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# Anti-Islam or Anti-religion? Understanding Objection against Islamic Education

Jolanda van der Noll and Vassilis Saroglou

*Opposition against the accommodation of Islam in Western societies is often attributed to a prejudice against Muslims. This overlooks the possibility that opposition against Islam could also be caused by a more general aversion towards religion and a desire for a stricter separation between the state and religion in general. Based on the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) of 2012, the current study investigated the non-Muslim majority's attitude towards religious education preferences in German public schools. By applying a multinomial logit model, we examined to what extent Islamophobic, xenophobic and religious attitudes predict whether people (i) support the provision of Islamic education, (ii) prefer only Christian education or (iii) opt for no religious education at all. Results show that Islamophobic and xenophobic attitudes are relevant indicators of objection against the provision of Islamic education in particular, while religiosity and religious style determine whether people support having religious education in general. Furthermore, the effect of Islamophobia and xenophobia depends on religious style. With these results the current study provides a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying resistance towards accommodating Islam in the public sphere.*

*Keywords: Islamophobia; Religion; Tolerance; Civil Liberties; Religious Education*

## Introduction

Discussions on diversity and social equality in the West are increasingly focused on how to deal with religious diversity, and in particular on how Muslim religious practices should be accommodated in Western societies. Especially since the early 2000s, social

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problems have been attributed to the mostly Islamic religious background of minorities rather than to other factors, such as socio-economic class (Mühe 2012). It is often perceived that the culture and lifestyle of Muslims is incompatible with Western ideals of gender equality and non-discrimination of, for example, homosexuals (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007) and there is a widespread scepticism towards Islam in general and Muslim religious practices in particular. Nevertheless, it is broadly acknowledged, and founded in legislation, that ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is an inevitable characteristic of Western societies, and that this diversity should be accommodated, as long as it does not counteract the interests of public safety, endanger public order, health or morals, or infringe on the rights and freedoms of others (Dobbernack and Modood 2011; Parekh 2000).

For minorities to feel full-fledged members of their host society, with the same rights and liberties as the majority population, it is important that their basic civil liberties and needs are respected and recognised, including the freedom to live by the moral, sexual or familial standard they prefer (McClosky and Brill 1983; Sullivan and Transue 1999). This requires more than mere toleration, or the freedom from government interference in minorities' (religious) practices, but entails recognition and the protected right of having the freedom to undertake public activities (Galeotti 1993; Van Doorn 2012; Vogt 1997). The recognition of rights does not encompass a moral judgement of the particular practices, but works within the moral boundaries of society (Dobbernack and Modood 2011).

Religion is often considered to be a private matter, but the distinction between the private practice of religion and the public sphere is blurred. The interplay between the private and public sphere is for instance illustrated by controversies that have arisen over the wearing of headscarves and burqas by Muslim women, the accommodation of praying facilities, religious holidays, ritual slaughtering, application of family law and religious education (Klausen 2005). In most conceptions of the liberal state, the government is supposed to take a neutral stance regarding religion, treating all religious and non-religious groups equal and discriminating against none, and citizens of different religious denominations are typically able to express their religion in (semi) public spheres (Lettinga 2011; Powell and Clarke 2013). However, despite the secular character of many Western societies, the historical traditions of Christianity are still present in today's societies (Cesari 2010). This, in combination with the public anxiety and aversion towards some Muslim practices, has challenged the accommodation of Islam in Western societies and put the position of Islam at the heart of fierce debates on diversity and the freedom of religion.

The aim of the present study is to test the hypothesis that religious style and a general aversion towards religion are, in addition to Islamophobia and xenophobia, among the main factors that underlie the opinion towards accommodating Islam in the public sphere. We concentrate on public opinion regarding the provision of Islamic education in German public schools as an example of the accommodation of Islam. We focus on attitudes and perceptions of the non-Muslim majority population because acceptance and integration of minorities is often embedded in the attitudes

and behaviour of the majority population (Breugelmans and van de Vijver 2004; Dobbernack and Modood 2011; Gibson 2006). People typically pay more attention to their direct environment than they do to the actions of policy-makers (McClosky and Brill 1983) and the decision of school officials to provide Islamic education will likely also depend on the attitudes and perceptions of the people in the neighbourhood. Studying public opinion furthermore gives an indication of exclusion and oppression in everyday encounters, as well as whether there is a basis for current and future legislation concerning the accommodation of Islam.

We focus on the provision of Islamic education in German public schools because schools are often perceived to be one of the most important channels through which future generations are socialised into society's value system, and as such play an important role in the debates around Muslims and Islam in Western societies (Mühe 2011). Religious instruction can be seen as a basic right, for pupils as well as parents, which comes with the principle of freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Lettinga 2011).

For our study, we use data of the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS). Germany is one of the European countries with the largest share of a (Muslim) minority population, mainly of Turkish origin (Pew Research Center 2009). Until the 1990s, immigrants were predominantly perceived as temporary and were encouraged to maintain their own culture, habits and language (Brubaker 2001). More recently, however, the position of (Muslim) minorities and the adherence to their culture of origin has been publicly challenged and the need for minorities to adopt the host society's customs is increasingly emphasised. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, remarked for example that the multicultural approach failed and that immigrants should do more to integrate (Weaver and Agencies 2010).

Most public schools in Germany offer Christian religious education. For those who do not want to have religious education, schools offer a non-religious ethics course and if there is sufficient demand, schools may offer Jewish religious courses (Fox 2008). To be able to provide religious education, religious communities need to have a 'public law corporation status.' To obtain such a status, religious communities should fulfil a number of criteria, such as respecting the German democracy, having sufficient financial resources and having a centralised organisational structure (Lettinga 2011). Since the Muslim community in Germany is so diverse, none of the groups has yet managed to be considered as the central representative body. Furthermore, the democratic commitment of Islamic organisations is often questioned. Because of these factors, most federal states have thus far denied the requests made by Islamic organisations to register as a public corporation or the demands to provide Islamic education (Duyvené de Wit and Koopmans 2005; Lettinga 2011). As a consequence, school officials do not feel required to provide Islamic education in their schools (Fetzer and Soper 2005). Recently, after a long judicial process, some schools in Berlin offer Islamic religious courses (Mühe 2011).

### Explaining Majority's Attitudes towards the Accommodation of Islam

In this study, we examine religious education preferences; should Islamic education be offered at public schools, is this a privilege to be maintained only for Christian religious education or should there be no religious education at all in public schools? Often, objection towards the accommodation of Islam is ascribed to Islamophobia—indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims (Bleich 2011; Dekker and Van der Noll 2012). However, the objection towards the accommodation of Islam can also be based on a general aversion towards religious presence in the public sphere (Modood 1994), in which case people are more likely to prefer having no religious education in public schools at all. In our study we focus on the role of interreligious antipathy (including Islamophobia), xenophobia, religiosity and religious style.

#### *Interreligious Antipathy and Xenophobia*

People have the urge to restrict groups or ideas they dislike (McClosky and Brill 1983) and research has shown that people who are more negative towards minorities are more likely to oppose granting minorities the same rights and liberties as the majority population (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). Tolerance, or to put up with something that one does not like (Gibson 2006; Sullivan and Transue 1999; Vogt 1997), implies having a negative attitude towards the target group and tolerant people are those who do not allow their personal dislikes to interfere with general principles of democratic rights and liberties (Jackman 1977). Hence, despite that they dislike a certain group or behaviour, they are convinced that, within the moral boundaries of society, this group must be allowed to express their views, act according to their own standards and have the same rights and liberties as others. Previous research has indeed shown that people with negative attitudes are less likely to support equal rights and liberties for minorities (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Van der Noll, Poppe, and Verkuyten 2010). We therefore expect that *people who have a more negative attitude towards Muslims are more likely to oppose the provision of Islamic education (H1)*.

There is an ongoing scholarly debate on whether Islamophobia is a new phenomenon or rather an expression of a general out-group antipathy. Some studies have found strong associations between attitudes towards different ethnic or cultural groups (Echebarria-Echabe and Guede 2007; Kalkan, Layman, and Uslander 2009; Zick et al. 2008). If this were the case, it is not necessarily negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam are the foundation for opposition towards Islamic education, but rather a general aversion towards other groups. Other studies showed, however, that attitudes towards different groups reached different levels, that different groups evoke different stereotypes and emotions, and have different antecedents (Cottrell and Neuberg 2005; Helbling 2010).

To account for the possibility that it is a generalised prejudice, rather than negative attitudes towards Muslims in particular, we additionally consider the attitude towards

Jews, who constitute a different religious out-group for the sample population, and, more generally, we examine the role of xenophobia. Xenophobia is not targeted at a specific out-group like Muslims, but at foreigners in general. If support for the accommodation of Islam is indeed the result of a generalised prejudice, we expect to find *that a negative attitude towards Jews and a higher level of xenophobia are related to opposition towards the accommodation of Islamic education in German public schools (H2-3)*.

However, tolerance does not always correspond with having a mere dislike of a particular group. Sniderman and Piazza (1995), for example, found that anti-Black sentiments do no longer dominate the political thinking of Whites, and that the level of support for pro-Black policies depends on the specifics of that policy. Similarly, Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007) showed that among people with a positive attitude towards immigrants, a substantial part object to the idea of granting immigrants the same rights and liberties as the majority population, and McIntosh et al. (1995) found only a moderate correlation between prejudice and tolerance. Research that focuses specifically on the rights and liberties of Muslims in Western Europe also showed that the willingness to restrict rights and liberties of Muslims was found beyond those having a negative attitude towards Muslims (Saroglou et al. 2009; Van der Noll et al. 2010; Van der Noll 2010, 2012, 2014). This indicates that having a positive attitude towards Muslims does not necessarily imply acceptance and support.

### *Religiosity and Religious Style*

What is currently often overlooked in popular debates and scholarly research is that the objection towards the accommodation of Islam can be the result of an aversion against religion in general, rather than against Muslims and Islam per se, or foreigners in general. The process of secularisation resulted in a distinction between people who think that there is a place for religion in the secular public sphere and those who think there is not (Modood 1994). It follows from this distinction that objection towards the expression of Islam can be based on a general rejection of religion in the public sphere, rather than an aversion towards Muslims or Islam in particular. In most European societies, a greater presence of religion in the public sphere is considered to be problematic (Dobbernack and Modood 2011; Fetzer and Soper 2005; Meer and Modood 2009).

The opinion on whether or not religion has a place in the public sphere is likely to be related to an individual's level of religiosity. People to whom religion is important personally are more likely to assign religion a role in public life. The impact of the strength of religiosity can however be ambiguous when it comes to support for the presence of Islam. On the one hand, people with a stronger religiosity themselves can be expected to be more supportive of religious behaviour and demands, even when it concerns another religion (Fetzer and Soper 2005). On the other hand, it can be argued that especially religious people might feel threatened by other religious lifestyles and will therefore be less supportive of the visible presence of Islam. Previous research has shown that the link between prejudice and political intolerance

is generally stronger for religious than non-religious people (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993; Jackson and Hunsberger 1999; Powell and Clarke 2013). One possible explanation is that identification as a member of a religious affiliation can trigger intergroup processes that lead to stereotypes, negative attitudes and anti-social behaviours towards other groups (Jackson and Hunsberger 1999). Following previous research, we hypothesise *that stronger religiosity is associated with an objection against abandoning religious education (H4)*.

A different way of looking at religiosity, in addition to the strength of religiosity, is to consider the way in which people are religious. Previous research has shown that this classification, rather than the strength of religiosity, is relevant for predicting prejudice, close-mindedness and racism (Fontaine et al. 2003; Saroglou et al. 2009). A distinction can be made between fundamentalism and non-fundamentalism. Religious fundamentalism reflects 'the belief that there is only one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity' (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992, 118). Although this definition refers primarily to believers, convinced non-believers can also be considered to be fundamentalist; fundamentalism then reflects the absolute conviction that the belief in any God or deity is wrong (Goldfried and Miner 2002). Fundamentalists, whether they are believers or non-believers, claim to have the absolute truth at hand regarding morality and religion, and are likely to consider deviances from their perspective as a threat (Powell and Clarke 2013). Religious fundamentalism is found to be associated with prejudice and a reluctance to extend civil liberties to minority groups (Altemeyer 2003; Blogowska, Lambert, and Saroglou 2013; McFarland 1989). We therefore expect *that fundamentalists are more likely to oppose the accommodation of Islam (H5), either because it is the 'wrong' religion (religious fundamentalists; H5a), or because Islam is a religion (anti-religious fundamentalists; H5b)*.

Non-fundamentalists, regardless of whether they are religious or not, on the other hand, have a more open approach to religion, treating truth claims to be tentative, rather than absolute. Because of this open approach to religion, non-fundamentalists should be better able to deal with people whose worldviews deviate from theirs and their societal norms and standards (Powell and Clarke 2013). We thus hypothesise *that non-fundamentalists are likely to prefer an equal treatment of the various religions and are therefore more likely to either support the provision of Islamic education or opt for having no religious education at all (H5c)*.

In addition to these main effects of religious style on religious education preferences, we expect to find an interaction between religious style and xenophobic or anti-Muslim attitudes: For people with a religious fundamentalist or anti-religious orientation, limiting the presence of religious (out-) groups is the natural disposition, whereas those with a more open attitude towards other religions might need additional justifications to limit the religious out-group's liberties and may thus rely more on their personal dislikes of foreigners and Muslims (Van der Noll 2012). Therefore, we expect *that xenophobic and anti-Muslim attitudes will play a more important role*

*among non-fundamentalists than among religious fundamentalists or anti-religious fundamentalists (H6).*

### *Conservative Values*

The endorsement of conservative values has been found to be associated both with negative out-group attitudes and with religiosity. Values can be defined as ‘enduring beliefs that a specific mode is personally or socially preferable to an opposing or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence’ (Rokeach 1973, 5). Value orientations are more abstract than attitudes and focus on ideals, whereas attitudes refer to concrete objects or subject. Values can give meaning to actions and are often used as a standard against which behaviour, from others or oneself, can be judged (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004). Conservative values, such as conformity, tradition and security, imply respecting societal norms and expectations and striving to act upon them. People who endorse these values are likely to be uncomfortable with people who deviate from community’s standards and social norms and are motivated to restrain action and impulses that might violate social expectations, or which might upset others (McClosky and Brill 1983; Schwartz 1992). Several studies have assessed the importance of conservative values for tolerance and inter-group prejudice and showed that they have a diminishing effect on support for the rights and liberties of others (Davidov et al. 2008 on support for immigration policies; Iser and Schmidt 2003 on group focused enmity; Sagiv and Schwartz 1995 on intergroup contact; Saroglou et al. 2009 and Helbling 2014 on negative attitudes towards the headscarf; Stolz 2005 on Islamophobia; Van der Noll 2014 on the accommodation of Islam in Germany).

Research has also shown that conservative values are associated with religiosity. A meta-analysis on the relation between Schwartz’ human values and religiosity, including 21 independent samples collected in the 1990s, showed that religiosity is consistently associated with the endorsement of the conservation values, most notably conformity and tradition (Saroglou, Delpierre, and Dernelle 2004). This implies that people who are highly religious are typically uncomfortable with deviations from the societal norms and expectations.

Given the association of conservative values with our two main explanatory variables, intergroup prejudice and religiosity, we control for conservative values in our model. We expect *that both the intergroup factors and religiosity variables maintain their unique explanatory power (H7).*

### *Differentiating between Anti-Islam and Anti-Religion*

We argue that to understand public opinion regarding the provision of Islamic education, we should not just examine the simple distinction between being for or against Islamic education. Instead, we anticipate that it is essential to make a distinction between having a general aversion towards religion in the public sphere, and an aversion towards Islam in particular. In other words, we expect that *a model*

with three outcome categories, distinguishing between supporting Islamic education, objecting Islamic education in particular and objecting religious education in general, provides a better understanding of the resistance towards accommodating Islam, than a model that just compares being for or against Islamic education (H8).

## Method

For the current study we used the 2012 survey of the ALLBUS (German General Social Survey; GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences 2013). The ALLBUS survey program exists since 1980 and is a bi-annual survey program that collects data on attitudes, behaviour and social structures in Germany from a representative cross-section of the population (Blohm 2008). In the following sections, the sample and measures used for this study are described.

### Sample

In 2012, 3480 respondents took part in the face-to-face interviews.<sup>1</sup> For our study, only respondents who identified as Protestant, Roman Catholic or non-religious were included in the sample ( $n = 3287$ ). Other respondents identified as belonging to a different Christian denomination ( $n = 74$ ), to a non-Christian religion ( $n = 110$ , of whom 86% identified as Muslim) or refused to give their religious affiliation ( $n = 9$ ). Respondents who did not answer the question on the provision of Islamic education ( $n = 78$ ) were also omitted from the analyses, leaving us with 3209 respondents of 18 years and older ( $M = 50$ ,  $SD = 18$ ), of whom 50% were women. Missing values on the independent variables did not exceed 4% and were omitted through listwise deletion from the analysis; this resulted in a sample size of 2900 respondents for the analyses, of whom 8% had a migrant background.<sup>2</sup>

### Measures

The dependent variable, *religious education preference*, was measured as follows 'It is being debated whether there should be Islamic religious instruction for Muslim children in state schools. What is your opinion about this: Should there be (i) also Islamic religious instruction in state schools, (ii) only Christian religious instruction or (iii) no religious instruction at all in state schools?' Respondents were asked to make a choice between the three options.

To capture the *religious style* respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed most with the statement that (i) there is only one true religion (we call respondents who choose this option 'religious fundamentalists'), (ii) one can find important truths in many religions ('non-fundamentalist') or (iii) important truths cannot be found in any religion ('anti-religious'). In addition to religious style, respondents were asked to report their strength of religiosity on a 10-point scale.<sup>3</sup> Finally, an indicator of *religious indifference* (3 items: 'I do not care if God exists', 'I do not care if there is a higher power' and 'I do not follow a religious doctrine');

factor loadings  $>.85$ ; 81% explained variance, Cronbach's alpha =  $.88$ ) was included in the analysis.

To capture *negative attitudes towards Muslims*, respondents were asked to indicate on 7-point scales how pleasant they would find it if someone in their family would get married to a Muslim, if they would object to a Muslim mayor of their town or village and to what extent they perceive that the presence of Muslims leads to conflicts (factor loadings  $>.69$ ; 57% explained variance, Cronbach's alpha =  $.61$ ). For *negative attitudes towards Jews*, respondents were also asked to react to three statements (on a 7-point scale of completely agree – completely disagree: 'Jewish people have too much influence in the world', 'Many Jewish people try to take personal advantage today of what happened during the Nazi era, and make Germans pay for it', and 'As a result of their behaviour, Jewish people are not entirely without blame for being persecuted'; factor loadings  $>.80$ , 66% explained variance, Cronbach's alpha =  $.74$ ). For both scales, a higher score reflects a more negative attitude. In addition, respondents were asked to what extent, on a 7-point scale, they agreed with four statements reflecting *xenophobic opinions* towards foreigners ('Foreigners living in Germany should adopt their way of life a little more closely to the German way of life', 'When jobs get scarce, the foreigners living in Germany should be sent home again', 'Foreigners living in Germany should be prohibited from taking part in any political activity' and 'Foreigners living in Germany should choose to marry people of their own nationality'). The four items reflect a single factor of xenophobia (factor loadings  $>.57$ ; 56% explained variance, Cronbach's alpha =  $.73$ ), on which a higher score reflects a stronger xenophobia.

In line with the definition of values being more abstract than attitudes, and serving as a guiding principles (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004), respondents were asked what ideas are important in shaping their life and behaviour. To construct a measure of *conservative values*, three items were selected that emphasise conformity, sense of duty and security ('It is important to respect law and order', 'It is important to strive for security' and 'It is important to be hardworking') and were averaged into one scale (factor loadings  $>.70$ ; 55% explained variance; Cronbach's alpha =  $.60$ ) in which a higher score reflects a stronger endorsement of these values. These items in particular tap in to the conformity and security dimensions of conservation values ('hard-working' for example relates to self-discipline and sense of duty, while 'respect for law and order' fosters a stable and secure society). There was no item that particularly addresses the importance of tradition, except for 'believing in God', which would be too closely related to our religiosity measures.

Background variables include gender, age in years, subjective perception of socio-economic status, living in former East Germany and self-identification as Protestant or Roman Catholic.

### Analyses

First, religious education preference and their relation with religious style are examined. Second, a regression analysis was conducted to examine to what extent

religious style and religiosity, interreligious antipathy and xenophobia and conservative values (means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1) relate to religious education preference. Because of the categorical character of the dependent variable (religious education preference) the current study employs a multinomial logit model to examine to what extent our independent variables increase the probability of people (i) supporting the provision of also Islamic education on German public schools, (ii) preferring having only Christian education or (iii) opting for no religious education at all. The output of multinomial logit model reports a change in the logit of choosing one option over the other (coefficient  $b$ ). It is difficult, however, to give a substantive meaning to the change in logit and to facilitate interpretation, the log odd coefficients were transformed into odds ratios [Exp ( $B$ ), Table 1] which reflect the probability of choosing one outcome category over another. An odds ratio greater than 1 indicates a positive effect, where coefficients smaller than 1 indicate negative effects.

Since we hypothesised that xenophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice have a different effect on religious education preferences depending on the religious style, we included interactions between religious style and xenophobia and negative attitudes towards Muslims. Since it is substantially meaningful to know the impact of xenophobia and negative attitudes towards Muslims on religious education preferences for the three distinct groups, we report the marginal effects per group in Table 1 (Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006). Interaction coefficients, that reflect how the impact differs between groups, are reported in the footnote of the Table 1.

Finally, we conduct logistic regression on being for or against the provision of Islamic education. The comparison of this model with our multinomial logit model allows us to test our argument that we should indeed consider the aversion towards religion in general in order to understand the resistance towards the accommodation of Islam.

To facilitate interpretation all continuous variables without a meaningful zero were standardised on zero ( $M = 0$ ;  $SD = 1$ ). The final model had a satisfactory fit (Model  $\chi^2 = 1259$ ,  $p < .001$ ; McFadden pseudo- $R^2 = .21$ ).

## Results

Of the 3209 respondents who answered the question about Islamic education, 35% agrees that public schools should also offer Islamic education for Muslim pupils, 27% prefers to offer only Christian education and 38% would rather have no religious education at all in public schools.

As expected, there is a significant bivariate association between religious style and religious education preference (Cramer's  $V = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Of the respondents having the opinion that there is only one true religion, 54% favours offering only Christian education at German public schools. Two-thirds (66%) of the anti-religious respondents choose to abolish all religious education. Providing also Islamic

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations independent variables; results regression models.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	Multinomial logit model						Logistic regress.	
		Isl. education compared to Chr. education		Isl. education compared to No rel. education		Chr. education compared to No. rel. education		Isl. Education compared to No. Isl. education	
		<i>b</i>	Exp( <i>b</i> )	<i>B</i>	Exp( <i>b</i> )	<i>b</i>	Exp( <i>b</i> )	<i>b</i>	Exp( <i>b</i> )
<i>Religious style</i>									
Non-fundamentalists (ref.)	.68 (.47)								
Religious fundamentalism	.07 (.25)	-0.85	0.43***	-0.12	0.89	0.73	2.08**	-0.51	0.60*
Anti-religious fund	.21 (.41)	-0.19	0.83	-0.64	0.53***	-0.46	0.63**	-0.72	0.49***
Religiosity <sup>a</sup>	.38 (.34)	0.11	1.12	0.40	1.50***	0.29	1.34**	0.02	1.02
Religious indifference <sup>a</sup>	.52 (.35)	0.05	1.05	-0.35	0.70***	-0.40	0.67***	-0.12	0.89
<i>Neg. Attitude Muslims<sup>ab</sup></i>									
Non-fund. (ref.)	.60 (.23)								
Religious fund		-0.67	0.51***	-0.22	0.80**	0.45	1.56***	-0.02	0.98
Anti-religious fund		-0.67	0.51**	-0.42	0.65	0.24	1.27	0.20	1.22
Neg. attitude Jews <sup>a</sup>	.37 (.26)	-0.43	0.65	-0.10	0.90	0.33	1.39*	0.22	1.24
Xenophobia <sup>ab</sup>	.37 (.22)	-0.23	0.80**	-0.14	0.87*	0.09	1.10	-0.04	0.97
Non-fund (ref.)		-0.70	0.50***	-0.36	0.70***	0.33	1.39***	-0.35	0.70***
Religious fund		-0.06	0.95	0.17	1.19	0.23	1.26	-0.30	0.74
Anti-religious fund		-0.73	0.48***	-0.69	0.50***	0.05	1.05	-0.31	0.73**
Conservative values <sup>a</sup>	.81 (.13)	0.02	1.02	0.06	1.06	0.04	1.04	0.01	1.01
<i>Demographics</i>									
Gender (ref. male)	.50 (.50)	-0.14	0.87	-0.12	0.89	0.02	1.02	0.79	2.20***
Age <sup>a</sup>	50 (18)	0.38	1.46***	0.08	1.08	-0.30	0.74***	-0.24	0.79***
Socio-economic status <sup>a</sup>	.45 (.16)	-0.08	0.93	0.06	1.06	0.14	1.15*	0.23	1.26***
East Germany	.34 (.47)	-0.62	0.54***	-1.15	0.32***	-0.54	0.59***	-0.42	0.66***
<i>Religious denomination</i>									
None (ref.)	.36 (.48)								
Roman Catholic	.29 (.46)	-0.12	0.89	0.31	1.37	0.43	1.54*	-0.15	0.86
Protestant	.35 (.48)	-0.48	0.62**	0.01	1.10	0.58	1.78***	-0.18	0.84
<i>Intercept</i>		0.78	***	0.32	*	-0.47	**	-0.36	**

Note: Reference group is an average male, non-fundamentalist, who does not belong to a religious denomination.

<sup>a</sup>Continuous variables are standardised ( $M = 0$ ,  $SD = 1$ ).

<sup>b</sup>Interaction coefficients are the marginal effects for the respective groups. Interaction coefficients (*b*) for religious fundamentalists compared to non-fundamentalists are, respectively, .64\*\*; .54\*; -.11; .06 (xenophobia) and .00; -.21; -.21; .22 (negative attitude Muslims). Interaction coefficients for anti-religious fundamentalists compared to non-fundamentalists are, respectively, -.04; -.32; -.28\*; .04 (xenophobia) and .24; .12; -.12; .24 (negative attitude Muslims).

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$ .

education is favourite among non-fundamentalists (be they believers or non-believers; 43%), while an additional 31% favours to offer no religious education at all.

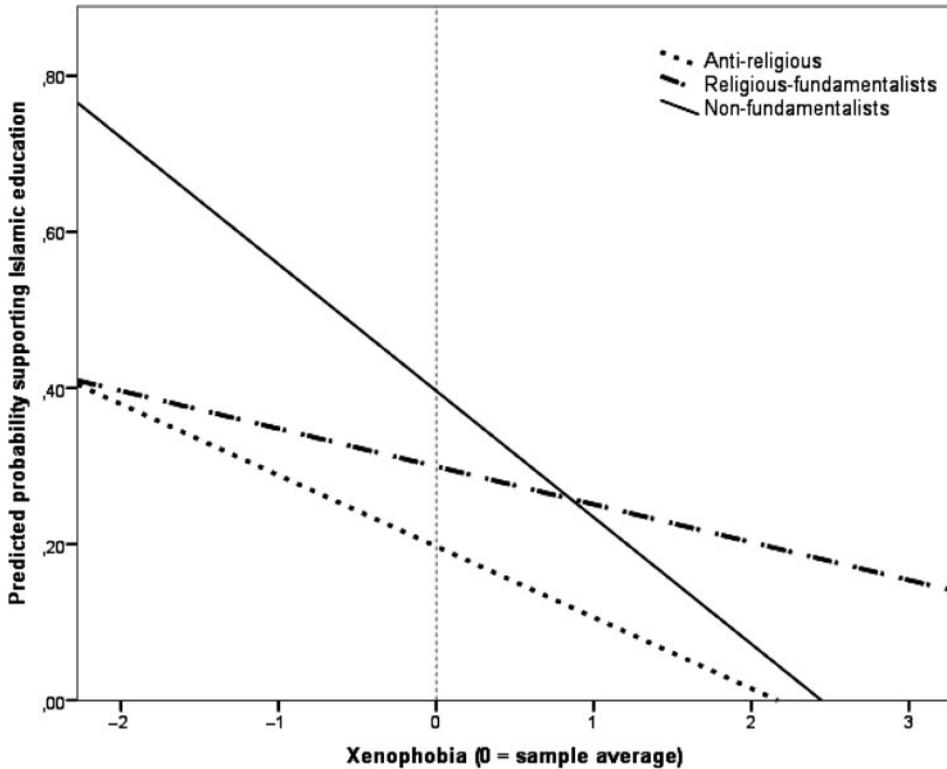
Results of the multinomial logit model (Table 1) show that having a religious fundamentalist or an anti-religious style, are among the strongest psychological predictors of opposing Islamic education. The odds of choosing to support having also Islamic education over having only Christian education are 0.43 for religious fundamentalists compared to non-fundamentalists (hence, religious fundamentalists are 2.3 times as likely as non-fundamentalists to choose having only Christian education over also providing Islamic education). Having an anti-religious style decreases the odds of supporting also Islamic or only Christian education in favour of having no religious education. Respondents high in religiosity are more likely to choose either having also Islamic education (OR 1.50) or only Christian education (OR 1.34) over no religious education, compared to respondents with an average level of religiosity, while respondents high on religious indifference are more likely to oppose having any religious education.

#### *Interreligious Antipathy and Xenophobia*

As expected, negative attitudes towards Muslims in particular and foreigners in general contribute to the objection towards Islamic education in German public schools. Among non-fundamentalists, a higher level of xenophobia not only decreases the odds of supporting the provision of Islamic education compared to only Christian education (OR 0.50) or to no religious education (OR 0.70) but also increases the odds of choosing only Christian education over no religious education at all (OR 1.39). We found a significant interaction between religious style and xenophobia, which shows that, in line with our expectations, xenophobia is less important for objecting the provision of Islamic education among religious fundamentalists compared to non-fundamentalists. Figure 1 shows the probability of supporting the provision of Islamic education by the level of xenophobia. Regardless of religious style, a higher level of xenophobia is associated with a decreased likelihood of supporting Islamic education. The decrease is, however, significantly stronger among non-fundamentalists than among religious fundamentalists. The strength of the impact of having a negative attitude towards Muslims in particular was less strongly affected by religious style.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, a more negative attitude towards Jews, a different religious out-group, also has a significant impact on religious education preferences; respondents who have more negative attitudes towards Jews are less likely to support the provision of Islamic education in German public schools.

We did not find a significant effect of the endorsement of conservative values. We argued that both religiosity and negative out-group attitudes are associated with the endorsement of these conservative values. In line with our expectations, we find that religiosity, religious style, interreligious antipathy and xenophobia affected religious education preference independent of conservative values. Furthermore, removing these variables from the model did not yield a significant effect of conservative values.



**Figure 1.** Predicted probability of supporting Islamic education by level of xenophobia.

### *Demographics*

Among the socio-demographical variables, living in a former East German federal states is one of the most prominent ones and cuts the odds of choosing to provide also Islamic education over only Christian education almost in half compared to respondents living in former West Germany (OR 0.54). Overall, East Germans are more likely to prefer having no religious education, while West Germans are more likely to choose having also Islamic education in German public schools. This is in line with other research, showing lower levels of tolerance towards minorities and more prejudice in former East Germany (Rajman, Semyonov, and Schmidt 2003; Wagner et al. 2003; Wagner, Christ, and Pettigrew 2008).

In general, older respondents are opposed to exclusively offering Christian education, and are more likely to support either the provision of Islamic education (OR 1.46) or opt for having no religious education at all (OR 0.74). This contradicts other research that typically finds that age is positively correlated with prejudice (Franssen, Dhont, and Van Hiel 2013). Based on our study, we cannot be certain, however, that the difference in religious education preference based on age is due to

an age effect, or a cohort effect. Gender has no significant effect on religious education preferences.

Religious self-identification, especially in the case of Protestants, is also associated with religious education preferences. Respondents who indicate to be Protestant or Catholic are more likely to support having only Christian education over having no religious education at all, while Protestants furthermore favoured having only Christian education over also providing Islamic education. Interactions between Christian denomination and other predictor variables did not contribute to the model.

### *Differentiating between Anti-Islam and Anti-Religion*

One of the motives for our study was the observation that discussions regarding the position of Islam often ignore that people can object to the accommodation of Islam not because it is Islam per se but because it is a religion. A comparison of our final model with a model distinguishing only between support for and objection against the provision of Islamic education supports our argument.

The logistic regression analysis (Table 1, last column) yields a similar conclusion regarding xenophobia; a higher xenophobia is associated with more resistance towards Islamic education, but not significantly so among religious fundamentalists. However, although it shows the same tendency as in our multinomial logit model, having a more negative attitude towards Muslims is not significant, neither are effects of attitude towards Jews, conservative values, religiosity and religious indifference. Religious fundamentalists and anti-religious fundamentalists oppose the provision of Islamic education, but the nuances whether respondents object to every kind of religious education, or support the provision of only Christian religious education cannot be made with this analysis. In contrast, results of our multinomial logit model shows that religiosity is not per se related to the question of providing Islamic religious education, but rather more generally to the issue of whether there should be religious education at all. Religiosity and religious attitudes do increase support for Islamic education, but only when the alternative is that all religious education would be abolished.

### **Discussion**

Opposition towards the accommodation of Islam in Western societies is often attributed to a prejudice against Muslims and Islam. In this study we tested the hypothesis that opposition towards Islam also depends on religiosity and religious style, and can be caused by a more general aversion towards religion and a desire for a separation between the state and religion. Based on the ALLBUS data of 2012 (GESIS - Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences 2013), we analysed religious education preference by distinguishing between (i) also providing Islamic religious education in German public schools, (ii) only providing Christian religious education or (iii) having no religious education at all in public schools.

Most respondents favour an equal treatment of Islamic and Christian religious education, either through allowing the provision of Islamic religious education or by having no religious education at all.

Our explanatory model shows that the question of whether people support Islamic education in German public schools reflects two related, but different issues: (i) should there be religious education in general and (ii) should there also be Islamic education?

First of all, which people support the provision of religious education in general? The answer to this question is particularly influenced by a higher level of individual religiosity and a lack of indifference towards religion. This supports our hypothesis that it is important to take religiosity, or an aversion towards religiosity, into account when debating the role of Islam in the public sphere.

Secondly, should there also be Islamic religious education? Our results show that here negative attitudes not only towards foreigners and Muslims, but also to Jews, play an important role. Moreover, emphasising again the role of religion, we show that the effects of xenophobia on religious education preferences differ according to someone's religious style. Although higher levels of xenophobic and Islamophobic attitudes are generally associated with an increased likelihood to oppose the provision of Islamic education, these effects are stronger among religious non-fundamentalists (regardless of whether they are believers or non-believers), than among religious fundamentalists. Non-fundamentalists are generally supposed to have a more open and accepting attitude towards different (religious) lifestyles (Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis 1993; Duriez et al. 2007). Our results seem to confirm the idea that while the acceptance of diversity is the natural disposition of non-fundamentalists, they need additional motivations to object towards the expression of Islam (Van der Noll 2012).

Some recent studies have suggested that negativity towards Muslim and Islam are an expression of a generalised prejudice, or a 'band of others' (e.g., Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009). In line with previous research, which shows a strong correlation between anti-Muslim and anti-Jew sentiments (Echebarria-Echabe and Guede 2007), we find that attitudes towards Jews play a significant role in explaining religious education preferences. Furthermore, we find that an aversion towards foreigners in general have a significant impact as well. Nevertheless, after filtering out these effects of xenophobia and attitudes towards Jews, we still find that anti-Muslim attitudes play a unique and significant role in our model. Therefore, we cannot fully support this claim of generalised prejudice. Rather, we suspect that both the ethnic and the religious component of Muslim minorities contribute to the opinion towards the accommodation of Islam in the public sphere. The data used in this study do however not allow to further disentangle these effects. Furthermore, in line with previous studies on support for the rights and liberties of minority groups (e.g., Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; Sniderman and Piazza 1995; Van der Noll 2014), our results show that the accommodation of Islam in the public sphere is not only a matter of disregarding one's personal dislikes.

This study is among the first to examine the role of religion and anti-religiosity in debates concerning the accommodation of Islam in Western societies. A limitation of our study is, however, that we were not able to examine attitudes towards education of other religious denominations (e.g. Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu religious education). A general aversion towards religion would predict opposition towards religious education to the same extent as people oppose Islamic education. Future research should further examine the validity of this claim. Furthermore, our dependent variable of religious education preference might suffer from a social desirability bias; respondents who do not support the provision of Islamic education in German public schools might not have wanted to appear to be prejudiced, and therefore choose the anti-religious option. In addition, since Germany is a highly secularised society, respondents might have felt that choosing for having no religious education at all was the socially desirable answer. Hence, we might have an overrepresentation of respondents who favour having no religious education. Unfortunately, the data used for this study do not allow us to control for social desirability. Finally, the provision of Islamic education is a complex matter, and the opinion towards the provision of Islamic education might be influenced by aspects that cannot be captured in a single question (for example, who will organise the course content and who will be teaching the course).

Nevertheless, our study shows that religiosity and religious aversion play a role beyond xenophobic and anti-Muslim attitudes. As such, the article makes an important contribution to our understanding of the mechanisms underlying resistance towards accommodating Islam in the public sphere.

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## Notes

- [1] Respondents were selected through two-staged disproportionate random sampling of municipalities and all persons residing in private households and being born before 1994. The total response rate was 37.6%; no further information is available about the non-response. [www.gesis.org/en/allbus/study-profiles/2012](http://www.gesis.org/en/allbus/study-profiles/2012).
- [2] Replication of the analyses without respondents with a migrant background ( $n = 2661$ ) yield largely the same results as reported in this study (model  $\chi^2 = 1186$ ,  $p < .001$ ; McFadden pseudo  $R^2 .21$ ).
- [3] In preliminary analysis, we constructed several scales that tap into different aspects of religiosity, such as the importance of religion for societal cohesion, religious orthodoxy, believe in a 'personal' god, religious practices, reflections over religious issues, valuing religion in personal life and society and religious meaning of life. Factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed that these constructed scales and the self-reported level of religiosity formed one main factor of being religious (factor loadings  $>.72\%$  explained variance, Cronbach's alpha = .95). Results of the analysis using this main factor were highly similar to the results reported in this study using only the self-report measure of strength of

religiosity. This is in line with Tsang and McCullough (2003) and Saroglou (2014), who argue that in a sample of average religiousness, various religious constructs are highly interrelated and reflect a higher order factor of religiousness. Therefore, we included only the self-report measure of religiosity in the analysis.

- [4] Since perceptions of Muslims and foreigners are often intertwined in public opinion, there is reason to argue that anti-Muslim attitude and xenophobia are too closely related. However, the correlation between the attitude towards Muslims and xenophobia is moderate ( $r = .41$ ) and tolerance statistics as well as the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) do not indicate any problem of multicollinearity. Moreover, additional analyses with either xenophobia or attitude towards Muslims removed from the model revealed the same pattern of results.

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