

Voting “Against Islamization”? How Anti-Islamic Right-Wing, Populist Political Campaign Ads Influence Explicit and Implicit Attitudes Toward Muslims as Well as Voting Preferences

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We explore the effects of anti-Islamic right-wing, populist political campaign ads on voting intention for a right-wing populist party using a quota-based online experiment (N = 174). Additionally, we investigate implicit attitudes (i.e., automatic affective associations) and explicit attitudes (i.e., overtly expressed evaluations) toward Muslims as underlying mechanisms of these effects. We find that exposure to the political campaign ads prompts explicit hostile attitudes toward Muslims mediated by implicit attitudes. Explicit attitudes in turn shape voting intention. Moreover, implicit attitudes toward Muslims predict voting preference beyond the influence of explicit attitudes. Thus, resentments toward Muslims may foster voters' support for anti-Islamic right-wing populist parties even “under the radar” of conscious awareness. In sum, this study demonstrates for the first time the entire process of right-wing, populist political campaign ads' effects on voting preferences via implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims.

KEY WORDS: advertising, explicit attitudes, implicit attitudes, Muslims, right-wing populism, political campaign, voting

Perceived threats from terrorist attacks by the so-called Islamic State (IS) and fears of cultural infiltration in Western societies have negatively impacted public opinion about Muslims in Western nations (Pew Research Center, 2017). This is a worrying development, as Muslims increasingly become an important minority group in Western countries making up more than five percent of the total population in many countries. At the same time, Muslims constantly encounter open rejection and discrimination in their everyday lives in Europe as well as in the United States, indicating that prejudice against Muslims is overall high (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Right-wing populist parties capitalize on these public resentments by mobilizing against Muslim immigration. Consequently, right-wing populist parties have become increasingly successful in Europe, winning representation in many countries including Austria, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden (Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, & De Vreese, 2017). However, by mobilizing “against Islamization,” political actors may contribute to a hostile environment for Muslims in Western societies (Kteily & Bruneau, 2016; for media effects, see Dixon & Williams, 2015; Mastro, 2009). In the United States, as well as in Europe, scholars have raised concerns about

the portrayals of Muslims in political campaigns, many of them putting Muslims under general suspicion for terrorism or extremism (Betz, 2013; Hafez, 2014; Krzyżanowski, 2013; Kteily & Bruneau, 2016). European right-wing, populist political actors have repeatedly associated Muslims with extremism when promoting stricter immigration laws or a limitation of Muslims' rights (e.g., the construction of minarets or wearing veils in public; see Betz, 2013; Hafez, 2014; Krzyżanowski, 2013). Yet, anti-Islamic political statements are not limited to a European context: In his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump was at the forefront of anti-Muslim campaigning using statements associating Muslims with terrorism when promoting controversial policies such as the Muslim immigration ban (Kteily & Bruneau, 2016).

Findings of previous research demonstrate increasing hostile attitudes, aggressive behaviors, and endorsement for anti-Muslim policies as a response to negative media portrayals of Muslims (Saleem, Prot, Anderson, & Lemieux, 2017). Yet, the existing research has mostly neglected a thorough investigation of the means with which political parties communicate their political stances directly to the electorate: political advertising. More specifically, the role of anti-Islamic political poster ads in influencing attitudes toward Muslims and their consequences for political decision-making have received scarce research attention. This is surprising given that many right-wing populist parties portray Muslims in their political poster campaigns (Betz, 2013; Hafez, 2014; Krzyżanowski, 2013). Additionally, political poster ads are still an important means of political advertising in Europe and can—in contrast to news media—hardly be avoided in public spaces (Dumitrescu, 2010). Against this backdrop, the central aim of this study was to examine whether anti-Islamic right-wing, populist poster ads influence attitudes toward Muslims as well as voting preference for a right-wing populist party.

More specifically, the contribution of this study to the existing research is twofold: First, the few existing studies, which deal with anti-Islamic political rhetoric in political campaigns (e.g., Kteily & Bruneau, 2016) have exclusively focused on effects on verbally expressed self-reports, so-called explicit attitudes. However, political communication may also influence individuals' automatic affective associations that may drive thought and behavior without intention—that is, their implicit attitudes (Payne & Dal Cin, 2015). Taking implicit attitudes toward Muslims into account is of crucial importance, as implicit attitudes have been found to predict spontaneous reactions and social behavior, which may contribute to discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in Western nations (Frieze, Hofmann, & Schmitt, 2009; Strack, Werth, & Deutsch, 2006). In the context of racial attitudes, there is first evidence that right-wing, populist political posters may strengthen negative implicit attitudes, while explicit racial attitudes are often suppressed (e.g., Arendt, Marquart, & Matthes, 2015; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; see also Huber & Lapinski, 2006). Yet, findings from studies investigating racial attitudes in response to political campaign poster ads may not necessarily apply to anti-Muslim attitudes as well. Special research attention for the relationship between implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims is warranted for two reasons. On the one hand, scholars argue that anti-Muslim sentiments have gained wider acceptance in mainstream societies, also called “a more ‘accepted racism’ of Islamophobia” (Hafez, 2014, p. 484). Therefore, voters might be less motivated in suppressing implicit attitudes when forming explicit judgments about Muslims as well as voting decisions, which is why findings in the domain of anti-immigrant or racial attitudes cannot simply be generalized to anti-Muslim attitudes. On the other hand, individuals who hold anti-immigrant attitudes may not necessarily have hostile attitudes toward Muslims and vice versa. While anti-immigrant attitudes are usually rooted in perceived economic or cultural threats (Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012), anti-Muslim attitudes revolve around concerns about women's rights, radicalization, terrorism (“jihad”), and religious freedom (Park, Felix, & Lee, 2007). Accordingly, right-wing populist parties have adapted their political rhetoric in order to cue those specific attitude domains among voters (Krzyżanowski, 2013). Overall, exploring both implicit and explicit anti-Muslim attitudes in response to right-wing, populist campaigns is therefore crucial, as findings with regard to their activation as well as their influence on voting preferences may differ from other attitudinal domains.

Our second main contribution lies in the consideration of mobilizing effects of anti-Islamic right-wing, populist campaign poster ads. Despite the relevance of the topic, the role of right-wing, populist posters in explaining voting preference for the populist right remains virtually unexplored in existing research. Extensive literature in the field of political communication suggests that political advertising is a crucial predictor for political participation (e.g., Brader, 2005) and voter turnout (e.g., An, Jin, & Pfau, 2006; Faber, Tims, & Schmitt, 1993; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Kaid, 2002). With reference to anti-Islamic right-wing, populist campaigns, political posters may reinforce voting intention for right-wing populist parties via strengthening both negative explicit and implicit perceptions of Muslims. In particular, when dealing with socially sensitive topics, a thorough investigation of both explicit and implicit predictors of voting preferences seems warranted (Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister, & Amadori, 2008; Bos, Sheets, & Boomgaarden, 2018; Maier et al., 2015). Therefore, this study aimed to model for the first time the complete path from anti-Islamic political poster exposure via implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims to voting preference for an anti-Islamic right-wing populist political party.

Accordingly, using a quota-based online experiment ($N = 174$), we investigated how anti-Islamic political campaign poster ads influence voting preference by shaping implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims. Along with traditional explicit measures, we included an implicit measure—the Affective Misattribution Procedure (AMP)—which marks a promising approach for the assessment of implicit attitudes toward Muslims (Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005).

The Portrayal of Muslims in Right-Wing, Populist Campaign Ads

In contrast to the United States, where political actors mostly rely on televised advertising spots, political poster ads are still important means of political advertising in Europe due to regulations on public service TV (Dumitrescu, 2010; Novelli, 2017). Compared to news reports or social media channels (see, e.g., Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017), political campaign poster ads may exert even stronger effects on individuals' attitudes, as they can hardly be avoided during election times—that is, they target a large part of the electorate (Dumitrescu, 2010). Additionally, they do not have to adhere to journalistic quality standards and therefore often make use of stereotypical content (Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015, 2017). Against that backdrop, researchers have repeatedly observed that political print and poster ads may severely affect individuals' attitude formation and subsequent voting decisions (e.g., Chang, 2001; Pinkleton, 1998).

For right-wing populist parties, political advertising serves as an important factor in spreading their populist ideas among society. While formerly focusing on an anti-immigrant agenda, right-wing populist actors have shifted their discourse toward increasing mobilization against Muslims and Islam in recent years. As a result, negative and stereotypical visual portrayals in political posters accompanied by slogans such as “Against the Islamization of Europe” or “United against Islam” have emerged (Betz, 2013; Hafez, 2014; Krzyżanowski, 2013). These posters reflect populist political ideas that emphasize the opposition of the ordinary, native people and cultural minorities or immigrants. The essence of populism revolves around the moral and causal divide between ordinary citizens as “good” ingroup and horizontally and vertically defined others as “evil” and culprit outgroups (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). Populism directed against horizontally defined outgroups such as ethnic or cultural minorities can be regarded as “excluding populism” (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 336), which is typical of right-wing populist parties (Reinemann, Aalberg, Esser, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2017). Using political campaign poster ads as a means to communicate these political stances, right-wing populist politicians tend to present simple solutions to the electorate: Outgroups such as Muslims are a threat to society and have to be removed from the territory of the people (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Repetitive exposure to these posters may prompt attitudinal changes among the electorate involving changes

in automatic associative processes (i.e., implicit attitudes), self-reported attitudes (i.e., explicit attitudes), or both (Arendt, 2013).

Effects of Right-Wing, Populist Campaign Poster Ads on Implicit and Explicit Attitudes Toward Muslims

Media-effects research suggests that political communication may affect voters' attitudes and behaviors in many ways (see, e.g., Kaid, 2004 for an overview). However, despite this evidence, voters often deny being influenced, or they don't explicitly express attitudes that are not socially desirable (Payne & Dal Cin, 2015). In particular, in the context of anti-Islamic political messages, voters might not want to be persuaded by these appeals (Albertson, 2011). Nevertheless, political posters may exert persuasive effects on citizens' attitudes and behaviors via their implicit attitudes.

One of the most influential theoretical models for understanding the distinction of implicit and explicit attitudes is the Associative-Propositional Evaluation (APE) model by Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2006). The basic premise of the APE model is that explicit and implicit attitudes need to be understood in terms of their underlying processes. Explicit attitudes on the one hand are based on propositional mental processes, which are generally concerned with the validation of beliefs. Implicit attitudes on the other hand are rooted in affective associative processes, which are automatically activated in response to relevant stimuli. The activation of these associations can occur regardless of whether a person considers the associations to be true or false (Devine, 1989; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). When measured with implicit measurement procedures, which take advantage of the automatic nature of such attitudes, individuals cannot necessarily control the activation of implicit attitudes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Especially when it comes to socially sensitive domains, such implicit attitudes can exert predictive power for behavioral outcomes that goes beyond that of self-report measures (Bos et al., 2018; Maier et al., 2015).

Right-wing, populist campaign poster ads may contribute to negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims by changing individuals' associative structure (Valentino et al., 2002). These changes either reflect the learning of a new evaluation or the differential activation of old evaluations that are already stored in memory (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Several studies have demonstrated changes in implicit attitudes resulting from repeated pairings of an attitude object with positive or negative stimuli (e.g., Arendt et al., 2015; Saleem & Anderson, 2013).

Studies examining exposure to stereotypical video games (Saleem & Anderson, 2013) or news reports on terrorism (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009) observed increased implicit attitudes toward Muslims in response to these media stimuli. First research evidence in the field of political poster advertising further indicates that exposure to right-wing, populist campaign poster ads increases implicit anti-immigrant attitudes (Arendt et al., 2015; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017). This effect may be explained by a political poster's role to serve as a situational cue, which enhances the salience of "evil" outgroups that pose a threat to society (Reinemann et al., 2017). That is, exposure to these poster ads may strengthen automatic affective associations between the attitude object "Muslim" and negative attributes such as "terrorist" (Arendt et al., 2015). Based on this reasoning, we proposed that:

H1: Exposure to right-wing, populist poster ads enhances negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims.

Changes of the associative evaluations of an attitude object may not only prompt negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims but also lead to corresponding subsequent changes in explicit attitudes (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). The APE model postulates that implicit associations provide input into propositional reasoning processes. However, implicit reactions can also be rejected as a valid basis for explicit attitude formation (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Individuals

are especially likely to suppress the outward expression of negative attitudes toward minority groups (Valentino et al., 2002). For instance, the propositional implication of a negative affective reaction to a Muslim minority member (e.g., “My gut tells me I don’t like this Muslim person”) may not correspond with explicit propositions (e.g., “It is bad to evaluate members of disadvantaged minority groups negatively”) (Arendt, Steindl, & Kümpel, 2016). The suppression of individuals’ automatic evaluations as a basis for explicit attitudes may explain the typically low correspondence between implicit and explicit attitudes found in previous research (e.g., Hofmann, Gawronski, Gschwendner, Le, & Schmitt, 2005). In particular, empirical research dealing with socially sensitive topics such as race prejudice (Fazio & Olson, 2003) or anti-immigrant attitudes (Arendt et al., 2015; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017) has demonstrated discrepancies between implicit and explicit measures.

Yet, this discrepancy might not necessarily apply to anti-Muslim sentiments. Scholars argue that reservations toward Muslims have become “accepted” and widespread in Western societies (Hafez, 2014), and studies investigating attitudinal bias toward Muslims observe significant correlations between implicit and explicit measures (Park et al., 2007). Moreover, first research evidence indicates effects of stereotypical media content on both implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims (Saleem & Anderson, 2013). Thus, individuals might see less need in suppressing their implicit affective reactions toward Muslims as a basis for their explicit evaluations compared to other attitudinal domains such as racial attitudes (Huber & Lapinski, 2006; Valentino et al., 2002). Yet, as the existing empirical evidence regarding media effects on implicit and explicit attitudes is puzzled, we formulate a research question:

RQ: Do right-wing, populist poster ads exert an indirect effect on negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims via negative implicit attitudes?

Right-wing, populist campaign poster ads may not only influence explicit attitudes through alterations in individuals’ affective associations. Rather, changes in explicit attitudes in response to political campaign posters can be due to alternative mental processes, which are independent from implicit attitudes—namely, changes in the set of propositions that are considered to be relevant for explicit attitude formation (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). Information presented in political posters may change existing propositions about Muslims by either adding new beliefs to an individual’s set of propositions or by prompting additional consideration of already familiar propositions (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006). For instance, political poster ads that associate Muslims with terrorism may increase access to existing memories of violent and terrorist actions by Muslims and may therefore lead individuals to alter their explicit judgments of Muslims (Saleem & Anderson, 2013). Findings from previous research have repeatedly observed an increase in hostile attitudes toward Muslims in response to stereotypical media content (Saleem & Anderson, 2013; Saleem et al., 2017). Additionally, previous research suggests that right-wing, populist political campaign ads can significantly shape individuals’ political attitudes (e.g., Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015, 2017; Schmuck, Matthes, & Paul, 2017). Based on the mentioned theoretical considerations and empirical results, we expected:

H2: Exposure to right-wing, populist poster ads enhances negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims.

Right-Wing, Populist Voting Preference

Although political campaign poster ads may influence attitudes toward societal groups, their primary goal is the improvement of parties’ electoral performance (An et al., 2006; Dumitrescu,

2010). It is well-known that political advertising may crucially contribute to voter turnout (An et al., 2006; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Faber et al., 1993; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Kaid, 2002; Lau & Pomper, 2001). For instance, An and colleagues (2006) found that higher exposure to issue-specific ads increased not only voters' knowledge of the candidates' issue positions but also the likelihood of turning out to vote in the election. In particular, political campaigns cueing negativity (Faber et al., 1993; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Lau & Pomper, 2001) or emotions such as fear (Brader, 2005) have been found to cause changes in political choice and to increase the likelihood of voting. Based on that evidence, it can be assumed that political poster ads portraying Muslims in a highly negative and emotional way would increase voting preference for a right-wing populist party. Therefore, we proposed:

H3: Exposure to right-wing, populist political poster ads increases voting preference for a right-wing populist party.

Additionally, knowledge about the underlying mechanisms of the influence of right-wing, populist political ads on voting intention is scarce. Numerous studies have demonstrated that anti-immigrant attitudes are an important predictor for right-wing, populist voting preference (e.g., Cutts, Ford, & Goodwin, 2011; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2008). Fewer studies, however, have investigated how Islamophobia in particular relates to voting for a right-wing populist party (see Cutts et al., 2011; Berbuir, Lewandowsky, & Siri, 2014; Rooduijn, 2014). Overall, these studies suggest that individuals who are concerned about Islam and its compatibility with Western democratic values are more likely to support a right-wing populist party (Berbuir et al., 2014) or to endorse policies such as restricting Muslim immigration or limiting their religious freedom (Kteily & Bruneau, 2016)—policies often demanded by right-wing, populist political actors. Hence, as politicians such as Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen, and Heinz-Christian Strache promote themselves and their parties as being the only ones to be fighting against the “Islamization” of Europe, Islamophobic attitudes on the demand side of the voters may be a crucial predictor of right-wing, populist voting preference. Accordingly, we expected:

H4: Negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims predict voting preference for right-wing populist parties.

Not only explicit attitudes but also implicit attitudes may predict electoral support for right-wing populist parties. Most previous research has focused on explicit measures in explaining the support for right-wing populist parties. Only recently, studies in the field of political psychology have begun to include implicit attitudes as predictors for political attitudes (e.g., Maier et al., 2015) and behavior (Albertson, 2011; Arcuri et al., 2008; Bos et al., 2018). These studies suggest that implicit attitudes predict political judgments and behavior in ways beyond that accounted for by self-report measures (Bos et al., 2018). In particular, in socially sensitive domains, political attitudes can be affected by unintentional processes. Although implicit attitudes may be explicitly rejected, the associations themselves may remain activated and unintentionally influence individuals' behavior (Payne & Dal Cin, 2015). Meta-analytic evidence demonstrated that implicit race attitude measures predicted behavior more effectively than did parallel explicit (self-report) attitude measures (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). In line with these findings, studies demonstrated that implicit attitudes exert additional incremental power beyond self-report measures in explaining support for right-wing populist parties (Bos et al., 2018) as well as attitudes toward the European Union (Maier et al., 2015). In line with these findings, we assumed that negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims would also affect individuals' intention to vote for a right-wing populist party. This influence may

go beyond the influence of explicit attitudes and explain incremental variance of right-wing, populist voting behavior (Maier et al., 2015). Therefore, our last hypothesis states:

H5: Negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims predict voting preference for right-wing populist parties.

The full theoretical model showing all hypotheses is depicted in Figure 1.

Method

We employed quota sampling based on the demographic characteristics of the general population in Austria. The experiment was conducted by Survey Sampling International (SSI) in December 2016. In total, 230 participants were randomly assigned to the experimental groups. However, during data collection, the Berlin Christmas-market attack occurred. This attack was a major Islamist terrorist attack leaving 12 people dead and 56 others injured. German and Austrian newspapers intensively covered the attack. These pretreatment effects may heavily influence participants' attitudes in an experiment (see Druckman & Leeper, 2012). In fact, our data revealed a significant difference with respect to negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims between respondents who participated before and after the attack, $F(1, 228) = 4.03, p = .046$.¹ Therefore, we excluded all participants who took part in the study after the terrorist attack including the day of the attack itself ($n = 56$), which yielded a final sample of 174 participants (41 % female; $M_{\text{age}} = 45.33, SD = 12.21$; ranging from 17 to 65 years old; 9.8 % compulsory school; 42 % apprenticeship, 9.8 % vocational school degree, 20.7 % with a high school degree; and 17.8 % with an academic degree).

Experimental Procedure

We employed a between-subjects design with a treatment group exposed to right-wing, populist poster ads ($n = 82$) and a control group ($n = 92$). Upon giving their informed consent, participants were told to evaluate different poster ads. After exposure, we asked participants to take part in a cognitive task (AMP) as well as to respond to a computer-administered survey about their general political attitudes involving the dependent variables. Upon completion, we thanked and debriefed participants.

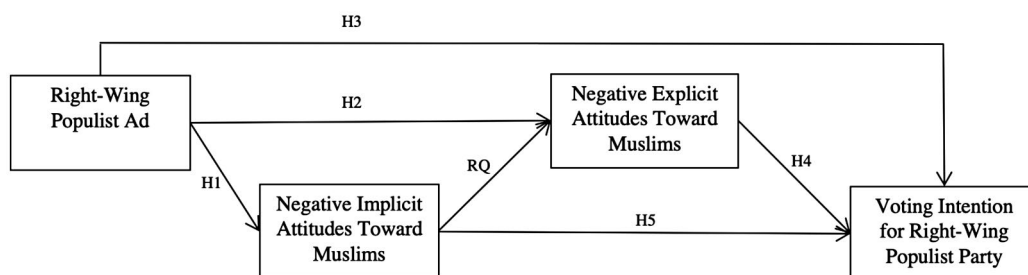


Figure 1. Conceptual mediation model.

¹ Respondents who participated before the attack ($M = 4.45, SD = 1.67$) had more negative attitudes toward Muslims than those who participated on the day of the attack or after the attack ($M = 3.91, SD = 2.01$). This difference may be a potential contrast effect explained by the extensive negative media coverage and public opinion about Muslims during those days. An alternative explanation could be the public condemnation of the attack by Muslim representatives, which might have contributed to more positive attitudes after compared to before the attack.

Randomization Check

A randomization check revealed no significant effects regarding age, $F(1, 172) = 0.28, p = .597$, education, $\chi^2(4, N = 174) = 8.87, p = .064$, immigration background, $\chi^2(2, N = 173) = 0.24, p = .885$, political predisposition, $F(1, 172) = 0.04, p = .840$, religious denomination, $\chi^2(1, 174) = 2.57, p = .861$, frequency of contact with Muslims, $F(1, 172) = 0.87, p = .352$, quality of contact with Muslims $F(1, 172) = 0.04, p = .845$, and exposure time to the political posters $F(1, 172) = 1.14, p = .287$, indicating that randomization for these variables was successful. However, we found a significant effect of the experimental group on gender, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 4.75, p = .029$. Therefore, we included gender as covariate in all analyses.

Stimulus Material

To avoid prior exposure to the political campaign poster ads used in this study, we created fictitious posters based on real political poster ads by the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), which is one of the most successful right-wing populist parties in Europe (Aalberg et al., 2017). The party's political communication can be considered as a model case of successful anti-Islamic rhetoric (Betz, 2013; Krzyżanowski, 2013). The treatment group was exposed to three fictitious political poster ads by the FPÖ and three neutral filler poster ads by the Austrian Peoples' Party (ÖVP; moderate conservative party). These filler ads were typical Austrian poster ads. We exposed the control group to three commercial poster ads with no cue to issues related to immigration or Islam and the same three filler posters by the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP). Exposure time was not forced. Therefore, we tracked exposure time to the posters for each participant.² The three FPÖ posters were based on original ads that were published as a poster, in print or online pamphlets, or on social media. The ads were slightly manipulated for the purpose of this study. All three posters explicitly referred to Muslims in a negative and stereotypical way. Similar political poster ads by the FPÖ were clearly described as Islamophobic and stereotypical (Krzyżanowski, 2013).

All materials are available from the authors upon request.

Pretest of Stimulus Material

We conducted a pretest among a student sample ($N = 63$, 70 % female, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.78, SD = 9.21$) using a within-subjects design. Descriptive results indicated that the FPÖ poster ads were rated as highly authentic for the party overall (ad 1: $M = 4.29, SD = 1.04$; ad 2: $M = 4.16, SD = 1.21$, ad 3: $M = 4.25, SD = 1.02$; 5-point Likert scale). Additionally, we conducted repeated measurement ANOVA with the within-subjects factor ad type (FPÖ ads vs. commercial control ads vs. ÖVP filler ads). Results revealed a significant main effect of the type of ads for perceived negative portrayals of Muslims; $F(1.37, 84.94^3) = 1388.72, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .96$. Contrasts revealed that participants rated the degree to which the FPÖ poster ads transmitted a negative image of Muslims ($M = 4.59, SD = 0.59$) as significantly higher compared to the control poster ads ($M = 1.12, SD = 0.43$); $F(1, 62) = 1470.73, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .96$, and ÖVP filler poster ads ($M = 1.17, SD = 0.39$); $F(1, 62) = 1668.19, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .96$. However, the scores for the control poster ads did not differ significantly from those for the ÖVP filler poster ads, $F(1, 62) = 1.48, p = .228$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Furthermore, there

²We also ran the analysis with exposure time as covariate. All significant effects remained stable when this covariate was included. As the randomization check revealed no systematic bias for exposure time between the experimental groups, we did not include exposure time in the final analysis.

³Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for the main effects of ad type on perceived negative portrayals, $\chi^2(2) = 37.57, p < .001$, and perceived stereotypical portrayal of Muslims, $\chi^2(2) = 120.01, p < .001$. Therefore, degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity ($\epsilon = .69$ for the main effect of ad type on perceived negative portrayals and $\epsilon = .54$ for the main effect of ad type on perceived stereotypical portrayals).

was a significant main effect for the type of ads for perceived stereotypical portrayals of Muslims, $F(1.08, 66.66) = 316.33, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .84$). Contrasts revealed that participants rated the degree to which the FPÖ poster ads transmitted a stereotypical image of Muslims ($M = 4.15, SD = 0.99$) as significantly higher compared to the control poster ads ($M = 1.24, SD = 0.66$); $F(1, 62) = 327.55, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .84$, and ÖVP filler poster ads ($M = 1.19, SD = 0.65$); $F(1, 62) = 320.65, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .84$. However, the scores for the control poster ads did not differ significantly from those for the ÖVP filler poster ads, $F(1,62) = 2.12, p = .150$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$.⁴

Measures

Negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims. We assessed negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims with seven items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*) based on Park et al. (2007) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$; $M = 4.45, SD = 1.66$; see the Appendix).

Negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims. We measured negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims using the AMP (Payne et al., 2005), which uses misattributions that people make about their own affective reactions to measure attitudes implicitly. The procedure used in this study was based on Payne and colleagues (2005). We informed participants (1) that the study examined “how people make simple but quick judgments” (p. 280), (2) that they would see several pairs of images consisting of a silhouette and a Chinese character, and (3) that the first image was simply a warning signal for the Chinese character, which should not influence their judgment of the character. We told participants to click a button labeled “Unpleasant” if they judged the character to be less visually pleasing than average and a button labeled “Pleasant” if they judged it to be more visually pleasing than average.

In total, participants saw 12 silhouette images (see the Appendix) of Muslim individuals and objects and 12 silhouette images of comparable non-Muslim individuals and objects. We included those 12 images in the study, which had the highest associations with Islam and Muslims in a pre-test. These images appeared prior to a Chinese pictograph (obtained from Payne's personal website; Payne, 2016). Each pictograph was presented for 250 milliseconds and was immediately preceded by a briefly visible (80 milliseconds duration) Muslim or non-Muslim silhouette. Furthermore, participants also saw 12 Chinese characters not accompanied by a silhouette in order to generate a baseline measure (see Payne et al., 2005, for additional procedure detail). We calculated the AMP score by subtracting the proportion of pleasant responses during Muslim prime trials from the proportion of pleasant responses during non-Muslim prime trials. We ultimately excluded three participants from the AMP who indicated that they read Chinese and four others who encountered technical problems during the procedure.

Right-wing, populist voting intention. For right-wing, populist voting intention, we used one question (How likely is it that you would ever vote for the Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ?) based on van der Eijk, van der Brug, Kroh, and Franklin (2006) (7-point Likert-type scale; 1 = *very unlikely* to 7 = *very likely*; $M = 4.09, SD = 2.47$).

Data Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a path analysis based on full information, maximum-likelihood estimation using the *lavaan* package in *R*. We modeled negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims as mediator of the effects of political ad exposure on negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims. Additionally, we modeled implicit and explicit attitudes as mediators of the experimental condition on right-wing, populist voting intention. We also controlled for all direct paths not

⁴We also conducted paired samples *t*-tests, which revealed the same results for both perceived negative and stereotypical portrayals of Muslims.

hypothesized in our model. We used 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals based on 10,000 bootstrap samples for statistical inference of indirect effects. As mentioned above, we included gender as covariate in the analysis.⁵

Results

Descriptive Statistics

A mixed-design ANOVA with a within factor (prime, with three levels) and a between factor (condition, with two levels) revealed a significant interaction effect of responses in the prime trials and the experimental group, $F(2, 344) = 4.40, p = .013$. This effect indicates that responses in the prime trials differed for respondents in the control group and the experimental group. To break down this interaction, contrasts (simple effects) compared each level of the prime trials across respondents in the control group and experimental group. These contrasts revealed a significant difference between the groups when comparing the Muslim prime trial with the non-Muslim prime trial, $F(1, 172) = 7.15, p < .001$, and when comparing the Muslim prime trial with the neutral prime trial, $F(1, 172) = 5.12, p = .025$. However, there was no significant difference between the groups when comparing the neutral prime trial with the non-Muslim prime trial, $F(1, 172) = .06, p = .803$. Figure 2 shows that

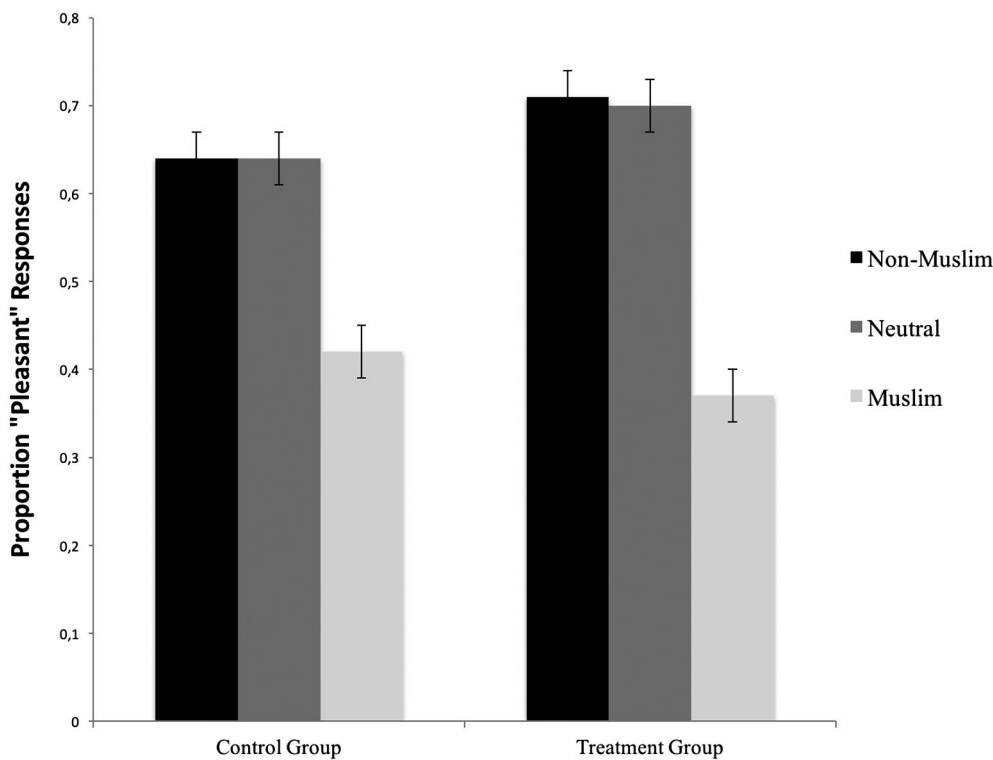


Figure 2. Proportion of “pleasant” responses as a function of prime trials and experimental condition. Error bars represent one standard error.

⁵Including gender or education as additional covariate does not change the significance of our effects, which points to the robustness of the effects.

although all respondents indicated less positive scores in the Muslim prime trial compared to the non-Muslim prime trial and the neutral prime trial, these differences were more pronounced for the experimental group compared to the control group.

Path Analysis

Table 1 presents and Figure 3 visualizes all of our results.⁶ Our first hypothesis (H1) assumed that exposure to right-wing, populist ads would enhance negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims, for which we found support ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .007$). Furthermore, mediation analysis confirmed a significant indirect effect of political ad exposure on negative explicit attitudes via negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims ($b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.09$; 95 % CIs [0.06, 0.41]). Thus, exposure to anti-Islamic right-wing, populist poster ads enhanced individuals' negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims through changes in individuals' automatic affective associations (i.e., implicit attitudes). Hence, in answer to our research question (RQ), we found that political ad exposure exerted an indirect effect on negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims via the enhancement of negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims.

Contradicting our second hypothesis, we found no significant direct effect of political ad exposure on individuals' negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .763$). There was also no significant total effect of political ad exposure on negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims ($b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.26$, $p = .299$). Findings also revealed no significant direct effect of political poster ad exposure on voting intentions for a right-wing populist party ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.31$, $p = .844$), which contradicted our third hypothesis (H3).

Our fourth hypothesis (H4) assumed that negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims would increase voting intention for the right-wing, populist party FPÖ. In line with that assumption, we detected a significant positive effect of negative explicit attitudes on voting intention for the FPÖ ($b = 0.77$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .001$).

Lastly, we were interested in whether or not implicit attitudes influenced voting intention for the FPÖ (H5). We found a significant indirect effect of negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims on FPÖ voting intention via negative explicit attitudes ($b = 1.20$, $SE = 0.33$; 95 % CIs [0.60, 1.91]) (see Figure 3). Additionally, we detected a remaining significant direct effect of negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims not explained by the mediator negative explicit attitudes ($b = 1.12$, $SE = 0.52$, $p = .032$). Thus, our fifth hypothesis was also supported. Additionally, mediation analysis confirmed a significant indirect effect of right-wing, populist ad exposure on voting intention for the populist right via an increase of negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims ($b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.09$, 95 % CIs [0.01, 0.37]). Moreover, we found a significant indirect effect for the complete path of right-wing, populist ad exposure on voting intentions via both implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims ($b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.16$, 95 % CIs [0.03, 0.70], see Figure 3).

In sum, these findings indicate that anti-Islamic right-wing, populist poster ads enhance individuals' automatic negative affective associations toward Muslims, which in turn increase explicit judgments about Muslims as well as voting preference for a right-wing populist party.

Overall, 33 % of the variance of voting intention for the FPÖ was explained (see Table 1).

Discussion

Extensive research has been dedicated to the factors that may explain the electoral success of right-wing populist parties (e.g., Lubbers & Güveli, 2007; Lucassen & Lubbers, 2012; Sheets, Bos,

⁶Running the analysis with the complete sample ($N = 230$) including individuals who participated after the Berlin attack revealed that all effects remained stable with one exception: No significant effect of political ad exposure on negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims was found ($b = .05$, $SE = .04$, $p = .213$). This finding might be explained by the occurrence of the attack, which can be considered a strong pretreatment effect.

Table 1. Path Analysis Based on Full-Information Maximum-Likelihood Estimation (unstandardized coefficients, $N = 174$)

Variables	Negative Implicit Attitudes Toward Muslims				Negative Explicit Attitudes Toward Muslims				Voting Intention for Right-Wing Populist Party			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	95% CIs	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	95% CIs	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	95% CIs
Gender	0.02	0.05	.03	−0.07, 0.11	−0.00	0.25	−.00	−0.49, 0.49	0.13	0.32	.03	−0.49, 0.75
Political Ad Exposure	0.12*	0.05	.21	0.01, 0.03	0.08	0.25	.02	−0.40, 0.59	−0.06	0.31	−.01	−0.67, 0.55
Negative Implicit Attitudes toward Muslims					1.56***	0.41	.28	0.75, 2.36	1.12*	0.52	.14	0.08, 2.14
Negative Explicit Attitudes toward Muslims									0.77***	0.09	.52	0.58, 0.93
<i>Indirect Effects of Political ad exposure on Voting Intention for Right-Wing Populist Party</i>												
Political Ad Exposure via Neg. Implicit Attitudes toward Muslims					0.19*	0.09	0.06	0.06, 0.41	0.14*	0.09	.03	0.01, 0.37
Neg. Implicit Attitudes toward Muslims via Neg. Explicit Attitudes toward Muslims									1.20*	0.33	.15	0.60, 1.91
Political Ad Exposure via Neg. Implicit Attitudes via Neg. Explicit Attitudes toward Muslims									0.21*	0.16	.01	0.03, 0.70
Adj. R^2			.04				.08					.33

Note. Model Fit Indices ($\chi^2(9) = 90.80$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00 90%-CIs [.00, .00]). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

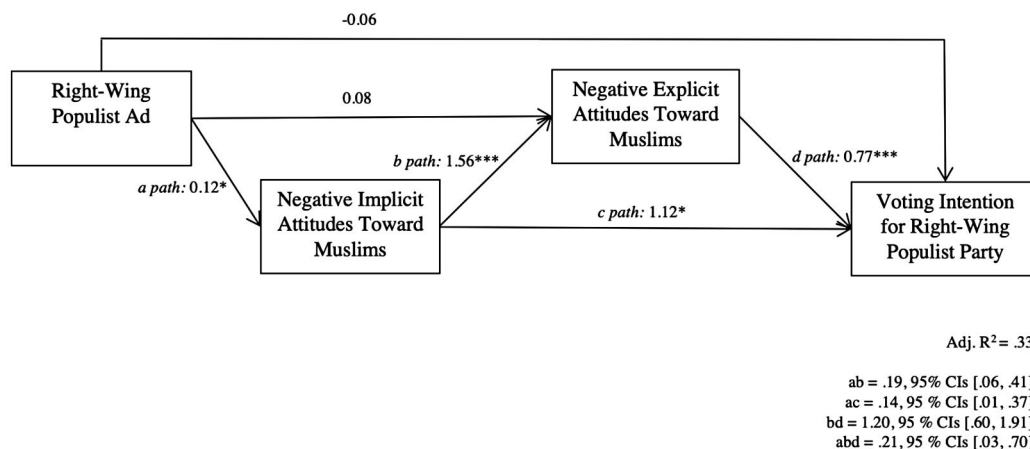


Figure 3. Hypothesized unstandardized path coefficients. Nonhypothesized path coefficients and covariates are omitted from the model for clarity reasons.

& Boomgaarden, 2016). Yet, the role of political campaign poster ads in mobilizing against Muslims and Islam in predicting voting preferences has been neglected thus far. We aimed at advancing this knowledge, by investigating how the effects of anti-Islamic right-wing, populist political poster ads contribute to right-wing, populist voting preference by shaping negative implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims.

In line with previous research (Albertson, 2011), we found that brief experimental exposure to political poster ads using religious appeals only affected individuals at an implicit but not at an explicit level. However, despite the lack of a direct effect on explicit attitudes, we detected a significant indirect effect of political ad exposure on negative explicit attitudes toward Muslims mediated by strengthened automatic associative evaluations of Muslims (i.e., negative implicit attitudes), which is in line with the predictions of the APE model. In that sense, our findings suggest a change in explicit perceptions of Muslims in response to right-wing, populist political poster ads that is not due to an adjustment in individuals' set of propositions but is based on altered associative evaluations of the attitude object—namely, individuals with Muslim religion (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006).

Furthermore, we examined for the first time how hostile perceptions of Muslims in response to right-wing, populist political campaign poster ads relate to voting preference for a right-wing populist party. Although political ad exposure had no direct effect on voting intentions for the populist right, changes in negative implicit and explicit attitudes toward Muslims in response to those ads predicted higher voting preferences. Additionally, political ad exposure influenced voting preference via implicit attitudes irrespective of self-reported attitudes toward Muslims. That is, an explicit rejection of anti-Muslim sentiments might not insulate citizens from the effect of implicit attitudes on their behavioral intentions such as voting preference (Albertson, 2011). The reason for this is negative implicit automatic associations, which may remain activated and unintentionally influence individuals' behavioral intentions despite being explicitly rejected (Payne & Dal Cin, 2015). By openly and blatantly ostracizing immigrants and religious minority members such as Muslims (Schmuck et al., 2017), right-wing populist parties tend to violate societal norms of tolerance and egalitarianism (Bos et al., 2018). Voters may therefore not openly agree with a party that employs simplistic campaign slogans and portrayals (Huber & Lapinski, 2006). However, our findings suggest that anti-Islamic political posters may nevertheless influence individuals' support for right-wing populist parties via their implicit attitudes toward Muslims. This is a key finding of this study, as it suggests that although individuals might deny being influenced by blatant and simple anti-Muslim political

poster ads on an explicit self-report level, they might still adjust their explicit attitudes as well as their voting intentions based on changes in their affective associative network—namely, their “gut reactions.”

Our findings contrast previous studies (Arendt et al., 2015; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017), which revealed no relationship between explicit and implicit attitudes in response to right-wing, populist campaign poster ads. However, these studies have dealt with racial attitudes. Considering the public norm of racial equality in Western societies, this divergence is not surprising (Albertson, 2011; see also Huber & Lapinski, 2006). Yet, on the topic of Islam religion and Muslims’ rights in Western societies, public norms may be less salient. Scholars argue that Islamophobia has become a kind of “accepted racism” in recent years (Hafez, 2014, p. 484). Islamophobic stances are increasingly found not only at the margins of European societies but also at the center. In fact, anti-Muslim political rhetoric is not limited to extreme right-wing parties anymore but also is increasingly employed by mainstream parties (Hafez, 2014). In this context, it may seem acceptable for voters to voice their concerns about Muslims. Hence, they tend to base their evaluations of Muslims and voting intentions in response to political poster ads to a higher degree on their “gut feelings.” These implicit reactions seem to exert a powerful influence on individuals’ explicit evaluations about Muslims as well as on their readiness to vote for a right-wing populist party. Hence, our findings make a strong case for taking into account relevant implicit concepts and measures as explanatory factors for political decisions in future research.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this research warrant attention. An important limitation refers to our experimental design. While participants in the control condition were exposed to a mix of commercial and political posters (see also Meirick [2002] for TV ads), those in the treatment condition were exposed to political posters only. This incongruence might have worked as a confounding factor in our study, as the difference between commercial and political communication in one condition and political communication only in the other condition could have influenced our dependent variables. Therefore, the incongruence between the conditions could serve as an alternative explanation for our findings and potentially threaten the internal validity of our experiment. Although not directly related to political communication and anti-Muslim attitudes, existing literature (e.g., Cacioppo & Petty, 1979, 1989; Schmidt & Eisend, 2015) suggests that repetitive exposure to congruent content predicts more thoughts about and understanding of the message content, which, in turn, can influence the attitudinal reaction toward an attitude object. Thus, future research is needed to entirely rule out that alternative explanation. Ideally, a methodological experiment systematically varying the presence and absence of commercial ads, moderate political ads, and right-wing, populist ads should be conducted to thoroughly examine the effects of all those possible combinations on political attitudes as well as to shed more light on the question whether incongruent communication (i.e., mixing commercial and political communication) per se has an effect on anti-Muslim attitudes. Furthermore, our findings are based on political poster ads by one specific right-wing populist party. However, first comparative research evidence suggests that effects of political campaigns by the FPÖ are highly comparable to those of other European right-wing populist parties (see Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017). Nevertheless, this research should be extended to other contexts. It is also worth noting that the filler ads in both conditions referred to Austrian nationality; however, the pretest of the stimulus materials revealed that those ads were not associated with negative or stereotypical portrayals of Islam. Moreover, the conservative ads were shown in both conditions, and therefore, the effects of the right-wing, populist ads on the attitudinal outcomes can be considered as independent from the filler ads.

Furthermore, our results are based on a single experiment, and some of the effects found are rather small. Yet, post hoc power analyses revealed that all significant effects achieved sufficient statistical power.⁷ Additionally, a small effect of exposure to political ads on attitudes toward Muslims is still important for two reasons. First, finding a small effect, which is due to the experimental manipulation, is meaningful, as there are many factors influencing those attitudes beyond exposure to political ads such as prior contact with Muslims or preexisting attitudes. Second, in a real-life environment, individuals are not merely exposed to a poster one time, but several times. Therefore, the effects may increase with repeated exposure to the political ads (Schemer, 2012). Thus, effects that are initially small may increase during the course of a campaign. Yet, more research on long-term effects of political ad exposure is needed to support that assumption. This is also necessary, as we measured all dependent variables at one point of time. As such, our findings only allow correlational evidence for the mediators and dependent variables.

Additionally, we presented the political posters on a computer screen, which may reduce the external validity of our results, but it is common in experimental political advertising research (e.g., Appel, 2012). Lastly, we did not control for political ideology in our model for two reasons: First, political ideology is highly correlated with voting preference, which we operationalized by measuring intention to vote for a right-wing populist party ($r = .60, p < .001$). Thus, due to the high correlation, we decided against controlling for one while trying to predict the other. Second, the randomization check for political ideology was successful indicating that political ideology did not systematically bias our results.

Implications

Despite these limitations, our study has important theoretical and practical implications. Our findings show for the first time that right-wing, populist political campaign poster ads may not only perpetuate resentments against Muslims, but may also contribute to the electoral success of right-wing populist parties. Using a key principle of populist communication, a black and white rhetoric, right-wing populist parties present simple solutions for people's growing fears about increasing Muslim immigration: a total exclusion of Muslims from “the people.” This is a successful strategy—as growing vote shares for right-wing populist parties across Europe demonstrate. However, while increasing their electoral support, right-wing, populist campaign poster ads may also harm integration processes of Muslims in Western societies as a side effect (Schmuck et al., 2017). In particular, our finding that right-wing populist posters may foster resentments against minority groups “under the radar” of conscious awareness seems alarming. In that light, our findings make a strong case for further research on strategies that can prevent a stigmatization of Muslims through right-wing populist political campaigns. Simultaneously, there is a need for positive and diverse representations of Muslims in mainstream Western media as well as continued opportunities in politics and society for non-Muslims to interact in positive and meaningful ways with Muslims.

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⁷A post hoc power analysis revealed sufficient statistical power (higher than $1 - \beta = .80$) for all significant effects found in the analysis including the effect of political ad exposure on negative implicit attitudes toward Muslims, $N = 174$, $\alpha = .05$, $f^2 = .04$, $1 - \beta = .85$.

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APPENDIX

Negative Explicit Attitudes Toward Muslims

Islam supports terrorist acts. Islam is an evil religion. Too many Muslims harm the Austrian culture. If I could, I would avoid contact with Muslims. If I could, I would live in a place where there were no Muslims. If possible, I would avoid going to places where Muslims would be. I think too many Muslims infiltrate our culture (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$; $M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.66$, 7-point Likert scale).

Example Silhouettes AMP

AMP example primes non-Muslim



AMP example primes Muslim

