

GENDER ATTITUDES OF MUSLIM MIGRANTS IN WESTERN AND NORTHERN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze differences between gender attitudes of migrants and local population in 8 countries of Western and Northern Europe. It tests whether migrants from developing countries, especially from the Muslim world, tend to follow European trends in their attitude towards gender equality or they tend to treat gender equality issues in the same manner as in their countries of origin. This topic is of particular importance as attitudes towards women's rights are proven to be a strong predictor of support for democracy and of liberal values in general. This study uses the data of the 5th wave of the European Social Survey, a representative national sample for the most European societies. The results show that migrants are a little more conservative in their gender attitudes than local Europeans, but the influence of this factor is often overestimated, whereas age and level of education exceed migrant status and Islam as predictors of liberal or conservative gender attitudes. Moreover, attitudes towards women's rights among migrants are very similar to the attitudes of the local population in any particular country. Consequently, migrants in the most liberal countries such as Sweden show more support for gender equality than locals in Germany or Switzerland. However, Muslim religion remains a robust medium-sized negative predictor of gender attitudes.

Keywords: gender attitudes; Islam; gender equality; Muslim migrants; cross-cultural;

INTRODUCTION

Mass migration of Muslims to Western European countries started at the end of the colonial era in 1950s and continues to be a widely discussed topic in the press and academic discourse [1]. This issue is often manipulated by right-wing politicians and results in sporadic conflicts between local population and migrants. Though migration to Western Europe these days is much lower than it used to be, communities of Algerians and Moroccans in France, Turks in Germany, and Pakistanis in Great Britain are still large; and the total number of Muslims in the European Union is estimated between 13 and 15 million people [2]. Their influence on the local economy is evident as they form an important part of the labor force in an ageing Europe [3]. Nevertheless, there is quite a strong sentiment among the local European population against migration from less developed countries. Some surveys show that Europeans prefer not to live in predominantly migrant neighborhoods as these are perceived as dangerous and non-prestigious. Immigrants to Europe, especially those who come from Muslim countries, are often accused by the local public of being under-integrated, lacking social skills and language proficiency, as well as loyalty towards receiving society. Governments in Europe are trying to solve this problem, but their methods are mainly aimed at eliminating differences, meaning assimilation of migrants [4].

The idea of the 'backwardness' of the Muslim migrant communities in Europe is often evidenced by their attitude to women, which is considered to be very repressive. The issue of women's rights in migrant communities became acute recently when veils in

public places were forbidden by the French government. This concern appears in reports on human rights, but even more often in anti-migrant and anti-Muslim periodicals and books in Europe. As D.T. Goldberg [5] argues, "The Muslim image in contemporary Europe is one of fanaticism, fundamentalism, female suppression, subjugation, and repression. The Muslim, in this view, foments conflict: violence, war, militancy, terrorism, cultural dissension. He is a traditionalist, pre-modern, in the tradition of racial historicism difficult if not impossible to modernize, at least without ceasing to be 'the Muslim'". Inglehart and Norris [6] prove that, contrary to these assumptions, Muslim people have very strong aspirations to live under democratic regimes. However, based on World Values Survey data, Inglehart and Norris have found that the population of Muslim societies is still conservative in respect of human rights, gender attitudes, and tolerance towards unpopular minorities (e.g. homosexuals). This paper is yet to test this assumption on the subsample of Muslim migrants in Western Europe.

Thorough analysis of gender attitudes of Muslim migrants in Western Europe is important not only for debunking the myth of complete value stagnancy in this group, but also for studying their values in a broader sense. Gender attitudes are strong predictors of democratic political preferences as well as of the general liberalization of values.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Integration of migrants into the host society is a very popular topic in academic research in both in the USA and in Europe. However, the discourse is quite different on either side of the Atlantic. Speaking very broadly, there are two major trends. One is the old, predominantly American, and currently, revisited theory of assimilation. Contemporary theorists, like Alba and Nee, or Eva Moravska argue that it can be used as a practical and well-developed tool for approaching integration issues. They add that assimilation cannot be seen as a one-way movement any more, as newcomers influence the mainstream culture as well.

European theorists have not found concrete evidence of assimilation in European societies. European sociology has been recently endorsing the theory of transnationalism. This approach theorizes migrants as members of two or more communities simultaneously [7]. The authors argue that diasporas and ethnic migrant communities do not exist in the old way anymore. They believe that contemporary migrants exist in two or more societies simultaneously due to greater connectivity as a result of cheaper flights, phone calls and the internet. Remittances (financial and social) prove that migrants stay linked to their home countries, they keep track of the situation there, and often exercise their right to vote in both states.

This short overview shows that there is a vast amount of literature on migration both in the United States and in Europe with a vast range of theoretical approaches. The values and religious affiliation of migrants, which are the focus of this study, have also received much attention in the literature, but they are treated very differently in the two continents. Interestingly, the degree of religiosity and problems that occur because of religious migrants, especially Muslims, are widely discussed in Europe (Buijs and Rath [8] posit that there are several thousand works on Muslim migration to Europe) whereas in the US, religiosity is perceived as a smoothing mechanism for adaptation and integration by many scholars. As Foner and Alba [9] argue that the reason for this could lie in the higher level of secularization of Western Europe whereas America is seen to

have a long tradition of incorporating various religions, ethnicities and cultures into American society. To quote Foner and Alba: "In Western Europe religion is generally viewed as the problem, not the solution, for immigrant minorities" [9].

In the American sociological tradition, the religious affiliation of migrants is often described as a protective mechanism against dangerous influences that are common in big cities (such as gangs or drugs). Contemporary theorists of segmented assimilation believe that religious migrants are better placed and adjusted in American society. However, European migration studies predominantly use level of religiosity as a negative predictor for integration and even as a serious obstacle for adaptation. This interesting effect may be explained by some quantitative evidence [10], but it is very likely that some of this discourse is driven by prejudice and fear. Taking this into account, this study includes variables of religiosity and belonging to certain religious groups into its analysis.

Value shift and migration process

It is stated in numerous studies that various factors influence the choice of the country for immigration. Economic prosperity of the host society is a very stable predictor, but other factors are also of importance. Studies show that a similar colonial past leads to similar educational systems, and linguistic and cultural hegemony of affluent nations in certain regions. This phenomenon is also known as cultural capital explanation [11]. Hypothetically, these factors may lead to certain level of similarity in value patterns, especially among the representatives of the elites. Migrants come to countries that have value patterns similar to their individual beliefs and for this reason voluntarily change in order to acculturate. Moreover, we believe that people tend to immigrate to societies where norms and values are acceptable to them, and do not make such a decision based on simple economic reasons only. Judging by these factors, Muslim migrants may be more flexible in their norms than the residents of their originating country.

HYPOTHESES

In general, my theoretical approach is built on the modernization theory revisited by Inglehart and Welzel [12] and on the recent work "Freedom rising" by C. Welzel [13]. They find that women's empowerment is a belief of inherently emancipative nature. According to these statements, we put that gender equality index is a good measure of people's readiness for emancipating women. In turn, those people who support women empowerment (measured by gender equality support) are more likely to be included into the broader process of human empowerment – an important component of a contemporary knowledge society.

According to the revisited theory of modernization, egalitarian gender attitudes (as well as other values characterizing human empowerment) are predicted by young age, female gender, higher education and high living standards and low level of religiosity. We also expect higher levels of egalitarian values from the people who were born in safer, richer, politically stable societies. If so, migrants from less developed states are supposed to have lower levels of egalitarian values, including gender equality support, as they have experienced worse life conditions and have higher levels of survival values. I hypothesize that (H1) migrants in Europe show more conservative attitudes towards gender equality, especially those people who belong to the Islamic culture and religion; I suggest that (H2) gender attitudes of migrants in different countries of Western Europe will be similar, but the local populations in European countries would

differ significantly on this issue; as Christian Welzel posits “the largest within-societal difference found for any group characteristic, even focusing on the most distant groups in that characteristic, is always dwarfed by the largest between-societal difference among people from the same group” [13]. Judging from this theoretical point, we may assume that Muslim migrants in Europe are not very conservative in their attitudes towards women, but would still show less support for gender equality than locals in Europe as they come from less affluent societies. I also expect that low level of religiosity is associated with higher gender equality support (H3).

DATA AND METHODS

I use the data provided by the 5th wave of the European Social Survey, 2010. These data allowed tracking migrant status, religious affiliation, country of origin as well as value profiles and gender attitudes. This sample is nationally representative and does not have a special migrant subsample in it. Though there are some surveys where migrants were sampled separately, these data did not include any specific questions on attitudes towards gender equality which is of particular interest in this study. The 5th wave of ESS data includes 29 countries of Europe, but only 8 of them are included in this research. The reasons for that are both theoretical and data dependent. The eight countries of Western and Northern Europe that were chosen have similar migration patterns [1] due to their colonial past or a certain level of affluence which is a strong draw. Some countries of these two parts of Europe such as Finland, Norway, and Denmark were excluded due to the small number of migrants in the sample which reflected the ratio of migrants in the general population. It was also important for this research to choose countries which would have Muslim migrants in their sample, which makes it possible to distinguish the effect of Islam on migration per se. The following countries were chosen for analysis: Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, France, UK, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Finally some countries were excluded from the sample even though they had a large population of Muslims. These countries are Turkey and Israel where the Islamic population is native, not migrant. We also excluded all the post-Soviet countries as they have different migration patterns and Muslims come from different (Soviet) backgrounds.

The dependent variable is gender equality index, a construct used by Inglehart and Norris [6]. This index differs from the original one that is based on the WVS data and is constructed of two questions regarding respondent attitudes: a) Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of family; b) Men should have more rights to job than women when jobs are scarce. Original questions were scaled from 1 to 5, but the index was re-coded into a scale ranging from 0 to 1 (0 – very conservative, 1 – very liberal).

The index gauges differences in values and attitudes between migrants, local populations in Europe, and populations in home societies not concerning their “personal goals” but gender attitudes which are more applicable for analysis of integration and modernization, as demonstrated by Inglehart and Norris [Ibid]. Migrants were divided into 2 categories: people whose parents are migrants and people who migrated themselves; all the rest are coded as locals. For analogous models, Muslim/non – Muslim dummy variable is used to check the differences between migrant background per se and religious affiliation.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Means for the gender equality index differ slightly even between very homogeneous European countries in the sample. To check the hypothesis that migrants score significantly lower than local European population in terms of gender equality attitudes, a t-test analysis was conducted and means for 8 countries of Europe were compared where migrants form a significant minority. For this part of analysis, people whose one or both parents were born abroad were excluded. The analysis included only migrants born abroad among a local population without migration history. In several countries this gap between gender attitudes of local population and migrants was found insignificant.

Table 1. Means for the Gender Equality Index for Locals and Migrants Separately¹

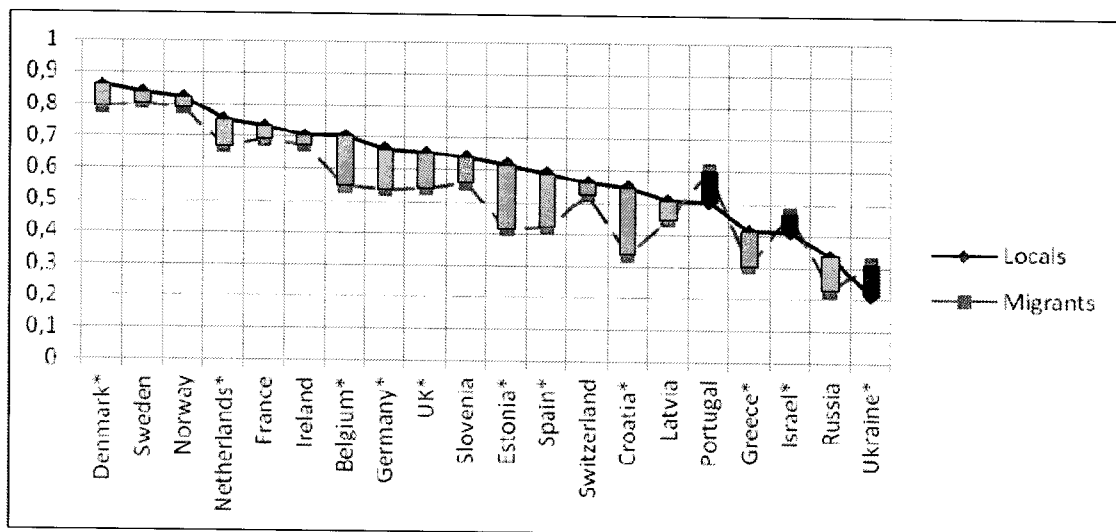
Country	Locals	Migrants
Sweden	0.84	0.80
Netherlands **	0.75	0.67
France	0.73	0.69
Belgium***	0.70	0.55
Germany***	0.66	0.54
UK***	0.65	0.54
Spain***	0.59	0.42
Switzerland	0.56	0.52

In Sweden, France, and Switzerland the mean for gender equality index fluctuates insignificantly when comparing locals and migrants. In the other five countries these differences show high significance; whereas means for migrants are lower in all these cases (migrants are more conservative). In order to show the general trend in Europe I found it possible to include a graph with all the countries that are in the ESS sample. Graph 2 shows the gender gap between migrants and locals in 20 European countries. Those cases where difference is significant are marked with asterisks.

Locals score higher on gender equality index than migrants in their countries. The only 3 exceptions are Portugal (where this gap is statistically insignificant), Israel, in which half of the sample are migrants (many of whom came from European countries), and Ukraine, where migrants are mostly Russians. At the same time, it is quite evident that migrants are very close to gender attitudes that are considered standard and normal in the countries where they immigrated.

¹ Asterisks show significance of difference between means for locals and migrants in each country.
 *** p < 0,001; ** p < 0,01; * p < 0,05

Figure 1. Means for Gender Equality Index: Locals and Migrants in 20 European Countries.



Often there is no significant difference in attitudes towards positions of men and women in the society in Sweden, Norway, France, Ireland, Slovenia, Switzerland, Latvia, Portugal, and Russia. Migrants report practically the same attitude towards gender equality as the local majority. This is remarkable in the light of the attention the issue of the migrant population's attitude towards gender roles in France has received for several years now. Simultaneously, in Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, UK, Estonia, Spain, Croatia, and Greece local populations demonstrate a more liberal attitude towards gender roles in their society.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Variables included into analysis on various stages were the following: migrant status is an index constructed as a dummy variable coded as 0 or 1 where 0 corresponds with a local origin or one parent migrant, 1 – with both parents migrants or designates that a person was born abroad. I also use a dummy variable for the religious denomination that is of interest in this research: 0 means non-Muslim, 1 – Muslim. Age is a continuous variable. Education has 5 levels where 1 stands for less than higher school, and 5 means tertiary track completed. To keep the models parsimonious, I treat this variable as a continuous after checking that there is no non-linearity here. ISEI is a measure of the prestige of profession that correlates with income and is considered a good proxy for the latter. Variable recoded from very detailed ISCO88 classification into ISEI categories (1 – directors, top-managers, 2 – professionals, 3 – technicians and associate professionals, 4 – clerks, 5 – service, 6 – skilled agricultural and fishery, 7 – skilled workers, 8 – semi-skilled workers, 9 – unskilled workers). Degree of religiosity means an answer on the question “How religious are you” and is a continuous variable coded in ascending order (0 – Not at all religious, 10 – Very religious). Country is a number of dummy variables for 8 states (Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, France, UK, the Netherlands, Sweden). An analysis with clustered standard errors was also made in order to check model robustness, and the results confirm those shown further.

The dependent variable - gender equality index – is a simple additive index with equal weights constructed from 2 attitude questions: a) Women should be prepared to cut

down on paid work for the sake of family; b) Men should have more rights to jobs than women when jobs are scarce. Original questions had a scale from 1 to 5, but index was re-coded into a scale from 0 to 1 (0 – very conservative, 1 – very liberal). As Inglehart and Norris argue, these two questions are the most important in accessing the degree of egalitarian attitudes, as they capture a possible perceived gap between societal positions of a woman and a man [6].

Regression Modeling

Regressions were made using OLS technique. This study consists of models with only country dummy variables in order to estimate variance that can be explained by cross-country differences. In table 2 three models are represented. Each model has 2 analogous variants: in models “a” migrant status is used as explanatory variable, and in “b” this predictor is changed for “Muslim /non-Muslim status”. Interestingly enough, these two models have very slight differences in coefficients and explanatory power. Due to large sample sizes the study does not rely on significance of the coefficients only. It uses standardized beta-coefficients and R^2 change to estimate size effects.

Model 1. Basic demographic predictors

The first model (1a&1b) includes the basic socio-demographic predictors for explaining variation in gender equality index. These are gender, age, and migrant/Muslim status and dummy variables for countries. At the country level, Sweden shows the most support for gender equality, while the Netherlands takes the second place. Belgium is taken as a baseline category for countries; Switzerland is least supportive of gender equality in the sample. Age is a strong predictor of gender equality support (the youth finds ideas of women’s liberation more important). If these can be compared, a person who is 20 years older is more conservative gender-wise, as a migrant in any given society in the sample, controlling for gender. Women are stronger supporters of equality between the sexes. Islam has bigger negative effect on gender attitudes than migration status per se.

Model 2 Education and socio-economic status

The second model adds controls for education and socio-economic status. The best educated people and those who occupy the highest socio-economic positions (SES is coded high to low, that is why coefficients get negative signs in the model) tend to show the most egalitarian attitudes when it comes to gender issues. Completing 1 extra stage of education is equivalent to 10 year difference in age. Migrant status and belonging to Islam gain lower coefficients when controlling for education and ISEI. Country-level trends show persistence. Models a and b have insignificant difference in explanatory power: $R^2_a = 17\%$ of variance, $R^2_b = 16\%$.

Model 3. Degree of religiosity

In the third model I control for the level of religiosity as this is important to distinguish between this effect and the denomination one belongs to. Here migrant/Muslim status loses a sufficient part of its explanatory power but remains rather strong and significant. Degree of religiosity (which has 10 categories) correlates negatively with the gender equality index and its explanatory power is in fact equivalent to that of Muslim identity and higher than of migrant status.

Regression modeling shows that migrant status and Islam have negative effect on gender equality support. The positive effect of education remains strong and robust in all the models. However, these within-country differences are smaller than between-country variation that is fairly high even among the most affluent societies of Europe. In Sweden and the Netherlands the values of gender equity are the most pronounced, while the least pro-egalitarian state in the sample is Switzerland.

Table 2. OLS models. Dependent variable – Gender Equality Index.

	<i>Dependent variable: Gender equality index</i>					
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
<i>Gender (female)</i>	0.02*** (0.004)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.004)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.004)	0.01*** (0.01)
Age	-0.003*** (0.0001)	-0.004*** (0.0001)	-0.003*** (0.0001)	-0.003*** (0.0002)	-0.002*** (0.0001)	-0.003*** (0.0002)
Migrant	-0.06*** (0.01)		-0.05*** (0.01)		-0.03*** (0.01)	
Muslim		-0.16*** (0.01)		-0.12*** (0.01)		-0.10*** (0.01)
Educational level			0.03*** (0.002)	0.03*** (0.002)	0.03*** (0.002)	0.03*** (0.002)
ISEI (prof. prestige)			-0.01*** (0.001)	-0.01*** (0.001)	-0.01*** (0.001)	-0.01*** (0.001)
Religiosity					-0.01*** (0.001)	-0.01*** (0.001)
Belgium			<i>baseline category</i>			
Switzerland	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)
Germany	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Spain	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)
France	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
UK	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
Netherlands	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Sweden	0.09*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Observations	15,219	7,615	13,741	6,778	13,741	6,778
Adjusted R ²	0.12	0.12	0.17	0.16	0.19	0.18

Notes:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper aims to explore the difference in values of migrants in the most affluent countries of Western Europe using the gender equality index. I argue that the majority in migrant groups does not stick to the values and attitudes of their countries of origin, but that they are moving towards more egalitarian attitudes what is reflected in their perception of gender roles. Attitudes towards gender equality are proven to be important predictors of post-materialist and democratic values, which is why it was chosen as a dependent variable for analysis. To distinguish between the effects of the Islamic culture and religion and migration per se, I pinned these predictors (migration status and Islam) into the same models in turns. The main findings of the survey are the following:

a) Neither migration status nor Islamic culture and religion are the strongest predictors of conservative attitudes towards gender roles in a society. Age (youth) and education

(higher levels) show the biggest explanatory power for this dependent variable among the predictors of individual level.

b) The degree of religiosity is equally important to the denomination one belongs to. The most religious respondents are much less likely to support ideas of gender equality. The difference between the most and the least religious person, holding everything else constant, is the same as between a Muslim and a non-Muslim. Migration per se or belonging to the Islamic religion does not explain much variance in attitude towards gender equality. However, Islam has a stronger effect than migrant status in all the models, and shows robust negative medium-size effect on gender egalitarian attitudes (in line with the findings of Alexander and Welzel [14]).

c) Migrants in general and Muslim migrants in particular are somewhat more conservative than the local population of 8 affluent Western European nations. At the same time, they closely follow the trends established in the host society. This leads us to believe that migrants in Sweden are more liberal in their gender attitudes than locals in Germany or Switzerland.

I find that immigrant and especially Muslim threat to European values and norms concerning women's rights and position in society is overestimated and oversimplified in Western Europe. The data analysis does not provide concrete evidence stating inevitable traditionalism of these groups regarding issues of gender equality which is considered to be a strong predictor of support for democracy and human rights. Moreover, migrants in Europe, even though they are slightly more conservative in these issues, follow closely general trends of the majority of the host society.

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