Where do Muslims stand on ethno-racial hierarchies in Britain and France? Evidence from public opinion surveys, 1988-2008

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Where do Muslims stand on ethno-racial hierarchies in Britain and France? Evidence from public opinion surveys, 1988–2008

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ABSTRACT   Bleich assesses levels of anti-Muslim prejudice in two important European countries—Britain and France—to begin a process of systematically evaluating the status of Muslims on national ethno-racial hierarchies. He reviews major scholarly and institutional public opinion polls from 1988 through 2008 to discern attitudes towards Muslims over time and in comparison to other religious and ethnic groups. The findings support the following conclusions: negative attitudes towards Muslims have risen over the past twenty years in Britain and France; when compared to other *religious* groups, Muslims are viewed with tremendous suspicion by British and French respondents; and, in spite of the events of recent years, Muslims have not sunk to the bottom of the *ethno-racial* hierarchy, most measures suggesting that other groups remain more distant ethno-racial outsiders than Muslims in both Britain and France.

KEYWORDS   attitudes, anti-Muslim prejudice, Britain, ethno-racial hierarchy, France, Islamophobia, Muslims, opinion polls, prejudice, surveys

Until recently, Europe's Muslims were rarely the subject of sustained academic enquiry or political scrutiny. Throughout most of the post-war era, these individuals were defined not primarily by their religion but rather by their citizenship status, economic function, race, ethnicity or nationality. 'Muslim' was thus a far less meaningful category than 'immigrant', 'asylum-seeker', 'refugee', 'foreigner', 'guestworker', 'Black', 'Arab', 'Kurd', 'Pakistani', 'Algerian' or 'Turk'. Over the past two decades, however, European Muslims have increasingly come to be understood *qua* Muslims, with this aspect of their identity viewed as trumping others, and with 'Muslim' frequently racialized as an essential category of identity, difference and inferiority.

Yet the extent to which Muslims have been constructed as ethno-racial outsiders remains unclear. Much of the recent work on Islamophobia suggests that Muslims are currently in an extremely low position on the

ethno-racial hierarchy. The 1997 Runnymede Trust report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, for example, defined 'Islamophobia' as comprising eight types of 'closed' views about Islam and justified the use of this neologism on the grounds that 'anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and rapidly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed'.[1] The term was firmly inserted into the French debate with the 2003 publication of Vincent Geisser's *La Nouvelle Islamophobie*, which suggested that 'ordinary racism' had found a new hook: 'the Muslim religion as an irreducible identity marker between "us" and "them".'[2]

Discussions about the spread of Islamophobia extend well beyond these two seminal publications. For example, Fred Halliday uses the term 'anti-Muslimism' to argue that 'the attack now is not against Islam as a faith, but against Muslims as a people',[3] while Jocelyne Cesari claims that there is an overarching conflation between 'an Islam perceived as an international political threat and the individual Muslim living in Western societies' that has translated into a sense of Muslims as 'The Enemy'.[4] More concretely, Clive Field's overview of British public opinion towards Muslims concludes that 'mutual suspicion and fear are fueling a worsening Islamophobia'.[5] Yet a 2003 French Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme (CNCDH) report on the extent and meaning of Islamophobia in the French context found that Islamophobia was difficult to define and that there was no obvious surge in such a sentiment at that time.[6]

Just where do Muslims stand on European ethno-racial hierarchies? Is their status similar or different across countries? Is Islamophobia rampant, is the term a red herring, or is the situation more complicated than that? This essay seeks to assess the levels of anti-Muslim sentiment in two important European countries—Britain and France—to begin a process of system-atically evaluating the status of Muslims on national ethno-racial hierarchies. Thus far, there have been strikingly few attempts to develop concrete measures for estimating the position of Muslims as ethno-racial outsiders and for evaluating their rank relative to other groups. Any definitive assessment of this issue would entail interpreting and aggregating multiple types of data, such as those on political and media portrayals of different

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1 Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All* (London: Runnymede Trust 1997), 4.
2 Vincent Geisser, *La Nouvelle Islamophobie* (Paris: La Découverte 2003), 10. All translations from the French are by the author unless otherwise stated.
3 Fred Halliday, *Two Hours That Shook the World. September 11, 2001: Causes and Consequences* (London: Saqi Books 2002), 128–30.
4 Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy Meet: Muslims in Europe and in the United States* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2004), 21–2, 35–7.
5 Clive D. Field, 'Islamophobia in contemporary Britain: the evidence of the opinion polls, 1988–2006', *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2007, 447–77 (469).
6 CNCDH, *2003. La Lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie* (Paris: La Documentation Française 2004), 179–230.

groups, incidents of hate crimes and acts of discrimination, social interactions between groups, state policies and public opinion. While this enormous task is not possible within the confines of a single essay, this contribution hopes to make progress towards that goal by examining the critical variable of public attitudes towards Muslims. Public opinion polls are a particularly important tool for this purpose as they provide direct information about majority attitudes towards Muslims across time and in comparison to other ethno-racial groups.[7]

Britain and France were selected for this study because they are large European countries with sizeable Muslim citizen populations. Although the precise number of Muslim citizens is difficult to assess, Britain's 2001 Census revealed 1.6 million Muslims in the country and more recent estimates place the figure closer to 2 million.[8] In France, where there is no census data on religion, credible estimates revolve around 4–5 million Muslims in the overall population. Because of the relatively inclusive citizenship and naturalization policies in these countries, a majority of these Muslims are now or will one day become citizens. The public's assessment of Muslims is thus less influenced by the notion that Muslims are foreigners, as might be the case in countries like Germany or Switzerland that have more restrictive naturalization laws and an extremely high percentage of non-citizen Muslims.[9]

Public opinion polls can offer important insights into the relative standing of Muslims on the ethno-racial hierarchy, yet it is important to identify their limitations. As Field states in his comprehensive overview of British polls between 1988 and 2006, the bulk of surveys about Muslims were conducted for media outlets in the immediate aftermath of a contentious event; these surveys thus catch respondents at moments when they are least favourably disposed to populations perceived to be problematic.[10] To compensate for this effect, this essay utilizes only surveys undertaken by scholarly or research institutions that have not based the timing of their polls on media-driven events. Naturally, by chance, some of these polls were conducted during crisis moments. But they were carefully planned, and did not pose sensational questions.[11] Furthermore, they have often asked similar questions over time,

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7 This essay focuses on how majority populations view Muslims, based on the logic that majorities hold most of the power to determine national ethno-racial hierarchies. It therefore excludes questions from surveys such as the Gallup series on 'Muslims in Europe' that, while extremely interesting, focus primarily on Muslim attitudes towards their host societies.

8 According to a 2008 estimate by the Home Office: see Alan Travis, 'Officials think UK's Muslim population has risen to 2m', *Guardian*, 8 April 2008.

9 Although Germany relaxed its naturalization laws in 2000, there remain many fewer Muslim citizens in Germany than in either Britain or France.

10 Field, 'Islamophobia in contemporary Britain', 449–50.

11 Space constraints make it impossible to include the wording of the questions asked in each survey. Please contact the author directly for this information.

and will continue to ask similar questions in coming years, making it possible in the future to build on the findings presented here. Another challenge inherent in survey research is that individuals may find it difficult to disentangle their sentiments about Muslims from those about ethnic groups that are predominantly Muslim (such as Asians, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis in Britain, or Arabs, Maghrebis or Beurs in France), or from those about immigrants in general, who in turn remain conflated with other ethno-racial categories.[12] To address this problem, this essay has focused as often as possible on surveys that directly compare sentiments towards these entangled groups in order to understand if negative sentiments vary consistently across the ethnic and religious components of identity. While these are not perfect solutions to the problems of entanglement—and while more sophisticated solutions may emerge in future research—they offer a useful starting-point for assessing the place of Muslims on national ethno-racial hierarchies.

The findings support the following conclusions: negative attitudes towards Muslims have risen over the past twenty years in Britain and France; when compared to other *religious* groups, Muslims are viewed with tremendous suspicion by British and French respondents; and, in spite of the events of recent years, Muslims have not sunk to the bottom of *ethno-racial* hierarchies in either country, most measures suggesting that other groups remain more distant ethno-racial outsiders than Muslims in both Britain and France. The following section sets the stage for this analysis by defining an ethno-racial hierarchy and by contextualizing the place of Muslims on British and French national hierarchies over the longer term. Subsequent sections draw on surveys from the past two decades to present the concrete evidence that leads to each of the three conclusions. The final section outlines additional implications of the findings.

Ethno-racial hierarchies and Muslims in Britain and France

A national ethno-racial hierarchy is determined by the relative status of different groups within a society. The concept draws on longstanding work in social psychology on social comparison, which demonstrates that respondents across cultures are able to rank different categories of people on status and competence measures.[13] Most parallel research in ethnic and

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12 For an extended discussion of this problem, see CNCDH, *2003. La Lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie*, 179–230; and Miranda Lewis, *Asylum: Understanding Public Attitudes* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research 2005), 36–45.

13 For a general overview of the field, see Serge Guimond (ed.), *Social Comparison and Social Psychology: Understanding Cognition, Intergroup Relations, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006). For specific work on intergroup ranking, see Susan T. Fiske and Amy J. C. Cuddy, 'Stereotype content across cultures as a function of group status', in Guimond (ed.), *Social Comparison and Social Psychology*, 249–63.

racial studies has focused on identifying ethno-racial outsiders. According to Richard Alba, for example, the boundaries between high-status groups and ethno-racial outsiders are 'bright' not 'blurry', with 'unambiguous' distinctions between them.[14] For Aristide Zolberg and Long Litt Woon, outsiders share 'an essentialized negative identity as dangerous strangers'.[15] Louk Hagendoorn has applied the concept of hierarchies most directly to the study of race and ethnicity, arguing that 'outgroups are rank-ordered in ethnic hierarchies'.[16]

Developing status measures is the only way to understand the number of ethno-racial outsider groups in a society, and the relative intensity with which that outsider status is experienced. Given the assertions about the extent of Islamophobia in Europe (and challenges to its value as a concept[17]), it is important to assess the place Muslims occupy on national ethno-racial hierarchies to assess the degree of the problem. Whether Islamophobia is rampant or a chimera can only be known in light of multiple sources of evidence, of which public opinion polls are one important type. This information can also help us determine the steps that need to be taken to address the challenges facing Muslims as well as other ethno-racial outsider groups.[18]

As a prelude to analysing the public opinion polls of the past two decades, it is helpful to examine the status of Muslims in Britain and France over the longer term. Because this is a comparative study, it is also important to ask whether we expect attitudes towards Muslims to be similar or different across the two countries. There are significant parallels in how British and French publics have viewed Muslims over time, just as there are meaningful national dissimilarities that could generate divergence in how people rank Muslims on their country's contemporary ethno-racial hierarchy.

14 Richard Alba, 'Bright vs. blurred boundaries: second-generation assimilation and exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2005, 20–49.

15 Aristide R. Zolberg and Long Litt Woon, 'Why Islam is like Spanish: cultural incorporation in Europe and the United States', *Politics and Society*, vol. 27, no. 1, 1999, 5–38 (6).

16 Louk Hagendoorn, 'Ethnic categorization and outgroup exclusion: cultural values and social stereotypes in the construction of ethnic hierarchies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, 26–51 (27). See also Milton Kleg and Kaoru Yamamoto, 'As the world turns: ethno-racial distances after 70 years', *Social Science Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1998, 183–90. A similar research agenda on ethnic hierarchies is pursued by Robert Ford in his paper, 'Not all immigrants are equal: the ethnic hierarchy in British immigration preferences', *Manchester–Harvard Summer School on Immigration*, 2008.

17 Christian Joppke, 'Limits of integration policy: Britain and her Muslims', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2009, 453–72.

18 Specifying the ethno-racial hierarchy in a given society, however, does carry the *political* risk of generating a competition over victimhood; if some groups argue they are more disadvantaged than others, it may weaken potential coalitions of ethno-racial outsiders.

Some of the most important differences that might affect British and French attitudes towards Muslims stem from longstanding national church–state arrangements, from the experiences of colonialism and decolonization, and from overarching policy approaches towards immigrant integration. Britain has an established church, whereas France has a much vaunted tradition of church–state separation known as *laïcité*.[19] The French colonial experience was deeply marked by its decolonization war with predominantly Muslim Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s, traces of which still colour much of French public discourse and political attitudes.[20] By contrast, British colonial history involved tensions in South Asia that involved both Muslims and Hindus, although the history of Britain's relations with Catholic Ireland can be seen as equally if not more powerfully formative.[21] Furthermore, whereas Britain has affirmed its commitment to a multicultural approach to immigrant integration since the 1960s (with notable variations and rhetorical caveats), France has tended towards an assimilationist philosophy based on equal national citizenship.[22] Together, these factors suggest that the British public would be much more favourable towards Muslims than French respondents, and may even call into question the wisdom of comparing these two countries.

Yet there have been multiple studies of Muslims in Europe based on the premise that all of these differences amount to less than the sum of their parts. Prominent authors such as David Theo Goldberg, Nancy Foner and Richard Alba, and Aristide Zolberg and Litt Woon Long have started from the assumption that there are more commonalities in how European countries view Muslims than there are differences.[23] For Goldberg, anti-Muslim attitudes have deep roots in many countries, with 'the Muslim' portrayed as 'inevitably hostile, aggressive, engaged for religious purpose in

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19 For an extended discussion of the implications of different church–state relations on policies towards Muslims, see Joel S. Fetzer and J. Christopher Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005).

20 See Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte 1991); Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2005).

21 See Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank–Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1993); Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat*.

22 Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1998).

23 This is true in scholarship that both pre-dates and post-dates the events of 9/11. See Joseph H. Carens and Melissa S. Williams, 'Muslim minorities in liberal democracies: the politics of misrecognition', in Rainer Bauböck, Agnes Heller and Aristide Zolberg (eds), *The Challenge of Diversity: Integration and Pluralism in Societies of Immigration* (Aldersot: Avebury 1996), 157–86; and Jytte Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005).

constant jihad against Europe and Christianity'.[24] Foner and Alba, and Zolberg and Long each contrast European and American attitudes towards religion, finding broad similarities across the European continent. Foner and Alba argue that in Western Europe 'religion is at the top of the scholarly agenda, with the extensive literature overwhelmingly concerned with the Islamic presence'.[25]

Zolberg and Long assert that the comparative approach to Muslims in Europe is justified by several sets of common experiences. All Western European countries share a Christian heritage and a broadly secular outlook that set practising Muslims at odds with the dominant modes of identity within their new countries.[26] Moreover, Europeans have all been exposed to domestic tensions surrounding 'areas of religious stress', such as the hijab, religiously slaughtered meat and the observance of rituals in the work-place.[27] International crises have also generated common experiences for European publics, which have witnessed, in addition to more recent events, the murder of Israeli athletes by the Palestinian group Black September at the 1972 Munich Olympics and the rise of Islamist radicalism heralded by the 1979 Iranian Revolution. For Zolberg and Long:

> These developments transformed the image of Islam in the West from a passive to an aggressive civilization, while lending support to established Orientalist beliefs, especially the idea that Islam is inherently incompatible with liberal democracy and that individual Muslims function as docile instruments of ruthless secular leaders and equally ruthless ayatollahs.[28]

Which of these views is correct? Are there dramatic differences in public attitudes across countries based on longstanding divergences in church–state relations, colonial histories and integration philosophies? Or do the common European experiences trump national distinctions to create broadly similar attitudes across these two countries? Our findings below do show a few notable differences in public attitudes on either side of the English Channel. Most significantly, according to many surveys, French respondents tend to have less favourable attitudes towards Muslims than their British counterparts. On the whole, however, the ranking of ethno-racial groups and the relative magnitude of estimated prejudice are much more similar in the

24 David Theo Goldberg, 'Racial Europeanization', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2006, 331–64 (344).

25 Nancy Foner and Richard Alba, 'Immigrant religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: bridge or barrier to inclusion?', *International Migration Review*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2008, 360–92 (360).

26 Zolberg and Long, 'Why Islam is like Spanish', 18–20. The authors do note some national variation, but overall they emphasize cross-national similarities over differences.

27 Ibid., 18.

28 Ibid., 17.

two countries than they are different. While it is vital not to overlook distinctions between the states, given the scholarly purpose at hand, this essay focuses primarily on the similarities in British and French public attitudes when analysing ethno-racial hierarchies in the two countries.

The status of Muslims: comparisons over time

Because Muslims were not deemed a problematic group within Europe until recent years, there are relatively few surveys about Muslims prior to 1990. It was not until the 'Rushdie affair' in Britain and the 'headscarf affair' in France—both of which erupted in 1989—that Muslims in each country were crystallized into an identity group worthy of extensive investigation and intense concern. Only in the wake of these 'affairs' did opinion polls systematically begin posing questions about Muslims and religious minorities.[29]

Happily, however, the European Union (then the European Community) conducted one survey that pre-dated this fundamental turning-point, and that therefore provides a useful benchmark of attitudes prior to the politicization of Muslim identity in 1989. In late 1988 its Eurobarometer survey asked respondents to identify whether they thought there were too many people of certain groups in their country, and whether they were personally disturbed by the presence of people of other identifiable groups. The results demonstrate that religious difference was not the main axis of concern in either country. Over 40 per cent of respondents in both countries identified people of another race and nationality as having too strong a presence in the country, more than twice as many as identified those of another religion (Figure 1). Moreover, a greater number of respondents in both countries were personally disturbed by people of another race, nationality and even class than by people of another religion (Figure 2). Although these data do not reveal precise attitudes towards Muslims, they

29 A note on methodology. Most surveys discussed in this essay had sample sizes of approximately 1,000 for each question in each country. For the British Citizenship Survey questions, the *n* was at least 5,000. The sample sizes for the 2005 national survey, *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice in Britain* (see note 43), were at least 2,500, except for the question about experiences of discrimination, for which the sample size for Asians was 184 and for Muslims 128. The Pew sample size for all questions was at least 500, except for the July 2005 survey question about which religion was most violent where for Britain *n* was 352 and for France *n* was 345. With regard to weighting, all Eurobarometer, Citizenship Survey and World Values Survey data are weighted to produce representative national samples, with British Eurobarometer data excluding Northern Ireland. The Citizenship Survey data analysed here contain both Core and Minority Ethnic Boost samples weighted using the combined sample individual weight variable included in the data sets.
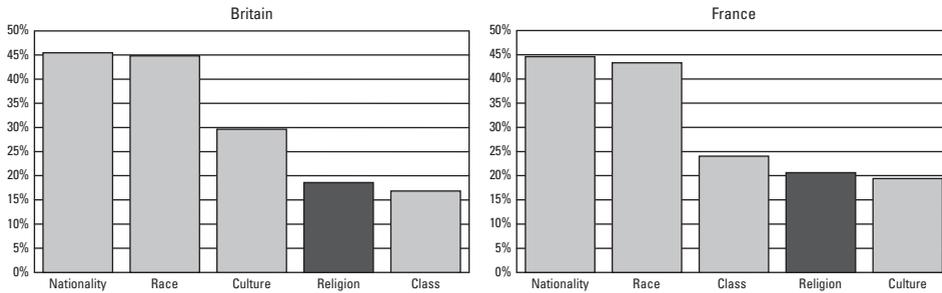
Figure 1   I feel there are too many people in this country of another…
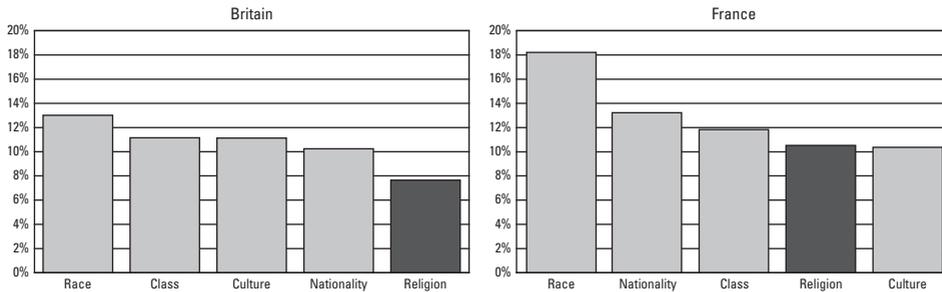Source: Eurobarometer 30, October–November 1988

Figure 2   I personally find disturbing the presence of people of another…
Source: Eurobarometer 30, October–November 1988

strongly suggest that Muslims were not the overriding concern in either country in late 1988.[30]

Subsequent Eurobarometer surveys between 1992 and 2000 also periodically asked respondents if they were personally disturbed by the presence of people of another race, nationality or religion (Figure 3). On the whole, more respondents answered in the affirmative in each country in 2000 than in 1988 with respect to all groups, and notably more with respect to religious groups. But responses followed an S-shaped curve with a rise in the early 1990s, a dip in the mid-1990s and another rise in the late 1990s. The overall findings of rising discomfort with religious Others are somewhat off-set in both countries, however, by the opinions given in the World Values Surveys from 1990 and 1999 in which respondents were asked to state which types of people they would not like to have as neighbours.[31] In 1990, 17 per cent of British and 18 per cent of French

30 When asked which groups they thought of under the category 'other religion', a majority of French respondents and a plurality of British respondents replied 'Muslim'. In Britain, however, 'Catholics' were just behind Muslims, and 'Hindus' were not far behind 'Catholics'.
31 Surveys designed and executed by the European Values Study Group and World Values Survey Association.
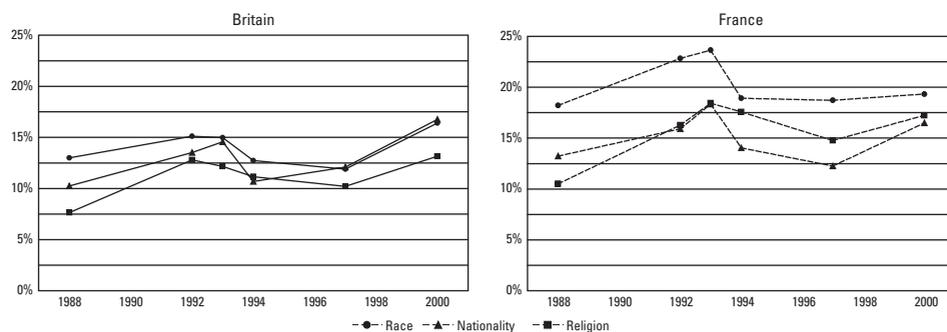
Figure 3 I personally find disturbing the presence of people of another...
Source: Eurobarometer 30, October–November 1988; Eurobarometer 37.0, March–April 1992; Eurobarometer 39.0, March–April 1993; Eurobarometer 42, November–December 1994; Eurobarometer 48.0, October–November 1997; Eurobarometer 53, April–May 2000

participants, respectively, listed 'Muslims', whereas, in the 1999 survey, the numbers had declined to 14 per cent and 16 per cent.[32]

While there are very few specific surveys about attitudes towards Muslims in the 1990s, the French government conducted polls as part of its annual report on domestic racism and xenophobia that included one especially relevant question.[33] From 1990 through 1998 it asked respondents if they thought there were too many people of a particular group in the country. The results (Figure 4) show that, by early 1990, in the wake of the 'headscarf affair' that emerged in late 1989, respondents had elevated Muslims well above Blacks—that is, religion was elevated above at least one type of race—as the group they thought was too numerous in the country. As animosity towards all groups declined through the 1990s, however, it is important to note that in every year marginally more respondents replied that there were too many Arabs than that there were too many Muslims. In other words, and as will be discussed in more depth in the following section, when forced to separate out their attitudes towards the ethnic category and the religious category, ethnicity trumped religion in each survey.[34]

32 It is possible that the 1989 'affairs' in each country and the first Gulf war elevated the 1990 responses. It is likely that this question will be asked again in the forthcoming World Values Survey, which will offer the opportunity to see trends over a longer period of time and in the context of the post-9/11 and 7/7 worlds.

33 These annual reports by the CNCDH, usually entitled *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie*, are published each year on 21 March (the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) and recent ones are available online on the CNCDH website at www.cncdh.fr/rubrique.php3? id_rubrique = 27 (viewed 21 April 2009).

34 Not having access to the detailed data from each year, it is not possible to conduct systematic tests to determine if the difference is statistically significant.
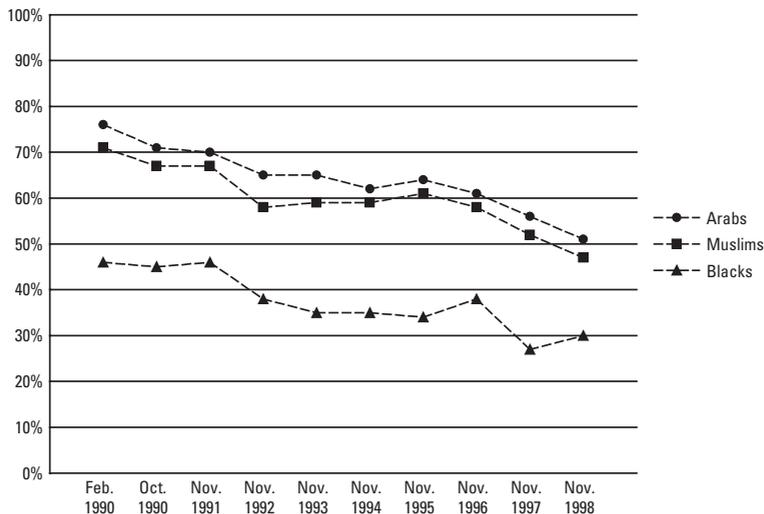
Figure 4   Would you say that in France there are too many...
Source: CNCDH, *1998. La Lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie* (Paris: La Documentation Française 1999), 337

As with responses in the wake of the 'headscarf affair', the impact of events can also be seen in French responses to a question posed from 2002 to 2007 that asked whether French Muslims were French like everyone else. While fully 25 per cent of those surveyed in December 2002 thought they were not, the number declined to 20 per cent in December 2004 before spiking to 31 per cent in the heat of the November 2005 riots and then tapering off to approximately 26 per cent two years later. These levels of raw suspicion of Muslims' Frenchness are significant, and are 12 to 18 percentage points higher than the equivalent responses *vis-à-vis* Jews in the same surveys.[35]

The first British surveys with consistent questions about Muslims are the massive British Citizenship Surveys of 2003, 2005 and 2007.[36] These surveys asked respondents which group they felt was the target of more racial prejudice compared to five years earlier (Figure 5).[37] Although it may seem obvious that Muslims would be at the top of the list following the events of 9/11, this was not the case in 2003, when only 16 per cent of non-Muslim respondents named 'Muslims'. As the surveys progressed, however, the number of responses climbed significantly, to 37 per cent in 2005 and to

35 CNCDH, *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie: année 2007* (Paris: La Documentation Française 2008), 311.
36 The bienniel Citizenship Survey was formerly under the auspices of the Home Office, and is now overseen by the Department of Communities and Local Government.
37 It first asked respondents whether they felt there was more racial prejudice than five years earlier; if they answered affirmatively, it then asked them to identify the groups that were the target of such prejudice. The data presented here represent the answers of non-Muslim respondents.
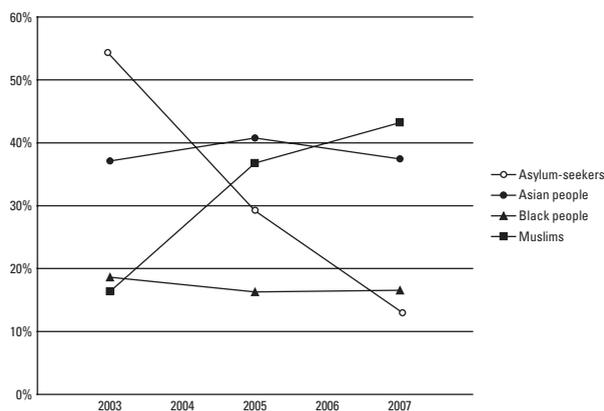
Figure 5   Groups against whom there is more racial prejudice today than five years ago
Source: Home Office Citizenship Survey 2003, SN 5087 (2005); Home Office Citizenship Survey
2005, SN 5367 (2006); Citizenship Survey 2007, SN 5739 (2008)

43 per cent in 2007, at which point Muslims were judged by non-Muslims to
be the primary group against whom there was more racial prejudice than
there was five years earlier, exceeding for the first time the more standard
ethno-racial formulation of 'Asians'. This indicates both the perceived
racialization of Muslims as a group within Britain as well as a sense that
they were moving quickly down the ethno-racial hierarchy.

The finding that there was greater disadvantage associated with being a
Muslim than in the past was echoed in the 2006 and 2008 Eurobarometer
surveys, which asked which types of discrimination were greater now than
five years earlier (Figure 6). In both Britain and France, religion and beliefs
ranked very high. They were roughly on a par with ethnic origin in the two
countries, and well ahead of the next most frequent answer, age. These data
suggest that the stigma associated with religion and beliefs—which for many
respondents in 2006 and 2008 was extremely likely to reflect feelings about
Muslims—was growing and was being noted by large numbers of British
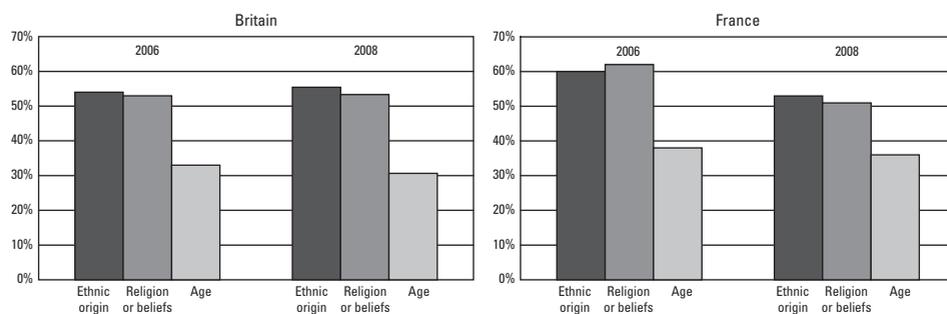and French citizens.

Figure 6   Discrimination is more common today than five years ago based on...
Source: Eurobarometer 65.4, June–July 2006; Eurobarometer 69.1, February–March 2008

Viewed in another light, however, what might be most striking about these data is the fact that respondents judged discrimination based on ethnic origin to be growing as rapidly as that based on religion and beliefs.[38] After all, both countries have decades of experience dealing with ethnic differences, and many of the ethnic differences within these countries do not correlate with citizenship or religious differences. It is thus important to investigate more closely attitudes towards Muslims in comparison with those towards other ethno-racial groups to understand not only trends over time, but also the relative standing of Muslims on the ethno-racial hierarchies of each country.

The status of Muslims: comparisons across religious groups

There is overwhelming evidence that Muslims are the most disliked group in both Britain and France when compared to other religions. When viewed from the long-term perspective of religious persecution and discrimination against Catholics and dissenters in Britain, and the longstanding traditions of separation of church and state in France, it is striking that Muslims have become the primary religious outsiders by a wide margin in both countries. Not all religions in Britain and France are constructed in ethno-racial terms today, but it is particularly revealing that attitudes towards Muslims are significantly more negative than those towards Jews, who were very low on national hierarchies throughout the twentieth century.

As noted above, the French surveys from 2002–7 demonstrated higher numbers of people stating that Muslims were not French like everyone else, compared to those that said the same about Jews.[39] The 2005 and 2007 British Citizenship Survey respondents who believed there was more religious prejudice than five years previously overwhelmingly believed that this prejudice was directed towards Muslims. Just over 90 per cent in 2005 and just under 90 per cent in 2007 identified Muslims as the target of such prejudice, with fewer than 12 per cent in each year selecting Christians, Sikhs, Hindus or Jews as the victims of increased prejudice.

Dislike and suspicion of Muslims have also been revealed by the Pew Global Attitudes surveys from 2004, 2005 and 2006. These surveys asked respondents to name the religious groups about which they had unfavourable opinions (Figure 7). Significantly higher numbers had unfavourable opinions

38 The difference in the response rate between the two categories was not statistically significant in either country in 2006 or in 2008.
39 Interestingly, however, when the question was only posed about Jews—i.e. with no comparison to Muslims—the negative responses were substantially higher for Jews. The 23 per cent in 2000 and 20 per cent in 2001 were in the same range as responses about Muslims in 2002–4, which declined from 25 to 20 per cent over those years. For all data, see CNCDH, *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie: année 2007*, 311.
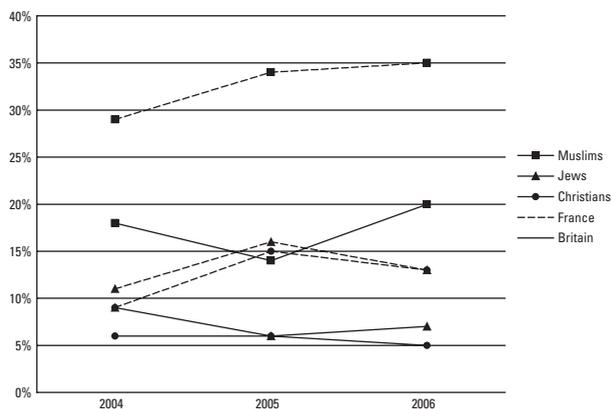
Figure 7 Respondents have an unfavourable opinion of...
Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 22 June 2006

of Muslims than of Jews or Christians in both countries, with an especially strong differential in France. In addition, just under half of all Pew respondents in 2005 thought that certain religions were prone to violence and, of those who did, clear majorities in each country pinpointed Islam as the most violent religion, with this number being particularly elevated in France (Figure 8). Moreover, in the Pew surveys from 2005 and 2006, between 63 and 70 per cent of respondents in Britain and France believed that Muslim identity was growing; and of those that thought it was growing, between 56 and 59 per cent of Britons and between 87 and 89 per cent of French respondents viewed this as a 'bad thing' (Figure 9).[40] What emerges is a picture of Islam and
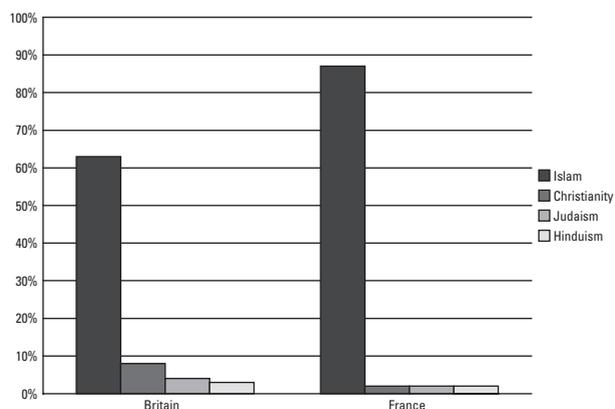

Figure 8 Which one religion is most violent?
Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 14 July 2005

40 In these same surveys, between 76 and 82 per cent of British and French respondents stated that Muslim identity in their country was 'strong', irrespective of whether they viewed it as growing.
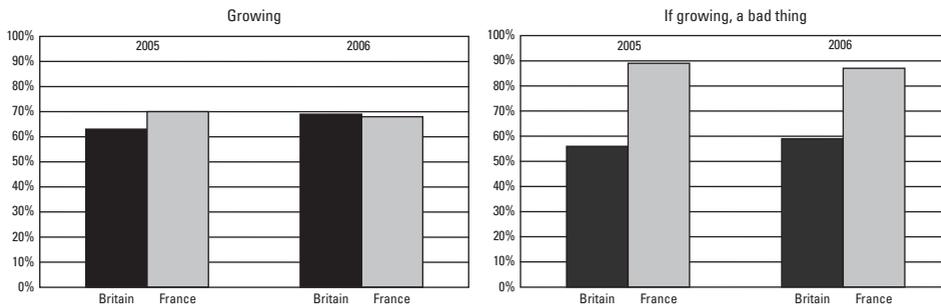
Figure 9   Muslim identity in our country is...
Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 6 July 2006

Muslims within each country (particularly in France) as objects of fear and aversion, when compared with other religions.

The status of Muslims: comparison across ethno-racial groups

While these surveys emphasize the presence of a good deal of anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain and France and the fact that Muslims have displaced *religious* outgroups of previous eras, they do not address Muslims' status on domestic *ethno-racial* hierarchies. It may appear self-evident that Muslims would have become the ultimate ethno-racial outsiders in Europe in the wake of 9/11, the Madrid train bombings, the assassination of Theo van Gogh, and the London transportation system bombings of 2005. But have they become more stigmatized than Blacks, Jews, immigrants, Roma and other ethnic minorities in Britain and France? Most of the polling evidence suggests that they have not, or at least not yet.

This argument may seem to contradict some evidence presented in Figures 5 and 6, which identified the perceived targets of increased prejudice and discrimination compared to five years earlier. In 2007 a thin plurality of British Citizenship Survey respondents identified Muslims as the group experiencing more prejudice at that time, and a thinner plurality of French respondents in the 2006 Eurobarometer survey thought that religion and belief were the most important elements generating increased discrimination.[41] However, the wording of these questions—comparing the present day to the recent past—did not require respondents to evaluate the relative position of these groups on the national ethno-racial hierarchy, but rather to assess which groups they felt were sinking most quickly on that hierarchy.

41 In the 2006 and 2008 Eurobarometer surveys, a thin plurality of British respondents tipped towards ethnic origin over religion and belief, as did a thin plurality of French respondents in 2008, suggesting—when combined with the British Citizenship Survey results—that ethnicity and religion were perceived as essentially equal vectors of increasing prejudice and discrimination.

These survey results support the claim that there is more anti-Muslim prejudice now than in the past in both countries, but they do not provide direct information about Muslims' current status compared to other groups.

The bulk of the direct evidence suggests that Muslims are perceived as lower on status hierarchies than other important ethno-racial groups, but that they are almost never the lowest-ranking group. For example, Britain's 2005 national survey, *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice*,[42] shows that 10 per cent of respondents had negative feelings about black people, whereas 19 per cent admitted to negative feelings about Muslims.[43] Yet 38 per cent of those responding to a similar question had negative feelings about asylum-seekers, placing them lower on the hierarchy than Muslims.[44] Moreover, majorities of Muslim and Asian respondents—two overlapping but not identical categories of people—said they had personally suffered discrimination based on ethnicity, whereas only minorities of those groups claimed to have suffered it based on religion.[45] Of course, many survey respondents have difficulty distinguishing clearly between categories such as asylum-seeker, Asian and Muslim,[46] but to the extent that both majorities and minorities do so, the evidence suggests that ethnicity is a more important vector of real-world discrimination than religion.

In a similar vein, greater numbers of respondents in the 1990 and 1999 World Values Surveys identified Muslims as opposed to someone of a 'different race' as the group they would not like to have as neighbours. Yet, between 1988 and 2000, every Eurobarometer survey showed more respondents disturbed by people of another race than by another religion (see Figure 3).[47] Moreover, even the 1999 World Values Survey showed that British respondents had a slightly greater aversion to immigrants than to Muslims, and that respondents in both countries had a much stronger aversion to 'Gypsies' as neighbours than to any other ethno-racial group (Figure 10).[48]

Another way to gauge the ranking of different groups on the status hierarchy is to ask people to assess their fellow citizens' views of justifiable

42 Dominic Abrams and Diane M. Houston, *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice in Britain: Results from the 2005 National Survey* (Canterbury: University of Kent Centre for the Study of Group Processes 2006).
43 There was no direct comparison to the ethnic group 'Asians' in this question.
44 Abrams and Houston, *Equality, Diversity and Prejudice in Britain*, 34.
45 Ibid., 42–3.
46 See CNCDH, *2003. La Lutte contre le racisme et la xénophobie*, 179–230; and Lewis, *Asylum*, 36–45.
47 These differences were statistically significant at the .05 level in four of the six years in each country, and at the .10 level in five of the six years in each country.
48 The 2008 Eurobarometer survey reinforced these findings, with 22 per cent and 15 per cent of British and French respondents, respectively, saying they would be uncomfortable having a 'Gypsy' as a neighbour, 4 per cent and 3 per cent uncomfortable with a neighbour of a different ethnic origin, and only 1 per cent and 2 per cent claiming discomfort with someone of a different religion.
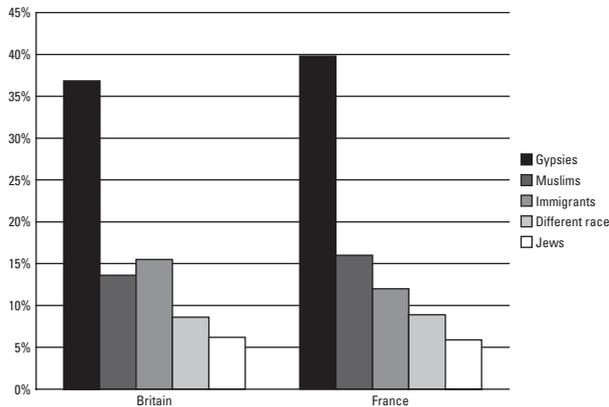
Figure 10   Which groups would you not like to have as a neighbour?
Source: European and World Values Surveys Integrated Data File (1999 survey)

types of discrimination. These questions reveal the extent to which people believe certain groups are seen as legitimate targets of discrimination. The 2002 Eurobarometer data showed that ethnic origin was perceived in both countries to be a more legitimate basis for discrimination than religion, suggesting that ethnicity remained a more salient marker of ethno-racial outsider status (Figure 11).[49]

In addition, the 2006 and 2008 Eurobarometer surveys included a direct question about the grounds on which discrimination was considered widespread in the country. Discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was seen to be widespread in both Britain and France, but appreciably more respondents saw discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin as widespread in both countries (Figure 12).

Moreover, according to the 2006 Eurobarometer survey, belonging to a minority religious group was considered significantly less of a disadvantage than belonging to several other categories, most notably, for the purposes of this essay, those of ethnic minority origin or Roma (Figure 13). Reinforcing this point, when asked annually between 2002 and 2007 which groups were the principal victims of racism or discrimination in France, more respondents spontaneously named 'Arabs', 'Maghrebis', 'foreigners' and 'Blacks' than 'Muslims' in every survey, typically by at least a two to one margin.[50]

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49 These differences are statistically significant at the .01 level in both countries. One potential qualification is illuminated in European Social Survey data from 2002–3, in which ethnic/racial/religious majority respondents in both Britain and France thought it marginally more important that a hypothetical immigrant to their country came from a Christian background than be white: see Christopher Bail, 'The configuration of symbolic boundaries against immigrants in Europe', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2008, 37–59, although Bail also raises the question of whether the tempered responses on race understated respondents' true aversion to racial difference (because of a social desirability effect common in survey research).

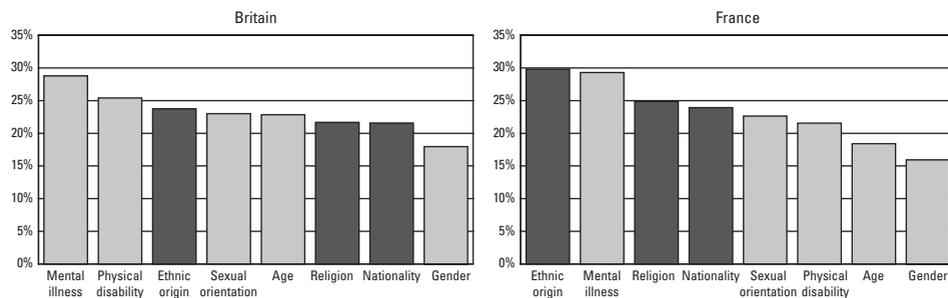50 CNCDH, *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie: année 2007*, 296–99.

Figure 11 Generally, people believe discrimination is always, usually or sometimes right based on...
Source: Eurobarometer 57.0, February–April 2002

Finally, it is not the case that the increasing stigma associated in the public's mind with being a Muslim has had a dramatic effect on attitudes about immigration from predominantly Muslim countries. Pew research data from 2002, 2005 and 2006 demonstrate that respondents in both Britain and France had identical and generally positive attitudes towards immigrants from the Middle East or North Africa as compared to attitudes towards migrants from Eastern Europe, who were presumably white and Christian (Figure 14). This suggests that there is a limit to the intensity of
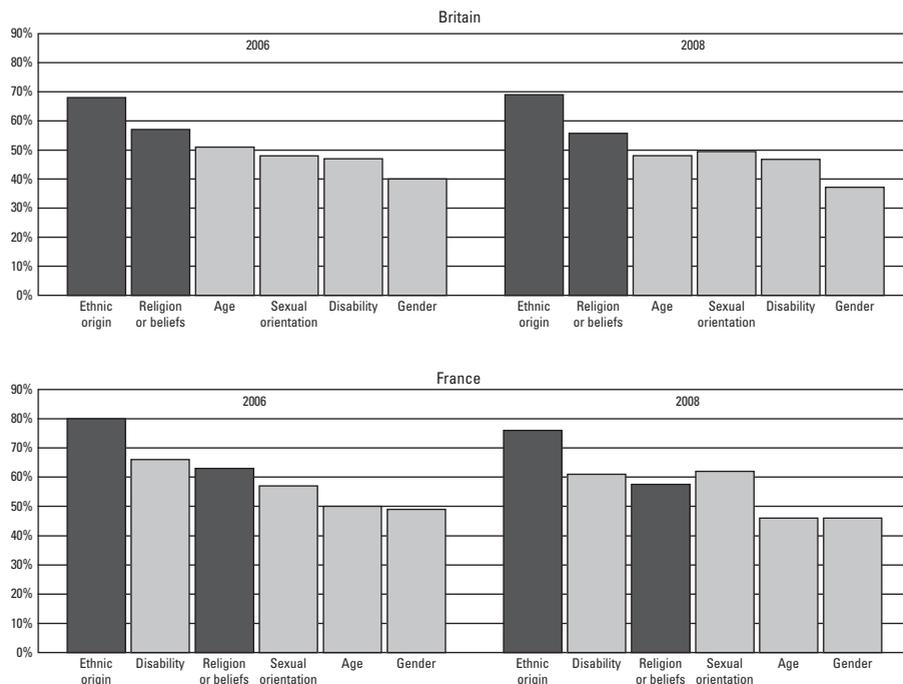
Figure 12 Discrimination in your country is considered widespread on the basis of...
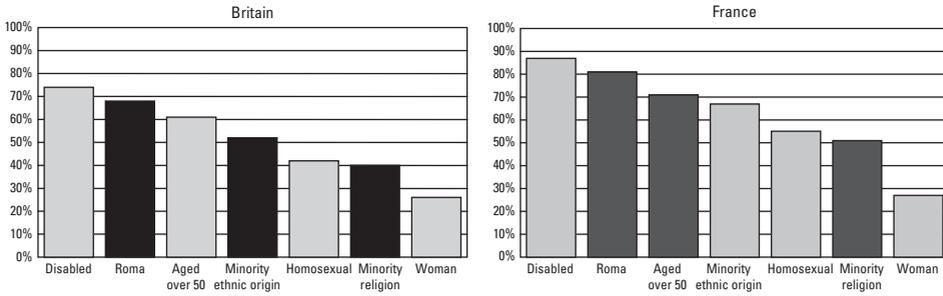Source: Eurobarometer 65.4, June–July 2006; Eurobarometer 69.1, February–March 2008

Figure 13 Belonging to the following group is generally a disadvantage.
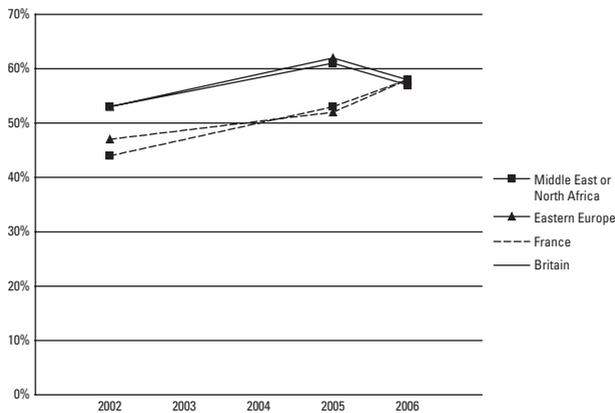Source: Eurobarometer 65.4, June–July 2006

Figure 14 It is a good thing that people come to work and live in this country from...
Source: Pew Global Attitudes Project, 6 July 2006

Muslim ethno-racial identities and outsiderness as constructed by majority populations in both countries, at least in certain respects.

Muslims and ethno-racial hierarchies: implications of the findings

If, as Karl Deutsch has observed, truth lies at the confluence of independent streams of evidence, the surveys reviewed here provide sufficient evidence to support three central propositions with respect to public attitudes towards Muslims in Britain and France: anti-Muslim sentiment is higher today than in the late 1980s; Muslims are clear and distant outsiders compared to other religious groups; and Muslims are not the lowest group on national ethno-racial hierarchies. Islamophobia is thus a concrete, measurable phenomenon, but it is also one that evidence suggests is not more severe than other longstanding forms of stigmatization based on ethnic or racial prejudices.

As convincing as the bulk of survey data may be, it is important to emphasize that this essay offers a preliminary analysis that has to be supplemented by further research. For example, it relies on straightforward frequencies of responses, without analysing subgroups to identify better the categories of people (old versus young, educated versus uneducated, women versus men etc.) most likely to hold anti-Muslim sentiments. More work needs to be done to disaggregate the effects of anti-Muslim prejudice from anti-Arab or anti-Asian prejudice, since these categories overlap quite a bit in practice. And a close examination of survey responses by Muslims is necessary to understand how prejudice is experienced by the victims themselves.[51] Moreover, while the study of public opinion polls is extremely revealing, a full understanding of ethno-racial hierarchies requires research into other arenas, such as political and media representations of different groups, incidence of hate crimes and acts of discrimination, social interactions between groups, the extent and valence of state policies towards different ethno-racial groups, and ethnographic work on minorities' perspectives on societal prejudice. Together, these constitute multiple streams of evidence that can be aggregated to form a richer portrait of national ethno-racial hierarchies. It is also worth examining whether the forces that drive considerable similarities in the status of Muslims in Britain and France apply in other Western European states, just as it is important to note and to explore important dimensions of cross-national divergence. Outlining the limitations of the current study—whether in the methodology and types of polls analysed, in the comparison of polling versus other data, or in its spatial scope and approach—reveals that more can be done to evaluate Muslims' place on ethno-racial hierarchies. It also suggests a specific and robust research agenda for future efforts.

There are further implications of the data presented here that merit closer attention. To some, it may appear logical and unavoidable that attitudes towards Muslims have become more negative over the past two decades given the rising salience of Muslim identity in this time period. Yet, examining the long-term patterns (to the extent that this is possible given the limited time-series data available) demonstrates that this trend has not been linear. Figures 3 and 4 reveal a dip in anti-religious minority and anti-Muslim sentiment in the mid-1990s. What can account for this dip? One obvious hypothesis is that anti-Muslim sentiment surges following high-profile events, such as the 1989 Rushdie and headscarf affairs in Britain and

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51 Some of this next level of analysis can be derived from existing surveys, especially the large British ones. In France, authors Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj have carried out and analysed a number of surveys that allow a deeper comparison of Muslim and non-Muslim public opinion. See, for example, Sylvain Brouard and Vincent Tiberj, 'The challenge to integration in France', in Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia and Simon Reich (eds), *Immigration, Integration, and Security: America and Europe in Comparative Perspective* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2008), 283–99.

France (Figure 3), the 9/11 bombings,[52] the 7/7 London Transport attacks (Figures 5 and 7), and the 2005 riots in France.[53] It follows then that these high levels taper off after the initially hostile reactions subside. In certain cases, strong anti-Muslim opinion appears to recede in the year or so following an event (Figure 4).[54] If this pattern holds up under further scrutiny, it implies that the passage of time and a lack of incidents may be the most significant factors explaining diminishing anti-Muslim sentiment. However, Figure 3 also indicates an increase in negative attitudes between 1997 and 2000 in both countries that is not easily explained by a domestic or international event. Because the interactions between events and anti-Muslim prejudice are not entirely clear, it is critical to study the relationship more closely, perhaps focusing in particular on the mid- to late 1990s as an era when anti-Muslim sentiment fluctuated without obvious explanation. Doing so may also provide insights into whether government integration policies and civil society actions—as opposed to time and a lack of violence—significantly affect group status on national hierarchies.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the relative importance of a group's absolute status versus the pace of its movement up or down the ethno-racial hierarchy over time. Contrary to what may seem obvious or at least plausible, Muslims are *not* the most distant ethno-racial outsiders in Britain and France. Being a Muslim appears to be less of a disadvantage than being Asian, Arab or Roma, even if some surveys suggest that it may be a greater disadvantage than being black. This implies that, if societies wish to concentrate attention and resources on fighting stigmatization, discrimination and prejudice against the worst-off groups, they should not necessarily prioritize Muslims over those who may be even more vulnerable; at a minimum, it implies that they need to be aware of the multiple and overlapping reasons for Muslims' ethno-racial outsiderness, among which outward appearance, country of origin and migration status may be just as important as religion.

On the other hand, there is a compelling argument for worrying most about a group if it is sinking fast on a national hierarchy. Some measures imply that Muslims are slipping quickly both in Britain and in France. This is particularly visible in data comparing prejudice today against attitudes from five years ago. If this trend is confirmed by additional research, it may provide the best justification for deploying the concept of 'Islamophobia' to

52 This finding is partially confirmed by Fetzer and Soper's pre- and post-9/11 surveys of public attitudes towards Muslim practices in Britain, France and Germany: see Fetzer and Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany*, 143–4. Unfortunately, the major surveys under review do not have systematic cross-time data covering the pre- and post-9/11 eras.

53 CNCDH, *La Lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie: année 2007*, 311.

54 Ibid.

mobilize states and civil society actors to combat anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain, France and beyond.

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