



Attitudes Toward Gender Equality and Opposition to Muslim Full-Face Veils

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Abstract. Often presented and perceived as incompatible with Western values, Muslim full-face veils meet strong opposition. Despite antiveil discourses often being based on concerns for gender equality, it is unclear whether those championing the equal treatment of men and women are also those who oppose full-face veils. Through two online studies conducted in French-speaking Switzerland, the present research aims to shed light on the complex relationship between attitudes toward gender equality and reactions to Muslim full-face veils. Study 1 showed that, as expected, people concerned about gender equality were less opposed to the public wearing of full-face veils because they supported Muslim minorities to a greater extent. Study 2 further revealed that people who believed that gender equality could be reached only by being enforced by all means opposed the wearing of full-face veils to a greater extent. Taken together, these results highlight both the complex underpinnings of attitudes toward the Muslim headscarf and the multidimensionality of positive attitudes toward gender equality.

Keywords: Muslims, full-face veils, gender equality, discrimination

Muslim veils and headscarves, and particularly those covering women's faces (e.g., niqabs and burkas), are often presented and perceived as incompatible with gender equality. Coupled with fears about security, concerns about the equal treatment of men and women have occupied a large place in the fierce discussions surrounding the interdiction of full-face veils in public spaces of several European countries (e.g., Belgium, France; in Switzerland an "antiburka" initiative was officially submitted to parliament in the Fall of 2015). Within these debates, bans have often been presented as a means to "liberate" Muslim women from a sexist and oppressive system (Chakraborti & Zempi, 2012; Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli, & Howarth, 2012). However, despite the prominence of gender-based arguments in antiveil discourses, it is unclear whether those championing the equal treatment of men and women are also those who want to ban full-face veils from public spaces. The few studies that have investigated how concerns about gender equality relate to attitudes toward Muslim veils or, more generally, to attitudes toward ethnic and migrant minorities, suggest that this relationship is anything but straightforward (e.g., Gianettoni & Roux, 2010; O'Neill, Gigengil, Côté, & Young, 2015; Roux, Gianettoni, & Perrin, 2006; Sarrasin, Fasel, & Green, 2015).

To shed light on the complex relationship between people's concerns about gender equality and their reactions to Muslim veils, the present study investigated attitudes toward full-face veils. Often perceived by non-Muslims as at odds with gender equality, these types of veils elicit more negative reactions than veils that do not cover women's faces (El-Geledi & Bourhis,

2012; Everett et al., 2015; O'Neill et al., 2015). Building on previous studies on attitudes toward Muslim veils and Muslim minorities, it is assumed that different forms of progressive attitudes toward gender equality relate differently to opposition to the wearing of full-face veils. On the one hand, people holding egalitarian gender beliefs are expected to tolerate the public wearing of full-face veils because they are concerned about the welfare of disadvantaged groups and thus lend their support to Muslim minorities as well. On the other hand, because bans are often presented as necessary to help Muslim women extract themselves from a patriarchal system, people who believe that gender equality should be enforced by all means are expected to oppose the public wearing of full-face veils. These assumptions were tested and confirmed with two online studies conducted in French-speaking Switzerland.

Gender Egalitarian Beliefs

Attitudes toward gender equality are often conceptualized and measured on a continuum from progressive to traditional attitudes. Indeed, because of strong normative pressures not to openly discriminate against women, negative attitudes toward women and gender equality tend to be expressed in subtler ways nowadays than previously (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). For instance, instead of demeaning women by decrying them as inferior to and

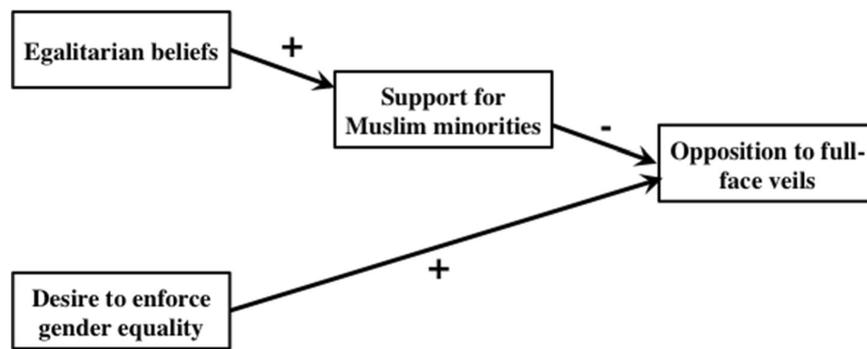


Figure 1. Summary of predictions.

as less competent than men, those holding traditional attitudes often deny that women still face some discrimination. In contrast, people holding gender egalitarian beliefs perceive that gender equality has not been fully reached in any society. Denying that gender-based discrimination still exists clearly undermines progress toward gender equality because those expressing such a belief do not see any point in promoting and enforcing policies and measures that aim to help women (e.g., Tougas et al., 1995).

Because of a general ideological orientation toward perceiving all social groups as worthy of equal rights and privileges (or, as termed by Zick et al., 2008, a low “generalized prejudice”), people concerned about gender equality tend to also express positive attitudes toward minorities and disadvantaged groups (e.g., immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities; e.g., Aasved & Long, 2006; Bäckström & Björklund, 2007). For this reason, people concerned about gender equality may support – or at least not oppose – the public wearing of veils by Muslim women out of support for a religious and cultural minority. Indeed, several studies have shown that tolerant reactions to Muslim veils are partly grounded in people’s positive attitudes toward both immigrant minorities in general and Muslims in particular (e.g., Saroglou, Lamkaddem, van Pachterbeke, & Buxant, 2009; van der Noll, 2014). In line with this “support for gender equality/support for minorities” argument, Swiss citizens concerned about gender equality – that is, who supported a measure that would help mothers pursue a career – expressed more tolerance for the public wearing of veils (of unspecified type) by Muslim women than those who did not support this measure (Sarrasin, Fasel et al., 2015).

Conversely, people who do not support gender equality (e.g., who think that it is no longer an issue) are likely to oppose the public wearing of Muslim full-face veils because of a general lack of support for minorities. Moreover, describing Muslim males as men who coerce their women into wearing veils may be a way to draw a “bright” boundary (Alba, 2005) between the Muslim culture and the majority culture, with the aim of perceiving the ingroup as nonsexist (compared to outgroups such as Muslims). In support of this argument, Swiss citizens with strong sexist beliefs were found to more readily attribute sexism to migrant and cultural minorities (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010). In addition, for those who hold negative attitudes to-

ward Muslims, perceiving and describing Muslims as sexist may be a means to justify discriminatory measures against this religious minority (for similar arguments, see Fernandez, 2009; Krivenko, 2012). In line with this assumption, in Australia concerns about gender equality within Muslim communities were found to be more common among those who showed prejudice against Muslims (Pedersen & Hartley, 2012).

Based on these lines of reasoning, people holding gender egalitarian beliefs – who, for instance acknowledge that women still face discrimination – are expected to express less support for banning full-face veils than those who do not support gender equality. They should do so because they support Muslim minorities to a greater extent (for a summary of predictions, see Figure 1).

Desire to Enforce Gender Equality

Despite the support for gender equality/support for minorities argument, it is probable that other ways of interpreting the concept of gender equality – not in terms of support – relate differently to attitudes toward Muslim veils. This may particularly be the case when gender equality and women’s free will are perceived to be in jeopardy (e.g., when girls wear veils, or when women wear veils that cover their face). Backing up this claim, some studies found no direct or even positive relationship between progressive attitudes toward gender equality and opposition to Muslim veils. For instance, Helbling (2014) found in several European countries that liberal ideologies (i.e., ideologies that pertain to gender equality as well as to other societal issues) were related to positive attitudes toward Muslim minorities, but were unrelated to attitudes toward the wearing of veils by schoolgirls. Similarly, in Switzerland Gianettoni (2011) found no relationship between egalitarian beliefs and attitudes toward the wearing of Muslim veils in public schools. Finally, a study by O’Neil et al. (2015) revealed that, among French-speaking female Canadians, those who described themselves as feminist tended to show less support for the public wearing of full-face veils.

The aforementioned findings may have resulted from the fact that some people believe that, because gender equality

must be enforced by all means, Muslim women and young girls should be helped out of a patriarchal system even if against their will. Generally, some authors argued that progressive attitudes toward gender equality can include very different – and not necessarily related – stances, such as support for equal rights and the desire to enforce equality by all means (Braun, 2008; King & King, 1986). The latter finds its expression in measures favoring women over men with positive discrimination measures (e.g., quotas) or forcing women out of traditional gendered roles (e.g., housewife). Following this reasoning, practices presented and perceived as contrary to gender equality (e.g., full-face veils) should be forbidden, with the aim of liberating women who are seen as being forced into them. However, others may think that, by discriminating against members of disadvantaged minorities (e.g., forbidding Muslim women who wear a full-face veil to be in public spaces), enforcing equality goes in fact against the principle of equality. Based on this line of reasoning, those who firmly believe that gender equality must be enforced are expected to oppose the public wearing of full-face veils to a greater extent than those who do not want to enforce equality (see Figure 1). However, besides the veils, there is no reason to expect a particular relationship between this form of attitude toward gender equality and support for Muslim minorities in general.

Study 1

Method

Sample

The hypotheses outlined were tested in French-speaking Switzerland. Data were collected through an online survey in December 2013 and January 2014. After receiving an invitation by email (either from the author of this paper or from another participant, 46.15% and 53.85% of the final sample, respectively), 227 people clicked on the link, and 125 of them completed the questionnaire. The survey contained three experimental conditions not used in the present study; note that the results presented below were unaltered by the inclusion of dummy variables controlling for the conditions.

The data of participants who did not indicate their sex ($N = 6$) or who reported that they were Muslim ($N = 2$) were excluded from analysis. The final sample was comprised of 117 participants (81 women and 36 men) aged 19 to 76 ($M = 34.79$, $SD = 12.15$; the missing values of two participants who did not indicate their age were replaced with the mean). Seventy-six participants reported that they were Swiss citizens with no other nationality (of those who reported foreign citizenship, the majority came from European countries such as France, $n = 15$, and Italy, $n = 8$). Sixty-three participants reported having a

religious affiliation (mostly Christian, $n = 60$) while the remaining participants did not.

Measures

Since the study was conducted in French, existing translations were used when available (i.e., official translations by the European Values Study, 2011, and the translation of the Modern Sexism Scale by Sarrasin, Gabriel, & Gyax, 2012). The other items were adapted or created by the author of this paper. The response format for all scales ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). Some scales were reversed such that high scores indicated strong opposition to full-face veils, strong support for Muslim minorities, egalitarian beliefs, and an outspoken desire to enforce gender equality. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 1.

Opposition to the public wearing of full-face veils was measured with a four-item scale adapted from Saroglou et al. (2009). Participants were invited to give their opinion as to whether full-face veils must be banned from public places, at school, in the street, and everywhere. Support for Muslim minorities was tapped with the belief that Muslims should not be forced to assimilate into the Swiss culture. To this end, they indicated their agreement with three statements adapted from Schalk-Soekar and Van de Vijver (2008): “People of Muslim faith should raise their children according to the Swiss way,” “People of Muslim faith should adopt the Swiss culture in private/in public” (two items). Egalitarian beliefs were measured with two items from the Modern Sexism Scale (Swim et al., 1995): “On average, people in our society treat husbands and wives equally” and “Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement.” Desire to enforce gender equality was tapped with two items from the European Values Study (European Values Study, 2011) asking whether both spouses/partners must contribute to the household finances and chores: “Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children” and “Both the husband and wife should contribute to household income.”

Results

All analyses were performed with Mplus 5.1 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2009). In a first step, I used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify that the four variables of interest – egalitarian beliefs, desire to enforce gender equality, support for Muslim minorities, and opposition to full-face veils – constituted distinct constructs. Then, in a second step, I used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the relationships outlined in Figure 1. Generally, CFA and SEM models are considered to fit the data adequately when the CFI is greater than .95 and the RMSEA is less than .05 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) although RMSEA

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations (Study 1)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Opposition to veil												
1. Public places	5.30	1.85	.73***	.82***	.68***	-.34***	-.20***	-.60*	-.14	-.25**	.01	.11
2. Street	4.40	2.11		.65***	.89***	-.31***	-.35***	-.60***	-.22*	-.23*	.01	.05
3. School	5.73	1.72			.62***	-.31*	-.18#	-.53***	-.14	-.27**	-.06	.06
4. Everywhere	4.13	2.21				-.24*	-.33***	-.52***	-.24**	-.28**	.01	-.00
Support for Muslims												
5. Children	3.99	1.81					.57***	.64***	.39***	.35***	-.04	-.01
6. Private	5.63	1.48						.46***	.29**	.22*	.10	.05
7. Public	3.46	1.88							.46***	.40***	.06	-.03
Egalitarian beliefs												
8. Equality	4.49	1.54								.61***	.05	.12
9. Opportunities	4.55	1.62									.09	.16#
Enforce equality												
10. Responsibility	6.37	0.95										.50***
11. Income	5.77	1.21										

Note. # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

values of up to .08 are deemed acceptable (Schermele-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003).

Measurement

A model with four variables was found to fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(37) = 59.11$, $p = .01$; CFI = .967, RMSEA = .071. Note that the errors of two items measuring opposition to the veil – in public places and in the street – had to be correlated. A model with only one variable of attitudes toward gender equality (composed of the egalitarian beliefs and desire to enforce equality items) was found not to fit the data, $\chi^2(40) = 92.15$, $p < .001$; CFI = .921, RMSEA = .106; $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 33.04$, $p < .001$, thus supporting the notion that progressive attitudes toward gender equality are composed of distinct beliefs. Egalitarian beliefs and the desire to enforce gender equality were in fact not even significantly related in the measurement model, $b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .25$. Finally, a last model with the items of support for Muslim minorities and opposition to the veil loading on one unique latent variable was also rejected, $\chi^2(40) = 142.73$, $p < .001$; CFI = .845, RMSEA = .148; $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 83.62$, $p < .001$.

Predicting Opposition to Full-Face Veils

In a second step, an SEM model was built based on the measurement model described above. Egalitarian beliefs, desire to enforce gender equality, and support for Muslim minorities were all set as predictors of opposition to full-face veils. In addition, egalitarian beliefs were expected to predict support for Muslim minorities, while this was not the case for desire

to enforce equality. For this reason, the latter relationship was constrained to 0. Finally, the impact of gender (1 = male), age, and nationality (1 = possessing only Swiss citizenship) was controlled for. Indeed, women and younger individuals tend to be more in favor of both gender equality (Yu & Lee, 2013) and minorities (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010), while those with an immigrant background tend to support cultural diversity to a greater extent (Sarrasin, Green, Fasel, & Davidov, 2015).

The model was found to fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(60) = 83.53$, $p = .02$; CFI = .966, RMSEA = .058. As expected, egalitarian beliefs were significantly related to support for Muslim minorities, $b = 0.76$, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .001$, which, in a turn, predicted weaker opposition to full-face veils, $b = -0.59$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$. While the indirect path from egalitarian beliefs to opposition was significant, $b = -0.45$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$, these two variables were not directly associated, $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .65$. Note, however, that this was the case in a model that did not include support for Muslim minorities, $b = -0.41$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .006$. Unexpectedly, desire to enforce gender equality was not significantly related to opposition to full-face veils, $b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .97$.

Finally, the only significant effects of the control variables were the following: Women expressed stronger egalitarian beliefs, $b = -1.08$, $SE = 0.28$, $p < .001$, and desire to enforce gender equality, $b = -0.38$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .05$, while younger respondents supported Muslim minorities to a greater extent, $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .004$. Note that reporting a religious affiliation and the frequency of contact opportunities with Muslims in the neighborhood were controlled for in preliminary studies (of both studies). Since they had no impact at all on any of the variables of interest, they were omitted from the final analyses.

Discussion

As expected, people with egalitarian beliefs expressed less opposition to Muslim women wearing full-face veils in public spaces through stronger support for Muslim minorities. The fact that the impact of egalitarian beliefs was not significant when support for Muslim minorities was also considered in the model suggests that a general concern for the welfare of disadvantaged groups such as Muslim minorities underlies the relationship between the former and reactions to Muslim full-face veils. Thus, nothing specific about gender equality – but rather a general concern about the welfare and rights of minorities – explains the impact of egalitarian beliefs. This result is line with research that showed the existence of a generalized form of prejudice expressed toward different disadvantaged groups (e.g., Zick et al., 2008).

Unexpectedly, the belief that gender quality must be enforced was not even remotely related to opposition to full-face veils. This may have been due to the strong agreement with the items used, which tapped the belief that men and women must both contribute to the household chores and finances (see Table 1). Indeed, hardly any participants disagreed with such statements (i.e., no one responded with less than 3.5 on a scale from 1 to 7), and the great majority strongly approved of them (i.e., 52.4% scored between 6 and 7). For this reason, a second – apart from the measure of desire to enforce gender equality – identical study was conducted. In the second study, attitudes toward strong forms of affirmative action – measures that usually receive mixed reactions in Switzerland (Krings, Tschan, & Bettex, 2007) – were used to tap the belief that gender equality must be enforced by all means.

Study 2

Method

Sample

Data were collected through an online survey in January and February 2015. Participants were reached by email (same procedure as in Study 1; 46.39% of the final sample) or advertisements (randomly placed on a large social media platform or in university buildings; 53.61% of the final sample). A total of 221 people living in French-speaking Switzerland clicked on the link, and 99 of them completed the questionnaire. Participants received 10 Swiss francs for their participation (i.e., a voucher for a shop or a donation to a charity). The data of participants who reported being Muslim ($n = 2$) were excluded from analysis.

The final sample was comprised of 97 participants (69 women and 28 men) aged 19 to 62 ($M = 34.78$, $SD = 11.44$; note that one participant did not indicate his/her age – the missing

value was replaced with the mean). Fifty-four participants reported that they were Swiss citizens with no other nationality (among those who reported a foreign citizenship, the majority came from European countries such as France, $n = 19$, and Italy, $n = 9$). Forty-nine participants reported having a religious affiliation (mostly Christian, $n = 46$), while the remaining participants reported having no religion. Overall, the participants of Study 2 appeared to be similar to those of Study 1.

Measures

All measures were identical to those used in Study 1 with the exception of desire to enforce gender equality. In this study, two items were created to tap the belief that strong measures are necessary to reach gender equality: “Quotas are necessary to increase women’s share in companies and governments” and “It is sometimes necessary to impose rules to reach gender equality.” As shown in Table 2, these items provoked more mixed reactions than the scale used in Study 1. The response format for all scales ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). High scores indicated strong opposition to full-face veils, egalitarian beliefs, an outspoken desire to enforce gender equality, and strong support for Muslim minorities. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations are presented in Table 2.

Results

The same procedure used in Study 1 was used in Study 2.

Measurement

As in Study 1, a model with four variables fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(38) = 51.53$, $p = .07$; CFI = .978, RMSEA = .061. Note that the errors of the same two items as in Study 1 had to be correlated (and also that one residual variance had to be fixed to 0, explaining the additional degree of freedom). The two different forms of attitudes toward gender equality – that is, beliefs and desire to enforce equality items – were again found to constitute clearly separate constructs. Indeed, a model with only one unique latent variable of attitudes toward gender equality did not fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(41) = 112.64$, $p < .001$; CFI = .883, RMSEA = .134; $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 61.11$, $p < .001$. As in Study 1, egalitarian beliefs and desire to enforce gender equality were not significantly related in the measurement model, $b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.30$, $p = .51$. Finally, a last model with items of support for Muslim minorities and opposition to the veil loading on one unique latent variable was also rejected, $\chi^2(41) = 95.54$, $p < .001$; CFI = .911, RMSEA = .117; $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 44.01$, $p < .001$.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations (Study 2)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Opposition to veil												
1. Public places	5.33	2.11	.84***	.83***	.76***	-.32**	-.23*	-.47***	-.05	-.14	.26*	.11
2. Street	4.87	2.32		.72***	.92***	-.30**	-.25*	-.57***	-.02	-.09	.33**	.10
3. School	5.69	1.91			.70***	-.29**	-.16	-.35**	-.11	-.19#	.16	.00
4. Everywhere	4.79	2.34				-.24*	-.24*	-.51***	.00	-.07	.30**	.09
Support for Muslims												
5. Children	4.08	1.70					.49***	.49***	.16	.20*	-.07	.03
6. Private	5.68	1.50						.45***	.30**	.26*	.07	.20#
7. Public	3.38	1.85							.25*	.18#	-.22*	-.02
Egalitarian beliefs												
8. Equality	4.57	1.61								.65***	.03	.14
9. Opportunities	4.78	1.71									.19#	.15
Enforce equality												
10. Quotas	4.38	1.82										.68***
11. Rules	5.14	1.46										

Note. # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Predicting Opposition to Full-Face Veils

The model was found to fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(61) = 85.06$, $p = .02$; CFI = .964, RMSEA = .064. Contrary to what was found in Study 1, egalitarian beliefs were not significantly related to support for Muslim minorities, $b = 0.34$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .08$. However, support for Muslim minorities still predicted weaker opposition to full-face veils, $b = -0.64$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .001$. Egalitarian beliefs were not significantly related to opposition to full-face veil, neither directly, $b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = .59$, nor indirectly through support for Muslim minorities, $b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .11$. As expected, with an improved measure, the desire to enforce gender equality was related to stronger opposition to full-face veils, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .04$.

Finally, as in Study 1, women expressed stronger egalitarian beliefs, $b = -0.78$, $SE = 0.30$, $p = .01$, and desire to enforce gender equality, $b = -0.97$, $SE = 0.37$, $p = .008$, while younger respondents supported Muslim minorities to a greater extent, $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .01$. In this study, however, one control variable predicted attitudes toward full-face veils: Participants who had no immigrant background reported stronger opposition, $b = 0.96$, $SE = 0.29$, $p < .001$. No other significant or marginally significant effect was revealed with a control variable.

Discussion

Using a different measure to tap the desire to enforce gender equality, the results of Study 2 confirmed the assumption that different forms of positive and progressive attitudes toward gender equality are related to people's opposition to full-face veils in different ways. As expected, the belief that gender equal-

ity must be enforced by all means appeared to rely on a different interpretation of the principle of equality, according to which those perceived as oppressed should be forced out of the alleged oppression. In line with this assumption, in Study 2, the desire to enforce gender equality was found to underlie a stronger willingness to ban full-face veils from public spaces.

However, it should be noted that the relationship between egalitarian beliefs and support for Muslim minorities in Study 2 was weaker than in Study 1. The fact that the data of Study 2 were collected during the weeks following the 2015 Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Casher attacks – perpetrated by members of an Islamist terrorist group – may have contributed to this weaker link. Indeed, in the wake of events that shocked people around the world, fears for security may have prevailed over empathy for disadvantaged groups in forming reactions to a garment often associated with Islamism in people's minds.

General Discussion

Antiveil discourses are often based on concerns for gender equality, with the underlying argument that Muslim women should be freed from an oppressive patriarchal system. Quite the contrary, the present research demonstrated that, at the individual level, egalitarian beliefs may be related to tolerant reactions to Muslim full-face veils. By examining people's reactions to the public wearing of full-face veils, a first study conducted in French-speaking Switzerland indeed showed that people who expressed concerns about gender equality – by admitting that it has not been reached – tended to support Muslim minorities more and to oppose full-face veils less than people less concerned about gender equality. Moreover, in line with

previous studies on people's reactions to Muslim veils (e.g., Saroglou et al., 2009; van der Noll, 2014), in both studies, opposition to full-face veils was found to be strongly rooted in people's stance toward Muslim minorities. In addition, the present research confirmed that progressive attitudes toward gender equality should not be conceptualized as a single dimension (Braun, 2008; King & King, 1986). In both studies, egalitarian beliefs and the desire to enforce gender equality were shown to constitute distinct constructs and were not even significantly related, stressing the fact that their underlying motives diverge.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the present research informed about the complex relationship between attitudes toward gender equality and opposition to Muslim veils, it also suffered from limitations that should be addressed in future studies. First, fears for security – another factor that is likely to play a role in attitudes toward full-face veils – were not taken into consideration in the present studies. Indeed, in addition to being more often perceived as at odds with gender equality than veils that do not cover women's face (e.g., hijabs), because it is not possible to determine who is under the veil, full-face veils are frequently presented as a security threat (e.g., see Leckey, 2013, for the case of Québec). Generally, valuing security has been found to predict opposition to Muslim veils more than other conservative values (Fasel, Green, & Sarrasin, 2013; Saroglou et al., 2009). It may thus be hypothesized that security values play an even greater role in predicting attitudes toward full-face veils, especially in times when the fear of attacks by Islamist groups are widespread. For this reason, future studies on the topic should include the extent to which people value security. Second, with the data at hand, I can only speculate on the role played by a general ideological tendency to reject versus support disadvantaged groups, which would explain why people with egalitarian beliefs expressed more positive attitudes toward Muslims. As in previous research on attitudes toward Muslim veils (e.g., Saroglou et al., 2009; van der Noll, 2014), future research on the topic should include measures of benevolence and universalism values, which do not target specific disadvantaged groups.

Third, the present research revealed that people who support gender equality tend to also support the right of Muslim women to wear a visible symbol of their faith and culture in public. However, it remains unknown whether people who support gender equality believe that Muslim women should wear a veil, and what their affective reactions to this garment are. It may be that some of these people do not appreciate veils, but also think that wearing them should not be forbidden (for a discussion on dislike vs. intolerance, see van der Noll, 2014). Thus, more nuanced measures of reactions to full-face veils – including emotive responses to this garment – are certainly needed. Finally, the present research revealed that support for

gender equality was related to attitudes toward full-face veils in a context in which antiveil gender-based arguments are common. It may be less so in contexts in which other arguments, such as those pertaining to the ostensible display of religious symbols, predominate in the debates on Muslim veils.

Conclusion

At the nexus of migration, cultural diversity, and gender, the wearing of veils by Muslim women appears to be a highly complex societal issue. Some actors in the debates surrounding this garment rely on gender equality-based arguments to justify measures such as bans. Others decry these measures as discriminating against a cultural and religious minority. The findings of the present research suggest that concerns about gender equality are more likely to serve as justifications by politicians rather than as grounds by the public (as studied here) for banning full-face veils (see Fernandez, 2009; Gianettoni & Roux, 2010). If so, opposition to Muslim veils based on concerns about gender equality may represent, in some cases, a subtle and modern form of prejudice against Muslims.

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