



Europe's 'Others'

Young People, Islam and European Identity

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This European Commission funded research aims to provide insight, for local, national and European policy makers, into how people feel about 'being European' and European citizenship. Men and women aged 18-24 were selected as the subjects, allowing a gender comparison and a focus on young and, therefore, new citizens. Research was conducted in pairs of cities or towns in nations and regions chosen because of their linked but contrasting histories of orientation to Europe: Vienna and the Bregenz area of Vorarlberg in Austria; Madrid and Bilbao in Spain; Chemnitz and Bielefeld, in Germany; Bratislava and Prague in the Slovak and Czech Republics; Edinburgh, Scotland and Manchester, England in the UK. The study sampled both 18-24 year old residents who were more likely to feel European because their study or work was Europe-oriented (target sample) and representative samples of young adults who had lived in the city or town for at least five years. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (in-depth interviews) data were gathered.

What does it mean to be European?

In our qualitative interviews, the young people we questioned were often reluctant to give voice to simple stereotypic images of a single, homogenous, 'European' character or culture. Instead, respondents often chose to emphasise the plurality of European cultures:

- 'Unity in Diversity'
- 'Europe for me is a togetherness of multiple cultures'
- 'a sort of mesh, a mix of people and cultures and countries'
- 'what I like about Europe is its diversity'

At the same time, respondents from all of our research sites could agree that the peoples of Europe were, or could be, united by a shared mentality and a commitment to a set of common values:

- 'Common Values'
- 'there is a kind of European mentality'
- 'Europe for me is a place of common values'
- 'Europe for me is place where people think the same way as me'

However, in many of these accounts, the precise nature of these 'values' or common 'mentality' was left unspecified.

Who or what is *not* European?

The fact that the young people who took part in our interviews often could not define precisely what it meant to be European is not surprising, and need not be regarded as problematic. Social identities are often understood less in terms of their essential, defining features, than in terms of their distinctiveness from relevant outgroups.

The young people we spoke to naturally expressed different opinions concerning the boundaries of the category 'European', and it was unsurprising to note that there were also differences between research sites: for example, respondents in Prague and Bratislava were particularly concerned with the relationship of Russia to Europe, whereas respondents in Vienna, Manchester and Edinburgh were more inclined to define Europe in contrast to the USA.

However, one common concern that was voiced widely by people of various backgrounds, and across all of our research sites, related to the distinction between 'European' values, culture and mentality and Islam. For many respondents, Muslims lay outside the boundaries of acceptable European diversity. And for many respondents, the key uniting feature of 'European' mentality, life-style and culture, was that it was basically Christian, or else that it was fundamentally secular. Either way, 'European' regions, countries and peoples were understood to be essentially different from their Muslim counterparts.

Islam as Europe's 'Other'

The problem of 'Islamaphobia' amongst the populations of EU member states has come to be recognized as a potentially serious problem, especially in the aftermath of 'September 11th'.

- On the one hand, our interviews provided some basis for optimism. The young people we spoke to generally did not articulate blatantly hostile attitudes towards Islam, and often demonstrated a level of sympathy towards Muslim peoples and cultures. It was clear that most of the young people who talked about Muslims were concerned not to be seen to display prejudice towards them.
- On the other hand, few of our non-Muslim respondents demonstrated an entirely 'even-handed' attitude towards Muslim peoples living in their own country, or towards Muslim countries outside of Europe. In particular, it was notable that when respondents spoke in favour of Turkey's membership of the EU, this was often justified by arguing that Turkey was not a 'very' Muslim country, that it was somehow 'better' than 'other' Muslim countries, or that the peoples of Turkey were gradually 'developing' and becoming 'less' Muslim.
- More generally, our interviews demonstrated a pervasive 'subtle' form of Islamaphobia. This type of prejudice was not expressed through overtly hostile attitudes. However, it was expressed through a general sense that Muslims were somehow 'different', not quite 'like us', and that they could not necessarily be trusted to share 'our' sense of national or European community:

'I think Europe is Christian. And I don't want to say that Islam is worse or better.'

- In addition, our findings indicated a widespread 'symbolic' form of Islamaphobia, in which Muslim peoples and countries were assumed not to share and potentially to threaten, 'our' liberal, democratic, 'European' values. Sometimes the young people we spoke to went so far as to suggest that the categories of 'democracy' and 'Muslim' were mutually exclusive:

'Europe to me means democracy, it means not being dominated by religious dogma, unlike Muslim countries today'.

- More generally, respondents frequently suggested that Muslims do not share 'European' concerns over matters such as the environment, and that Islamic religious practices were not consistent with 'modern' or 'European' concerns over animal welfare.
- The young people who took part in our interviews were particularly inclined to regard Muslim peoples and States as unconcerned about social equality in general, and the equality of women in particular.
- Our respondents also frequently gave voice to the common stereotype that Muslims hold a primary loyalty to their global faith community, and consequently are unlikely to share 'our' commitments to regional, national, State and EU citizenship and identity.

The identities and attitudes of young Muslim Europeans: (How) are they different?

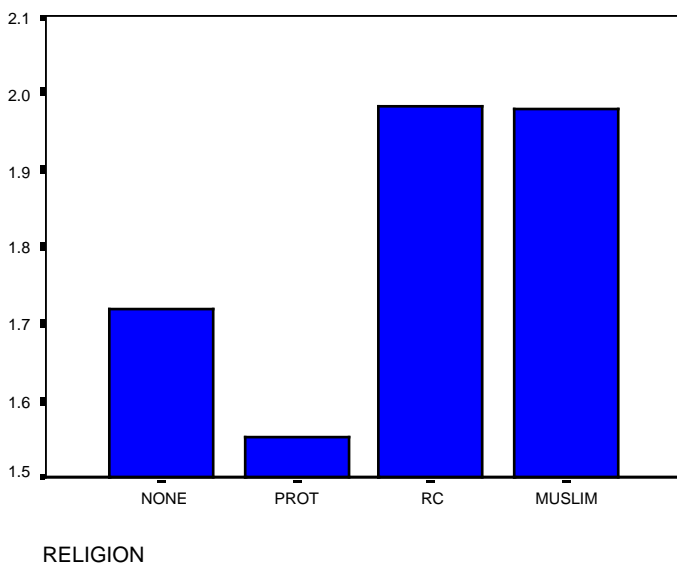
Previous surveys of young EU citizens have occasionally considered the impact of religious identity on European attitudes and identities. However, most of this research has focussed on comparing the views of young people from different types of Christian background. For example, the Eurobarometer Report ‘The Young Europeans’ (Eurobarometer 47.2, 1997) broke down the survey data on European attitudes and identities by nationality of respondent, and also by the religious identity of respondent. However, the categories of religious identity used were restricted to Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and ‘other’. The ‘other’ category grouped together all those identifying with ‘minority religious’ including Hindus, Jews and Muslims.

Among the young people who took part in our survey, the most common forms of religious identity were: None/agnostic: 1887(40%); Roman Catholic: 1630(35%); Protestant/ Church of England: 721(15%); Muslim 194(4%).

Most of the Muslim respondents were from Vienna, Vorarlberg, Bielefeld and Manchester. Although this sample does not represent the universe of young Muslims living in EU member states (for example, people of North African family origin are under represented), we may nevertheless still meaningfully ask whether, and how, the attitudes and identities of the young Muslims who took part in our survey differed from those of the young people who identified themselves as Roman Catholic or Protestant, or who did not claim any religious identity.

Do young Muslim Europeans have ‘different’ identities?

In our survey, we asked: ‘How frequently do you think of yourself as a global citizen?’

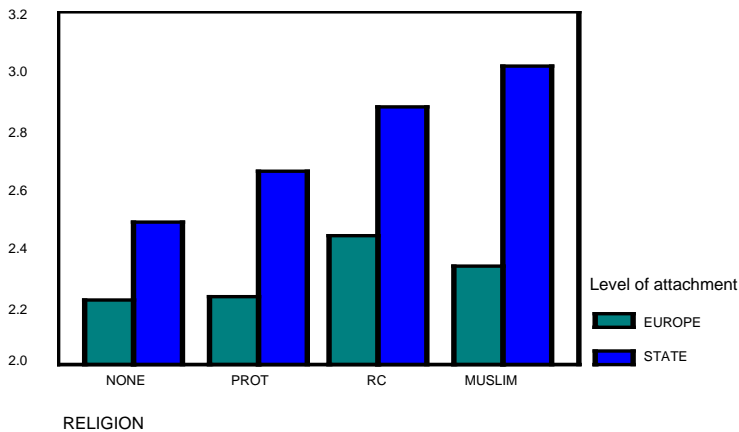


Our findings indicated that young Muslims did, indeed, report regarding themselves as a ‘global citizen’ more often than did the young people who identified themselves as agnostic or as Protestant. However, young people of Roman Catholic faith also identified relatively strongly with a sense of global citizenship.

In our survey, we asked respondents how attached they felt to the state in which they lived, and to Europe. (see graph following findings)

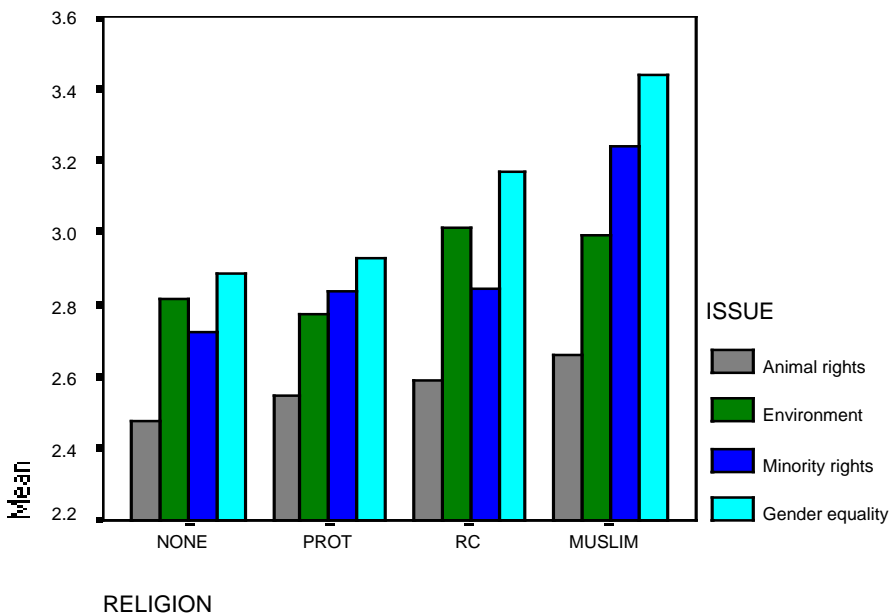
- These findings would not appear to substantiate the common assumption that people of Muslim backgrounds will identify with their global faith community at the expense of territorial identities.
- In our survey, it was the young Muslims who identified most highly with the state in which they lived. This findings is, of course, all the more significant when we bear in mind that not all of these young people will have held full citizenship status.

- In addition, the young Muslim respondents did not identify less highly with Europe than did young Protestants, or people with no religious affiliation.
- Our survey also showed that young Muslims were more inclined to express concern over the threat of terrorism, and were more inclined to be concerned about national security, than were the young Roman Catholics, Protestants or agnostics.



Do young Muslim Europeans have 'different' social and political attitudes?

In our survey, we asked people how concerned they were about a range of different social and political issues.



Our findings do not confirm popular stereotypes concerning the 'different' social and political values of Muslims compared to 'other' Europeans

Young Muslims were, on average, more concerned about animal rights than were other young Europeans

Young Muslims were no less concerned about the environment than were other young Europeans

Perhaps not surprisingly, young Muslims were generally more concerned about issues relating to minority rights and discrimination against minorities. However, in stark contrast to the popular stereotype, the young Muslims who took part in our survey were also more inclined to express concern over equality between the sexes than were other groups of respondents.