

## Attitudes towards the Islam and Muslims in Europe

### Selected Results of the Study "Group-focused Enmity in Europe" (GFE-Europe)

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Download of the report and a short report:

[www.uni-bielefeld.de/ikg/zick](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/ikg/zick)

## I. Methods

This report presents results on attitudes of Europeans towards the Islam and Muslims. The results are based on data of the representative survey on *Group-Focused Enmity in Europe*. This survey was conducted from October until December 2008.

In each of eight countries 1.000 representatively selected citizens were interviewed by telephone. Respondents were 16 years or older. Germany, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Hungary participated in the study.<sup>1</sup> Interviews focused on prejudices towards several different target groups, on attitudes towards democracy and Europe and on individual fears, worries and orientations.

For most questions respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement to a set of pretested attitudes on 4-point scales ranging from 1 = *I strongly disagree*, 2 = *I somewhat disagree*, 3 = *I somewhat agree* to 4 = *I strongly agree*.

All results were carefully tested for reliability and validity. Please, consider that the agreement to a single prejudiced statement correlates significantly with the agreement to other negative attitudes towards the same target group. All prejudices are measured by a set of statements and arguments that generally devalue other groups or members of these groups – such as Muslims in this case.

WE define prejudices towards Muslims (often called Islamophobia) as prejudices towards Muslims ‘because they are Muslims’.

## II. Attitudes towards Muslims and the Islam

*Islam is judged as not fitting to culture.*

Only 16.6% of the German respondents agree to the statement: *“The Muslim culture fits well into Germany”*. This is the lowest proportion compared to all other observed countries! In France and Portugal about 50% and in Britain and the Netherlands about 39% somewhat or strongly agree to this statement with respect to their countries; in Poland and Hungary *“Europe”* was addressed instead due to the very low percentage of Muslims in these countries.

*Prejudices toward Muslims are common.*

The data mirror worries that people feel to be a stranger in their own country. 44% of the Europeans somewhat or strongly agree to the statement: *“There are too many Muslims in [country / in Europe in Poland and Hungary]”*. We have to mind that de facto the

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<sup>1</sup> Countries were chosen by the following criteria: 1. Participation of new and old EU-members with different migration history and policies, 2. Cooperation with scientists who are excellent in the research of prejudices, 3. Support by private foundations aimed to ensure an independent analyses.

proportion of Muslims in European countries is rather low. E.g., whereas 50% of the Italians agree that there are too many Muslims in Italy, the percentage of Muslims in Italy is estimated by official statistics of about 2%.

In Poland (47% agreement) and Hungary (60.7% agreement) the maximum proportion of Muslims in the population is 1%. In Germany, with an estimated proportion of about 5% Muslims, 46% agree that there are „*too many Muslims*“. In France with a similar percentage of Muslims we observe only 36% agreement. Note that these are results of a representative sample, i.e. not only respondents living in big cities that often have a higher percentage of Muslims but also from rural areas that very often have a very low rate of Muslims were interviewed.

### *The Islam is perceived as an intolerant religion.*

There is broad consensus of respondents that “the Islam is a religion of intolerance” (respectively, in France the disagreement to “*The Islam is a religion of tolerance*” was measured). 52.2% of the respondents in Germany and 54.4% of the European respondents agreed somewhat or strongly. However, the same respondents who belong to the vast majority of the Christian confession agreed to racist, anti-Semitic, sexist and homophobic statements. Religious persons (following one of the Christian religions) agree to these prejudice significantly more than non-religious persons (with or without religion). They do not seem to be aware that they are intolerant towards several groups themselves: There is only a moderate relation of group-focused enmity (interrelated syndrome of several prejudices) and the extent to which the respondents estimate themselves to be racist ( $r = .22$ ).

### *Muslims are suspected to be intolerant.*

One of the most common prejudices towards the Islam and Muslims is that they do not treat women and men equally. Additionally many Muslims are reproached of intolerance towards homosexuality. The data show that 78% of the Europeans and 76% of the Germans somewhat or strongly agreed to the statement that: “*Muslim’s attitudes towards women contradict our values*“. Europeans of several countries vastly agree in their perception of attitude differences between themselves and Muslims opinion with only minor variation in Portugal and Poland with 72% agreement. It seems to be worthwhile to know that at the same time 60% of the Europeans support the view that: “*Women should take their roles as wife and mother more seriously*” (please see the attached graph for details). In Germany 53%, in Poland even 87% and in Hungary 88% of the samples agree. In addition 42,6% of the European and 38% of the Germans and 88% of the Polish respondents reject the statement: “*There is nothing immoral about homosexuality*“. Obviously Europeans use a double standard when judging about Muslims.

### ***Prejudices against Muslims are linked to other prejudices.***

Europeans not only hold negative attitudes towards Muslims but to several other groups, like Jews, Blacks, migrants, women and homosexuals. To give some examples there are 49% of the German population and 41% of the Europeans in the other countries who agree to the opinion: *"Jews try to take advantage of having been victims during the Nazi era."* 30% of the Germans and 31% of the Europeans believe: *"There is a natural hierarchy between black and white people."* These statements are indicators for traditional anti-Semitism respectively blatant racism. Our analyses prove that there is a syndrome of *Group-focused Enmity* in each of the observed countries. This means that a person who is prejudiced toward one group has a significant higher probability to devalue other groups as well. We can prove that a general support of hierarchies between groups (ones are up and ones are below) leads to a devaluation of these specific groups.

### **III. Some Causes of Enmity**

There are four major causes of prejudices against Muslims and the Islam that are obvious by empirical evidence: norms, perceived threats, diversity believes, and authoritarianism. These are also causes for other prejudices.

#### **The devaluation of Muslims is perceived to be 'okay'.**

Utterances which devalue Muslims and raise social distances gain more open and blatant agreement than other prejudices. Compared to other prejudices anti-Islam prejudices seem to be less (or not at all) restricted by norms. We observe that an official or widely shared proscription is missing. Restraining public prejudices, openness to Islamic communities, and pro-social norms (protecting minorities, suppressing prejudices) are less observable in the case of the relations with Muslims. Therefore, there is a low relation between anti-Islam prejudices and the subjective estimation of respondents to be non-prejudiced. The 'undamped' devaluation of Muslims may have several causes. In public speeches of political and cultural opinion leaders very often Islam is associated with terror and Islamist propaganda or terrorism. Additionally many opinion leaders stress that integration of Muslims has failed. This generalization may facilitate anti-Islam sentiments. It legitimates prejudices which are often precursors of discrimination.

Unfortunately a higher educational background only has a limited influence on the probability to agreement on anti-Islam statements.

## **Muslims under suspicion and felt threats**

Generalized suspicion of terrorism supports the reservation and rejection of Muslims in Europe. 1% of the German respondents and 22% of the Europeans suspect that: “*The majority of Muslims find Islamic terrorism justifiable.*” The suspicion leads to feeling threatened. One should ask whether this threat is due to an objective or subjective basis. The actual proportion of Muslims on the whole population in each country is very low. As described earlier there were also people included in this study who live in areas with (nearly) no Muslims. Therefore, the agreement does not have its ground on concrete experiences but more on old and new delivered stereotypes about Muslims. We can only assume that respondents gained their images about Muslims out of the dominant subjects discussed in public, such as forced marriage, missing integration or terrorism. At least one should clarify why people think Muslim culture does not fit, by focusing on the history of immigration in the observed countries.

## **Rejection of Multiculturalism**

One remarkable cause of anti-Islam prejudices are attitudes towards cultural diversity respondents prefer or neglect for their country. With different statements a so called diversity-belief was measured in this study, which means the belief that several religions, ethnics and way of lives should have their place in one society. Data show that rejection of a cultural pluralism goes hand in hand with stronger prejudices towards several minorities. The agreement on pluralism is linked to a lower probability of *Group-focused Enmity*.

## **Law-and Order Authoritarianism**

The survey shows that agreement to attitudes indicating authoritarian orientations is linked to a stronger *Group-focused Enmity*. Instead of looking at authoritarianism as a personal trait we understand authoritarianism as an ideological orientation that speaks out for harsh treatment, punishment and exclusion of outsiders like Muslims. This orientation is strongly linked to an authoritarian subordination towards traditional values and leadership structures in the search for security and a reduction of complexity if there is uncertainty. As most respondents probably have little real experience with Muslims and no deeper knowledge of the Islam the claim of law-and-order can be seen as strategy to reduce their uncertainty.

#### **IV. Possible Consequences of prejudiced Attitudes**

##### *Prejudices raise the intention to discriminate.*

The study concentrates on opinions and attitudes. Here, it can not be proven that opinions which are important for democracy have any influence on behavior. However, we can show that agreement on anti-Islam prejudices significantly correlate with the intention to discriminate groups like Muslim. Taking results of attitude-behavior-approaches into account we assume that prejudices, missing social norms, the support of important others such as the family and friends added with the intention to discriminate can cause certain discriminatory behavior.

##### *A blockade for integration*

Analyses of the associated German study on „Group-focused Enmity in Germany“ indicate that prejudices towards Muslims and the Islam have a negatively influence on the support of integration. Data shows that the rejection of immigrants goes hand in hand with the rejection of participation and non-acceptance of cultural maintenance. It is not the attitude towards integration that causes prejudice, but stereotypes and prejudices cause rejection to integrate immigrants. Prejudices cause many problems within the discourse on integration of any group.

#### **V. Protective Factors**

The results of the GFE-E survey refer to a sample of factors which make people disagree to negative generalizing opinion on Muslims and the Islam. One of these is a positive attitude towards democracy, the rejection of national pride and the level of education. We highlight two factors that seem to be particular relevant for political education and for the engagement into an intercultural dialogue.

##### *Appreciate cultural diversity.*

The appreciation of heterogeneity of the multiple ways of living together and of ethnical and religious diversity of groups goes along with more positive attitudes towards Muslims and other prejudiced groups. It's a critical questions how to sustain diversity beliefs without coming back to an ideological multicultural discussion.

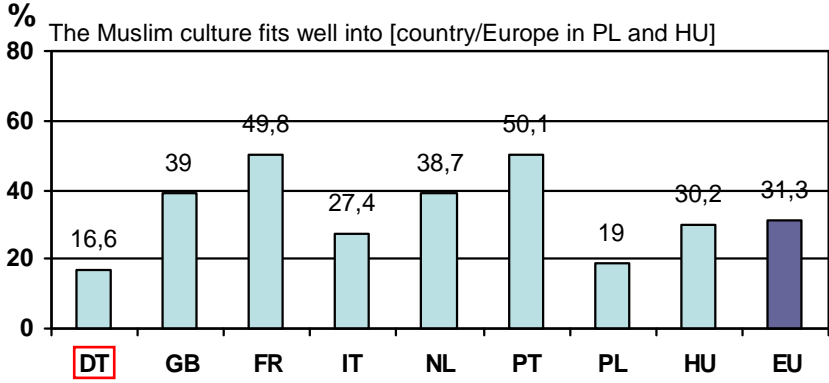
##### *Support of intercultural contact*

Data clearly show that a personal contact with Muslims, especially friendships, protect of careless agreement on prejudices. Data shows that these certain contacts with a certain group also have an influence on the opinion on other target groups even though there is no contact at all. As research stresses this accounts not only for direct

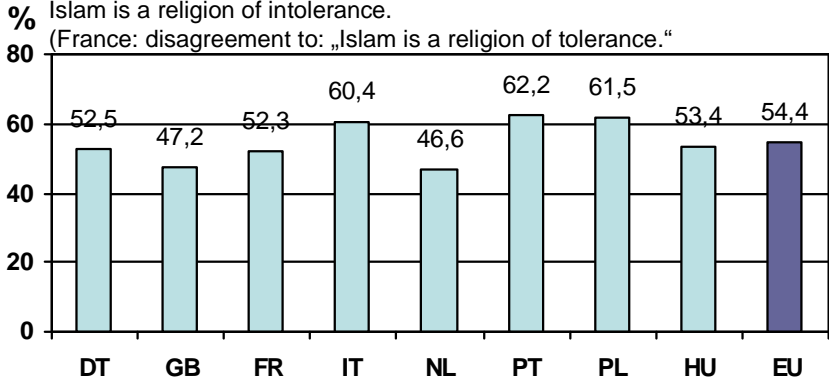
contact but also for indirect contact; i.e., if someone's friend has a friend who immigrated into the country, this person is less prejudice towards immigrants and also more tolerant towards other groups. In sum, contact between certain groups has an influence on the development of a generally more positive towards several target groups and therefore, it is worth investing.

Attachment: Agreement to some selected indicators of anti-Islam prejudices

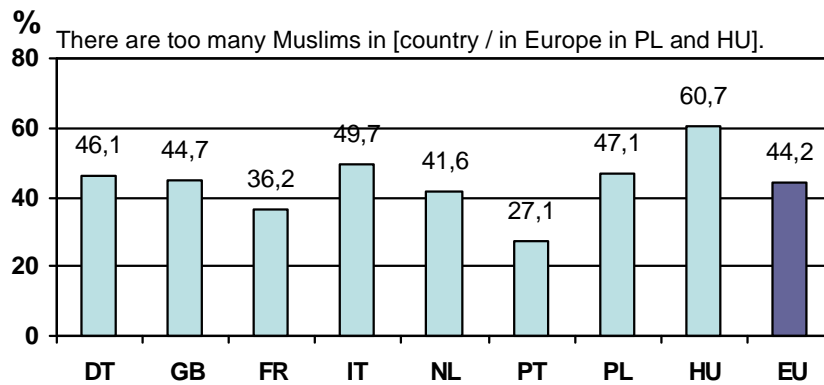
**anti-Muslim attitudes (Islamophobia)**



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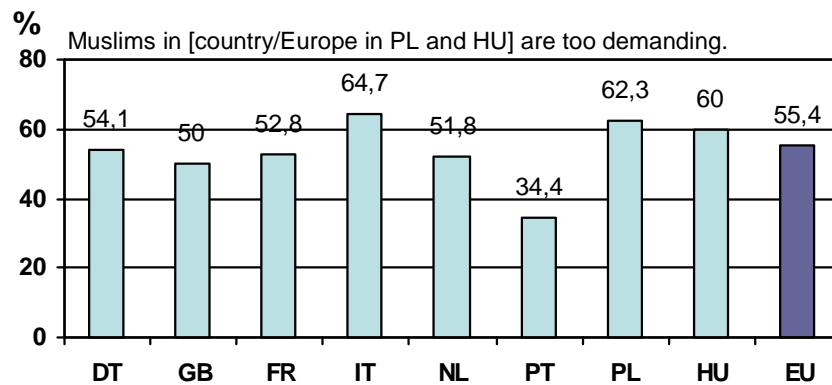
## anti-Muslim attitudes (Islamophobia)



max. % Muslims 5% 3% 5% 2% 6% 1% 1% 1%

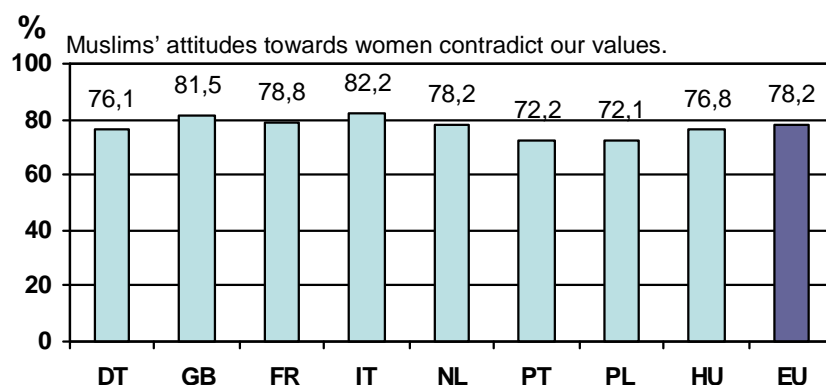
Source: CIA Factbook 2009

## anti-Muslim attitudes (Islamophobia)



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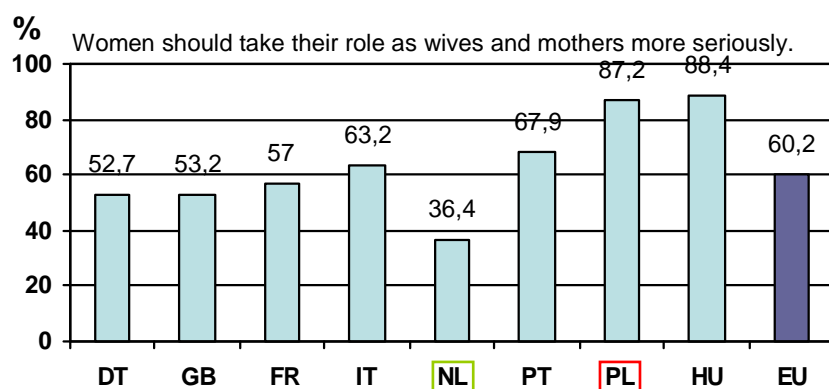
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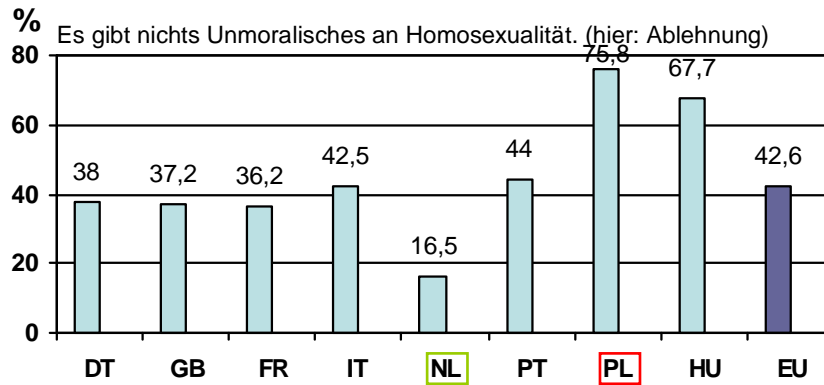
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## Sexism

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## Homophobia



There is nothing immoral about homosexuality (reverse coded: high values = rejection)

## anti-Black Racism

