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# What Is Islamophobia and How Much Is There? Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept

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## Abstract

Islamophobia is an emerging comparative concept in the social sciences. Yet there is no widely accepted definition of Islamophobia that permits systematic comparative and causal analysis. This article explores how the term *Islamophobia* has been deployed in public and scholarly debates, emphasizing that these discussions have taken place on multiple registers. It then draws on research on concept formation, prejudice, and analogous forms of status hierarchies to offer a usable social scientific definition of Islamophobia as *indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims*. The article discusses the types of indicators that are most appropriate for measuring Islamophobia as well as the benefits of concept development for enabling comparative and causal analysis.

## Keywords

Islamophobia, concept development, measurement, attitudes

Islamophobia is a widely used concept in public and scholarly circles. It was originally developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s by political activists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), public commentators, and international organizations to draw attention to harmful rhetoric and actions directed at Islam and Muslims in Western liberal democracies. For actors like these, the term not only identifies anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments, it also provides a language for denouncing them.

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In recent years, Islamophobia has evolved from a primarily political concept toward one increasingly deployed for analytical purposes. Researchers have begun using the term to identify the history, presence, dimensions, intensity, causes, and consequences of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments. In short, Islamophobia is an emerging comparative concept in the social sciences. Yet, there is no widely accepted definition of the term. As a result, it is extremely difficult to compare levels of Islamophobia across time, location, or social group, or to levels of analogous categories such as racism, anti-Semitism, or xenophobia. Without a concept that applies across these comparative dimensions, it is also virtually impossible to identify the causes and consequences of Islamophobia with any precision.

This article aims to make Islamophobia a more concrete and usable concept for social scientists. It theorizes Islamophobia in light of scholarship on concept formation, social psychological theories of prejudice, and research on analogous forms of intolerance. The goal is to offer a focal definition for social scientists who seek to deploy the term in comparative causal analysis. To do this, this article first briefly reviews public and scholarly discussions of Islamophobia to illustrate the drawbacks of the vague and varied contemporary uses of the term. The second section argues that Islamophobia is best defined as *indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims*. The third section identifies the types of indicators that are most useful for measuring Islamophobia, stressing that direct measures are preferable to indirect measures. The fourth section emphasizes the benefits of concept development and measurement for enabling systematic comparative and causal analysis in the social sciences.

## Islamophobia: The Origins and Imprecision of a Concept

In some senses, Islamophobia is a new word for an old concept. At least since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in the late 1970s, it has been widely accepted that "the West" has long associated Islam with negative images, sentiments, and stereotypes (Said, 1978/1979, pp. 58-75).<sup>1</sup> Yet Islamophobia only emerged in contemporary discourse with the 1997 publication of the report "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All" by the British race relations NGO the Runnymede Trust (1997). Since then, and especially since 2001, it has been regularly used by the media, citizens, and NGOs in Britain, France, and the United States (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani, 2009, pp. 92-93; Zúquete, 2008, pp. 321-322).<sup>2</sup> The term has also spread to international organizations at the highest levels. The European Union issued several reports on the topic in the mid-2000s (European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia [EUMC], 2002, 2003, 2006), and in 2004 United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan opened a UN conference on "Confronting Islamophobia" with the lament, "When the world is compelled to coin a new term to take account of increasingly widespread bigotry, that is a sad and troubling development. Such is the case with Islamophobia."<sup>3</sup>

Although the term has become relatively common, there is little agreement about Islamophobia's precise meaning. The 1997 Runnymede Trust report contains varied and sometimes contradictory perspectives. It describes Islamophobia as "a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam—and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 1). It then nuances that position by making a distinction between "legitimate criticism and disagreement" with Islamic doctrine or with the policies and practices of Muslim states as contrasted with true Islamophobia, defined as "unfounded prejudice and hostility" (p. 4). The report uses the term not just to cover hostile sentiments but also extends it to "the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs" (p. 4).

In spite of its limitations, the Runnymede Trust report offers a relatively specific and well-developed sense of the term, even when compared to its increasingly frequent use by scholars. Some authors deploy Islamophobia without explicitly defining it (Bunzl, 2007; Cole, 2009; Halliday, 1999; Kaplan, 2006; MacMaster, 2003; Poynting & Mason, 2007). Others use characterizations that are vague, narrow, or generic. Gottschalk and Greenberg (2008, p. 5), for example, call it "a social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures." Geisser (2003, p. 10) discusses a "rejection of the religious referent . . . the Muslim religion as an irreducible identity marker between 'Us' and 'Them.'" For Werbner (2005, p. 8), it is "a form of differentialist racism."

To be fair, not all scholarly uses of the term suffer from these weaknesses. Even when definitions are more specific, however, there is still significant variation in the precise formulations of Islamophobia.<sup>4</sup> Lee et al. (2009, p. 93) define the term as "fear of Muslims and the Islamic faith." Similarly, for Abbas (2004, p. 28), it is "the fear or dread of Islam or Muslims." Drawing on the Runnymede Trust definition, Zúquete (2008, p. 323) describes Islamophobia as "a widespread mindset and fear-laden discourse in which people make blanket judgments of Islam as the enemy, as the 'other', as a dangerous and unchanged, monolithic bloc that is the natural subject of well-deserved hostility from Westerners." In the United States context, Semati (2010, p. 1) calls it "a single, unified and negative conception of an essentialized Islam, which is then deemed incompatible with Euro-Americaness." In one of the most carefully considered definitions, Stolz (2005, p. 548) asserts that "Islamophobia is a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements (e.g., discrimination, violence)." In sum, for Lee et al. and for Abbas, Islamophobia is exclusively about fear (or dread), directed at either Islam or Muslims. For Zúquete and Semati, it involves either more than fear or perhaps excludes fear and is directed uniquely at Islam and not at Muslims. For Stolz, it is rejection of either Islam or Muslims that extends beyond thought processes to include concrete actions.

As much as they may lack precision or coherence, what unites all of the above definitions, proto-definitions, and underlying assumptions is a sense that Islamophobia is a social evil. Yet there are also interpretations of Islamophobia that reject this core

proposition. Two prominent British journalists have openly embraced Islamophobia as a justifiable stance. Shortly after publication of the 1997 Runnymede Trust report, *Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee wrote "I am an Islamophobe, and proud of it," while *Sunday Times* columnist Rod Liddle presented a talk a decade later entitled "Islamophobia? Count me in" (cited in Osborne & Jones, 2008, p. 14). These writers emphasized their distrust of Islam as a doctrine rather than hostility toward Muslims as a group. Approaching the topic from a different angle, scholar Christian Joppke stresses that the very concept of Islamophobia heightens Muslims' claims on the British state and raises expectations to a point that cannot be met (Joppke, 2009). For these reasons, Joppke is doubtful that the term is a useful or progressive development. Kenan Malik takes the critique further, suggesting there is little evidence of widespread Islamophobia and that the term serves primarily as a way for Muslim leaders to cement their power and for politicians to demonstrate sensitivity to Muslims while simultaneously pursuing war in Iraq or antiterrorism policies that engender frustration or that have negative consequences for many Muslims (K. Malik, 2005).<sup>5</sup>

This dissonance surrounding the meaning of Islamophobia is problematic for an emerging comparative concept, but it is far from unusual. Even seemingly well-established terms like *democracy* or *ideology* are fluid and subject to scholarly disagreement (Gerring, 2001, Chapter 4; Goertz, 2006, Chapter 4). One solution to this problem is to analyze Islamophobia as a contested and politicized concept, the shifting definition of which depends on the specific context in which it is embedded.<sup>6</sup> Examining how and why the term has been deployed serves a purpose, but it is not particularly useful for the social scientific study of the causes and consequences of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments.

Another solution is for academics to scrap the term *Islamophobia* altogether on the grounds that it is too imprecise or politically loaded. Authors have criticized the term because it has been applied to widely divergent phenomena (Cesari, 2006, pp. 5-6; Zúquete, 2008, p. 323), because it implies fear of Islam as a faith when the "true" problem is negative stereotyping of Muslims as a people (Halliday, 1999, p. 898) and because it risks stigmatizing all critiques of Islam (Halliday, 1999, p. 899; Zúquete, 2008, p. 324). Some will agree with John Bowen (2005, p. 524), who has observed that "because the term has come to be used in this overly broad way and is highly polemical, using it as an analytical term is a bit dicey." Instead, it may be preferable to deploy more targeted and specific categories, such as anti-Islamic (Zúquete, 2008, p. 324), anti-Muslimism (Halliday, 1999, p. 898), or anti-Muslim prejudice (M. Malik, 2009). Avoiding Islamophobia in favor of alternative concepts has distinct advantages, and some scholars will prefer to move in this direction.

At the same time, Islamophobia has taken root in public, political, and academic discourse, and there is no putting the genie back in the bottle. It exists not only for political reasons but also because it attempts to label a social reality—that Islam and Muslims have emerged as objects of aversion, fear, and hostility in contemporary liberal democracies. As Gerring (2001, p. 67) has argued, "to deprive the social science community of certain words, or of certain uses of commonly understood words, is

bound to create confusion, and also to limit the usefulness of social science as a way of apprehending the world.” Under these circumstances, there is substantial merit in making Islamophobia a comprehensible and meaningful concept for social scientists as well as for political actors.

## Theorizing Islamophobia as an Emerging Comparative Concept

Formulating Islamophobia as a workable comparative concept is most productive in light of a broader discussion about concept formation.<sup>7</sup> Political scientist Gary Goertz (2006) has developed an analysis of social scientific concepts that focuses on their multilevel and multidimensional nature. He starts by breaking down terms such as *democracy*, *revolution*, and *welfare state* into three core levels: basic, secondary, and indicator.<sup>8</sup> The basic level is the thing itself, while the secondary level consists of the key constitutive elements that are most useful for causal analysis. For example, the basic level concept of copper can be defined by many secondary or indicator level properties, one of which is “reddish.” As Goertz argues, color is important for some purposes (e.g., if you are an interior designer), but if you are interested in knowing what copper does—why it is causally important for scientific purposes—it is not the best property around which to build your definition. It is much more useful to define the concept *copper* based on the secondary-level property of its atomic structure, because that is what explains its malleability, conductivity, and other crucial aspects useful for scientific analysis (Goertz, 2006, pp. 27-28).

Viewed through this lens, the basic level concept of Islamophobia is best defined by the following secondary level components: *indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims*. These are the ontologically significant aspects of Islamophobia because they are the ones that we assume influence societal interactions that we care about. This way of defining Islamophobia is therefore in keeping with Goertz’s (2006, p. 28) observation that “we tend to identify as core dimensions those that have causal powers when the object interacts with the outside world.” Equally important, these aspects are not causally related to Islamophobia—they do not cause it, nor are they consequences of it—rather, they are the dimensions of Islamophobia itself that are most salient for social scientific analysis. Together, these components are necessary and sufficient to identify the basic level concept Islamophobia.<sup>9</sup>

As I have laid it out, there are three central aspects to this definition. First, *indiscriminate* means that differentiated attitudes or emotions do not constitute Islamophobia. If a Muslim woman grows up in a country where Islam is interpreted to justify forced subservience or female circumcision, she (and others) may hold negative attitudes or emotions directed at some interpretations of Islam by some Muslim communities. Questioning or even criticizing aspects of Islamic doctrine or practices of specific subgroups of Muslims is not automatically Islamophobia. However, if she (or others) concludes from these examples that Islam or Muslims as a whole are worthy of condemnation, it becomes an indiscriminate attitude that constitutes Islamophobia.

I borrow the term *indiscriminate* from Sniderman and Hagendoorn's (2007, pp. 45, 50, 53) discussion of prejudice, noting that it is consistent with the insights of the Runnymede Trust report (1997, p. 4) that not all criticism and disagreement constitutes Islamophobia. Terms such as *indiscriminate*—or cognates such as undifferentiated or unnuanced—cover instances where negative assessments are applied to all or most Muslims or aspects of Islam. There are advantages and disadvantages to including *indiscriminate* as a core aspect of the definition of Islamophobia. It is far easier to gauge whether attitudes or emotions are indiscriminate than it is to determine whether they are illegitimate, unjustified, unfounded, or unwarranted—highly normative terms that have nonetheless frequently been used in studies of prejudice or Islamophobia (Runnymede Trust, 1997, p. 4; Sniderman, Peri, de Figueiredo, & Piazza, 2000, pp. 16-18). Yet there is likely to be a sliding scale of differentiation in the real world that makes it difficult to categorize all attitudes or emotions as indiscriminate or not. On balance, the advantages of including *indiscriminate* outweigh the disadvantages of excluding it from the definition. There is likely to be a causally significant difference between those who have indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions toward Islam or Muslims and those who hold highly differentiated assessments.

Second, *negative attitudes or emotions* encompass a range of evaluations and affects. Although the American Psychological Association defines a phobia as “a persistent and irrational fear of a specific object, activity, or situation that is excessive and unreasonable, given the reality of the threat,”<sup>10</sup> Islamophobia is not a clinical psychological term. As with parallel concepts such as homophobia or xenophobia, Islamophobia connotes a broader set of negative attitudes and emotions directed at individuals or groups because of their perceived membership in a defined category. Viewed in this way, Islamophobia is also analogous to terms such as *racism*, *sexism*, or *anti-Semitism*. Decades of research on racism and prejudice have demonstrated that it can take many forms and that negative ethnic attitudes and emotions range widely in source, type, and intensity (Brewer, 2007; Fiske, 1998; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). For Kleinpenning and Hagendoorn (1993), the scale begins with aversion, moves through threat-based fears, and at the extreme involves the hostility of those who advocate denying fundamental civil rights and imposing segregation. Aversion, jealousy, suspicion, disdain, anxiety, rejection, contempt, fear, disgust, anger, and hostility give a sense of the range of negative attitudes and emotions that may constitute Islamophobia.

Focusing on attitudes and emotions emphasizes the evaluative and affective aspects of Islamophobia. An evaluation tells you if a group is good or bad, if it is worthy of respect or disdain, and if it should be avoided or embraced. An affect is a gut-level reaction, such as disgust, fear, or hostility. Analytically, attitudes and emotions can be distinguished both from beliefs and from actions. Contemporary research in social psychology tends to differentiate between beliefs (such as stereotypes), attitudes, and emotions (Brewer, 2007; Fiske, 1998).<sup>11</sup> Although all three are frequently related, stereotypes are less intertwined than are attitudes and emotions, and stereotypes are weaker predictors of discrimination and social distance than are prejudices or emotional responses (Fiske, 1998, pp. 372-373). Attitudes and emotions are also

clearly distinguishable from subsequent actions such as discrimination or physical violence.<sup>12</sup> These actions are often a direct consequence rather than a core aspect of Islamophobia and thus cannot be included in the definition of the concept.

Third, negative attitudes directed at *Islam* or *Muslims* suggest that the target may be the religious doctrine or the people who follow it (or whose ancestors have followed it or who are believed to follow it). This recognizes the multidimensional nature of Islamophobia and the fact that Islam and Muslims are often inextricably intertwined in individual and public perceptions. It may be possible in some circumstances to identify differences between anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim attitudes or emotions, and even to explore whether there are causal relationships between those two subcategories of Islamophobia. In studies of anti-Americanism, some scholars have noted differences in attitudes toward the United States as a whole compared to perceptions of the American people (Isernia, 2007, pp. 60-63). Nevertheless, each of these theoretically distinct components is considered a part of the umbrella concept of anti-Americanism. Whether it is necessary to separate the components of Islamophobia should remain an open empirical question and may depend on the specific research program at hand. But most public and social scientific treatments of Islamophobia recognize the importance and interrelatedness of both the Islamic and Muslim dimensions of the term (see Lee et al., 2009; Runnymede Trust, 1997; Stolz, 2005).

In addition to identifying the three core components of Islamophobia, it is necessary to stress that Islamophobia is not what cognitive psychologists refer to as a classical set (Lakoff 1987: 6, 21)<sup>13</sup> that allows coding of objects in an unambiguous and egalitarian manner as fully inside or outside a category with a fixed boundary (such as U.S. senator). Instead, it conforms more closely to notions developed in fuzzy-set theory of a graded category (such as tall people), where Islamophobia is not an all-or-nothing proposition (Zadeh, discussed in Lakoff, 1987, pp. 21-22; Ragin 2000). Some attitudes or people clearly count as Islamophobic, and others clearly do not count. In between, there are varying degrees of Islamophobia.

Two insights can help determine the degree to which a statement or a person can be classified as Islamophobic. In their discussion of anti-Americanism, Katzenstein and Keohane (2007b) identify the intensity of an individual's adherence to a particular position. They assign changeable opinions less weight than more durable predispositions, such as distrust or bias (pp. 19-24). This distinction is related to Sniderman et al.'s (2000) reliance on measures of attitudinal consistency to determine levels of prejudice. For Sniderman et al., the more frequently an individual offers a negative evaluation (or withholds a positive one) of a group or its members, the more prejudiced he or she is (pp. 23-25). Following these insights, a one-off negative opinion about Islam or Muslims constitutes low-level Islamophobia, especially if that opinion can be altered based on new information. At the other extreme, expressions of unshakable hostility are high-level examples of Islamophobia. The more consistently an individual expresses a greater number of such intensely held biases, the more Islamophobic he or she is. The greater the prevalence, consistency, and intensity of Islamophobic expressions and individuals, the greater the Islamophobia in a given social group or society.

Identifying the key aspects of Islamophobia helps to recast and to make sense of the cacophony of perspectives laid out above. The Runnymede Trust (1997) definition focuses largely on the secondary dimensions of the concept, but it also mixes in some indicators and even effects of Islamophobia (such as discrimination and exclusion) that are best kept separate. The British journalists who brashly categorize themselves as Islamophobes are expressing an aversion to aspects of Islamic doctrine that they find objectionable. To the extent they are doing so in an undifferentiated way—implicating all of Islam—they are indeed exhibiting Islamophobia, and to the extent that their statements go beyond aversion to express fear or hostility, they are more intensely Islamophobic. Joppke (2009) is not taking issue with the definition of Islamophobia but rather with the term's purported effects on public debates. These are amenable to empirical observation. K. Malik (2005) is challenging the measures of Islamophobia; more importantly, he is also assessing its causes, attributing them to narrow, instrumental self-interest rather than to forces that suggest it is a greater societal evil.

In short, debates about Islamophobia are taking place across several levels: around its definition, key components, and intensity; around its causes; and around its effects. Building a clear, justifiable, and usable definition of Islamophobia as a comparative concept is a first step toward making sense of these discussions and toward understanding what is at stake at the three levels.

## **Measuring Islamophobia**

Beyond identifying its key definitional components, it is vital to measure Islamophobia. Most observers, scholars, activists, and politicians have provided evidence of Islamophobia that suffers from one of three weaknesses. Some authors rely on extremely indirect indicators of contemporary Islamophobia, such as noting its deep historical roots (Goldberg, 2006, pp. 344-348; Matar, 2009) or identifying current socioeconomic disadvantages concentrated in Muslim communities (Tausch, Bischof, Kastrum, & Mueller, 2007). Others provide examples of Islamophobia that are anecdotal or symbolic, such as examples of violence directed at Muslims (EUMC, 2002, pp. 13-30; 2006, pp. 62-89) or the use of "Bin Laden" as a schoolyard taunt (Cole, 2009, p. 1682). A third type of research conflates Islamophobia with attitudes toward overlapping ethnic, national-origin, or immigrant-status groups. In these cases, contemporary histories of anti-Arab, anti-South Asian, or anti-immigrant sentiments and policies (MacMaster, 2003; Poynting & Mason, 2007; Vertovec, 2002) or examples of discrimination or attacks against groups that are predominantly Muslim (EUMC, 2006, pp 44-62), or composite measures that mix together responses about Islam/Muslims with those about national origin or ethnic groups (Stolz, 2005, pp. 555-556) serve as indicators of Islamophobia.<sup>14</sup> These approaches and observations are each useful to a degree. Yet, because they use indirect, anecdotal, or conflating measures, they cannot provide a systematic baseline for analyzing and comparing Islamophobia across time, location, social group, or intolerance directed at other minority groups.<sup>15</sup>

What are the indicators that best reflect “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims”? Developing adequate indicators of an underlying concept poses a challenge because of the distance between what we can actually observe in the real world and the abstract nature of a theoretical concept. This gulf can be bridged in a number of ways. According to Goertz (2006, p. 55), there are at least three types of relations between indicators and concepts: “(1) concept causes indicator, (2) indicator causes concept, and (3) a noncausal relationship.” Within each type, there may also be a qualitative difference in the directness with which different specific indicators reveal the underlying concept.

To clarify some of these distinctions, it is helpful to draw on Goertz’s (2006, pp. 27-28, 57-59, 64-65) discussion of the “disease–symptom” metaphor of concept indicators. To give a concrete example from the medical world, if the disease is cirrhosis, the secondary level definition of the concept is scarring of the liver.<sup>16</sup> If we biopsy a liver and find scar tissue, this is not because (a) cirrhosis causes scarring, nor is it because (b) scarring causes cirrhosis, but rather it is because (c) liver scarring *is* cirrhosis—it is a noncausal indicator of the disease. There are, however, also (Type 1) symptoms of cirrhosis that function as indicators of the underlying condition, although these vary widely in their ability to reveal the disease. Some are indirect, such as nausea, lack of appetite, weight loss, and tiredness—problems associated with a wide number of illnesses. Some are much more directly correlated with cirrhosis, such as jaundice. Jaundice may in fact reveal another liver-related disease such as hepatitis, but it is a more direct indicator than many other symptoms because it has a higher probability of revealing a problem with the liver and potentially of cirrhosis. At the other end of the spectrum are indicators associated with cirrhosis that may themselves be (Type 2) causes of the disease, such as alcohol abuse, cystic fibrosis, or too much copper in the liver.<sup>17</sup>

Applying these insights to the measurement of Islamophobia, the best noncausal indicators are direct survey, focus-group, or interview data. The ideal measures involve carefully tailored questions or experiments through which respondents accurately reveal the extent of their indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims. Of course, these data are hard to come by. It is not my goal here—nor do I have the space—to spell out exactly which questions should be asked of respondents or which experiments should be undertaken. But it is helpful to note that there are precedents for students of Islamophobia in the form of long-standing scholarship on racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, anti-Americanism, xenophobia, sexism, and other types of negative attitudes and emotions (among others, see Beere 1990; Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2007, p. 1078; Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007a; Kleg & Yamamoto, 1998; Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993; Smith, 1993; Sniderman et al., 2000).

As most studies in these cognate fields have emphasized, the key to uncovering reliable indicators of Islamophobia lies in consistency. The more consistently negative the attitudes and emotions of respondents to a series of questions, the more confident we can be that they are expressing Islamophobia. Questionnaires can also aim to

discern different levels of intensity of responses (aversion vs. fear vs. hostility) and of intensity of adherence to Islamophobic positions (an opinion vs. a predisposition such as a bias). One good starting point for further discussion and testing is the Islamophobia Scale, developed by Lee et al. (2009). These researchers used a 5-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* on which 223 undergraduate students responded to questions such as: “If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims” and “Islam is a dangerous religion.” These types of questions may have diminished utility if expressing open Islamophobia becomes less socially acceptable, but in the current historical context, they are direct measures with a high probability of accurately revealing Islamophobia.<sup>18</sup>

The fewer questions asked in surveys, focus groups, or interviews, the more difficult it is to measure the consistency, intensity, and nature of Islamophobic sentiments. Any arguments about Islamophobia that rely on a single survey question should be viewed with skepticism. To the extent that a question is extremely direct—such as asking respondents to rate their level of sympathy or antipathy toward specific groups—it is more likely to be a useful indicator than less direct questions. Indirect questions can be revealing, but they also run the risk of having an ambiguous relation with the underlying phenomenon. The World Values Surveys, for instance, ask: “Which of the following groups would you NOT like to have as a neighbor?” Answering “Muslim” may reflect Islamophobia, but this is like diagnosing cirrhosis based on jaundice—there is a high probability that it is correlated with the underlying phenomenon, but the indicator may also be caused by something else entirely (a racist’s desire not to live next to someone who is likely to have dark skin, or an atheist’s desire not to live next to a religious person). Other surveys ask questions such as: “Would you favor the building of a mosque in your neighborhood?” Negative answers may indicate Islamophobia, but they may also reflect concerns with other factors, such as a desire to minimize traffic disruption. Responses are thus most revealing when compared with attitudes toward building churches, big box stores, police stations, or other non-Islamic construction projects; only then can survey questions like these illuminate the specific effect of the Islamic or Muslim component of the equation.

Looking beyond survey, focus group, and interview data, it is possible to directly measure Islamophobia by examining unsolicited statements proffered by politicians, civil servants, public figures, religious leaders, journalists, bloggers, and others whose words are recorded for posterity. These are noncausal indicators to the extent that they represent the attitudes and emotions of the speaker or writer. It is possible to undertake systematic analyses of news content about Islam and Muslims (Moore, Mason, & Lewis, 2008), or to examine the changing nature of far-right political rhetoric vis-à-vis Muslims (Zúquete, 2008), or to discuss the interpretation of Islam by a prominent writer such as Oriana Fallaci (Talbot, 2006). To the extent that projects like these are systematic—by reviewing all major news stories, far-right rhetoric, or best-selling authors—they can convey important information about the prevalence and nature of Islamophobia at specific times and places.

Because consistent and reliable noncausal indicators are difficult to come by, we often have to infer the presence of Islamophobia from its effects. The key is to understand the quality of the indicator and the likelihood that it reveals the underlying phenomenon. Experiments can be a fruitful means for uncovering attitudes and emotions toward particular out-groups. In most experiments, participants are asked to perform a task or a series of tasks. Although subjects are often unaware that researchers are testing their perspectives on racial, ethnic, or religious difference, the results allow researchers to infer these perspectives.<sup>19</sup> For example, Adida, Laitin, and Valfort (2010) developed a series of experiments to gauge non-Muslim French participants' generosity toward French Muslim participants. They found that non-Muslim French exhibit less generosity toward Muslims under a variety of circumstances and that this outcome depends more on emotional sense of threat than on rational beliefs about expected Muslim behavior (Adida et al., 2010a, pp. 4, 20).<sup>20</sup>

Some behavioral effects of Islamophobia, like hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims, are typically tightly connected to underlying attitudes and emotions.<sup>21</sup> Others, like a low percentage of Muslims in public office or significant socioeconomic disparities between Muslims and non-Muslims, are much less direct indicators of Islamophobia, as they may be fully or largely explained by other causes. There are numerous sites to examine for evidence of Islamophobia, such as disparaging portrayals of Islam or Muslims in textbooks or in popular culture (TV, movies, cartoons, video games, novels, or music), sparse or conflict-prone social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, oppressive public policies toward Islam and Muslims, and Muslims' own perceptions of high levels of prejudice or suspicion. Each of these may be a revealing indicator, but each has to be examined carefully and critically to understand the degree to which it reflects underlying Islamophobia as opposed to other factors.

Some of these examples function not only as noncausal indicators or effects of Islamophobia but also as causes. When far-right politicians or public figures make anti-Muslim proclamations, these statements are not just indicators of their own Islamophobia; they are also likely to amplify or to reinforce Islamophobia among their devotees. Complicating the picture even further, those same statements may engender a sympathetic response among other listeners, having the effect of both aggravating and diminishing Islamophobia simultaneously among different audiences. It is easy to get caught up in the cross-currents of causality when examining indicators. The most important point is to be explicit about how the selected indicator relates to the underlying concept, both in terms of which (or how many) of the three types of relation(s) it has to Islamophobia and in terms of how directly or indirectly it measures the concept.

Is it possible to measure Islamophobia? It is. But it is not a straightforward task. Analysts and observers frequently disagree over how to capture levels of racism, economic health, public well-being, or democracy. This is a standard challenge for social scientists, and it is one that also applies to Islamophobia. The best way to measure Islamophobia is to seek out the most direct indicators of "indiscriminate negative

attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims.” Assembling multiple, reliable, and consistent indicators provides a more systematic and accurate sense of levels of Islamophobia within a particular society at a specific time. It may not be possible to develop a meaningful aggregate index of Islamophobia given the currently available data, and there are some purposes for which attempting to do so would be pointless, but it is vital to move beyond using indirect, anecdotal, or conflating indicators as evidence of contemporary Islamophobia.

### **Putting the Concept of Islamophobia to Use: Comparative and Causal Analysis**

Given the inherent difficulties in doing so, is it worth the effort to establish a definition and concrete measures of Islamophobia? It is both intellectually interesting and analytically important to bring rigor and clarity to a vague concept. But there is little point to this—at least for social scientists—if the goal is purely theoretical. Developing Islamophobia as a clear concept, however, is also the foundation for systematic comparison, and systematic comparison is the key to accurate causal analysis.<sup>22</sup>

Conceptualizing and measuring Islamophobia allows us to compare its levels *over time* within a geographic unit (such as a country, region, state, city, or neighborhood), its relative strength and manifestations *across space* (because the concept is applicable across geographic contexts), its dimensions and prevalence in different *social groups* (such as among people who differ by age, socioeconomic status, or education levels), and its intensity relative to negative attitudes and emotions directed at *other groups*, such as those defined by race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, or other factors. Looking across these four dimensions is the first step toward answering descriptive questions such as: Is Islamophobia becoming more or less widespread and entrenched? Is it particularly acute in some places or among some types of people? Has Islamophobia become a more important vector of intolerance than that directed at Jews, Blacks, Roma, Pakistanis, North Africans, asylum seekers, and so on? Right now, we have no systematic way to know. Defining Islamophobia precisely and identifying its indicators are prerequisites to answering these kinds of comparative questions that are of tremendous interest to scholars, journalists, and citizens.

If the concept of Islamophobia is useful for social scientists, though, it has to have value for causal analysis. Once we are able to measure Islamophobia across the four comparative dimensions, it is possible to analyze causes and effects from the macro to the micro levels. An aggregate index of Islamophobia that tracks rises and falls across time would be a valuable tool to help investigators understand the impact of major episodes of Islamist violence, the end of the Cold War, or levels of Muslim immigrants in particular countries, cities, or neighborhoods. It would also allow historians and social scientists to better understand the long-term, macrosocial processes that generate slow but significant change in how groups move up or down ethnoracial hierarchies.<sup>23</sup> On the effects side of the equation, it may be possible to trace the impact of Islamophobia on outcomes such as foreign policy toward the Middle East or stances

on Turkey's joining the European Union, on differential patterns in employment or electoral prospects for Muslims, or even on rates of depression or suicide in different Muslim communities.<sup>24</sup>

Many scholars will be interested in the causes and effects of Islamophobia on a much smaller scale. They will need narrower measures of Islamophobia to isolate its precise relation to other variables they are investigating. Drawing on precedents from cognates to Islamophobia, one study has demonstrated a causal connection between news coverage of immigrants and anti-immigration attitudes (Boomgaarden & Vliegthart, 2009). Another has correlated extreme right and racist violence with the role of political elites (Koopmans, 1996). It is easy to imagine a parallel research project examining the effect of far right party leaders' Islamophobic statements on anti-Muslim hate crime.

These kinds of targeted studies are emerging with respect to Islamophobia. One has examined in detail how job-related experiences (such as satisfaction, recognition, and responsibility) can affect German police officers' attitudes toward and experiences with Muslims (Mescher, 2008). A second study correlated the propensity of Spanish respondents who expressed anti-Arab or Islamophobic statements with their willingness to act on their beliefs, as measured by their sending in a form supporting a fictitious association that stood for the defense of Western values against "the risk of Islamization as a consequence of the massive immigration of people from Arab countries" (Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2007, p. 1085). These meso- and micro-level studies examine more fine-grained and concrete variables that can serve as causes and effects of particular forms of Islamophobia. Yet if all such studies use a different starting point for conceptualizing and operationalizing Islamophobia, it will be impossible to evaluate the consistency of the findings and to aggregate knowledge. In short, we are at the beginning of the process of thinking through what Islamophobia is and how to measure it. The next step is to develop concrete and replicable ways to do so.

## Conclusion: What Is at Stake?

Most people assume that Islamophobia exists. But we know less than we should about its dimensions, intensity, and prevalence across time, space, and social groups, and compared to other forms of intolerance. In part, this is because *Islamophobia* originated as a political term and is still frequently deployed for political ends. Yet scholars are increasingly using *Islamophobia* to designate the specific social reality of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments in Western liberal democracies today. Given the rising prevalence of the term in scholarly studies, it is important to theorize and measure Islamophobia as an emerging comparative concept in the social sciences. This article has offered a theoretically grounded definition of Islamophobia as *indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims*. It has also emphasized the importance of using direct noncausal indicators for measuring Islamophobia to the greatest extent possible.

The utility of any definition of a concept depends on the research question at hand, and the definition offered here will not be optimal in all circumstances. Some scholars will seek to understand the history and politicized uses of the term itself. They will therefore rightly reject a fixed, transhistorical definition of the concept. Others will be more concerned with isolating and measuring subcomponents of Islamophobia. They may want to focus on the differences between anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim sentiments, between those who hold changeable Islamophobic opinions and those who hold inflexible biases, or between those whose Islamophobia manifests itself primarily through aversion and those who are motivated more by hostility. For these scholars, however, it may still be useful to situate their research questions in the context of an overarching definition of Islamophobia rather than to ignore or to redefine the concept itself.

There are distinct advantages to developing a focal definition and consistent measures of Islamophobia. Doing so makes it easier to distinguish between debates that revolve around what Islamophobia is, what causes it, and what its consequences are. It also creates a standard for evaluating the directness or indirectness of specific measures of Islamophobia used by different researchers. This encourages studies that utilize the most direct measures and that replicate those measures in different settings. The effect for scholars will be more accurate comparisons of Islamophobia across time, place, and social groups, and compared to other forms of intolerance. In short, developing Islamophobia as a concept for social scientists is a first step toward a deeper understanding of the comparative and causal questions that interest us.

There are also critical policy-making stakes linked to these questions. When civil society groups, antiracist bureaucracies, or politicians allocate their time and money to Islamophobia, they shift resources away from other serious concerns (such as racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Roma sentiments, anti-immigrant prejudice, sexism, homophobia, etc.). How much attention each of these issues receives should be dictated by the most accurate estimate possible of the extent of the problem. Developing Islamophobia as a concrete and usable social scientific concept is therefore not only the basis for meaningful comparative and causal analysis in academia; it is also the foundation for more informed public debates and for more effective policy decisions.

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## Notes

1. Recent scholarship typically identifies a more nuanced and complex nature to early attitudes toward Islam, but still emphasizes the presence of significant anti-Muslim prejudice in early modern Europe (Mastnak, 2010; Matar, 2009).
2. There is even a website called <http://www.islamophobia.org>.
3. Video available at <http://www.un.org/en/unlearningintolerance/previous.html> (accessed August 10, 2010). The Organisation of the Islamic Conference has also launched an Islamophobia Observatory that issues regular reports on Islamophobia (see [http://www.oic-oci.org/page\\_detail.asp?p\\_id=182](http://www.oic-oci.org/page_detail.asp?p_id=182); accessed November 10, 2010).
4. Grosfoguel and Mielants (2006) offer four separate perspectives on the meaning of Islamophobia.
5. Other bloggers and journalists have also argued that Islamophobia is more fiction than fact. Writing from the United States, see Daniel Pipes (<http://www.danielpipes.org/3075/islamophobia>; accessed August 10, 2010), and from Australia, see Paul Sheehan (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/islamophobia-is-a-fabrication-20090329-9fjm.html?page=-1>; accessed August 10, 2010).
6. See, for example, the introduction and contributions in Shryock (2010).
7. In what follows, I draw heavily on the work of Goertz, although I have also been deeply influenced by the insights of Gerring (2001, p. 39, Chapter 3), who emphasizes that "goodness in concepts may be understood as an attempt to mediate between eight criteria: coherence, operationalization, validity, field utility, resonance, contextual range, parsimony, and analytic/empirical utility."
8. Goertz (2006, pp. 1-5) recognizes many ways of thinking about concepts but identifies this structure as the most useful formulation for social scientists.
9. Technically, the latter two components operate with a family resemblance structure. In the second component, there may be negative attitudes *or* emotions, and in the third, the target may be Islam *or* Muslims. See Goertz (2006, pp. 39-46) for an extended discussion of necessary and sufficient versus family resemblance structures.
10. See the Glossary of Psychological terms of the American Psychological Association, available at <http://www.apa.org/research/action/glossary.aspx#p> (accessed November 11, 2010).
11. There is far from unanimity in the social psychological literature about the relations among beliefs, attitudes, and emotions (Brewer, 2007; Fiske, 1998). This article offers one coherent way to analyze these three elements, but it is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive.
12. For discussions of the relation between prejudice and discrimination, see Fiske (1998) and Quillian (2006).

13. Ragin (2000, p. 6) calls this a “conventional” or “crisp” set.
14. Although they do not use the term *Islamophobia*, Sniderman and Hagendoorn’s (2007) book frequently conflates discussions of attitudes toward Muslims and toward immigrant groups. In addition, at least one study designed to capture “anti-Arab prejudice” uses a significant number of indicators of Islamophobia as component parts (Echebarria-Echabe & Guede, 2007).
15. At least two authors have argued that Islamophobia is difficult to distinguish from xenophobia (Helbling, 2010; Stolz, 2005). These propositions require further testing; if found to be true, then conflating measures of anti-Muslim and anti-foreign (especially anti-Arab or South Asian) sentiments may not be highly problematic for certain purposes.
16. More technically, it is fibrosis and the formation of regenerative nodules. See the Merriam-Webster medical dictionary and [http://www.uptodate.com/contents/diagnostic-approach-to-the-patient-with-cirrhosis?source=search\\_result&selectedTitle=1~150](http://www.uptodate.com/contents/diagnostic-approach-to-the-patient-with-cirrhosis?source=search_result&selectedTitle=1~150) (accessed May 9, 2011).
17. On cirrhosis, see <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cirrhosis/DS00373> and <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/cirrhosis> (accessed August 13, 2010).
18. One may also investigate whether the expressed Islamophobia is a constant and durable presence in respondents’ lives or whether it is triggered by or modulated based on particular circumstances such as survey question priming.
19. Quillian (2006, pp. 315-320) reviews the strengths and weaknesses of implicit prejudice experiments for determining underlying beliefs about racial minorities.
20. As with survey questions, there can also be experiments that are more or less direct. Sniderman and Hagendoorn’s (2007, pp. 32-36) list experiment correlates participants’ attitudes toward Muslims and Muslim practices with feelings about “special assistance for minorities.”
21. These connections, however, are clearest when the data do not suffer from conflation with other motives for hate crimes or discrimination. The FBI, London’s Metropolitan Police Service, and a few other European jurisdictions collect data specifically on anti-Muslim hate crimes (on the FBI’s collection of “anti-Islamic” data, see Kaplan, 2006); an example of a test set up to capture anti-Muslim discrimination can be found in Adida, Laitin, and Valfort (2010b); on field audit studies to test for racial discrimination, see Quillian (2006, pp. 302-309).
22. The goal here is analogous to Keohane and Katzenstein’s (2007, p. 3) when they write that their intent is “to clarify the forms that anti-Americanism takes and to enable us to make more informed inferences about its sources and consequences.”
23. Pierson (2004, Chapter 3) has drawn attention to these slow-moving processes in the social sciences. Historians such as Lucassen (2005) have taken this long view with respect to the study of immigrant integration. On ethnoracial hierarchies over time, see especially Kleg and Yamamoto (1998); on Muslims’ place on those hierarchies, see Bleich (2009).
24. For one attempt to correlate Islamophobia and depression among Muslim respondents, see Sheridan (2006).

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## Bio

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