



The Monkey Cage

Democracy is the art of running the circus from the monkey cage -- H.L. Mencken

Do the French Discriminate Against Muslims Because of Gender Norms?

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This is a guest post by [Claire Adida](#) of UCSD, [David Laitin](#) of Stanford, and [Marie-Anne Valfort](#) of the Paris School of Economics & Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne University. We have previously discussed their research [here](#) and [here](#).

Muslims express more traditional views toward gender-based inequality than do non-Muslims. Relying on the World Values Survey, Steven Fish [shows that](#) Muslims are significantly more likely to agree that “a university education is more important for a boy than for a girl”, to think that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women” and to support the idea that “men make better political leaders than women do” (p 181-193). Concomitantly, many correspondence tests have shown that nationals originating from Muslim dominated cultures face systematic discrimination in European labor markets. In France, Duguet, Léandri, L’Horty and Petit ([ungated](#)) show that callback rates received by applicants with North African sounding names are much lower than those received by applicants with French sounding names. In Sweden, Magnus Carlsson [identifies](#) substantial discrimination against applicants with Middle Eastern sounding names. And Kass and Manger [show that](#) applicants with Turkish sounding names are discriminated against in the German labor market.

Could discrimination against nationals originating from Muslim areas be partly accounted for by recruiters’ reluctance to hire individuals whose gender norms might threaten the firm’s female employees and thus its esprit de corps?

Answering this question presents methodological challenges. First, one must isolate the source of discrimination faced by applicants originating from Muslim areas. Confounding factors complicate any causal claim. For example, do employers discriminate against people of North African, Middle Eastern or Turkish background or do they discriminate against

Muslims? Second, one must confirm that gender norms between Muslims and Christians do indeed differ, with Muslims being less favorable to women than Christians. In addition to the issue of confounds, current cross-country survey data are compromised since their measures rely on self-reported, not actual, behavior. Third, even if it is found that Muslim gender norms tolerate or encourage discrimination against women, it remains to be demonstrated that the behavior of employers in regard to Muslim job applications in the European labor market is related to Muslim gender norms

We addressed the first challenge by running a correspondence test in France in 2009, holding constant the country of origin of the two applicants—French nationals of Senegalese background. Religion was the only differentiating characteristic: one of the applicants was Christian while the other was Muslim, thereby allowing us to isolate the Muslim factor from country of origin and other possible confounds in French labor market discrimination. Our results confirm that anti-Muslim discrimination is significant: the Muslim candidate is 2.5 times less likely to receive a call back for a job application than is her Christian counterpart. (This result previously appeared on The Monkey Cage [here](#); see [our paper](#) for further details.)

Are Muslims less favorable to women than are Christians?

A unique identification strategy combined with a set of lab experiments in France allow us to meet the second and third methodological challenges. Members of two Senegalese communities (Serer and Joola), who are each united by language, culture, and race, but divided by religion (Muslims and Catholics), immigrated to France over the same period in the 1970s. Studying this population (as we did for the correspondence test) thus enables us to isolate the effect of religion on gender norms.

To do so, we compared the donations of 18 Senegalese Muslim and 11 Senegalese Christian players to men and women in a [dictator game](#) we conducted in the 19th arrondissement of Paris in 2009. In this classic experiment, subjects view pictures of people whom they have never met and are given money either to keep for themselves or to share with the person (the “recipient”) whose picture they are viewing. There were no penalties for keeping it all, and no one could influence their donations. They are therefore effectively “dictators.” Fewer donations to a particular group in the experiment is an indicator of discrimination.

In our version of the dictator game, dictators were shown the same set of six recipients on a large screen revealing only their faces and their ascribed first names. The dictators were asked to allocate from zero up to the five euros allotted to them for each recipient. Among the six recipients, three appeared to be rooted French (i.e., French-born subjects of French-born parents and French-born grandparents) and presumably Christian, one appeared to be a Muslim from North Africa, and two appeared to be black Africans. We varied the first names

of the recipients such that dictators would see the same faces, but with different signals of religious identities via ascribed names. For example, for half the sessions, subjects viewed one of the black African recipients with a Christian name and the other with a Muslim name; for the other half of the sessions, this was reversed. This protocol enabled us to investigate whether Senegalese Muslim “dictators” treat women differently from men relative to Senegalese Christian “dictators.”



First name	Version 1	Sylvie	Georges	Khadija	Jean-Marc	Farida	Michel
	Version 2	Sylvie	Mohammed	Joséphine	Jean-Marc	Christine	Aboubacar
Ethnicity/ Religion	Version 1	Rooted French	Rooted French	SM	Rooted French	Muslim North African	SX
	Version 2	Rooted French	Muslim North African	SX	Rooted French	Rooted French	SM

Our results confirm that in-group gender norms differ between Senegalese Muslim and Senegalese Christian players (see [this paper](#) for details). First, Senegalese Christian male players favor rooted French women over rooted French men, while Senegalese Muslim male players do not. And, given that rooted French male dictators also favored rooted French women over rooted French men, our experimental data indicate that Senegalese Christian gender norms coincide with rooted French gender norms while Senegalese Muslim gender norms do not. Second, Senegalese Christian male players favor their co-religious women over their co-religious men, while Senegalese Muslim male players discriminate against their co-religious women over their co-religious men. Third, gender norms are not reserved for men: Senegalese Muslim female players also discriminate against their co-religious women over their co-religious men, thereby taking an active part in supporting an in-group norm that favors co-religious men over women.

Is there a causal link between Muslim gender norms and French labor market discrimination?

To address this question, we need to know whether rooted French anticipate anti-women gender norms among Muslims. We addressed this question with a set of experiments in 2010 that brought together 50 rooted French players and asked them to guess the donations of our 2009 Senegalese Muslim and Christian dictators to our set of 6 recipients the figure above. We find that rooted French do not associate our Senegalese Muslim players with different gender norms relative to our Senegalese Christian players, thereby casting strong doubt on the notion that Muslims are discriminated against in the French labor market because French employers respond to a perception of gender discrimination among Muslims.

Our research reveals that the gender norms supporting inequality towards women as reported in the survey literature accurately represent the behavior of Muslims in France. But the link between those norms and the egregious discrimination in the French labor market has only been assumed. Our research questions that link. The sources of anti-Muslim discrimination in Europe remain obscure, but our research reduces confidence that the answer lies in Muslim gender norms.