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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Unworthy victims and threatening adversaries: Islam, Muslims, and U.S. foreign policy

Evan W. Sandlin[1] | **Daniel J. Simmons**[2]

[1]Stanford University, Stanford, California, USA

[2]Department of Political Science, Saint Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont, USA

Correspondence
Evan W. Sandlin, 635 Downey Way, Los Angeles, CA 90089–332, USA.
Email: esandlin@usc.edu

Abstract

Objective: We examine the role of how a hostile discourse toward Islam influences American public opinion regarding U.S. foreign policy actions toward Muslim populations and Muslim-majority nations.

Methods: Using a survey experiment with two vignettes, we test how Americans' foreign policy preferences are affected by Islamic identity. In the first vignette, a minority group is facing ethnic cleansing. Second, a country is developing chemical weapons.

Results: We find that Americans are less likely to see Muslim minorities abroad as under threat or to support costly foreign policy actions to assist them. We also find that Americans are more likely to see Muslim countries as threatening and to support the use of military force against Muslim states.

Conclusion: Our evidence suggests that the political effects of Islamophobia are not restricted to domestic policy but include foreign policy preferences too.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979 and especially following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Islam and Muslim communities have become prominent topics of national political discussion in the United States. In the course of these discussions, Muslims are often portrayed as violent, threatening, and irrational (Kumar 2010; Said 1979). As a result, Muslims are among the least trusted groups in the United States and face discrimination (Lipka 2017; Pew Research Center 2014). We suggest, however, that the negative effects of popular depictions of Islam and Muslims are not limited to the domestic landscape. For many Americans, Islam represents a hostile *and* foreign identity marker that is incompatible with the national identity of the United States. We believe these hostile American perceptions of Islam and Muslims also impact American foreign policy preferences.

U.S. media, political, and popular discourse describes Muslims as unworthy victims and as threatening adversaries. We theorize that this discourse impacts U.S. foreign policy preferences such that Americans will be less willing to assist Muslim victims of foreign persecution and will be more willing to employ costly foreign policy actions to counter potential threats emanating from Muslim countries. We find evidence for this theory using survey experiments that include a series of foreign policy vignettes.

THE PERCEPTION OF ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES

There are two major factors that significantly affect the unique preferences Americans hold toward foreign policy when engaging with Muslim states or Muslim populations. The first factor is a general dissimilarity in state characteristics between the United States and Muslim states. Individuals tend to be less trusting of states and groups with dissimilar features, including regime type (Tomz and Weeks 2013) and culture (Geva and Hanson 1999; Rousseau 2007). Individuals may also exhibit the same proclivities toward their coreligionists and, conversely, antagonism toward states with a dissimilar religious identity (Fox 2001; Seul 1999). As such, we would expect Americans to have less affinity toward and favor different policies with respect to Muslim states or communities simply because Islam differs from the predominantly Christian United States. Islam, however, has been treated with significant and *unique* hostility over the last four decades in the United States. Elements of the unique status of Islam may influence American foreign policy preferences toward Muslim states specifically rather than simply all religious "others."

Islam is presented in two complimentary ways in modern U.S. discourse: First, Muslims are unworthy of sympathy, and second, Muslims are inherently threatening. Like other marginalized groups, Muslims have periodically faced discrimination and persecution in countries where Islam is the religion of a minority of the population. With respect to Muslim groups such as these, a certain discourse in media, elite circles, and among the public surrounds these victims that does not extend to other religious or ethnic groups. American media outlets have demonized fleeing Muslims and have argued that Muslims are a kind of fifth column that is infiltrating Western society and undermining "Western values" (Bail 2016; Gharib and Clifton 2012). Additionally, studies of media coverage have demonstrated instances of violence in which Muslims are the victims are given scant coverage and are framed as "internal conflicts or issues" rather than events of international importance (Elmasry and el-Nawawy 2020; el-Nawawy and Elmasry 2017).

Political actors have also rhetorically or materially contributed to the notion that Muslim victims of violence are suspect and less worthy of support. During the Bush administration, both Democratic and Republican lawmakers promoted and attended official screenings of documentaries that demonized immigrant Muslim communities and organizations as inherently anti-democratic and anti-human rights (Johnson 2011). In 2015, the House of Representatives passed the largely bipartisan H.R. 4038, the "American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act," which would effectively pause refugee resettlement from Iraq and Syria. Republican officials, including then the presidential candidate Senator Ted Cruz, went further, saying the United States should only allow in Christian refugees and place a hold on all Muslim refugee settlements (Lind 2015). As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump campaigned to halt all Muslim entry to the United States, including refugees from war-torn countries, especially Syria. When Trump assumed the presidency, the proposed ban became official policy (Johnson and Hauslohner 2017).

The American public behaves and communicates in ways that suggest that Muslim victims of violence are unworthy of support. Polls have demonstrated that considerable numbers of Americans, including many Democrats and Liberals (sometimes majorities), feel cool toward Islam and believe Muslims are inherently more violent (Lipka 2017; Pew Research Center 2014). These beliefs impact how Americans behave. Americans are less likely to favor refugee assistance and resettlement when the refugees are Muslim (Adida, Lo, and Platas 2017, 2019; Nassar 2020). Americans are even less likely to donate to charities that are specified as "Islamic" (Tremblay-Boire and Prakash 2019). As such, we believe that the perception of Muslims as less worthy of assistance will induce Americans to be less likely to see Muslims as threatened and more likely to see Muslims as the persecutors of others (Hypothesis 1). Additionally, we predict that this perception will convince Americans to favor less costly and less aggressive policies in order to assist Muslim victims of violence abroad (Hypothesis 2).

The U.S. discourse surrounding Islam also singles out Islam and Muslims as unique threats to be confronted. The notion that Islam is threatening and in conflict with "Western civilization" can be found in both popular media and academia. Scholars like Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis argued that Islam was fundamentally different from other religious traditions and that a clash between the "Muslim world" and "the West" was inevitable (Beydoun 2018, p. 79). This framing was readily adopted by media outlets, especially after 9/11 (Abrahamian 2003). Even prior to these events, the media contributed to shifting

views of Islam by having "blurred the line" between political Muslims and terrorists (Gerges 1997, p. 73). Focus on the connection between Islam and violence skyrocketed after the 9/11 attacks (Green 2015, pp. 239–240). Islam is now overwhelmingly portrayed by media, and American media in particular, as sexist, violent, and irrational (Ahmed and Matthes 2016).

The discursive connection between Islam and violence is evident in political discourse as well. After the September 11 attacks, the Bush Administration articulated the conflict as a battle between two ideologies that were cosmic and metaphysical in nature by using terms like crusade, Islamic terrorism, militant Islam, Muslim extremism, and jihadists. The term Islamic terrorism "discursively links the religion of Islam with terrorism, thereby forming an unconscious and seamless association between the two" (Jackson 2007, p. 405). Besides a proclivity for violence, the image of the "Mad Mullah" that is popularized in Western political discourse implies that Muslim leaders are violent *and* irrational (Beeman, 2005). Such images helped cultivate the perception that conventional foreign policy tools, such as diplomacy and deterrence, that had been aimed at traditional adversaries, such as the Soviet Union, would not be effective in countering Muslim states. For example, while much has been made about the religious beliefs of Iran's leaders as a possible motivating factor for the acquisition of a nuclear weapon, "little discussion is devoted to why Iran, as a rational political actor, might want to acquire nuclear weapons" (Kumar 2012, p. 50).

Polling data have consistently revealed that Americans perceive Islam as inherently violent (Gerges 1997, p. 70). Despite overwhelming Muslim condemnation of the September 11 attacks, many Americans still considered the attacks consistent with the "true" teachings of Islam and believed Islam to be inherently more violent than other religions (Panagopoulos 2006). Such attitudes are more prevalent among the right-wing and the evangelical Christian populations (Beck and Plant 2018; Shortle and Gaddie 2015). Further survey evidence suggests that concerns about national security specifically underlie such anti-Muslim attitudes (Ciftci 2012; Wike and Grim 2010). Given the discourse in media, politics, and the public that presents Muslims as threatening, we expect Americans to feel more threatened by Muslim states (Hypothesis 3) and favor more aggressive and costly foreign policy actions to counter a potential foreign threat from a Muslim state (Hypothesis 4).

Past research shows that individuals in democracies feel less threatened by democratic states and are more reluctant to use force against them (Tomz and Weeks 2013). As such, the fact that a country is democratic may reduce negative American perceptions even if it is a Muslim country. Conversely, explicitly stating that a country is autocratic may increase respondents' concerns about the state's Islamic identity. We would therefore expect the presence of Islam to have stronger effects when a country is labeled autocratic (Hypothesis 5).

Previous studies and polling of anti-Muslim animus have generally concluded that such attitudes are more prominent among the right-wing (Pew Research Center 2014, 2017). Therefore, we expect the foreign policy effects of the presence of Islam or Muslims to be stronger among Republicans than Democrats (Hypothesis 6), especially as anti-Muslim rhetoric was common from the Trump Administration (Johnson and Hauslohner 2017; Khan et al. 2021).

Finally, in addition to ideology and partisanship, exposure to the narrative of Muslims as unworthy victims and Islam as a violent religion may increase the propensity to advocate for less costly foreign policy actions to assist them and more costly actions to address Muslim threats. Both Sides and Gross (2013) and Saleem et al. (2015) find that immediate lab-induced exposure to media-driven stereotypes impacts policy preferences. These studies do not test, however, whether regular media or news consumption leads to such results. Given that the media is one of the major vectors by which these stereotypes are articulated, we hypothesize that the foreign policy effects of the presence of Islam or Muslims will be stronger among those who follow current events more closely (Hypothesis 7).

DESIGN AND METHODS

We design two vignettes to examine two different situations where Muslims could be impacted by U.S. foreign policy. The first examines how foreign policy preferences are affected when Muslims are victims

of state violence. The second examines how a Muslim state adopting a threatening posture could affect the U.S. public's foreign policy preferences.

We first present respondents with a scenario, which we call the minority vignette, in which a country is persecuting an internal minority group. In the primary treatment condition, this minority is specified as Muslim. In the control condition, we do not mention the religious identity of the minority; it is simply a nondescript minority group. This condition alone, however, may not be an adequate control, as respondents may simply treat religious minorities differently. Therefore, in a secondary treatment condition, we denote the minority as Christian since Christianity is the majority religion in the United States and is well known even among nonpractitioners. Using Christianity as a secondary treatment allows us to examine both Muslims relative to a generic "other," as well as Muslims (i.e., the "out" group) to Christians (i.e., the "in" group). Based on previous research, we expect respondents to display markedly different opinions with respect to how to treat those they view as either within or without their group (Beniot, Sawyer, and Marquez 2008; Malhotra and Margalit 2010; Nelson and Kinder 1996). Additionally, we vary the religious identity of the persecuting state in the vignette as being nondescript, Christian, or Muslim to test whether respondents are more or less sympathetic toward minorities based on who is persecuting them. We provide respondents with some additional information about the country, including its relative military strength and relationship with the United States. Such information is held constant across treatments.

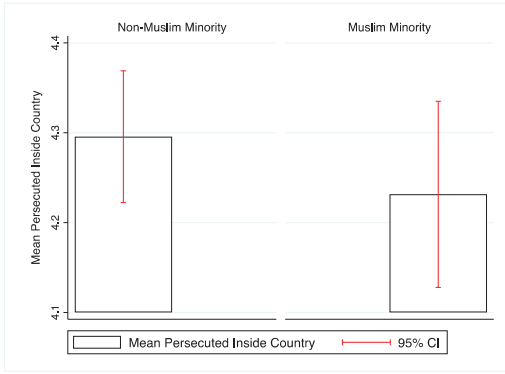
After reading the vignette, respondents are asked how likely they believe it is that the country will continue to persecute the minority inside and outside of the country on a 5-point likelihood scale. After assessing how respondents view the persecution of the minority, we gauge which foreign policy actions they favor to assist the threatened minority population, giving them the options of no action, diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and military action.

In order to assess whether respondents view Muslim countries differently from non-Muslim countries when posing as a potential adversary, the second experiment utilizes what we call a threat vignette, which presents a scenario in which a country is developing chemical weapons. In the primary treatment condition, the country developing chemical weapons is specified as a Muslim country. In order to test H5, we also specify whether or not the country is a democracy or an autocracy. Following the vignette, respondents are first asked how likely they believe the country will threaten to use or actually use these weapons on another country and how likely they believe the country will specifically threaten or attack the United States or its allies. Respondents indicate their answers to both questions on a 5-point likelihood scale. Just as in the minority vignette, we ask respondents reading this scenario to indicate their foreign policy preferences in response to the described threat.

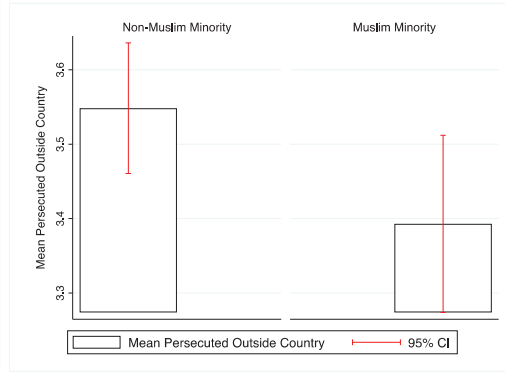
Our sample of 990 adults in the United States was recruited through the Lucid Theorem. Respondents were told they were taking part in a political science study and that the researchers were interested in their views on public policy. Along with the survey treatments, we collected information about respondent's racial, gender, and religious demographics, as well as political leanings.[1] Participants were randomly assigned to read a version of the minority vignette and a version of the threat vignette; which one was viewed first was also randomized.

We compare the difference in means in perceptions and policy preferences between Muslim and non-Muslim treatments. In comparing differences in policy preferences between treatment groups, we code the comparison as differences in the maximum policy respondents are willing to endure or "policy ceiling." The four policy options available to respondents (no action, diplomatic pressure, sanctions, and military action) all have associated potential costs ranging from nothing (no action) to U.S. lives and dollars (military action). As options were not mutually exclusive and multiple options could be selected, a respondent could, for example, indicate they support both no action *and* economic sanctions. While respondents may support multiple policies to address a foreign policy scenario, we believe the relevant criteria for comparison are the farthest they are willing to go or the highest cost they are willing to endure to assist a persecuted minority or address a potential threat. In our example case, the respondent's maximum policy would be coded as economic sanctions since the respondent indicated they would be willing to endure the policy cost *up*

[1] Respondents were compensated through Lucid Theorem's network of companies.

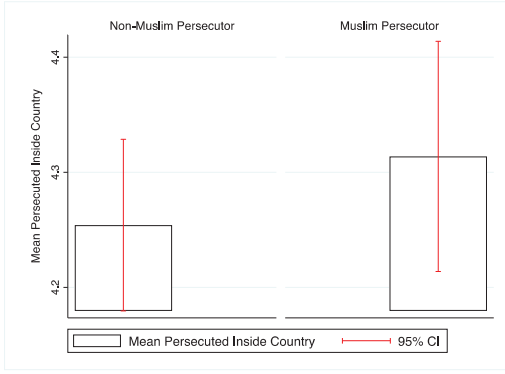


(a) Persecution within Country

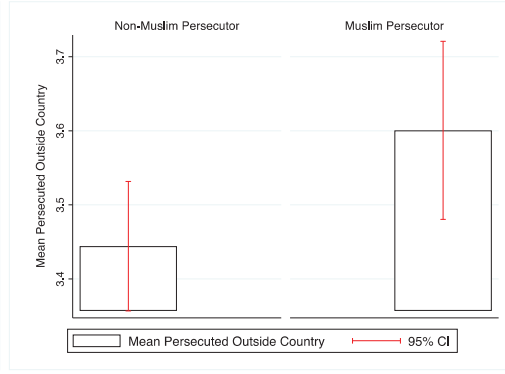


(b) Persecution Outside of Country

FIGURE 1 Persecution of Muslim and non-Muslim victims



(a) Persecution within Country



(b) Persecution Outside of Country

FIGURE 2 Muslim and non-Muslim countries persecuting minorities

to those associated with economic sanctions. Economic sanctions are therefore the maximum policy or "policy ceiling" the respondent was willing to support.

RESULTS

Figure 1 reports the difference in means regarding the perception of how threatened the minority group is as described in the minority vignette. There are significant differences between how respondents view the threat to Muslim and non-Muslim minorities. On the one hand, respondents do not believe Muslims would be any more or less likely to be persecuted inside the state as a minority than Christians or a generic minority group. Respondents do, however, believe the Muslim minority would be less likely to be persecuted *outside* of the state. Essentially, in support of H1, respondents thought it was less likely countries would escalate violence against the minority if that minority was Muslim.

We also find support for H1 with respect to the religious identity of the persecuting country. Figure 2 demonstrates significant differences in the perceived threat to minorities based on whether the country persecuting them was Muslim or non-Muslim. While respondents do not find Muslim states to be more likely to persecute minorities inside the state, they do see Muslim states as more likely to persecute minorities outside the state. This result suggests a tendency to see Muslim states as more likely to escalate violence

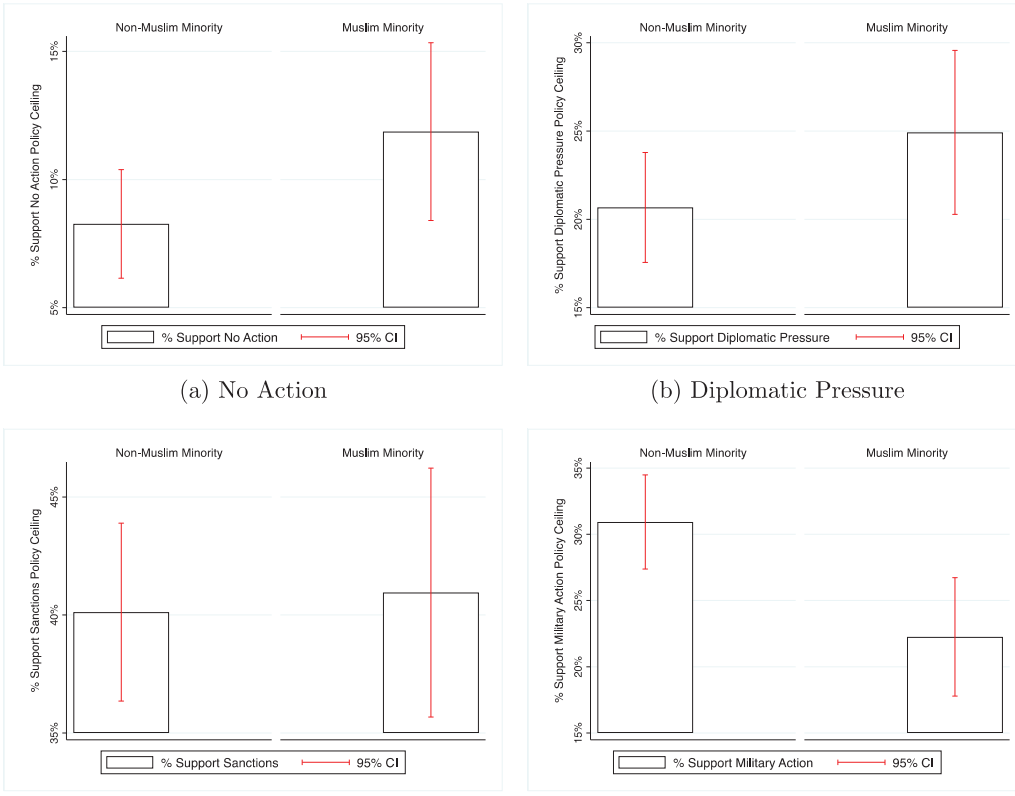


FIGURE 3 Preferred foreign policy actions to protect a persecuted minority

beyond their borders in order to persecute a minority. These results hold regardless of whether we compare Muslim countries to either Christian or nondescript countries.

To assist the persecuted minority, 9.5 percent support no action, 22 percent support diplomatic pressure, 40 percent support sanctions, and 28 percent support military action. However, respondents exhibit differences in foreign policy preferences depending on what minority group is being threatened. Figure 3 shows that respondents are significantly more likely to support only taking no foreign policy action when the minority being persecuted is Muslim. Approximately 11.8 percent of respondents supported no action when the minority in question was Muslim, whereas approximately 8 percent of respondents were willing to do so when the minority was non-Muslim. Thus, respondents are more likely to say they *only* support doing nothing when a foreign Muslim minority is being persecuted in a country that has openly declared "ethnic cleansing" as its goal. There are also somewhat significant differences in terms of support for diplomatic pressure, as respondents are about 4 percent more likely to say diplomacy would be the most they would support to address the plight of a Muslim minority.

Support for these relatively low-cost policies contrasts starkly with the results for military intervention. While almost 31 percent of respondents said they would support military action to assist a non-Muslim minority, only 22 percent said they would be willing to support such action to assist a Muslim minority. There are no significant differences when it comes to support of sanctions. Additionally, these results hold regardless of whether we compare the Muslim treatment to the Christian treatment or the control, indicating that Muslims are unique and not treated as simply another non-Christian group. We conclude strong support for H2; Americans are more likely to favor less costly options (no action and diplomacy) to assist Muslim minorities and less likely to favor costly ones (military action).

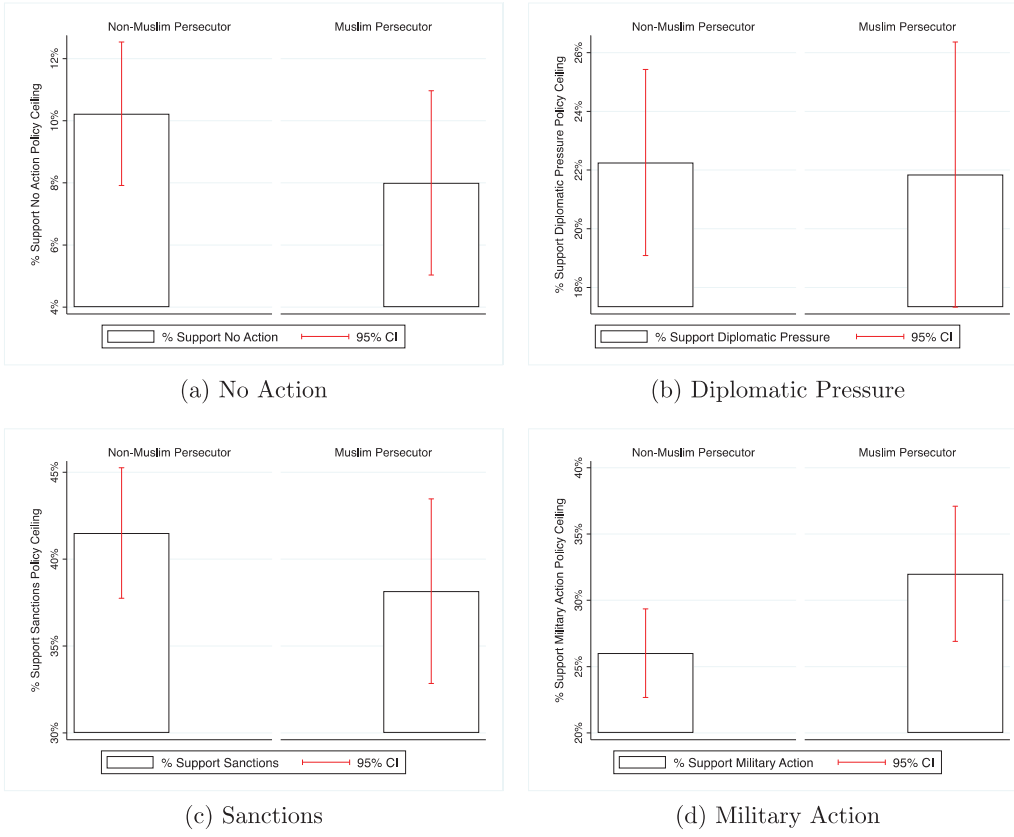


FIGURE 4 Preferred foreign policy actions against a persecuting country

We also find differences depending on what types of countries are engaged in the persecution of minorities, although the results are not as strong as when comparing minority types. Consistent with H2, respondents are more likely to advocate for military action when the persecuting country is Muslim (Figure 4). There are no significant differences, however, between Muslim and non-Muslim persecuting states with respect to any other policy option.

With respect to the threat vignette, Muslim countries are not viewed as more threatening than non-Muslim countries.[2] Respondents do not believe Muslim countries developing chemical weapons are any more likely to threaten other countries or are any more likely to threaten the United States and its allies, compared to non-Muslim countries developing chemical weapons. Respondents also do not believe Muslim countries are any more likely to attack other countries, the United States, or U.S. allies. When comparing Muslim countries to Christian ones, however, we find respondents do find Muslim countries to be more threatening to others and more likely to attack other countries, including the United States and its allies. When we compare Muslim countries to the control, the effect of the Muslim treatment becomes insignificant. This finding is important since we replicate the results of Johns and Davies (2012) and Lacina and Lee (2013) but also find that the results do not hold when we compare Muslim states to a true control. The perception of Muslim states as more threatening is driven not so much by the American perception of Muslim states but by the perception of Christian states as being inherently less threatening. As such, we find only partial support for H3.

[2] Tables for results that are discussed but not reported in the main text can be found in the Supplementary Appendix.

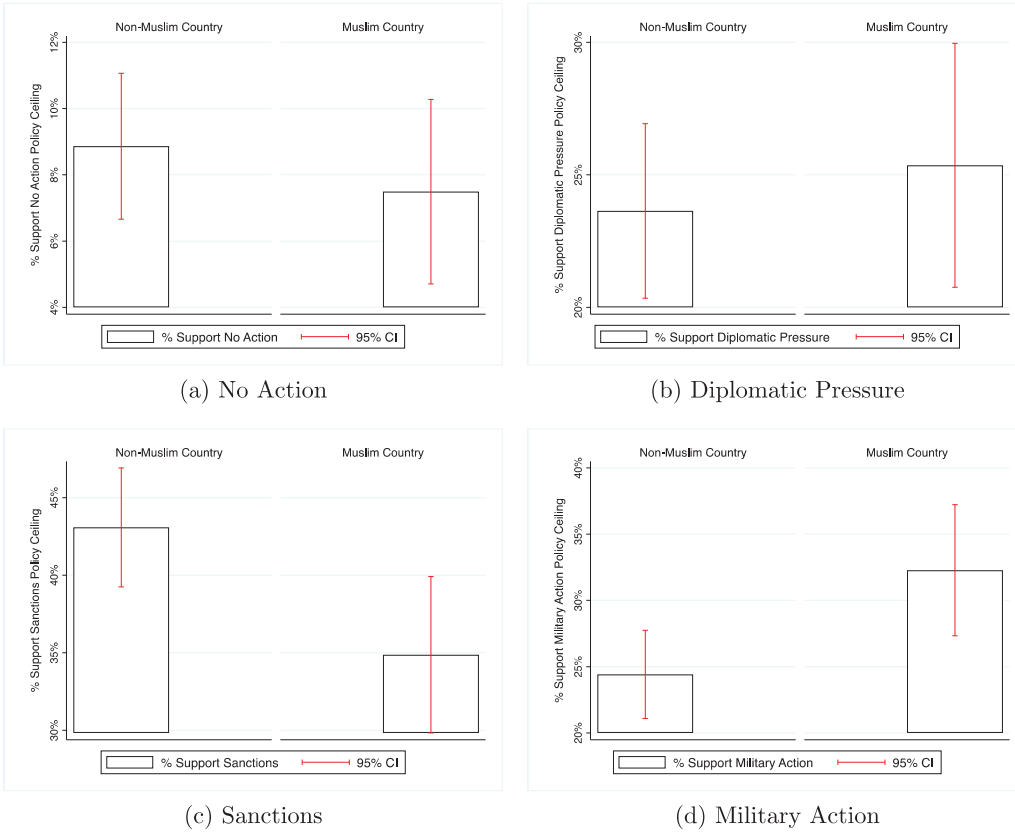


FIGURE 5 Preferred foreign policy actions against a chemical weapons-seeking country

Despite saying Muslim states do not represent any increased threat, respondents favor more costly foreign policy options in order to address them. About 8.4 percent of the sample supports no action, 24.2 percent supports diplomatic pressure, 40.2 percent supports sanctions, and 27.2 percent supports military action. However, Figure 5 demonstrates differences in foreign policy preferences when addressing Muslim states. Respondents are more likely to favor military action in response to a threat from a Muslim state, supporting H4. In a scenario where a Muslim state is developing chemical weapons, 32 percent of respondents support military action. In a scenario where a non-Muslim state is developing chemical weapons, only about 24 percent of respondents support military action. Additionally, we find respondents are more likely to indicate that sanctions would be the costliest foreign policy action they would support when the country is non-Muslim, again indicating support for H4. The result holds regardless of whether we compare the Muslim treatment to the Christian treatment or to the control; however, the results are much stronger when compared to the Christian treatment.

With respect to the threat vignette, when we compare Muslim democracies to non-Muslim democracies and Muslim dictatorships to non-Muslim dictatorships (Table 1), we find that while in both cases respondents are more likely to advocate for military action against Muslim states, the treatment effects are larger when we compare Muslim democracies to non-Muslim democracies, the opposite of what we hypothesized in H5. Essentially, the individual-level democratic peace results of Tomz and Weeks (2013) do not apply to Muslim states. Whether Muslim states are democracies does not play any significant role in determining individual attitudes toward the use of force against such states. Such results are replicated regardless of whether we compare Muslim states to Christian states or the control.

TABLE 1 Treatment effects by regime type

Support for policy ceiling (percent)					
Regime/country type	***N***	**No action**	**Diplomatic pressure**	**Sanctions**	**Military action**
Non-Muslim democracy	323	10.83 percent	26.00 percent	41.48 percent	21.67 percent
Muslim democracy	173	6.93 percent*	31.63 percent	31.79 percent**	30.63 percent**
Non-Muslim dictatorship	320	6.87 percent	21.25 percent	44.68 percent	27.18 percent
Muslim dictatorship	174	8.04 percent	20.11 percent	37.93 percent*	33.90 percent*

*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$.

TABLE 2 Muslim treatment differences in foreign policy preferences by partisanship

	Minority vignette		**Threat vignette**	
Percent difference in support of policy ceiling	**Democrats (*N* = 510)**	**Republicans (*N* = 336)**	**Democrats (*N* = 510)**	**Republicans (*N* = 336)**
No action	+0.83 percent	+7.51 percent**	–2.29 percent	+1.96 percent
Diplomatic pressure	–0.23 percent	+8.34 percent**	–4.76 percent	+4.99 percent
Sanctions	+4.34 percent	+0.32 percent	–4.36 percent	–11.59 percent**
Military action	–4.95 percent	–16.19 percent***	+11.43 percent***	+4.64 percent*

*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

We hypothesized that in both the minority vignette and the threat vignette, the treatment effects would be stronger among self-identified Republicans than among self-identified Democrats. While we do find differences by partisanship, they differ considerably by vignette. Table 2 shows differences in the foreign policy preferences between Democrats and Republicans when the minority is Muslim. We find that while the Muslim treatment is insignificant among Democrats, the effects are significant among Republicans, with Republicans being more likely to say no action or diplomatic pressure would be the most aggressive action they would favor on behalf of Muslim minorities. Republicans are also less likely to advocate for military action on behalf of Muslim minorities. We observe a different result, however, with respect to the threat vignette. We find that the effect of the Muslim treatment is much stronger among Democrats than Republicans. While Democrats significantly increase their support for military action in response to the Muslim treatment, there is no significant increase among Republicans. Generally, Republicans have a higher baseline for the use of force, but it is Democrats that increase their support for military action by over 11 percent (to over 32 percent support overall) when the country is Muslim. Democrats might not discriminate against Muslim victims of violence, but they are more likely to advocate for using military force against Muslim states. Just as anti-Muslim discourse is not limited to the right, neither are the biases in foreign policy preferences.

In addition to partisanship, we also find some evidence that the treatment effects are stronger among those who follow current events (Table 3). With respect to the minority vignette, we find no significant effects of the Muslim treatment among those who rarely or never follow current events. Those who sometimes follow current events, however, are twice as likely to only support no action when it comes to Muslim minorities. Respondents who mostly follow current events are also less likely to advocate for the use of military force to assist persecuted Muslim minorities abroad. The results are even more pronounced with respect to the threat vignette. The effects of the Muslim treatment are insignificant among those who never, rarely, or sometimes follow current events. Those who mostly or always follow current events, however, are much more likely to advocate for the use of military force against Muslim states than non-Muslim states. The results concerning media effects should be read with caution, both because the number of

TABLE 3 Muslim treatment differences in foreign policy preferences by news consumption

Minority vignette					
Percent difference in support of policy ceiling	**Never ($N = 31$)**	**Rarely ($N = 122$)**	**Sometimes ($N = 305$)**	**Mostly ($N = 351$)**	**Always ($N = 181$)**
No action	+1.33 percent	+5.94 percent	+8.72 percent***	+0.07 percent	+2.39 percent
Diplomatic pressure	–20.00 percent	+0.47 percent	+2.57 percent	+13.15 percent***	–5.03 percent
Sanctions	+30.00 percent*	–5.00 percent	–5.09 percent	+6.15 percent	+0.45 percent
Military action	–11.33 percent	+1.41 percent	–6.20 percent	19.38 percent***	+2.19 percent
Threat vignette					
Percent difference in support of policy ceiling	Never ($N = 31$)	Rarely ($N = 122$)	Sometimes ($N = 305$)	Mostly ($N = 351$)	Always ($N = 181$)
No action	–4.16 percent	+0.28 percent	–3.96 percent	–2.78 percent	–6.62 percent
Diplomatic pressure	+0.83 percent	+1.14 percent	+10.00 percent**	–3.30 percent	–0.58 percent
Sanctions	–17.91 percent	–2.91 percent	–9.82 percent**	–3.66 percent**	–14.12 percent**
Military action	+21.25 percent	+1.48 percent	+3.78 percent	+9.75 percent	+13.28 percent**

*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

respondents who rarely or never follow current events is relatively small and because we cannot be sure the results are causal.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Our results demonstrate the presence of Islam and Muslims in a U.S. foreign policy scenario exerts an independent effect on the foreign policy preferences of U.S. respondents. Americans are less likely to think violence against Muslim minorities will be intensified and are more likely to advocate for no action or diplomacy as *the most* they are willing to undertake in response to ethnic cleansing when the victims are Muslim. Additionally, respondents are less supportive of military action to assist threatened Muslim minorities. The tendency to advocate for less aggressive and less costly foreign policy actions is reversed when Americans are faced with a possible threat from a Muslim state. Americans are more likely to view the state as threatening and less likely to support limiting the U.S. policy response to sanctions or less and is more likely to advocate for military action. Furthermore, this inclination toward more costly foreign policy preferences is not significantly mitigated by the presence of a Muslim democracy, casting some doubt on the robustness of individual-level norms that underlie democratic peace.

These findings are striking for several reasons. Although the results are consistent with anti-Muslim rhetoric in the United States, this kind of rhetoric peaked during the "War on Terror." As such, some may have expected anti-Muslim bias in foreign policy to dissipate. However, our results show a persistent bias against Muslims and Muslim countries even twenty years after the September 11 attacks. Second, casual observers may perceive a simple "doves versus hawks" dichotomy with respect to Democrats and Republicans. Our results paint a much more complicated picture. While Republicans have higher baseline support for military action, it is Democrats who increase their support for military action when faced with a potential threat from a Muslim state. In fact, when it comes to support for military action against Muslim states, there is no significant difference between Democrats and Republicans.

While portions of the foreign policy literature cast doubt on the ability of the public to influence foreign policy decisions, there is evidence that the domain of war and peace is an exception to this result (Hildebrandt et al. 2013; Jacobs and Page 2005). As such, if the public views Muslim minorities as less worthy of U.S. assistance, policymakers may face reduced pressure to support foreign policy actions that would address the plight of such minorities. Policymakers may also be more likely to advocate for militant responses to possible threats emanating from a Muslim state due to increased public concern regarding the Muslim identity of the potential threat. Also, plausible is a scenario in which policymakers may advocate for military means to address a potential threat with less public scrutiny or opposition due to the Muslim identity of the threat. Anti-Muslim and anti-Islam discourse has the potential to alter public opinion and policy preferences away from a rational and measured discussion about the most effective means to address a scenario and toward a reliance on implied characteristics of Muslims that make persecuted Muslims less worthy of assistance and Muslim states worthier of military confrontation.

ORCID

Evan W. Sandlin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9268-6120
Daniel J. Simmons https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3861-621X

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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