Muslims in the U.S. & Europe

Islamophobia, integration, attitudes, and rights

Conference Schedule ♦ Friday September 23rd, 2011

All meetings in the President’s Room, University Club, Indiana Memorial Union

10:00-10:15: introduction, coffee

Presentations are for a maximum of 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of comments by discussant and 25 minutes of Q&A.

10:15-11:30: Attitudes towards Muslims

- Chair & discussant: Jeff Isaac, Indiana University
- **Attitudes towards Different Immigrant Groups in Britain: Evidence from a Survey Experiment.** Timothy Hellwig and Abdulkader H. Sinno, Indiana University
- **9/11/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans a Decade Later.** Mehdi Bozorgmehr, CUNY Graduate Center

11:30-11:40: Coffee break

11:40-12:55 pm: Islamophobia

- Chair & discussant: David McDonald, Indiana University
- **Making Sense of Anti-Muslim Attitudes in Contemporary United States.** Kambiz GhaneaBassiri and Paul Gronke, Reed College
- **What is Islamophobia, and How Much Is There? Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept.** Erik Bleich, Middlebury

2:00 pm-3:15 pm: The integration of Muslim Americans

- Chair and Discussant: Beth Buggenhagen, Indiana University
- **(Dis)integration of US Muslims: Rethinking assimilation in the context of securitization.** Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia, Rutgers.
- **The Silicon Rush: Muslim Communities and Institutions in the Greater Bay Area.** Hatem Bazian, UC Berkeley

3:15 pm-3:30 pm: Coffee break

3:30 pm-4:45 pm: Muslims’ views and attitudes

- Chair and discussant: Abdulkader Sinno, Indiana University
- **Explaining Muslim Americans’ Public Opinions on Salient Social and Non-Social Issues.** Gamal Gasim, Grand valley State University
- **When Religion is Lived: Understanding Western Muslims’ Religiosity and Political Behavior.** Justin Gest, Harvard

4:45 pm-5:00 pm: Concluding remarks
Abstracts of presentations

Attitudes towards Muslims

Timothy Hellwig and Abdulkader H. Sinno, Indiana University

We make use of an original experiment embedded in a British survey to compare and understand attitudes towards Muslim immigration, East European immigration, and immigration in general. We use the experiment’s results to provide a more sophisticated understanding of what motivates opposition to immigration than current scholarship provides. We go well beyond the “economic issues” versus “cultural factors” debates to also test the effect of concern about security and fear of crime. We find that the attitudes of the British public towards immigrants are much more complex than aggregate studies imply. Britons are generally less supportive of East European immigration than general or Muslim immigration. More interestingly, the British public has particularly negative reactions to Muslim immigration, and immigration generally, when the issue is framed in terms of security. We find the same reaction vis-à-vis East European immigrants, and immigration generally, when a “crime” frame is used. East Europeans benefit from “integration” and “values” frames that disadvantage Muslims, while Muslims benefit from frames that emphasize economic factors. Elite cues also matter—we find that the consumption of tabloid news reduces support for immigration in general, and supporters of the British far right political parties have a stronger dislike of immigrants with a specified background (both Muslim and East European) than they do for immigrants in general. Finally, we uncover occupational differences. Blue collar workers are more concerned about immigration by east Europeans than by Muslims, while white collar workers support Muslim immigration more than they do other types of immigration.

9/11/11: Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans a Decade Later

Mehdi Bozorgmehr, CUNY Graduate Center

Brief Description: Before the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans were relatively invisible and of little interest to scholars. Almost a decade later, several research projects, which began soon after 9/11, have come to fruition. The publication of over half a dozen books and several articles on Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans in the last couple of years reflects growing interest in these populations. A decade after 9/11, it is time to synthesize this new and burgeoning literature. I begin by clarifying the complex nomenclature and inconsistent classification of these minority populations. Next, I analyze how the post-9/11 backlash crystallized “Arabs and Muslims” as a category, conflating these groups that are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. I then focus on the themes covered by the new publications on these ethnic and religious groups, including racial classification and racialization, discrimination and backlash, and civic and political incorporation. Lastly, I identify gaps in knowledge about these impacted populations and suggest areas of future research.
Islamophobia

Making Sense of Anti-Muslim Attitudes in Contemporary United States

Kambiz GhaneaBassiri and Paul Gronke, Reed College

This paper seeks to make sense of anti-Muslim attitudes in contemporary United States by exploring the relationship between the public image of Muslims and public attitudes and policies dealing with Muslims. To assess public attitudes we rely on a review of public opinion about Muslims for the past decade and a survey we administered in the 2010 election. We assess the public image of Muslims through an analysis of news media coverage of Muslims and an examination of popular anti-Muslim books published since 9/11. To assess policy impact on public opinion, we examine federal government press releases dealing with Muslims since 9/11. We find that public image, attitudes, and policies mutually reinforce one another to establish a distinct conception of Islam as an insidious but amorphous threat to the United States. This conceptualization of Islam is effective in shaping public opinion, not so much of Muslims and Islam as one would expect, but of American national identity, foreign policy, and torture.

What is Islamophobia, and How Much Is There? Theorizing and Measuring an Emerging Comparative Concept.

Erik Bleich, Middlebury

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. In this essay, I explore how the term Islamophobia has been deployed in public and scholarly debates, emphasizing that these discussions have taken place on multiple registers. I then draw 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. I discuss 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.

The integration of Muslim Americans

(Dis)integration of US Muslims: Rethinking assimilation in the context of securitization

Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia, Rutgers

Recent empirical studies on Muslims in the US provide a paradoxical view of their current effectiveness in assimilating. American Muslims are generally considered, according to most
measures, to be broadly integrated into the economic mainstream as adjudged in terms of labor market integration, educational achievement, and income. Conventional indicators of social integration also confirm their tendency to integrate. The vast majority of Muslims who come to the US seek to adopt Americans customs and ways of life. Furthermore, the substantial majorities of both native and naturalized US Muslims hold liberal attitudes on a number of political issues and reject extremism. Yet, other indicators suggest that the situation of Muslims in the US should not be idealized. There are still strong socio-economic inequalities between 1. Muslims and the general population; 2. Between foreign-born and native-born US Muslims; and 3. Between African American Muslims and other Muslims. Furthermore, Muslims in the US suffer from discrimination – a trend fueled by a clash of misperceptions and the radicalization of “home-grown” terrorists. Although other minorities were perceived as posing a threat in previous historical periods, the situation of US Muslims appears unique, mainly as a consequence of securitization measures implemented in the last decade. Muslims are not only perceived as potential “inside enemies” but they are also tarred with “guilt by association” with Islamist terrorists acting abroad.

In this context, in this paper I examine the question of the capacity of American Muslims to reach the level and form of integration achieved by prior waves of immigrants. I do so by focusing on two major challenges: the so-called Muslim community’s extreme diversity; and the peculiarities of Muslim integration compared to other diverse minorities (such as Hispanics and Asian Americans).

In addressing this issue, my central argument examines a paradox of identity politics: in order to strengthen their position in mainstream society and become an influential actor in ethnic politics, Muslims have to emphasize their “common identity” on a basis that remains to be defined. Yet, the emergence of more powerful Muslim organizations may confront fears from critics about a potential ‘Islamization’ of the US, as well as generating negative perceptions of Muslims.

**The Silicon Rush: Muslim Communities and Institutions in the Greater Bay Area.**

Hatem Bazian, UC Berkeley

From 1980-2010, the Muslim community in the Silicon Valley experienced a phenomenal rate of growth that witnessed its transformation from few thousands with three centers into three hundred thousands and some 72 centers. The growth in numbers and institutions points to the powerful political, social, religious and economic forces shaping present day American urban centers. The Silicon Valley, as a major engine of the new economy, contributed greatly to this expansion and continue to play a central role in Muslim demographic shifts. In this initial paper, my goal is to document the rapid expansion of the Silicon Valley and Greater Bay Area’s Muslim populations, the main causes, the ethnic and class make-up, the institutional framework developed to serve the diverse needs of these communities, the racial and gender tensions lurking in the background and what geographical shifts resulting from micro and macro economic patterns in the Bay Area.
Muslims’ views and attitudes

*When Religion is Lived: Understanding Western Muslims’ Religiosity and Political Behavior*

Justin Gest, Harvard

There has been much ado about the irreconcilability between Western political structures and Islam, with its tawhidic transcendence of modern boundaries between the civic and the ecclesiastical. Based on this historical transcendence, Islamic fundamentalists and Islam’s detractors alike have promulgated their contention that devout followers of Islam are confronted with—at best—an approach to civic affairs that is incompatible to Western democratic participation, or—at worst—a conflict of loyalties whereby allegiance to country will be superseded by a stronger sense of ummatic obligation. Attempts to understand and measure socio-political attitudes and habits among Western Muslims have been defined by the work of survey research motivated significantly by popular interest in testing the aforementioned contentions. Consequently, they have intensively addressed differences between the cultural values of Muslims and non-Muslims. Though much of this work has reproduced monolithic images of Islam and the West, results have admirably exhibited the baselessness of extreme stereotypes and oversimplifications. However, it doesn’t require a million dollar survey to demonstrate that Western Muslims are as capable as Western non-Muslims of participating democratically in political society. Indeed, a cursory observation of Western Muslim politics reveals a remarkable range of political behavior. Setting aside the distracting debate between apologists and fear-mongers, a key outstanding question is what explains Muslim behavioral outcomes? More specifically, are we able to loop Muslim political behavior into a larger field of scholarship about democratic political participation? Or does Islam’s transcendence of the civic sphere hold a unique impact on individual political choices and claims-making? More directly, what is the relationship between Islamic religiosity—in its myriad forms—and political participation, political withdrawal, and political rebellion? I will distill contemporary scholarship about measuring and understanding Muslim (and non-Muslim) religiosity and political behavior. In reviewing these subjects together, I will therefore not reproduce secularism’s separation of faith and state matters by studying such topics in a vacuum. Instead, I will be able to consider connections between religious ideas, political ideas, social habits and political activity to more vividly derive the sources of Western Muslim social and political behavior.

*Explaining Muslim Americans’ Public Opinions on Salient Social and Non-Social Issues*

Gamal Gasim, Grand Valley State University

Despite its members personal remarkable success and achievement in living their American dream, Muslim American community still remains one of the most misunderstood and underrepresented minorities in the United States. Until October 2006, no Muslim American was ever elected to the Congress. The consequent events that followed the tragedy of September 11 added more pressure on Muslim Americans. Muslim Americans found themselves and their faith at the center of unprecedented debate in the media and the public. Most Americans know little about their fellow Muslim American citizens and their contribution in this country. In this paper we examine Muslim Americans’ public opinions on a number of salient social and non-social issues