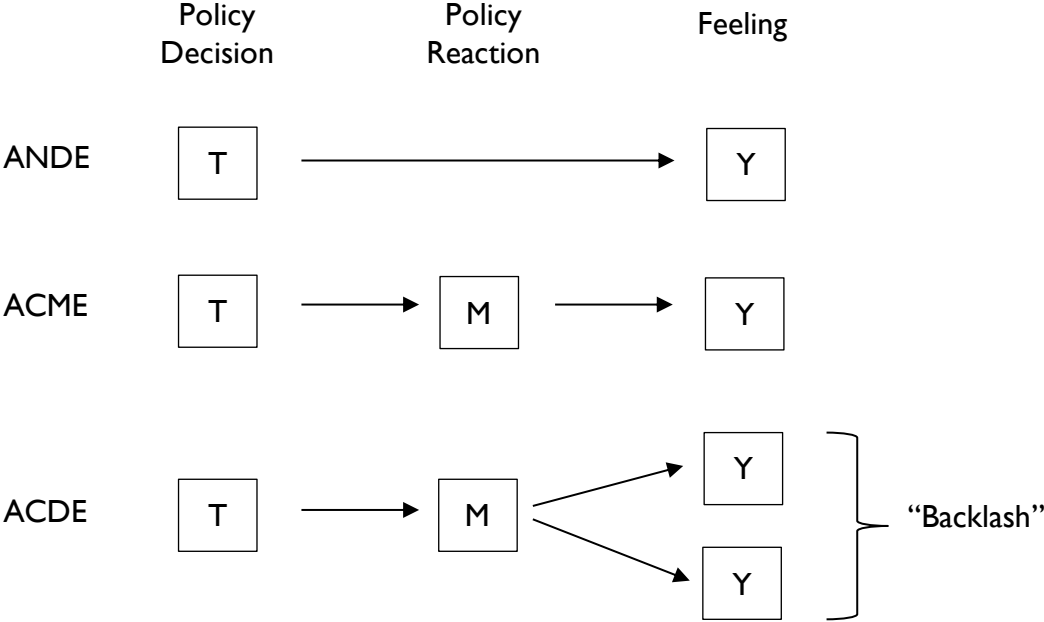
Feldman and Stenner (1997: 762) have shown “that certain types of threat polarize the attitudes of those high and low in authoritarianism, causing high authoritarians to become more intolerant and punitive, while low authoritarians become less so.” They also report that it is political threat – the perceived ideological disagreement with political elites – that has particularly polarizing consequences for the tolerance of out-groups. This is exactly the mechanism we believe to be at work in the context of integration

policy decisions and attitudes toward Muslim immigrants.

We give a more formal description of our hypothesized causal mechanism in the supporting information. There we define more precisely how we think about the policy effect on citizens' attitudes toward Muslim immigrants and lay open the assumptions needed to identify and estimate this effect. Since our theoretical argument stresses the importance of citizens' policy reaction, we decompose the policy effect in two parts: an indirect or mediated effect that runs via citizens' reaction – and thus captures our argument – and a direct effect that captures all possible remaining policy influences on citizens' attitudes (cf. Imai et al. 2011).

We are interested in the *average causal mediation effect* (ACME) i.e. how the population thinks about Muslim immigrants compared to how the population *would* think about Muslim immigrants *if we changed their policy reaction*, while holding the actual policy constant. In contrast, the *average natural direct effect* (ANDE) subsumes all policy effects that impact public opinion on Muslim immigration but which do not work through citizens' critical response. Finally our main argument is captured by the *average controlled direct effect* (ACDE). Whereas the ACME describes how the outcome changes with a treatment-induced *change* in the mediator, the ACDE captures the treatment-induced change in the outcome as a function of the *value* of the mediator: the first is the *mediating* effect of the mediator, the second is the *moderating* effect of the mediator (Imai et al. 2010a). In terms of our research interest it quantifies how a specific degree of support or opposition to liberal policy decisions affects its impact on attitudes toward Muslim immigrants.

Figure 1: The Causal Mechanisms of Backlash to Policy Decision



Data and Methods

Virtually all studies on the “effect” of integration policy on citizen attitudes are based on observational data (Ariely 2012, Weldon 2006, Wright 2011, Wright and Bloemraad 2012). This makes it difficult to rule out confounding factors and to identify the causal impact of political regulations on citizens’ attitudes. The greatest challenge is reverse causality, i.e. that policies are themselves the result of citizens’ collective preferences. To overcome this methodological challenge, we propose to investigate the effects of policy decisions on citizens’ attitudes using an experimental research design. We want to be clear from the outset that our experiment only tests the effect of one particular policy decision, in one particular domain, and at only one particular point of time. We thus do not expect to find either a strong, or a long lasting effect on citizens’ attitudes

(cf. Gaines et al. 2007). Nonetheless we think that this will shed some important new light on the micro-foundations of the effects of integration policy.

To test the causal impact of policy decisions on citizens' attitudes toward Muslim immigrants we conducted an online survey experiment in the UK in June 2015. Based on their online access panel of over 360'000 British adults, YouGov provided us with a sub-sample of N=4'468 respondents who are representative of the general national British population in terms of age, gender, social class, region, party identification and newspaper readership. Selected panelists were invited by email to visit a website where they could answer the survey and receive a small cash reward.¹ In our particular sample 51 percent respondents are female with a mean age of 50 years (SD: 15.8 years). The youngest is 18 and the oldest 86 years old. 91 percent identify as white British and 47 percent hold a university degree.

Experimental Setup

Our experimental design is based on a full factorial vignette analysis (Auspurg and Hinz 2015) that manipulates the immigrant status of a fictitious group (immigrants from Bulgaria, immigrants from Nigeria or native British), their religious denomination (Muslim or Christian) and their degree of religiosity (non-practicing, devout or radical). Importantly, respondents were randomly assigned to either of two different policy decisions of how to deal with the religious group's demand to hold public demonstrations. Whereas the first is a liberal policy response to the demands made by the group, the second adapts a restrictive policy approach. Respondents were asked

¹ For more information on YouGov's panel methodology see: <https://yougov.co.uk/about/panel-methodology/>.

whether they supported or opposed the policy proposal. We then recorded respondents' general feelings towards these groups and to what extent they thought these groups deserved welfare benefits and should have further political rights.

Each respondent was presented with a single vignette as follows (varying the groups' immigrant status, religion and religiosity, and policy decision):

*“Now we are interested in your opinion regarding some groups that are currently active in social and political life in Great Britain. Imagine a group of **immigrants from Nigeria** who are **devout Muslims who regularly go to the mosque and regularly pray at home**. Members of this group want to hold public rallies and demonstrations for a better recognition of their interests in Britain. The authorities propose to **permit** these demonstrations.”*

We restricted our vignettes to Muslim and Christian groups as the former constitute a controversial immigrant group in Great Britain (and most Western European countries) and the latter the traditional majority religion in Great Britain. In the vignettes seculars were defined as persons who never go to church/mosque and never pray. Devout persons regularly go to church/mosque and regularly pray. Radicals think that there is only one interpretation of the Bible/Koran that is for them more important than British laws. We decided to describe immigrants as coming from either Bulgaria or Nigeria as we wanted to select countries where both Muslims and Christians exist to make the vignettes realistic. In Nigeria, Muslims make up roughly 40 percent and in Bulgaria 10 percent of the population (Johnston & Grim 2013). Moreover, both nationalities constitute important migrant groups in Great Britain. Due to its colonial past there have been large migration flows from Nigeria over the last half-decade. EU enlargement in the mid-2000s has led to increased immigration from Eastern Europe.

Focusing on Bulgarian and Nigerian immigrants allows us to vary cultural distance and to differentiate between EU and non-EU migrants.

Importantly, respondents were randomly assigned to either of two different policy decisions concerning the group's exercise of the democratic right to hold public demonstrations (T). The first provides the respondents with a liberal policy decision to the demands made by the **religious** group (*"The authorities propose to **permit** these demonstrations."*) and the second frames the vignette in terms of a restrictive policy decision (*"The authorities propose to **ban** these demonstrations."*). Although respondents are only presented fictional descriptions, this experiment closely resembles how many citizens would experience the policy decisions in a more natural setting. The average citizen would learn about the authority decision in an indirect fashion, either by reading about it in a newspaper or hearing about it in a discussion among acquaintances. Concerns about the external validity of this experiment are therefore likely to be minor.

After the vignette on the public demonstrations and authorities' decision, we first elicited respondents' policy reaction (M) by asking: *"How would you react to such a **permit/ban**?"* The answer categories were "Strongly support", "Support", "Neither support nor oppose", "Oppose", and "Strongly Oppose". We then asked them to indicate their general feelings toward the religious group just described in the vignette. The question text reads as follows:

"Now we would like to know what your general feelings are about this group. We'd like you to rate them with a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel favourably and warm toward them; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favourably towards them and that you don't care

too much for them. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward them you would rate them at 50 degrees.”

We use the feeling thermometer scores as the final outcome variable (Y) in our analysis and test how it is affected by the policy treatment and citizens' reaction to the regulation proposed by the authorities.

Results

A First Look at the Experiment

Before directly testing our backlash argument using causal mediation analysis, we first provide a brief description of the outcomes of our survey experiment. For each of the 36 treatment combinations (i.e. for 3 immigrant groups x 2 religions x 3 types of religiosity x 2 policy decisions), we look at the average policy reaction (Table 1) as well as the average feeling thermometer scores (Table 2). We structure the discussion along the two key comparisons between liberal and restrictive policy (permits vs. bans) and between Muslim and Christian groups.

Table 1: Support for the Policy Decision to Either Ban or Permit Public Demonstrations

		Non-practicing			Devout			Radical		
		Ban	Permit	Diff.	Ban	Permit	Diff.	Ban	Permit	Diff.
Native Britons	Christian	2.6	3.3	+0.07*	2.4	3.5	+0.11*	3.0	3.0	+/-0
	Muslim	2.9	3.0	+0.01	2.9	2.9	+/-0	3.9	2.2	-1.7*
	Diff.	+0.03	-0.03		+0.05*	-0.06*		+0.09*	-0.08*	
Immigrants: Bulgaria	Christian	3.3	2.5	-0.08*	3.0	2.8	-0.02	3.5	2.4	-1.1*
	Muslim	3.4	2.5	-0.09*	3.1	2.6	-0.05*	3.8	2.3	-1.5*
	Diff.	+0.01	+/-0		+0.01	-0.02		+0.03	-0.01	
Immigrants: Nigeria	Christian	3.2	2.5	-0.07*	3.0	3.1	+0.01	3.5	2.4	-1.1*
	Muslim	3.0	2.6	-0.04	3.2	2.5	-0.07*	4.0	2.1	-1.9*
	Diff.	-0.02	+0.01		+0.02	-0.06*		+0.05	-0.03	

Note: Means on a 5-point scale reported. Higher values indicate higher support to the policy decision. * Bonferroni corrected $p < .05$.

Overall, respondents favor restrictive rather than liberal policy toward the right to demonstrate. Support for bans is significantly higher than for permissions in no less than 10 out of 18 total comparisons (we account for multiple comparisons by relying on the Bonferroni correction). In fact, we only find positive effects of liberal policy decisions² for native Britons and only if the group is described as secular or devout Christian (+0.7* and +0.11*, respectively), but not for native Muslims or radical groups. Perhaps unsurprisingly, preferences for allowing the demonstrations of native radical Muslims are significantly and markedly less frequent than for their banning (-1.7*). This particular group is likely viewed as highly problematic if not outright dangerous to British society.

The degree of religiosity seems to be more important than religious faith per se. Whether a group is described as Muslim or Christian does matter, but it is less relevant for citizens' policy reaction than might be expected. Differences between these two faith groups are only significant in 5 out of 18 comparisons, four of which refer to natives, where Christian demonstrations are generally met with more support than Muslim demonstrations. But this holds only for devout and to a stronger degree for radical groups, not for secular groups. When it comes to immigrants, citizens do not differentiate between Muslim and Christian groups at all (nor between Bulgarians or Nigerians for that matter). This is likely due to the fact that immigrants' right to demonstrate is generally met with low support in the first place. The only exception to this general pattern are devout Nigerians where respondents are again significantly less likely to support public demonstrations for Muslims (-.08*).

² These effects are simple *sample average treatment effects* (SATE), i.e. differences in means between the liberal and the restrictive policy conditions.

Turning to the feeling thermometer scores we find no noteworthy differences between the liberal and the restrictive policy decision conditions (Table 2). Not only are the sizes of the differences generally small, they also do not reach conventional levels of significance for any of the 18 comparisons. While this finding indicates that there is no direct effect of policy decisions on respondents' feelings toward religious groups, it leaves open the idea that any such effect depends on citizens' policy reaction (which we will address head-on in the following section). We also fail to find notable differences in citizens' feelings toward Muslims and Christians. Muslims are met with significantly cooler feelings in only 3 out of 18 comparisons and all of these instances refer to radical religious groups. Secular or devout Muslims are not significantly less liked than secular or devout Christians. Again, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the by far least liked groups are the radical religious.

Table 2: Feeling Thermometer Scores Toward Religious Group

		Non-practicing			Devout			Radical		
		Ban	Permit	Diff.	Ban	Permit	Diff.	Ban	Permit	Diff.
Native Britons	Christian	54	53	-1	53	50	-3	30	30	+/-0
	Muslim	51	51	+/-0	50	48	-2	20	18	-2
	Diff.	-3	-2		-3	-2		-10*	-12*	
Immigrants: Bulgaria	Christian	41	41	+/-0	49	47	-2	23	28	+5
	Muslim	43	40	-3	44	43	-1	20	19	-1
	Diff.	+2	-1		-5	-4		-3	-9	
Immigrants: Nigeria	Christian	40	37	-3	50	47	-3	27	24	-3
	Muslim	46	43	-3	41	37	-4	14	18	+4
	Diff.	+6	+6		-9	-10		-13*	-6	

Note: Means on a scale from 0 to 100 reported. Higher values indicate warmer feeling toward the group. * Bonferroni corrected $p < .05$.

How Citizens' Reactions Mediate the Effect of Policy on Feelings

The estimations of the different causal effects (ACME, ANDE, and ACDE) proceed in several steps (see the supporting information for a more technical description). We first assess whether liberal or restrictive policy decisions by the authorities (T) have a causal effect on citizens' policy reactions (M). Here, we combined the answers of both experimental groups such that higher values correspond to greater *support of the permission* or greater *opposition to the ban* of the demonstration. This regression equation includes all vignette characteristics along with basic pre-treatment covariates: sex, age, education, political ideology and religiosity.³ Since we found that empirically the distinction between Bulgarians and Nigerians did not matter much, we collapsed both groups into a single category "immigrant."⁴ We rely on OLS regression because it is easy to interpret and, more importantly, it allows for a more straightforward sensitivity analysis (see further below).

In a second step, we model citizens' general feeling toward that group (Y) using a second equation including the treatment (T), the mediator (M), vignette characteristics, and the same basic pre-treatment controls. We also enter a multiplicative interaction term between policy decision and citizen reaction to allow for the possibility that the

³ These covariates are coded as follows: sex (1- female, 0 – male), age in years, education (1 – university degree and higher, 0 – less than university degree), left-right-ideology (*„In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 1 means the left and 7 means the right?“*), and subjective religiosity (*„Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? 0- not at all religious to 10- very religious“*).

⁴ It might be that although Nigerians are culturally more distant than Bulgarians they are still familiar to British natives as they come from a former colony and have been in Britain for a longer time than Bulgarians. Cultural distance and familiarity effects might therefore cancel each other out.

mediation effect depends on treatment status. Based on the estimates from these two model equations, we then employ the algorithm proposed by Imai et al. (2010a, b) to calculate the ACME and ANDE. Finally, we estimate the ACDE using the algorithm proposed by Acharya et al. (2016) in the following section. We deal with missing data in key covariates (respondent's education, religiosity, and left-right-ideology) by imputing five complete data sets and running all models on each of these data sets (Little and Rubin 1987). In the following we present the combined results.

Model 1 in table 3 presents the results of the first regression equation for the effect of liberal policy decisions on respondents' policy reaction. A simple comparison of liberal and restrictive authority decision reveals that a liberal decision gains significantly *lower* support from respondents (-.09*), although the substantive effect size is not particularly great.

As before, respondents differentiate between groups and are less likely to support public demonstrations of Muslims than of Christians (-.33**). However, they are even less likely to support public demonstrations of immigrants (-.42**). Radical religious groups are met with the least amount of support (-.46**). This does not seem to be an expression of anti-religious sentiment. Indeed, devout groups are more readily granted the right to hold public demonstrations, than the non-practicing (.13**) who are the reference category.

Respondents themselves also differ in their policy reaction. While both females and older respondents tend to be less supportive (-.17** and -.09**, respectively), higher levels of education are clearly related to more support (.34**). Ideologically right-leaning respondents are less likely to support a liberal policy decision toward public demonstrations (-.30**). Interestingly, we find no relation between respondents' subjective religiosity and their reactions. Adjusting for these pre-treatment covariates

leaves the coefficients vignette characteristics unchanged.

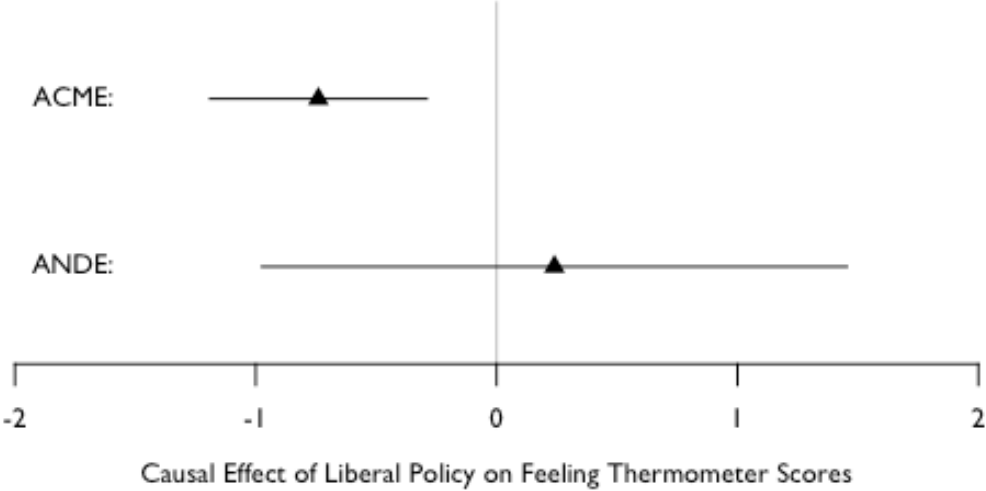
Having demonstrated that policy decisions have a causal effect on citizens' policy reaction, we now seek to understand whether citizen reaction triggers a change in more general group evaluations. Model 2 presents the results of the second regression equation for respondents' feeling thermometer scores, which includes citizens' reaction and also interacts it with the policy decision. As before we find that respondents have cooler feelings toward Muslims (-1.88**), immigrants (-3.34**), and especially radical religious groups (-18.67**). In general, women (3.49**), older (.65*) and more religious respondents (1.12**) have warmer feelings, and political right leaning respondents have cooler feelings (-.86**). But most importantly for our present purposes, we find a conditional effect of liberal policy decisions on feeling thermometer scores that depends on respondents' reaction (1.93**). The negative impact of liberal policy decisions becomes weaker and eventually turns positive as citizens' support increases.

Table 3: Regression models of the causal effect of policy decisions (T) on citizen reaction (M) and general feelings toward religious groups (Y).

	M1: Citizen Reaction (M)		M2: Feeling Thermometer (Y)	
Liberal Policy (T)	-.09*	-.04	-5.25**	-.11
	(.04)		(1.49)	
Citizen Reaction (M)	--	--	5.15**	.25
			(.78)	
Liberal Policy (T) x Citizen Support (M)	--	--	1.93**	.04
			(.50)	
<i>Vignette Characteristics</i>				
Muslim	-.33**	-.14	-1.88**	-.04
	(.04)		(.62)	
Devout	.13**	.05	-1.30	.02
	(.04)		(.75)	
Radical	-.46**	-.18	-18.67**	-.36
	(.04)		(.75)	
Immigrant	-.42**	-.16	-3.34**	-.06
	(.04)		(.66)	
<i>Respondent Characteristics</i>				
Female	-.17**	-.07	3.49**	.07
	(.04)		(.61)	
Age/10	-.09**	-.12	.65**	.04
	(.01)		(.20)	
Higher Education	.34**	.14	-.80	-.01
	(.04)		(.63)	
Left-Right-Ideology	-.18**	-.21	-.86**	-.05
	(.01)		(.27)	
Subjective Religiosity	.01	.03	1.12**	.13
	(.01)		(.11)	
Intercept	4.49**		20.82**	
	(.11)		(1.89)	
N	3922		3922	
R ²	.19		.41	

Note: Unstandardized coefficients, standardized beta coefficients, and standard errors in parentheses. Combined results from 5 multiply imputed data sets. * p<.05, ** p<.01

Figure 2: Average causal mediation effect (AMCE) and average direct effect (ANDE) of policy decisions on feeling thermometer toward religious groups along with 95 percent confidence intervals (based on 1000 simulations). Combined effects from 5 multiply imputed data sets.



Based on these two regression equations we can now derive our causal quantities of interest. This is done by first predicting the policy reaction under the two policy conditions (keeping all other variables at their empirical values) and then plugging these predicted values into the predictive formulas for the feeling thermometer scores, again setting the policy conditions to its two values (and again leaving the remaining covariates at their empirical values). The propagation of inferential uncertainty from the first to the second equation and the resulting 95 percent confidence intervals for the ACMEs and ANDEs are obtained by running $s = 1000$ simulations.

Figure 2 presents the average causal mediation effect (ACME) and average natural direct effect (ANDE) of policy decisions on feeling thermometer scores. The first effect quantifies the difference in how the population feels about religious groups compared to how the population *would* feel about the groups *if we only changed their policy*

reaction, but kept the actual policy constant. The second effect quantifies the difference in how the population feels about religious groups if we changed the policy but kept their reaction constant.⁵

While the estimated ACME is statistically significant, the estimated ANDE is not. This suggests that the policy treatment of authority permission causes negative general feelings toward religious groups because citizens tend to react negatively to liberal regulation of public demonstrations of religious groups. Although the reported effect is again small in substantive terms (-0.53 [95% CI: -.96, -.01]), it does provide evidence that changes in feelings toward religious groups result from citizen reactions triggered by regulatory political decisions.

Further analyses presented in the supporting information (figures S1 and S2) suggest that the policy effect on citizens' feelings does not affect all religious groups the same way. In particular, citizens are especially critical of Muslim immigrants' public demonstrations and respond with greater dislike of this group when authorities decide to follow a permissive approach. Citizens' backlash against liberal policy decisions is also stronger for devout and secular groups than radical religious groups. This may be due to a floor effect: Radical groups are met with such cool feelings that policy decisions are unlikely to further add to the already pronounced dislike.

⁵ We report the *averaged* ACME and ANDE, averaging over the liberal and restrictive policy conditions. The ACME for the liberal policy condition is -.44 [95% CI: -.81, -.07] and for the restrictive policy condition it is -.61 [-1.10, -.12]. The ANDE under liberal policy is .13 [-1.09, 1.35] and .36 [95% CI: -.87, 1.59] under restrictive policy. The average ANDE is .24 [-.98, 1.46]. See the supporting information for a precise definition of these quantities.

Potential Threats to Inference

Since the causal interpretation of policy effects rests on the untestable assumption of no unobserved confounders of the relation between citizens' reaction (M) and their feelings toward religious groups (Y), we conducted a sensitivity analysis to assess the sensitivity of our results to this assumption (Imai et al. 2010a) and document it in the supporting information (see figures S3 and S4). Here it suffices to note that a violation of this assumption is unlikely to have major consequences for our main inference.

Our result also rests on the assumption that the causal order indeed runs from citizens' reaction to feelings and not the other way around, i.e. in the sense that liberal policy decision triggers a dislike of a religious group which then leads to a negative policy reaction. To bolster our causal claim, we rely on three observations.

First, we reverse our causal mediation analysis by treating feeling thermometer scores as mediators (M) and policy reaction as outcome (Y). We obtain a non-significant ACME of -0.02 [95% CI: -0.04, 0.01] and a significant but small ANDE of -0.07 [-0.14, -0.01]. In other words, the effect of authorities' liberal policy decision on respondents' policy reaction is not mediated through feelings, but instead runs directly from decision to respondents' opposition.

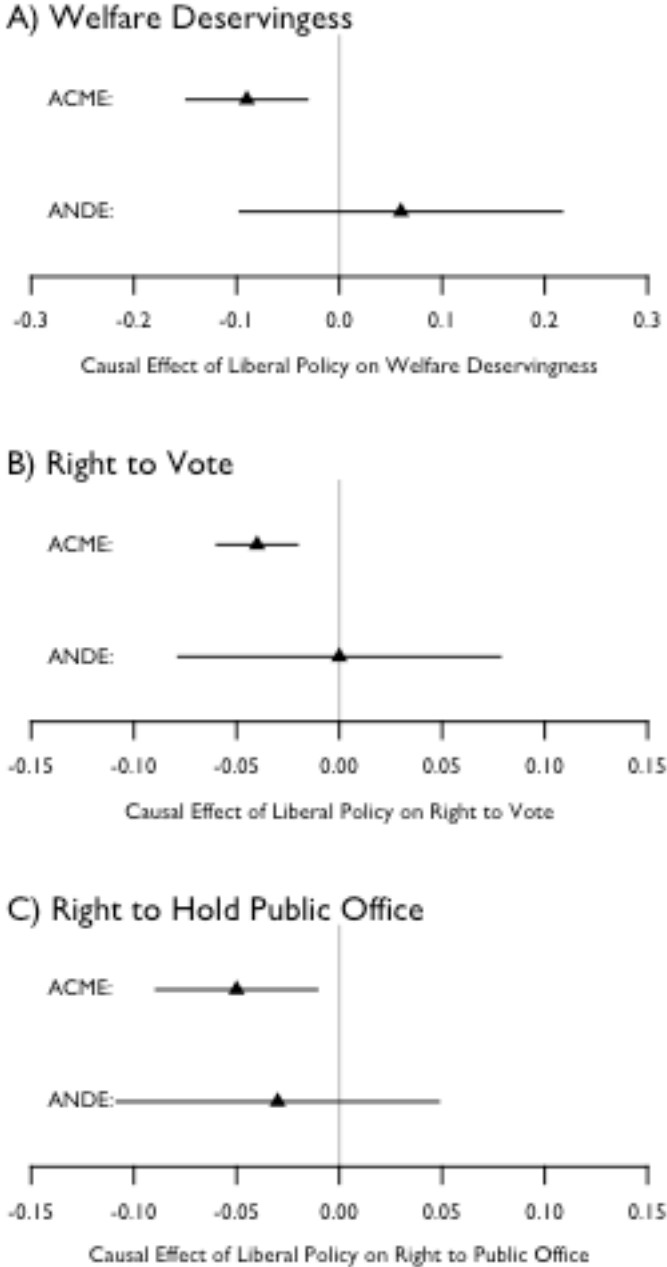
Second, our causal perspective is supported by a classical experiment in the study of racial prejudice. In their famous "mere mention" experiment Sniderman and Piazza (1993) also relate policy preference to feelings toward a group (opposition to affirmative action and feelings toward Blacks). Crucially and unlike our experimental set-up they randomized the order between the policy question and the feeling question and found that raising the issue of affirmative action "was sufficient to excite a statistically significant response, *demonstrating that dislike of particular racial policies can provoke dislike of blacks*" (Sniderman and Piazza 1993: 104, emphasis added).

Third, we can look at other outcomes (Y) where the reverse causal direction is less plausible than for general feelings. For instance, we would find it unconvincing when considering the question whether citizens view a religious group worthy of welfare or whether citizens want them to have the right to vote or hold public office. Figure 3 presents the results for attitudes toward a) welfare deservingness of religious groups, b) their right to vote, and c) their right to hold public offices (see the supporting information for further details).⁶ As there are no significant ANDEs we can rule out any alternative causal mechanisms that do not run via citizens' reaction to policy decision. The ACMEs clearly echo the results found for the feeling thermometer scores: liberal policy decision has a negative effect on citizens' attitudes toward religious groups, which is entirely mediated via their negative reaction. The ACME of liberal policy decision on attitudes of welfare deservingness is -0.09 [-0.15, -0.03]. The ACME of political regulation on citizens' willingness to extend the right to vote to religious groups is -0.04 [-0.06, -0.02]. Finally, the ACMEs on citizens' opinion on the groups' right to hold public offices is -0.05 [-0.09, -0.01]. As before, the effect sizes are quite small in substantive terms. Nonetheless, they are reasonably robust and suggest that liberal policy decision leads to a negative reaction among citizens, which in turn will make them less generous toward the groups benefitting from the policy. When authorities

⁶ The wording of these survey questions is as follows. Welfare deservingness: „Assume that a single mother from this group with two children is unemployed. To what extent do you think she deserves help from the government? Very undeserving of help from the government (0) to Very deserving of help the government (10)“. Right to vote: „To what extent do you agree that the members of this group should be allowed: to vote in national elections? Agree strongly (1) to Disagree strongly (5)“. Right to hold public office: „To what extent do you agree that the members of this group should be allowed: to hold public office? Agree strongly (1) to Disagree strongly (5)“. We reversed the answer categories of the last two items so that higher scores indicate higher levels of agreement.

are permissive, citizens are more likely to deny religious groups welfare benefits and the fundamental political rights of active and passive democratic participation. Since we find very similar results for these more specific questions, this strengthens our initial causal story.

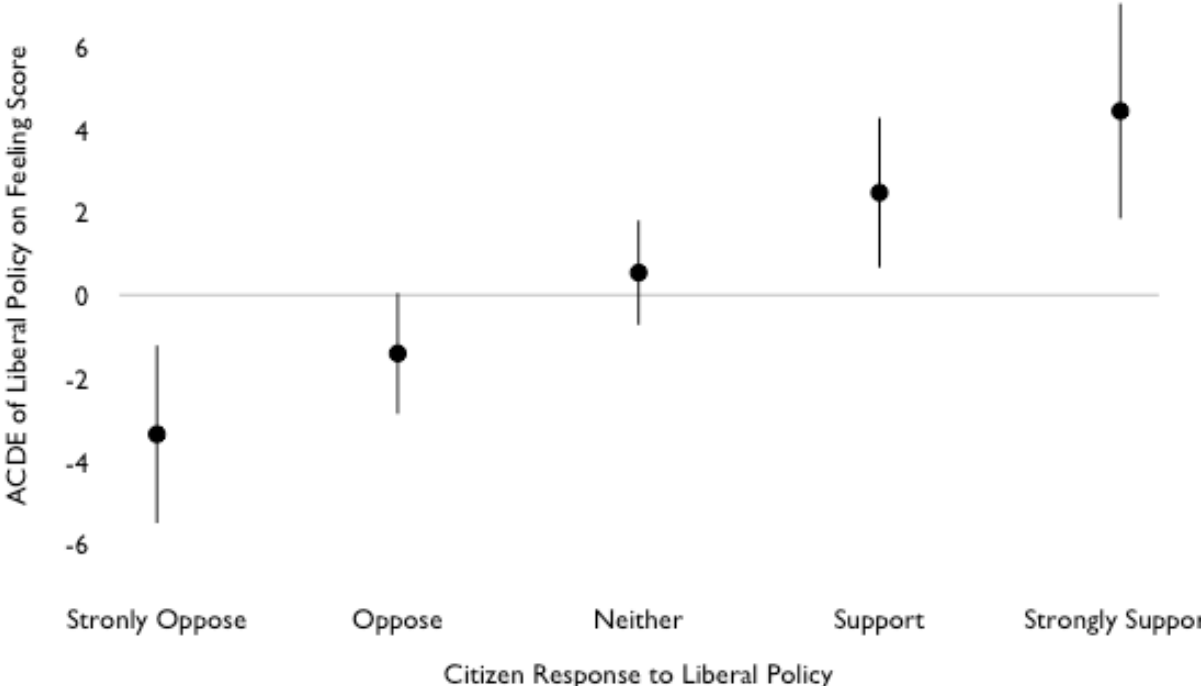
Figure 3: ACMEs and ANDEs of policy decisions on citizen attitudes toward A) welfare deservingness of religious groups, B) their right to vote, and C) right to hold public office. Based on the results in table S2 in the Supplemental Information. 95 percent confidence intervals are based on 1000 simulations.



How Citizens' Reactions Moderate the Effect of Policy on Feelings

The central element of our backlash argument is that the effect of policy decisions on feelings toward religious groups depends on citizens' policy preferences. We now shed more light on this causal mechanism by taking a look at the ACDE presented in figure 4. The ACDE illustrates how the effect of political regulation is moderated by respondents' particular reaction to the authorities' decision, i.e. their degree of support or opposition toward liberal policy decisions. This operationalizes our backlash argument.

Figure 4: How the effect of liberal policy on feelings toward religious groups depends on citizens' reactions. ACDEs based on model 2 in table 3 with simulated 95 percent confidence intervals.



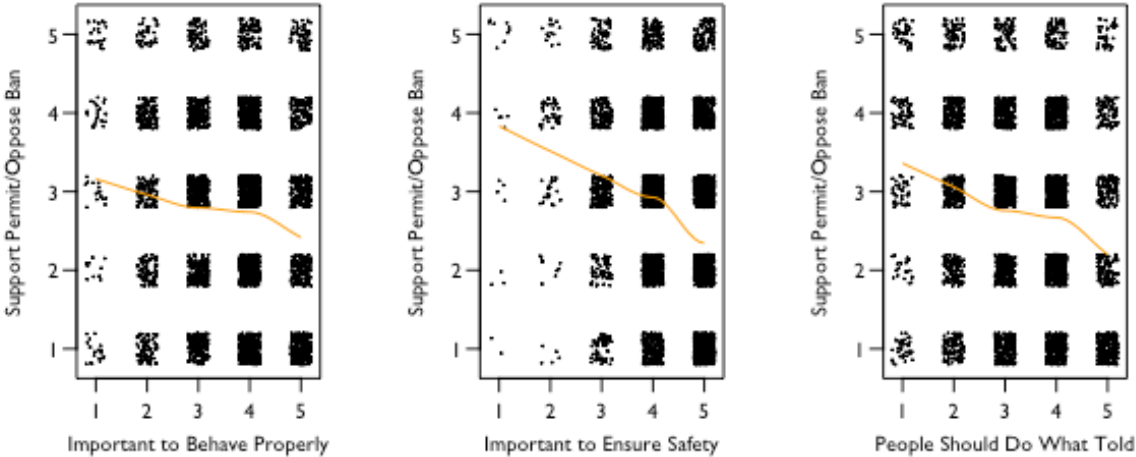
Liberal respondents who support the right to demonstrate *increase* their warm feelings under liberal regulation. The respective ACDE is 2.5 [95% CI: 0.8, 4.2] for supporters of the policy and 4.4 [95% CI: 1.9, 6.9] for strong supporters. Conversely, respondents who oppose a liberal policy decision *reduce* their warm feelings toward religious groups under liberal policy: by -1.4 [95% CI: -2.8, 0.0] for those opposed and -3.3 [95% CI: -5.4, -1.3] for those strongly opposed. Thus, liberal policy decisions have completely opposite effects on the attitudes of religious groups, depending on whether citizens oppose or support it. The overall negative mediated impact is due to the fact that considerably more citizens favor a restrictive approach and liberal decisions by the authorities push even more people in this direction.

Since we rely on Stenner's (2005) "authoritarian dynamic" to understand the psychological mechanism behind this polarizing backlash effect, a remaining question is whether citizens' policy reactions are indeed related to authoritarian dispositions. While the experiment itself does not include measures of authoritarianism as potential moderating mediators it is possible to verify that respondents with authoritarian dispositions indeed react to the policy decision in predictable ways (i.e. support a ban and oppose a permit). Our survey includes three items that tap into authoritarian dispositions that were asked *before* the survey experiment.⁷

⁷ These items elicit to what degree respondents agree with the following statements: "*It is important to always behave properly. You want to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.*", "*It is important that the government ensures the county's safety against all threats. The state should be strong so it can defend its citizens.*", and "People should do what they're told. People should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching." [Disagree strongly (1) to Agree strongly (5)]. Note that they are pre-treatment variables and thus cannot be *activated* by the treatment, as the theory suggests.

As figure 5 shows, stronger agreement with these authoritarian ideas clearly correspond to lower support for permitting demonstrations or opposition to banning demonstrations. The correlation between supporting demonstrations and the view that one should always behave properly is $-.11$ ($p < .001$), the view that government should ensure safety $-.26$ ($p < .001$), and the view that people should do what they are told $-.19$ ($p < .001$). The three items form a reasonable scale tapping into the same underlying authoritarian trait (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$) and a simple mean score is also significantly related to respondents' policy reaction ($-.23$, $p < .001$). We interpret this as supporting evidence for our idea that respondents' policy reactions are indeed rooted in authoritarian dispositions which, when activated, lead to feelings of intolerance.

Figure 5: How the policy reactions relate to authoritarian dispositions. Jittered data with scatter plot smoother.



Conclusion

Political conflicts over Muslim immigration, the public demands of this minority group and their political rights have advanced to challenges in almost all Western democracies. In this paper, we have demonstrated that policy decisions can shape citizens' views on Muslim immigrants and their rights. Based on a survey experiment we were able to show that liberal policy decisions lead to a polarization in attitudes toward Muslims: Citizens who agree with a liberal policy decision become more sympathetic, while those in favor of a restrictive decisions become more critical of Muslim immigrants.

This finding on opinion backlash to integration policy decisions has several important implications. It indicates that political elites face a considerable dilemma when regulating Muslim integration. Even well intentioned liberal policy may harm Muslim immigrants because it risks a backlash among more conservative or authoritarian citizens and increases opposition to the rights of this particular minority group. This insight qualifies previous research on the socialization effects of integration policy regimes in the explanation of citizens' attitudes toward minorities which suggests that liberal policy regimes which grant wide ranging political and cultural rights will make citizens more tolerant (Weldon 2006, Wright 2011, Schlueter et al. 2013).

Our findings call this optimistic view into question and suggest that – at least in the short run – integration policy is not the subject of a shared consensus among citizens, but one of polarization. Citizens are not simply socialized into an integration regime, they form their opinion toward Muslim immigrants in a critical response to the regulatory approaches suggested by political actors. Policies that threaten the status quo are rejected by many and result in counter-productive outcomes in the sense that some citizens are less likely to accept Muslim immigrants and their political demands. This seems to limit the strategic options of political actors who, by devising liberal policy,

not only risk losing citizens' electoral support but also failing their intended policy goal. Yet, it would be wrong to conclude that yielding to the intolerance of some and restricting political rights on the basis of religion could be seen as a viable solution to this dilemma.

On a cautionary note, it is understood that our experiment is limited in that it only tested the effect of a single and also very specific policy decision. We would also like to stress that the effect sizes we uncovered are rather small in substantive terms. Indeed, we should not expect strong effects, nor should we expect them to last very long. We are nonetheless convinced that our finding provides important insights into the micro-foundations of the effects of integration policy regimes and the democratic dilemma between public opinion and minority rights.

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