



**Open Competitie MAGW/Open MAGW Program
Application Form 2007**

Details of applicant

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Title of research proposal (NL and UK)

NL: Sacraal en Seculier? Houdingen ten opzichte van moslims en rechts stemmen in seculier Europa

UK: Sacred and Secular? Attitudes towards Muslims and right-wing voting in secular Europe.

Abstract

The author suggests a Ph.D. study on the relation between secularization on attitudes towards Muslims and right-wing voting behaviour in Europe. Special attention is paid to the local influence of global polarization between religions and / or cultures, and the influence of immigration towards Europe. The proposed research will use data from the European Values Survey (EVS) conducted in 27 European countries. The analyses will involve multilevel models distinguishing between four levels of data. Structural equation modelling will be used in order to analyse more complex theoretical models and causality.

Research Proposal

Number of words for topic and approach: 2392

Research topic

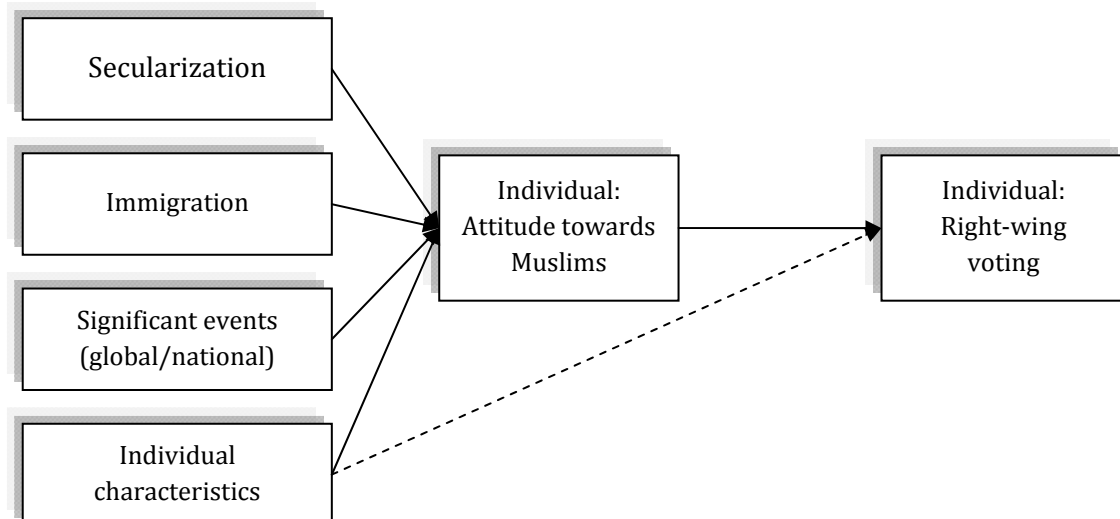
Identity is constituted to a greater extent by who is 'out' than by who is 'in'. It is the "*boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth, 1969, p. 15). We look to the Other to know who we ourselves are. For centuries, Europe has found a significant Other in the Arab World in the Middle East and North Africa (Delanty, 1995; Ferreiro, 2003; Strath, 2002). This distinction seems to have a primarily religious foundation, as these Arab regions generally embrace Islam as their major religion, while Europe predominantly adheres to Christianity. However, recent decades have witnessed an overall decline of (institutional) religion in Europe (Bruce, 2002, 2003). On the face of it, one could therefore expect that religion, functioning as a 'mirror' to establish identity would also diminish, and European attitudes towards Muslims would become more positive. Yet, there seems to be a global polarization between the (mainly Christian) western world on the one hand, and the Islamic regions on the other (Fekete, 2004). The teachings of the Islam are the subject of heated public debate (Venkatraman, 2007). In addition, the arrival of immigrants has become a hot topic in many European societies, and right-wing political parties are gaining in popularity in several countries.

The proposed Ph.D. research intends to investigate this interesting paradox. How can it be that while religion is becoming less important in European societies, the resistance towards Muslims seems to be growing? Furthermore, the implications of this process will be examined. How does an increased resistance towards Muslims affect voting behavior? The central questions that this study will examine are formulated as follows:

- 1) *Is there a relation between secularization and the attitude towards Muslims in Europe, and if so, which individual and contextual characteristics influence this relation and to what extent?*
- 2) *How does this process affect right-wing voting behavior?*

Although the emphasis of this study is most certainly on secularization, several individual and contextual factors influencing the attitude of Europeans towards Muslims should also be taken into account. *First*, on a contextual level, the number of immigrants to a respondent's region potentially has some bearing on his or her attitude towards minorities in general, and therefore also towards Muslim (immigrant) minorities. It would be interesting to see whether indigenous Europeans differentiate between Muslim immigrants and immigrants in general. *Second*, in a globalized world, it is essential to take global events into account. Regarding the so-called 'war on terror' that has been raging since the terrorist attacks on the world trade centre in New York in 2001, many authors have suggested that western-Muslim tensions have increased as a result of global developments (Castells, 2004, pp. 108-109). These global events may have an influence on a national, local or even individual level. Besides taking into account 'standard' individual background characteristics such as education and gender, a person's religious denomination and religiosity potentially influences their view on the matters at hand. Furthermore, these effects may vary as religious context differs (see Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006), which should be examined as well. In the following sections, I will not provide an extensive theoretical framework for every aspect in the paragraph above, since this would be beyond the scope of this proposal. However, I will elaborate on the measurement of some of these indicators. This proposal focuses predominantly on the attitude towards Muslims, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, on the way this affects voting behavior. A conceptual¹ model of the proposed research is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1 - Conceptual research model.



¹ This graphical depiction of the research model is not at all exhaustive in terms of included variables or relations in the eventual study, and is intended for clarification purposes only.

Approach

In this section, I will expand on the questions that I have posed above, and provide a theoretical framework in which this research proposal should be regarded. After this, an outline of the intended practical approach is given, including the methods and data sets that will be used. Before proceeding, however, it should be mentioned that the research will be executed in two distinct phases. The first phase focuses on the determinants of the attitude towards Muslims, while the second aims at explaining right-wing voting behavior in the light of these findings. This practical division will be elaborated on further down in this proposal.

Theoretical approach

In order to understand the effect of secularization on indigenous Europeans' attitudes towards Muslims, we should investigate the relation between (Christian) religiosity and these attitudes. After all, if we know what effect religion has on the individual level, we should be able to predict the result of its demise on a societal level. In order to provide more insight into the aim of the study, I have formulated two central, competing hypotheses which will be looked into in this proposal². They each represent one theoretical approach to the subject. Comparing the conclusions drawn based on these hypotheses should give us an indication as to which explanation seems most plausible in the case of secularization in Europe and attitudes towards Muslims.

The first central hypothesis is inspired by a concept that seems to be widely accepted within the social sciences. I will mention some of these social science disciplines in order to illustrate the theoretical relevance of this hypothesis. The idea that people tend to identify themselves and the groups to which they belong on the basis of which groups they do *not* belong to is in sociological theories often referred to as *identification* by *dysidentification* (see de Swaan, 1995; de Swaan, 1997; de Swaan, 2001; de Swaan, 2003), while anthropologists study the boundaries of ethnic groups and *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1983; Barth, 1969; Eriksen, 2002, 2004). By the same token, human geographers often speak of *bordering*, *ordering* and *othering* (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). This last term, *othering*, is also regularly used in psychological discourse (see Erikson, 1968), as are terms like *mirrors* and *mirroring* (Oster, 1998). All these concepts refer to essentially the same principle³, the idea of determining the 'other' in order to be able to realize a sense of 'self'. A framework of equality and difference to define who we are (Jenkins, 2004).

With regard to the first hypothesis, this concept of *othering* is complemented by the *ethnic competition theory*. The central proposition of this theory is that people who experience competition or actually compete with other ethnic groups, are likely to have more antagonistic attitudes towards these groups (Marcel Lubbers, Coenders, & Scheepers, 2006, p. 246). Although this theory is perhaps most often applied to economic competition (e.g. competing for the same jobs), I would like to propose applying it to religious-cultural competition. In line with *ethnic competition theory*, I expect members of other religions than Islam to experience an ideological or cultural threat from Muslims. My expectation concerning the people who do not claim to

² In the eventual research more specific sub-hypotheses will of course be examined.

³ Of course various differences between the exact definition of these concepts exist among the disciplines. Nevertheless, the basic principle seems to show a reasonable amount of resemblance.

belong to any religious denomination, is that they feel less 'culturally threatened' by Islam than religious people. Combining the need for differentiation mentioned in the previous paragraph, and the cultural-religious competition between non-Islamic religious people and Muslims, the first central hypothesis reads:

Non-Islamic religious people generally express more antagonistic attitudes towards Muslims than non-religious people.

Although the idea of *othering* or *identification versus disidentification* mentioned above *can* lead to the first hypothesis, the same concept could lead us to an opposite expectation as well. After all, important in this line of reasoning is *with whom* one identifies. In the above argumentation, the implicit assumption is that non-Islamic religious people in Europe experience Islam as a competing religion; a threat. However, another religion may not be the greatest threat to traditional European religions. There is no place in the world where secularization has emerged so drastically as is the case in Europe (Bruce, 2003; Knoblauch, 2003). For that reason, perhaps it is the disappearance of religion *altogether* that non-Islamic religious people are most afraid of. In this line of reasoning, the emergence of an often more pious Islam might even be perceived as strengthening their position vis-à-vis non-religious people and organizations: Muslims as allies in the struggle for religious survival in increasingly secular societies. By the same token, non-religious people might feel *more* threatened by Islam because it constitutes a religious influence as opposed to their own secular view on society. The second central hypothesis therefore maintains:

Non-Islamic religious people generally express less antagonistic attitudes towards Muslims than non-religious people.

The second phase of the proposed research focuses on investigating how the relations established in the first phase (briefly put: secularization, (global) polarization and immigration) affect voting behavior. Putnam (2000) mentions war time experience, stating that "external conflict increases internal cohesion" (as quoted in Ruiters & Baer, *forthcoming*). I would like to broaden this statement to include all external pressure instead of only conflict, and to add the exclusion of all individuals and groups that are not members of the *ingroup*: external pressure increases internal cohesion, which in turn increases *outgroup* exclusion. When applied to the subject of this proposal, this amounts to an increase of external pressure as a result of an ideological or cultural threat from Islam towards 'traditional' European religion. This would then lead to an increase in internal cohesion and an increase of *outgroup* exclusion. Right-wing political parties often speak out against welcoming immigrants and allowing 'Islamic influences', so voting for right-wing parties could be regarded as the expression of *outgroup* exclusion (see also M. Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002). In other words:

Non-Islamic religious people are more likely to vote for right-wing parties than non-religious people⁴.

This central hypothesis, too, will be examined while taking into account the aforementioned individual characteristics and contextual differences.

Practical approach

As I have mentioned in the previous section, the proposed research will be executed in two distinct phases. In the first phase, the researcher will examine the effects of immigration, significant global or national events, and secularization on the attitude towards Muslims. The second phase will connect these relations with right-wing voting behavior. In order to investigate the causal relation between attitude towards Muslims and right-wing voting (see figure 1), this study will utilize structural equation modeling (see Kline, 2005). By constructing a theoretical path model and testing it using this technique, we can assess the plausibility of such a causality.

The study will draw on existing data from the European Values Survey (EVS) conducted between 1993 and 2004. These questionnaires, which were held in varying years, include items on all desired individual characteristics, as well as data regarding which region the respondent lived in at the time of interview. Importantly, the attitudes towards immigrants and Muslims⁵ were measured, as well as self-placement on the political left-right continuum and party choice. From all available datasets, only those sets will be selected in which the dependent variables were measured in at least two distinct waves of interviews. This amounts to the analysis of 27 European countries⁶.

The information on the respondent's region will be linked to contextual data, derived from external sources, such as EuroStat. The information that will be incorporated on the contextual level includes (1) the degree of secularization in the region⁷ and (2) immigration levels. The numbers for immigration are specifically aimed at providing numbers for immigrants from Islamic countries. Furthermore, (3) significant national events, such as the burning of mosques (see Cesari, 2005) and political assassinations will be coded into the data. A final contextual characteristic included in the analysis is (4) significant global events, such as wars in Islamic area's or Islamist terrorist attacks. These global events will be coded by year of survey. Including all contextual data above, as well as individual characteristics amounts to a four-level⁸ analysis.

In conclusion, I will highlight the most important features of the time planning of this research. The project will span four years, in which the Ph.D. student will produce several papers and a dissertation (see *Output* section). The researcher should start his or her first six months by

⁴ Of course, in the eventual study, such a hypothesis should be examined while taking into account 'traditional values'.

⁵ By asking whether or not the respondent would mind to have Muslim neighbors.

⁶ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Great-Britain, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Northern-Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Slovenia, and Slovakia.

⁷ Which can also be aggregated from the original individual data from the EVS.

⁸ Individual, regional, national, year of measurement.

writing an extensive theoretical framework for the subject. Furthermore, the religious background and variation of every country will be examined. The next six months of the first year will be used to prepare data on the individual and contextual level. Especially the latter is expected to be quite time-consuming, since global and national events have to be coded⁹, and regional characteristics regarding immigration and secularization need to be retrieved from various sources¹⁰. Subsequently, all data needs to be prepared in order to have comparable figures. Towards the end of the first year, the Ph.D. student should start on the analysis for the first phase of the study.

As the second year begins, a start should have been made in analyzing the data for the first phase. After approximately six months, the researcher will write and submit a paper on his or her findings so far regarding . After incorporating the critique following this article, some final conclusions are drawn based on the first phase. The second phase of research commences halfway through the second year. The first activities include the construction of a scale to measure political party choice. This is expected to be quite time-consuming as well, since, besides the self-placement of the respondents on a left-right continuum, respondents were asked to choose between national political parties in the questionnaire. The Ph.D. student should code these parties according to a content analysis of party programs. A paper will be written on this content analysis towards the end of the second year or start of the third.

The third year starts with the analysis of the hypotheses from the second phase, which should take no longer than three months. After this, the researcher is required to construct and analyze a final structural equation model in which all findings should be incorporated. The third year will, again, end with a paper on the researcher's findings.

Finally, in the fourth year of research, the Ph.D. student will write his or her dissertation, which should take no longer than six months. The remaining six months will be used to draw up a policy advisement paper to reduce ethnic tensions and / or discrimination towards minorities, based on the findings in this study.

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⁹ With regard to, among other things, media coverage of these events.

¹⁰ Predominantly national statistics bureaus and EuroStat.

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Output

The Ph.D. student is required to write a total of three papers, a dissertation, and a policy advisement paper. For more information, consult the *Practical approach* section above.

1. Second year, **paper** on progress so far. Should include coding of significant global and national events
2. Second / third year, **paper** on content analysis on party programs.
3. Third year, **paper** on final theoretical model and analysis.
4. Fourth year, Ph.D. **dissertation** on findings.
5. Fourth year, **policy advisement paper** on ethnic tensions / discrimination.



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Relevance

The relevance of this research is twofold. First, it is *scientifically* relevant. As I mentioned on page three, the subject relates to quite a diverse field of social sciences. The Ph.D. student is expected to incorporate as many perspectives from these fields as possible, so that cross-pollination between the disciplines is facilitated. Furthermore, the relationship between secularization and attitudes towards specific religious minorities has not yet been examined extensively. An important improvement is also made by linking these insights directly to voting behaviour.

Secondly, the present study would be relevant for *society*. As Christian Europe is growing more and more secular, and the number of Muslim inhabitants in the continent is continually increasing, this is a question that needs resolving. As global tensions between Islamic regions and 'the west' amplify, we need to understand what kinds of pressure this may put on local communities and European nations. The growth of European Islam, the increasing support for extreme right-wing parties, and the increased xenophobia or 'Islamophobia' is a potentially explosive combination, that we need to understand.