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Islamphobia or Secularization? Why Are Muslim Organisations Discriminated?
An Experimental Approach in the Area of Zurich

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Islamphobia or lacking secularization?

Ongoing discussion about discrimination of muslims in Western states. Starting from the point that there indeed is discrimination, there are two types of explanations for it:

1. Discrimination is real and *unjustified* in the sense that muslims are treated worse than other people – especially – Christians. Muslims are defined as an out-group against their will.
   ⇒ out-group discrimination due to a "taste of discrimination"

2. Discrimination is self-chosen because muslims define themselves as an out-group, that declines the secularized western societies. In this sense they are *justly* discriminated by western in-groups (exponents of secularism).
   ⇒ statistical discrimination of religious groups

Consequences of different forms of discrimination

The different forms of discrimination may have different consequences in the future.

"taste for discrimination": discrimination will not disappear easily. Especially ongoing secularization of muslims *will not change discrimination*.

"discrimination of religious fundamentalism": The more muslims are secular, the more discrimination will disappear.

A typical case of this discussion happened around the vote about the "minaret-initiative" in November 2009. Then, Swiss voters banned the construction of new minarets.

Research question: Explanation of discrimination of muslims in the urban area of Zurich?

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Definitions
Three Approaches for the Explanation of Discrimination

Definitions

Stereotype: Opinion about or attitude towards members of a certain social group. Stereotypes are negatively or positively connoted.

Prejudice: A negative stereotype towards members of a certain group, that is emotionally laden.

Discrimination: The behavioral aspect of a prejudice. Discrimination causes the factual disadvantages.

Islamophobia: Discrimination of muslims, because they are muslims.

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1. Identity/frustration approach I

Mechanism: Discrimination of members of an out-group helps to
stabilize the identity of the own group (in-group).
⇒ "taste for discrimination" (Becker 1957)

- The more the own in-group is perceived as being
  endangered, the more *some* out-group will be
  discriminated in order to stabilize the own
  identity.
- Fear of social decline in the in-group (as a
  consequence of migration, globalization etc.)
  promotes the need for discrimination of an
  out-group.

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1. Identity/frustration approach II

- Typically, members of the in-group discriminate members of out-groups they do not have any experience with (Jews!).
- Muslims are one possible, though not the only out-group (Germans!) in Zurich.

Hypothesis I/F: Swiss people of lower classes tend to discriminate muslims more, (and the more they do not have any experience with muslims).

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2. Contact approach

Mechanism: Contacts in everyday life form stereotypes, and therefore discriminating behavior.
⇒ "statistical discrimination" (Phelps 1972)

- If the experience with a group is largely negative, there will be discrimination, otherwise not.
- Additional information (e.g. by experience) tends to change stereotypes and therefore discrimination.

Hypothesis C: People having contact with muslims will

- not discriminate muslims, if their experience is predominantly positive.
- discriminate muslims, if their experience is predominantly negative.

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3. Secularization and statistical discrimination

Mechanism: (Protestant) Switzerland has a history of
discrimination of religious groups (e.g. Catholics,
Jews and muslims). $\Rightarrow$ Religion is perceived as a
threat to the secular Swiss state and society.

- Muslim groups are perceived as putting
  themselves outside of the secular society
  (women rights, rights of homosexuals etc.),
- and therefore muslim groups are discriminated.

Hypothesis S_1: Muslim groups are discriminated as much as other
anti-secular groups, e.g fundamentalist Christian
groups.

Hypothesis S_2: Groups that profit from the secular state (e.g.
women, homosexuals) tend to discriminate
fundamentalistic religious groups more than other.

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Operationalization
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Quasi-experimental design: Lost-Letter-Technique

(Milgram et al. 1965)

- Setting: Standardized and stamped letters with the same address are "lost" in the field.
- Treatment/control: Names of interesting groups and neutral control group, respectively.
- Targeted variable: Rate of letters dropped in a mail box (= letters sent back). $\Rightarrow$ Discriminating behavior
- Subjects: Unknown finders of the letters
- Randomization: No randomization, instead parallelization by blockwise design; control and treatment letter(s) are "lost" together.
- Causal effect: Differences in dropping rates of control address to treatment address(es).

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Treatments

Names of groups used as part of the address.

Treatment 1 – muslim group Muslimischer Kulturverein Goldene
            Moschee

Treatment 2 – Christian group: Kirche der Bewahrer des Tempels
            Jesus Christus

Control group: Verein zur Pflege alter Obstsorten

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Text of the letter

ESCHER Tief- und Hochbau GmbH
Forststr. «hausnummer»a, 8044 Zürich

control / treatment 1 / 2
Rathausgasse 25
3011 Bern

Markierungsarbeiten in der Rathausgasse

Sehr geehrte Anwohner der Rathausgasse,

die Escher Tief- und Hochbau GmbH wird ab dem 6. Dezember 2010 in der Rathausgasse die
Parkplatzmarkierungen erneuern. Sie werden deshalb gebeten, vom 6. bis 9. Dezember keine
Fahrzeuge in der Rathausgasse zu parkieren (bitte auch keine Velos und Motorräder). Sie
erleichtern uns damit die Arbeit und ersparen sich Unannehmlichkeiten, weil parkierte
Fahrzeuge für die Markierungsarbeiten abtransportiert werden müssen.
Wir werden vor dem 6. Dezember auch mit Hinweisschildern in der Rathausgasse auf die
Markierungsarbeiten hinweisen.

Mit bestem Dank und freundlichen Grüssen

Escher Tief- und Hochbau GmbH

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Theoretical interpretation of treatment effects

The sequence of the return rates of the treatments are interpreted as follows:

Control > muslim > Christian: Support for the secularization hypothesis and rejection of the identity hypothesis.

Christian > control > muslim: Support for the identity hypothesis.

Muslim > Christian > control: Rejection of the secularization and the identity hypothesis.

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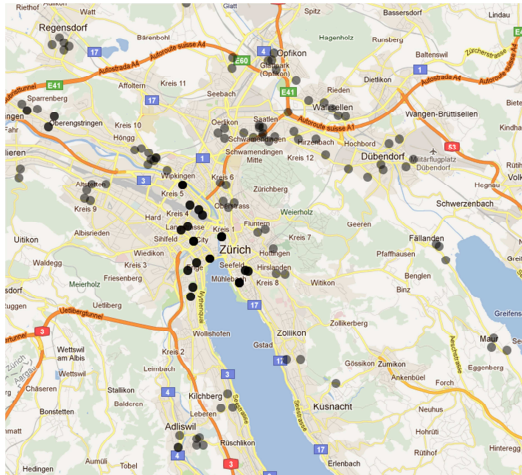Operationalization
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Additional information

- Letters were distributed under windshield wipers with a hand written post-it note on it, reading "Your letter? Was lying beside your car". Only private cars with a license plates from Zurich were used.

- License plate number of the car was noted $\Rightarrow$ Name and address of the owner can be obtained online from the cantonal authorities.

- "Losing" address of any block of 3 letters.

- Type of the car
  - Allows for an estimation of the socioeconomic status via "Sinus Vision"

- daytime, weekday, weather

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Field work

- $125 \times 3 = 375$ letters distributed in late November / early December 2010.
- Aim to reach about equal distribution compared to the population density in all districts of Zurich and in all of the adjacent communities.

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Distribution of the letters (blockwise, 3 × 125)

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Results fieldwork

- Overall 182 of 375 letters (48.5%) sent back, most within very few days.
- Very few letters were opened, reclosed and dropped.
- Two letters were directly dropped at the address in Bern.
- No hints, that the experiment was discovered.

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Univariate results

- 326 car owners (of 375, 86.9%) identified from their license plate.
  - 157 with native Swiss background (41.9% of all identified)
  - 52 with Christian background (not Swiss) (13.9% of all identified)
  - 18 with muslim background (4.8% of all identified)
  - 148 (39.5% of all identified) owners could not be assigned to a religious background, mainly owners from former Yugoslavia.
- Stratification of subjects depending on their cars (Sinus Vision; 289 of 375 assignable, 77.1%):
  - 98 working class (26.1% of all)
  - 72 middle class (19.2% of all)
  - 119 upper class (31.7% of all)

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Return rates depending on treatment

- control ("Obstverein"): 76 (60.8%)**
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 59 (47.2%)
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 58 (46.4%)

- Significant difference between secular and both religious groups
- but no difference between muslim and Christian group.
    - Support for secularization hypothesis
    - Rejection of identity/frustration hypothesis

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Return rates depending on cultural/religious background: Native Swiss (n=159)

Background assigned from names like: *Heinz Würmli* or *Susanne Tschudi*

- control ("Obstverein"): 40 of 54 = 74.1%*
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 32 of 58 = 55.2%
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 25 of 45 = 55.6%

- Significant discrimination of both religious groups
- but no difference between muslim and Christian group.
  - Support for secularization hypothesis
  - Rejection of identity/frustration hypothesis

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Return rates depending on cultural/religious background: Christian / not Swiss (n=52)

Background assigned from names like: *Gianfranco Perri* or *Christina Munoz*

- control ("Obstverein"): 8 of 20 = 40.0%
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 8 of 15 = 53.3%
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 8 of 17 = 47.1%

- No significant discrimination
  - Rejection of secularization and identity/frustration hypothesis

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Return rates depending on cultural/religious background: Muslim (n=18)

Background assigned from names like: *Fatmire Jusufi* or *Hassan Tuskan*

- control "Obstverein": 2 of 6 = 33.3%
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 1 of 6 = 16.7%
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 6 of 6 = 100.0%

- No significant discrimination due to case numbers,
- but clear difference to *non-muslim* groups.
  - Rejection of the secularization hypothesis
  - Some support of the identity/frustration hypothesis *for the (religious) out-groups*

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Return rates depending on socioeconomic status (cars): Upper class (n = 119)

Status assigned from cars like: *Mercedes* or *Porsche*

- control "Obstverein": 22 of 36 = 61.1%
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 21 of 37 = 56.8%
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 21 of 46 = 45.7%

- No significant discrimination
  - Rejection of secularization and identity/frustration hypothesis

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Return rates depending on socioeconomic status (cars): Middle class (n = 72)

Status assigned from cars like: *Renault* or *Opel*

- control "Obstverein": 12 of 23 = 52.2%
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 13 of 25 = 52.0%
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 10 of 24 = 41.7%

- No significant discrimination due to case numbers,
- but clear difference to muslim group
    - Rejection of the secularization hypothesis
    - Some support of for the identity/frustration hypothesis

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Return rates depending on socioeconomic status (cars): Working class ($n = 98$)

Status assigned from cars like: *Fiat* or *Nissan*

- control "Obstverein": 23 of $36 = 63.9\%$**
- treatment "Tempel Jesus Christus": 9 of $32 = 28.1\%$
- treatment "Goldene Moschee": 17 of $30 = 56.7\%$**

- Significant discrimination of Christian group,
- no difference between secular and muslim group.
- This holds also for the subgroup of Swiss subjects.
  - Rejection of identity/frustration hypothesis.

Summary

- Discrimination of muslims in the urban area of Zurich is significant,
- but the discrimination is not stronger than the discrimination of religious Christian groups.
- Native Swiss discriminate both religious groups and prefer the secular group.
- Muslims show some tendency for the discrimination of non-muslim groups.
- No evidence that lower classes discriminate more than other socio-economic groups.

Interpretation

- Discrimination of muslims in the urban area of Zurich is not due to a "taste for discrimination" in order to stabilize the own identity,
- but is rather grounded in statistical discrimination of non-secular groups.

Further work

- More precise coding of religious background from owner's names.
- More precise coding of car types to socioeconomic status.
- Approximation of socioeconomic status by price of the car ("Schwacke List").
- Approximation of sex of finder from owner's names.
  $\Rightarrow$ problematic homophily assumption
- Approximation of socioeconomic status by owner's address.
  $\Rightarrow$ ecological fallacy

Thank you for your attention!