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Levels of Media Consumption and Muslim Intolerance

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Levels of Media Consumption and Muslim Intolerance

Abstract

Exploring the various factors that lead to Muslim intolerance, specifically the role of media consumption and the control variables of age and education levels

Keywords

Media Consumption, Muslim Intolerance

Disciplines

Communication | Islamic Studies | Models and Methods | Political Science

Comments

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**The Age of Islamophobia: The Role of Media Consumption in Influencing
Tolerance Towards Muslims**

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3 November 2017*

I. Introduction

With 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide, Islam is the second largest religion across the globe. Roughly 3.3 million of those individuals reside in the United States of America. Strengthening in numbers, this religion is often subject to controversy, oppressive stereotypes, and prejudices (2017 “Islamophobia in the USA”). A surge in anti-Muslim rhetoric circulates the world. Believing that followers of Islam are inherently violent, aggressive, and intolerant of democratic institutions are just a few of many ideas that people might have in regards to Muslims. Islamophobia is an “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam” (2017 “Islamophobia”). This phenomenon pervades too many societies, potentially contributing to negative impacts on Muslim communities—Muslim communities that do not always condone abhorrence or hatred.

Interjecting itself into the everyday lives of people, the mass media serves as an outlet for the display of Islamophobic dialogue and propaganda. News platforms may overtly or subtly promote fear of Muslims through their coverage of current events. Vilifying Muslims through cartoons, images, and cruel language, the media sometimes portrays these people as dangerous outcasts. As Edward Mitchell IV of the Council on American-Islamic Relations admits, “If I was not a Muslim and all I know is what I saw in the evening news, then I might be afraid of Muslims too” (2017 “Islamophobia in the USA”).

The growing presence of both Muslim populations and the media entices social scientists to study the origins of anti-Muslim biases. Partnering and cooperating with Muslims is essential to the national health of countries. Thus, it is vital for the fostering of religious tolerance and cultural alliances to discuss the role of the media in perpetuating this strand of religious bigotry.

My research studies the connections between forces that potentially give rise to anti-Muslim sentiments. The following paper aims to identify the sources of negative perceptions of Muslims. Furthermore, my research question is as follows: ***under what conditions are individuals more likely to be less tolerant towards Muslims?***

II. Literature Review

Preceding the 9/11 attacks in the United States, terrorist activity and its coverage by the media has produced a climate that fosters anti-Muslim sentiments. Fewer than one percent of Muslims around the world have participated in militant activity in the past twenty five years (“Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West”). Nevertheless, oppressive and discriminatory prejudices ensue.

Political scientists Christine Ogan, Lars Willnat, Rosemary Pennington, and Manaf Bashir conducted a 2014 study that examined the factors that led to Islamophobic attitudes in several European countries and the United States. All of these countries have sizable and growing Muslim populations (Ogan, Willnat, Pennington & Bashir 2014). At the beginning of this study, the political scientists explored whether anti-Muslim attitudes have increased or decreased in Europe and the United States over the past several years. Special emphasis was placed on the interaction of political ideology and religiosity (Ogan et al. 2014). Afterwards, they analyzed the potential relationship between exposure to news coverage about Muslim-related issues and attitudes towards Muslims in the United States.

After considerable analysis, their findings indicated that negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam are most frequently and strongly associated with political conservatism on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (Ogan et al.

2014). Those who identify as politically conservative in the United States, France, Germany, and Spain generally viewed Muslims in a more negative light than liberals. Although the connection between religiosity and political affiliation was supported by European respondents, this was not the case with Americans (Ogan et al. 2014). Furthermore, the data revealed that perceptions of Muslims and Islam are relatively independent from religious beliefs. Instead, they are more strongly influenced by political viewpoints (Ogan et al. 2014). In regards to the focus on the media, the findings support the hypothesis that media exposure to Muslim-related topics might have an effect on feelings about Muslims and Islam. A noteworthy discovery is that being classified as a Republican was a predictor for holding the beliefs that Islam is a religion of violence and that Muslims should be limited in their freedoms (Ogan et. al 2014). Thus, does the previous finding indicate that those with exposure to conservative media are likely to endorse negative ideas about Muslims? Furthermore, does conservative media encourage Islamophobic thoughts more than liberal media outlets?

Throughout the world, Muslims admit that they often feel disrespected by Western nations. Although a smaller percentage is found in European nations, 52% of Americans report that Westerners refuse to respect Muslim communities (“Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West”). Even among Americans who declare that they have no prejudice against Muslims, one-third say that they have unfavorable opinions about Islam, 36% (“Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West”). It is not surprising that those with the most amount of prejudice against Muslims are those who have the least favorable views of Islam, 91% (“Islamophobia: Understanding Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West”).

Similarly, three studies tested by a group of social scientists analyzed the effects of terrorism news on prejudice against outgroups (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof & Vermeulen 2008). The researchers hypothesized that news coverage about terrorism would remind individuals of their mortality, which would, in turn, increase prejudiced attitudes. The three studies incorporated different terrorist activities and documented reactions from randomly selected respondents (Das et al. 2008). Providing a unique account of prejudice, these studies are the first to document a causal chain from a terrorist act to death-related thoughts to prejudice, and propose a media priming account between prejudice and death-related thoughts (Das et al. 2008).

The previous studies emphasize how the media may influence human thought-processes, thereby making it a powerful and dangerous weapon for those who wish to encourage Islamophobia. As a result of these prejudices, Muslim communities might obliterate in legitimacy—such obliteration might stem from the media.

On a similar note, a 2017 study looks at the association between news exposure and anti-Muslim prejudice in one of the most culturally tolerant nations in the world (Shaver, Sibley, Osborne & Bulbulia 2017). New Zealand has a relatively accepting population, making it an interesting country to study in regards to how the media can shape negative attitudes towards outgroups. The article examines the feelings of Muslims, Arabs, and Asians (Shaver et al. 2017). Since New Zealand is home to predominantly tolerant citizens, one would assume that it might not be exceedingly vulnerable to the media. The political scientists in this study used a multitude of variables during their research. While measuring the feelings of warmth and anger of the respondents, the researchers took into consideration the levels of education, socioeconomic deprivation, and news consumption (Shaver et al. 2017).

After collecting and analyzing the data, they found strong evidence that media consumption is associated with great anger towards Muslims (Shaver et al. 2017). Although support is strongest for the anger towards Arabs, this association runs in the same direction as the one that pertains to Muslims. Alternatively, there is zero support for

the association between news exposure and anger towards Asians (Shaver et al. 2017). Although the study does not establish causation, it reveals a linear association between media exposure and Muslim prejudice in a society with no history of Muslim conflicts or issues (Shaver et al. 2017). This case deepens my fascination about the influence of media and anti-Muslim sentiments, being that no association between exposure to the news and prejudices against Asians exist. Thus, negative feelings specifically pertain to Muslims.

Similarly, another study empirically examines the influence of the media on three different occasions: the stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists, perceptions of Muslims as aggressive, and the support for policies that explicitly harm Muslims (Saleem, Prot, Anderson & Lemieux 2017). The first study indicates that exposure to news coverage that depicts Muslims as terrorists is associated with support for military action. In addition, the second study extends these results by studying the effects of media exposure and the belief that Muslims are aggressive (Saleem et al. 2017). The results also reveal that long-term exposure to terrorism news is positively associated with perceptions of Muslims as aggressive (Saleem et al. 2017). Coinciding with the results obtained from the third study, the researchers found that short-term exposure to news portraying Muslims as terrorists intensify support for public policies that explicitly harm Muslims (Saleem et al. 2017).

The ability for the media to insert anti-Muslim prejudices is not verified; however, findings indicate that it possesses some level of influence over the beliefs about Muslims. For instance, Niaz Ahmed examined the news coverage of Muslims and issues in Tamil dailies, and hence, the representation of Islam and Muslims in said region (Ahmed 2016). He specifically looked at how Muslims and Islam are viewed in regards to the Tirunelveli district that treats Muslims as a minority group. Serving as an effective and powerful medium to influence public opinion, Tamil News Dailies may be a potential source for the cultivation of negative feelings about certain groups of people (Ahmed 2016). Ahmed carried out a content analysis, making replicable and valid inferences, and chose four major newspapers that report coverage on Muslims. Through his findings, it is unequivocal that Tamil Dailies present Muslims and the religion of Islam in a negative light (Ahmed 2016). The data compounds the concepts of otherness and hatred towards Islam and Muslims. Nevertheless, one of the major shortcomings of this study is that the political scientist fails to compile a diverse collection of respondents from different political, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds (Ahmed, 2016). Nevertheless, his findings support the idea that media can potentially insert vile thoughts and images about Muslims into the minds of humans.

Furthermore, other studies produce findings that suggest that positive media portrayals of outgroups yield positive attitudes towards said outgroups (Bodenhausen, Schwarz, Bless, & Waenke 1995; Mastro & Tukachinsky 2013; Power, Murphy, & Coover 1996; Ramasubramanian 2007, 2011, 2015). In the wake of rapid media coverage and greater emphasis on following the news, individuals do not inevitably produce negative attitudes towards outgroups discussed in the media. For instance, studies find that viewing favorable media portrayal increases sympathy and compassion for outgroups (Bodenhausen et al. 1995; Power et al. 1996). Nevertheless, certain American media has and continues to represent Muslims, Arabs, and people from the Middle East as violent and evil terrorists (Alsultany 2012; Dill, Gentile, Richter & Dill 2005; Dixon & Williams 2014; Nacos & Torres-Reyna 2007; Powell 2011; and Shaheen 2009).

Overall, the research on the negative impacts of media on the views of Muslims is fluid and relatively new. The literature previously explained is only a dosage of the many studies in which social scientists examine said pertinent topic.

III. Generating a Tentative Answer

Upon reviewing literature pertaining to the topic of anti-Muslim hate and the influential role of the media, I have developed a framework for answering my research question. Although the media provides significant information that better educates citizens of the world, hateful remarks and descriptions about Muslims alter emotions. It is inevitable for the audience of news networks to become hesitant and cautious during their interactions with Muslims. If the media presents comments of how Islam condones violence and ruthless hate, then individuals will surely become wary of supporting Muslims. Why, then, would people be willing to rally behind a group of people that the media so vehemently disparages?

Islamophobia embodies a multitude of forms. Whether it be through dialogue, images, or video footage, this phenomenon is a powerful force in forming perceptions about Muslims. Journalists, guest speakers, and producers of media sources utilize their power to encourage anti-Muslim thoughts. It is unquestionable that the rise of media and Islamophobia shape the feelings about Muslims.

Henceforth, I have produced a hypothesis that will guide my exploratory research in regards to the media, Islamophobia, and tolerance towards Muslims: ***In a comparison of individuals, those who have high levels of media consumption are more likely to be less tolerant towards Muslims than those who have lower levels of media consumption.***

Islamophobia surely impacts the sentiments about the followers of Islam; however, the level to which the media influences said emotions may differ across groups of people. Thus, I intend to develop a collection of groups of interest that I find most prominent and relevant to my research topic and hypothesis. With media consumption being my key independent variable and the tolerance towards Muslims as my dependent variable, my hypothesis will be tested in regards to various types of people. Individuals with varying levels of media consumption and education levels are a sample of the types of people that I will use in my research. In addition, I will use the income and age of respondents as controls in my research project. Constituting a mixture of individuals, these groups of interest will ensure that my findings are not conclusive in regards to one group of people. Instead, my research will draw on a diverse collection of individuals.

Furthermore, I will also have a null hypothesis that my findings will either help me fail to reject or reject altogether. My null hypothesis states that there is no statistical significance between my two main variables (media consumption and tolerance towards Muslims). The null hypothesis is as follows: ***There is no statistically significant relationship between media consumption and tolerance towards Muslims.***

III. Research Design Section

Introduction

In order to test my hypothesis, I examined data from the General Social Survey (GSS) from the year 2012. This data includes one year and a random sample of 1,974 adults aged eighteen years or older, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center and made available through the Inter-University consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan. The 1,974 adults used in said dataset are residents of the United States of America and are from the year 2012.

I selected the 2012 General Social Survey dataset for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it contains variables that are relevant to my research question. It includes three nominal-level variables that match my project. Ensuring that the reader does not become confused by technical and statistical vocabulary, I will call said three variables by names distinct from their official names in the dataset. The first one will be recognized as Muslims teach, which refers to whether or not Muslims should be allowed to teach in the college environment. The second variable will be called Muslims preach. Said variable asks respondents whether or not Muslims should be allowed to preach hatred of the United States. Lastly, the third variable will be identified as Muslims books. The third nominal-level variable asks the question of whether or not Muslim books should be permitted in public libraries. All three of these variables give the option of answering with a “Yes” or “No”. I used these variables to generate an additive index thereby producing my dependent variable: tolerance towards Muslims. My new variable, tolerance towards Muslims, has four possible response categories ranging from “0”, having low tolerance towards Muslims, to “3”, having high tolerance towards Muslims.

Another motive for choosing the 2012 General Social Survey dataset was that it contains a variable that I used as my independent variable. Being that I wish to explore the effects of media consumption on tolerance towards Muslims, I chose a variable that describes how often one reads the newspaper. The ordinal-level variable, news, describes how often one reads the newspaper by providing a scale ranging from reading the newspaper everyday to never reading the newspaper.

Even more, the dataset possesses a collection of other variables of interest that pertain to my research. It provides me with my two control variables and a way of producing an interaction term. Not only did it allow me to control for income and age, but I was also able to produce an interaction term by multiplying the news variable by a level of education variable.

Overall, the 2012 General Social Survey was an essentially ideal dataset for my research project. It consists of the material necessary to test my hypothesis.

Variable Measurements

In order to operationalize tolerance towards Muslims, I used a tolerance towards Muslims variable in my research project. As described in the most recent section of the paper, this ordinal-level variable is created by three other nominal-level variables, Muslims teach, Muslims preach, and Muslims book. Those three nominal-level variables are coded “0” for having a less-tolerant response and “1” for having a more-tolerant response. After creating an additive index with said variables, I produced my dependent variable. Said variable, tolerance towards Muslims, is an ordinal-level variable and describes tolerance towards Muslims on a scale from “0” to “3”: “0” representing low tolerance, “1” representing somewhat low tolerance, “2” representing mid tolerance, and “3” representing high tolerance. Upon collecting descriptive statistics, I found that the tolerance towards Muslims variable has a total of 1,258 cases. Additionally, the mode for this variable is the category of “0”, which is synonymous with low tolerance towards Muslims. According to the mode, 42.92% of the 1,258 cases have low tolerance towards Muslims. In addition, the mean score for this variable is “1.256”. A score of “1” translates to somewhat low tolerance towards Muslims. Furthermore, the sum of the entire collection of scores divided by the number of cases is the score that indicates somewhat low tolerance. The median, which is the score that divides the cases into two equal-size groups, is

also “1”. Thus, more than 50% of the cases fall in or below this response category of having somewhat low tolerance towards Muslims.

In order to operationalize the amount of media consumption of individuals, I used news as my main independent variable. Also an ordinal-level variable, it describes how often people read the newspaper. Cases fall into the five categories in the following order: reading the newspaper everyday, a few times a week, once a week, less than once a week, or never. I produced a one-frequency distribution that shows that 26.72% of the 1,301 cases claim to read the newspaper everyday. Additionally, the median of this variable is the category of reading the newspaper once a week. While the most cases read the newspaper everyday, more than 50% fall in or below the category that only reads the newspaper once a week. It was useful to discover the prevalence of reading the newspaper everyday and once a week in this variable due to the fact that I am interested in examining the effects of media consumption on tolerance towards Muslims.

In addition to my dependent and independent variables, I had two control variables. The first one is in regard to age. In order to control for the age of respondents, I used the age variable. An interval-level variable, age ranges from being one to eighty-nine years old. It has a total of 1,969 cases and a mean of 48. The second control variable concerns the income levels of cases. In order to control for the levels of income, I used the income variable. The ordinal-level variable of income either places respondents into the five categories in the following order: low income, med low income, mid income, med high income, or high income. It has a total of 1,142 cases and a mean of “3”, which represents the mid income category. I also desired to study the effects of media consumption and level of education on tolerance towards Muslims. Multiplying the two ordinal-level variables, news and level of education, I produced an interaction term: media consumption times the level of education.

Furthermore, I found it interesting to compare the proportions between those who have high and low tolerance towards Muslims over having both high and low media consumption. In the top half of Table 1.0, I provide the proportions of tolerance towards Muslims for those who have low media consumption. One can see that roughly 63% of those who have low media consumption have low tolerance towards Muslims, and close to 37% of those who have low media consumption have high tolerance towards Muslims. Based on the confidence intervals, one can be 95% confident that the actual percentage of those who have low media consumption and low tolerance towards Muslims falls between 58% and 68%. One can also be 95% confident that the actual percentage of those who have low media consumption and high tolerance towards Muslims falls between 32% and 42%. Additionally, the confidence intervals among those who have low media consumption and either low or high tolerance towards Muslims do not overlap. Such a finding may suggest a statistically significant relationship between low media consumption and tolerance towards Muslims.

In the bottom half of Table 1.0, the results reveal the proportions of tolerance towards Muslims for those who have high media consumption. One can see that roughly 54% of those who have high media consumption have low tolerance towards Muslims. One can be 95% confident that the actual percentage among said type of people falls between 48% and 60%. In addition, roughly 46% of those who have high levels of media consumption have high tolerance towards Muslims. One can be 95% confident that the actual percentage of those who have high levels of media consumption and high tolerance towards Muslims falls between 40% and 52%. Opposite for those who have low media consumption, the confidence intervals for those who have high media consumption indeed overlap. Said

finding may indicate a nonexistent statistically significant relationship between high media consumption and tolerance towards Muslims.

Table 1.0

Tolerance towards Muslims by Media Consumption 611 Total Observations		
	<i>Proportions</i>	<i>Confidence Intervals</i>
<i>Low Media Consumption</i>	<i>Low Tolerance</i>	.6337209 (.5813016 - .6831546)
	<i>High Tolerance</i>	.3662791 (.3168454 - .4186984)
<i>High Media Consumption</i>	<i>Low Tolerance</i>	.5393258 (.4790265 - .5984958)
	<i>High Tolerance</i>	.4606742 (.4015042 - .5209735)

Model Estimation

I modeled the effect of media consumption on tolerance towards Muslims with an ordered probit regression. Said type of model is designed for research projects in which the dependent variable has ordered categories. Similar to models for binary data, ordered probits focus on how changes in the independent variables translate into the probability of observing a specific ordinal outcome. In Table 1.2, I provide the coefficients found in the output of my ordered probit regression. In Figure 1, I created four groups of interest represented on the x-axis that illustrate my interaction effect. The y-axis of Figure 1 ranges from “0” to “1” and provides the probability that someone is tolerant towards Muslims. I also include the 95% confidence intervals.

Results

In Table 1.2, I provide the coefficients from the output of my ordered probit. Being that I include the interaction (media consumption times level of education), I will only look at the coefficients of the control variables (income and age). Firstly, the coefficient for the control variable of income (0.0561) is positive and statistically insignificant. Its p-value is not less than either of the three p-values that are taken into consideration (0.1, 0.05, or 0.01). Secondly, the coefficient for the other control variable is also statistically insignificant. The coefficient for age (-0.00448) is negative and is not statistically significant being that its p-value is not less than the the three p-values that are taken into consideration (0.1, 0.05, or 0.01).

Table 1.2

<i>Effects on Tolerance towards Muslims: 374 Observations</i>	
<i>Media Consumption</i>	0.143 (0.132)
<i>Level of Education</i>	0.551*** (0.154)
<i>Media Consumption x Level of Education</i>	-0.0682 (0.0422)
<i>Income</i>	0.0561 (0.0486)
<i>Age</i>	-0.00448 (1.00446)
<i>Constant Cut 1</i>	1.042** (0.523)
<i>Constant Cut 2</i>	1.499*** (0.524)
<i>Constant Cut 3</i>	1.814*** (0.526)
<p><i>Dependent Variable:</i> Tolerance towards Muslims 0 (Low Tolerance) - 3 (High Tolerance) <i>Media Consumption:</i> 5 media consumption groups <i>Level of Education:</i> 4 education groups <i>Media Consumption and Level of Education:</i> 20 groups <i>Income:</i> 5 income groups <i>Age:</i> 89 age groups Standard Errors in parentheses Results estimated using ordered probit regression, Data Source: General Social Survey 2012 ***p<0.01 **p<0.05 *p<0.1</p>	

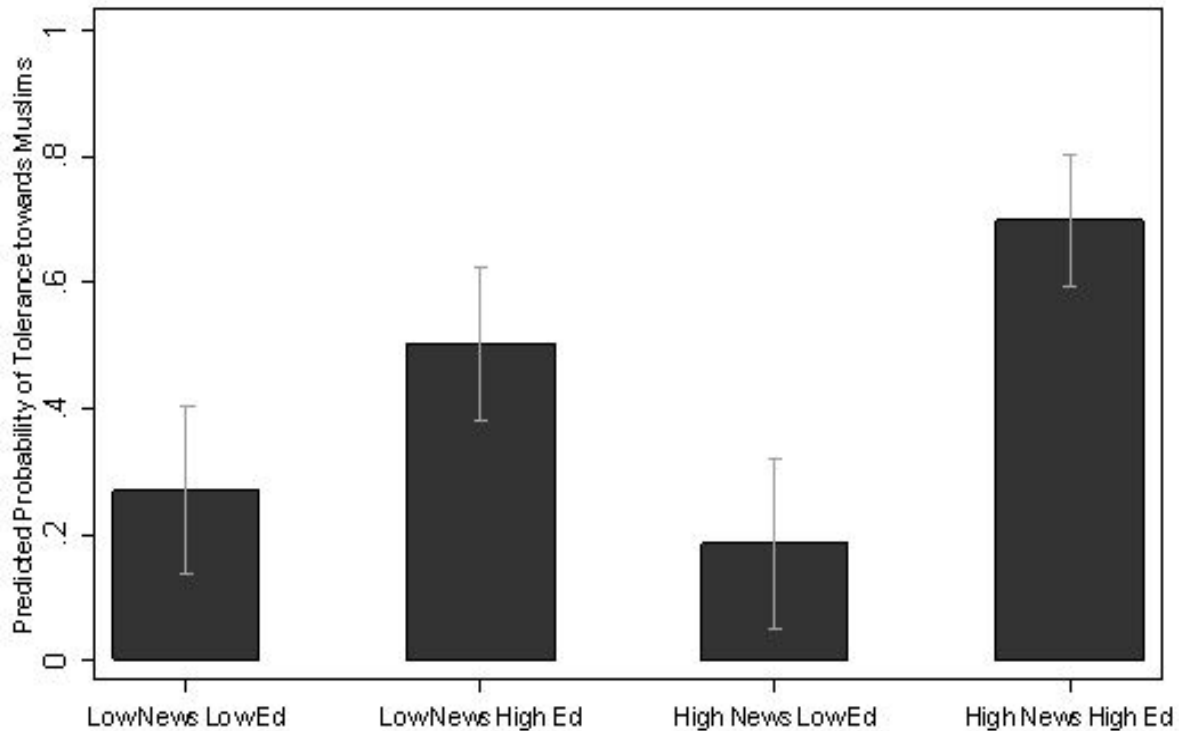
By looking at Figure 1, one can see that those who have high levels of education and differing amounts of news consumption have overlapping confidence intervals. Such an observation indicates that there is a statistically insignificant relationship between high media consumption times differing levels of education on tolerance towards Muslims. Moreover, those with low media consumption and differing levels of education also have overlapping confidence intervals. Said observation indicates that there is a statistically insignificant relationship between low media consumption times differing levels of education and tolerance towards Muslims.

Although the two bars connected with low news consumption are higher than the bar connected to the one bar connected to high news consumption and low level of education, the bar connected to high news consumption and high education is higher than all three of the other bars. Furthermore, such a finding does not coincide with my expectations. I thought that that both bars connected with high media consumption would be lower than the two bars connected to low media consumption. Being that I believed that those who consume high amounts of media would be more likely to be less tolerant towards Muslims, I thought that the probability for being tolerant towards Muslims among those with high media consumption would be lower than those with low media consumption. In Figure 1, the findings do not satisfy my hopes for the outcomes of the ordered probit regression.

Based on the predicted probabilities presented in the graph and the confidence intervals that overlap, I would fail to reject my null hypothesis. I cannot reject that there is no statistically significant relationship between media consumption and tolerance towards Muslims. This is largely because the overlapping confidence intervals indicate that a statistically significant relationship between media consumption and tolerance towards Muslims does not exist. In addition the p-values (the calculated probability of finding the observed results when the null hypothesis is true), are not less than .05 for the variables of news, level of education, or interaction variables.

Nevertheless, there is one finding that stands out as exceedingly intriguing. The confidence intervals between those with high media consumption and differing levels of education do not overlap. Thus, those with high media consumption and differing levels of media consumption have noticeable differences on their probabilities of being tolerant towards Muslims. Those who have low levels of education and high media consumption have a lower predicted probability of being tolerant towards Muslims than those with high levels of education and high media consumption. Furthermore, polarization exists within the category of those who have high amounts of media consumption and differing levels of education. Those with high education and high media consumption have a higher predicted probability of being tolerant towards Muslims than those with low education and high consumption of media. Said finding is worthy of recognition.

Figure 1: Tolerance Towards Muslims by News Consumption and Education



Data source: GSS dataset. Results estimated using ordered probit regression, regression holding income level and age at their mean values

Discussion & Conclusions

Overall, the findings from my study do not fully support my hypothesis. I would, therefore, fail to reject my null hypothesis. The p-values produced from running the ordered probit regression were all greater than 0.05. Furthermore, the findings in Figure 1 highlights that media consumption does not necessarily lead to being less tolerant towards Muslims. One can notice by looking at Figure 1 that those who have higher levels of education indeed have the highest predicted probabilities of being tolerant towards Muslims. Such a finding causes one to question why this might be so.

One reason may be that having a high level of education allows one to absorb an array of information regarding topics that may or may not be related to Islam. Thus, one might be less inclined to jump to conclusions about Muslims and other groups of interest. Likewise, those with greater levels of education might receive more opportunity to interact with people of various socioeconomic, cultural and political backgrounds, potentially making them more respectful towards other religious and ethnic groups.

Another interesting finding is that those who have low levels of education had the smallest predicted probabilities of being tolerant towards Muslims. Serving as a potential reason for such a result, people with minimal education might not be as well versed in current affairs or other types of topics that might allow them to be more accepting of other groups of people. Those with low levels of education may feel as though their own personal experiences and beliefs are facts rather than opinions. Thus, they might be less inclined to be tolerant towards Muslims.

The polarization between those with high media consumption and differing levels of education should cause political scientists to stop and critically think about why this occurs. One potential cause may be due to the idea that those with more education will consume high amounts of media with advanced knowledge and toolsets that aid them in comprehending the stories produced by the media. In addition, those with low levels of education may consume heavy amounts of media with distorted or uneducated minds. Such lack of awareness from minimal education may result in a lower probability of being tolerant towards Muslims.

Thus, my findings remain vitally crucial to the research question of under what conditions are people likely to be less tolerant towards Muslims. The results suggest that media consumption does not necessarily cause someone to be more or less tolerant towards Muslims and lays the groundwork for the exploration of other factors that might affect tolerance towards said group of people. Other causes such as cultural upbringing, political affiliation, and geographical location may influence tolerance levels.

In contrast to the case studies conducted in New Zealand, my research produces a small wave of hope for media and news outlets. They might not be as cruel and inherently discriminatory against Muslims as other case studies find them to be (Shaver et al. 2017). Although I did not examine what constitutes low tolerance towards Muslims, my findings do not accept the theory that media consumption leads individuals to believe that Muslims are innately aggressive (Saleem et al. 2017). My research can add to the less extensive and in depth collection on the ability for the media to not instill intolerance towards Muslims. Likewise, the polarization within those with high media consumption and differing levels of education supply political scientists and the world of political research with interesting data. They can use my findings in the process of constructing future research projects that deal with polarization in the attitudes of those with differing levels of education and tolerance towards Muslims, all of which is based on high media consumption.

Furthermore, research on my topic is incomplete. Political scientists should strive to look at the factors that underlie the polarization of tolerance towards Muslims for those who have high media consumption. They should take into consideration not only the differences in level of education, but also in geographical location, demographics, and socioeconomic status. Although my findings do not lead to grandiose implications and discoveries, they are still useful.

Thus, my research can spark future questions for political scientists. For instance, what leads to being tolerant towards Muslims for those who consume high amounts of media, but yet have different levels of education? Is there a particular region in the United States or the world where high media consumption and low level of education causes less tolerance towards Muslims? Additionally, do those with higher levels of education find themselves more involved with media outlets that handle affairs that are connected to Muslim communities? A myriad of research questions can take form. It is up to us, as political scientists, to continue asking, theorizing, and exploring such questions.

I hereby affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the honor code.

Kathryn Cushman

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