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A post-secular turn in attitudes towards religion? Anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment in Western Europe

by EGBERT RIBBERINK, PETER ACHTERBERG
and DICK HOUTMAN

1. *Introduction*

Even before the PEGIDA demonstrations of 2015 and 2016 (Dostal 2015), anti-Muslim expressions were front-page news in many European countries. Geert Wilders' *Fitna* movie in the Netherlands, protests against the construction of mosques in Switzerland, the head-scarf controversy in France, and protests against the integration of Turkey into the EU in countries like Austria, France and Germany suggest that anti-Muslim sentiment in Western Europe is common (Betz, Meret 2009; Gerhards, Silke 2011). What is more, not only protests against Muslims and Islam, but a wide range of anti-religious expressions seem to proliferate. Some have a political agenda, promoting a strict separation of all religious influences from State institutions (i.e. secularism, see Calhoun *et al.* 2011), but it is also prevalent in other institutional domains. For example, Richard Dawkins' atheist bus campaign¹ publicly challenged believers to consider an enjoyable life without God. Other examples would be the intolerance towards religious leaders influencing politics, negative attitudes towards traditional Church morality, distrust of the Church as an institution, protests against the presence of religion or religious symbols in public buildings or in education, the use of negative stereotypes of religion, etc. (Casanova 2008; Smith 2011; Stahl 2010).

These anti-religious and anti-Muslim attitudes and expressions seem to contradict the common notion that Western European

¹ See <https://humanism.org.uk/about/atheist-bus-campaign/> for a description of what the campaign involved (Web 12 Feb. 2016).

countries constitute secular bulwarks of tolerance, inclusiveness, and broadmindedness (Bruce 2002, 43; Emerson, Hartman 2006, 130; Inglehart 1997; Norris, Inglehart 2012; Penninx 2006). As anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment seem to proliferate, this raises the question how the non-religious position themselves vis-à-vis religion in secular societies. Do these attitudes disprove the notion, prominent in secularization studies, that in a context of religious decline and religious privatization, the non-religious become indifferent to religion (Bruce 2011; 2013)? Or, is this current attention for religious issues in secular contexts an illustration of a return of religion to the public domain, i.e. post-secularity (Casanova 2009; Gorski *et al.* 2012; Habermas 2008; Kaufmann *et al.* 2012; McLennan 2010; Moberg *et al.* 2012)? As the «secularistic» theory of privatization predicts religious indifference instead of anti-religious contention in secular contexts, widespread religious contention would indeed fly in the face of this theory. Therefore, in this paper we will develop and test two hypotheses, based on a discussion of these competing theories of privatization and post-secularity, on the way religious decline transforms stances among the non-religious vis-à-vis religion and vis-à-vis Islam. Testing these hypotheses by means of a linear multilevel analysis of European survey data allows us to understand better the relationship between secularization, anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment. As there are also alternative explanations for these sentiments, we also discuss and control for the way they might be influenced by the institutional and political opportunities European Muslims and other minorities may or may not have (cf. Koopmans *et al.* 2005; Cinalli, Giugni 2011).

2. *The privatization theory*

The privatization thesis maintains that in modern, differentiated contexts religion loses its collectively shared status and recedes from the public realm to become a matter of strictly personal choice. Among others, Thomas Luckmann (1967) argued that in differentiated contexts, religion changes and becomes increasingly privatized and hence socially and publicly insignificant and «invisible». In other literature, this privatization is oftentimes linked with religious decline. For instance, Bryan Wilson defined secularization as the decreasing social significance of religion, yet he

pointed to decline in church membership and church attendance as evidence of secularization (Wilson 1966, xiv). Steve Bruce also maintains that privatization is one of the key processes responsible for religious decline in modern societies. As it becomes harder for religions to influence the public domain, bounded as they are to follow the secular rules of engagement, it becomes more difficult to socialize the next generations in their religion (Bruce 2011; 2013). Hence, in time, non-religiosity will grow.

What is more, not only will there be more non-religiosity, Bruce maintains that privatized religion leads the non-religious to be completely indifferent and ignorant of religion, as they are not challenged in any way, and have no incentive to find out more about this invisible religion. It becomes «alien» to them (Bruce 2014, 18). Thus, in contexts where religiosity declined, the remaining religion will predominantly a private matter, and thus «invisible». The non-religious will not oppose to this kind of religion, as they find nothing to oppose. They will be indifferent to religion instead (Bagg, Voas 2010; Bruce 2002; Glendinning, Bruce 2011; Voas 2009). Subsequently, only in contexts where religion has public significance and where it influences other institutional domains (e.g. politics, economy or the media), anti-religious attitudes can be expected (Bruce 2002; 2011, 38; Ribberink *et al.* 2013). The stronger religions influence a certain context, the more reasons the non-religious will have for opposing religion.

Yet, various observers have pointed out that seemingly, religion has become more publicly significant in various modern countries since the 1980s (e.g., Casanova 1994; Conway 1996; Haynes 1998; Juergensmeyer 1993). In fact, discussing Jose Casanova, Peter Achterberg *et al.* (2009, 698) maintain that religious decline may produce a deprivatization of religion, i.e. a waxing desire for an active and public role of religion. Indeed, their analysis shows that the increased assertion of religion's public role is systematically related to its numerical decline. They argue that a confinement of religion to the domain of private life can lead to an increasing tendency to push religion as a moral resource for the public domain.

In turn, Tony Glendinning and Steve Bruce (2011) criticize Achterberg *et al.* for drawing conclusions based on people's wish for religion's stronger role, as this wish itself does not make it happen. In fact, Glendinning and Bruce argue that notwithstand-

ing many examples of increased public presence of religion, the non-religious do not become more outspoken and opposed to religion. Based on their study of Britain, Glendinning and Bruce maintain that the non-religious expect religious decline and religious privatization to go hand in hand. «[T]here has not been a greater hardening of attitudes against the public presence of religion among the nonreligious. Our findings show that people who do not participate in organized religion, which represents the majority, are neither less sympathetic nor more antagonistic than they were at the end of the 1990s. The position of the nonreligious majority has remained the same: religion should be confined to the private sphere» (Glendinning, Bruce 2011, 514). In sum, privatization theory argues that religious privatization and religious decline go hand in hand and it predicts religious indifference instead of anti-religious attitudes among the non-religious in these secular contexts of religious decline and privatization. Although there might be a reaction of «deprivatization» among the remaining religious, this does nothing to the attitude of the non-religious vis-à-vis religion.

3. *Post-secular theory*

Opposed to privatization theory, post-secular theory maintains that in secular contexts the non-religious are reacting strongly and negatively against religion in general and Muslims in particular. To assess which of these competing theories explains these sentiments best, we will develop and test two hypotheses in the following paragraphs, one dealing with anti-religiosity and the other with anti-Muslim sentiment.

3.1. *Where to expect strongest anti-religiosity?*

Secular contexts are defined as countries that have seen a strong decline in traditional (Christian) religiosity. According to post-secular theory, there is more to say about this decline, as religion changes and new types of religion grow and flourish in these contexts. Pointing to various recent conflicts around religion in the public sphere, this theory most of all critiques the notion that religion has become privatized in these secular contexts.

One of the first to do so was Jürgen Habermas (2008). Based on three aspects of religious strife, he argued that in modern societies public consciousness has changed from secular to post-secular. The first of those three aspects is the prominent place of religion in global political conflicts, which undermines and relativizes the secularistic belief in the foreseeable disappearance of religion. Second, Habermas observes a trend that religious minorities gain influence in the public sphere, also in response to rivalry between Christians and Muslims. Both religions become more visible and vibrant in secular contexts, giving the *non-religious* a keener consciousness of the public presence of religion. Third, through the complicated and troublesome integration of refugees and economic immigrants in post-colonial European societies, Habermas contends that the pluralist way of life is challenged and the tolerant coexistence of religious and secular communities becomes harder and harder. He concludes that «[i]n these societies, religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground» (Habermas 2008, 21).

Following Habermas, many other sociologists began to speak of a post-secular turn (Casanova 2009; Gorski *et al.* 2012; Kaufmann *et al.* 2012; McLennan 2010; Moberg *et al.* 2012; Stevenson *et al.* 2010). These authors point out how religion has once again become paramount to public and political debate, and hence argue that this disproves privatization theory's prediction of a continuing decline of religious influence on modern societies. In fact, Eric Kaufmann *et al.* predict the emergence of anti-clerical European atheism in the coming decades, in response to a combination of religious decline bottoming out and religious growth due to demographic factors (Kaufmann *et al.* 2012). Thus, this theory predicts the opposite of religious indifference among the non-religious, namely anti-religious contention to be widespread in contexts of religious decline. This leads us to formulate a first hypothesis, which is that the non-religious will have strongest anti-religious attitudes in contexts where religion declined most (H1). In statistical terms, this means we expect a positive cross-level interaction effect of people's non-religiosity and their context's secularity, when assessing their anti-religiosity.

3.2. *Where to expect strongest anti-Muslim sentiment*

The privatization theory maintains that the non-religious expect the religious to accept normatively the quintessentially modern understanding of religion as privatized and in effect without public significance beyond the boundaries of Churches and congregations. Many Muslims in Western Europe have, however, not just retained their religious beliefs, but their religious identities have been strengthened through their encounter with the secular context in which they have come to find themselves: the latter are «Made in Europe» (Phalet *et al.* 2013; Voas, Fleischmann 2012). Whereas outside remaining pockets of orthodoxy, the typical Christian has perhaps transformed his or her religiosity into a strictly private affair, increasingly Muslims insist on public recognition and State support for their faith (Cesari 2011). This is also visible in an increased political participation of Muslims when institutional arrangements open up (Cinalli, Giugni 2016). In doing so, they challenge the secularist accommodation of religion that has evolved in Western societies over the last hundred years, claiming right to confessional education, protection of their faith from criticism and ridicule, and remedying of inequalities in laws and policies on the freedom of religious expression (Achterberg *et al.* 2009; Casanova 1994; Glendinning, Bruce 2011, 504; Modood 2009). This sparks new controversies over the place of religion in Western European countries, as observed by Jocelyne Cesari with respect to Islam in France: «Through the decades, major religious groups – Christian and Jewish – have made uneasy peace with *laïcité* by relegating religious expression to private domains. Muslim settlement in France has disrupted that peace. It has introduced new confusion over boundaries between public and private space and led to renewed controversy over religious freedom and political tolerance» (Cesari 2002, 36).

How do the non-religious react to these «European» Muslims? Initially, when Muslim immigrants from North and East Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and the Middle East arrived in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, they were warmly welcomed (Nielsen 2004). They were willing to do jobs that Europeans did not want to do against wages that Europeans did not accept for themselves. However, those immigrants did not leave Europe when jobs became scarce in the 1980s. Instead, they started to bring their families from their home countries or started new

families with partners from their ethnic groups. They were there to stay (Peach, Glebe 1995). This change in expectation by the European population and their governments – from accommodating temporary workers (mainly men) to the need for hosting and integrating complete families of immigrants – led to an increasingly hostile situation for many Muslims throughout Europe, from the 1990s onwards (Laurence 2012). Considering the received notion that countries in Western Europe distinguish themselves by religious indifference, tolerance and broadmindedness (Bruce 2002, 43; Emerson, Hartman 2006, 130; Inglehart 1997; Norris, Inglehart 2012; Penninx 2006), it is striking to observe this strained relationship with Muslims and Islam in these countries (Mason, Poynting 2006). Even more so, given the fact that rightist-populist political parties have succeeded in defining Muslims and Islam as a major problem for contemporary Europe. Therefore, it is particularly important in this context to carefully flesh out the extent to which today's anti-religiosity mentioned above might in fact be exclusively directed against Muslims and Islam.

This relation between anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment is central to post-secular theory. In fact, some have commented on this theory, that its applicability is limited to the place of Islam in Europe only. In Michelle Dillon's words, «if the term post-secular is theoretically robust it should also have applicability beyond the specific context of Islam in Europe» (Dillon 2010, 143). It is true that, although not very explicit, it is nonetheless quite central to this theory that the heightened public contention of religion in secular contexts is attributed to the assertively voiced critiques of Muslims and Islam (Gorski *et al.* 2012, 6; Kaufman *et al.* 2012, 90; McLennan 2010; Moberg *et al.* 2012, 4; Stevenson *et al.* 2010, 345). In fact, post-secular theory hardly differentiates between anti-religious contention and anti-Muslim sentiment. For instance, referring to controversies over terrorism, immigration, the integration of Turkey into the EU, and over Islamic dress in public functions, it is argued that Western Europe is not as secular as «secularizationists» like Steve Bruce demonstrate (Casanova 2008; 2012). As the «secularistic» theory of privatization predicts religious indifference instead of anti-religious contention in contexts of religious decline, high levels of both anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment disputes privatization theory's core hypothesis.

Post-secular theory maintains that anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-religiosity are one and the same expression of a return of religion to the centre of the public sphere and a showcase that secularization theory is in fact an ideology and not an empirical phenomenon. Summing up, in addition to hypothesis 1 on anti-religiosity, post-secular theory's second hypothesis is that in the most secular contexts, we must also find the non-religious to have highest levels of anti-Muslim sentiment (H2). In statistical terms, this means we expect a positive cross-level interaction effect of people's non-religiosity and their context's secularity, when assessing their anti-Muslim sentiment.

4. Data and analysis

In order to test these hypotheses, we use the most recent European Values Study data set: EVS 2008. This dataset deals with economic, political and religious values and attitudes in Europe. We are interested in attitudes towards religion and particularly towards Muslims in Western European countries with a varying degree of secularity. Therefore, we included all Western European countries available in this data set. The Western European countries studied are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Northern Ireland with an N of 25,222 in 20 countries.

Our first dependent variable is anti-religiosity. This attitude is measured by looking at the two items that can be seen to measure the respondents' hostility towards religion in general. One item asks whether the respondent is a religious person. The answers to this item differentiate between religious, non-religious and «convinced atheist». Although the term «atheist» is very much contested and can mean many different things, in this case people have to assess it as something distinct from being religious, or non-religious. We therefore assume that most respondents will have read the term «convinced atheist» meaning «anti-religious», since the other options do include the religious and non-religious category. Read in this way, people react to this question positively (religious), neutral (non-religious) or negatively (convinced atheist). Therefore, we coded people with religious

preference as 1, non-religious preference as 2, and convinced atheist as 3 (answer category «do not know» was coded as missing).

The item that asks for people's confidence in the Church as an institution can also be seen as an expression of anti-religiosity. Its answer category is a 4-point scale, ranging from «a great deal» to «none at all». We used the mean of the standardized results of this measure (which has already been coded in such a way that high scores indicate mistrust of the Church), together with the standardized score for the «convinced atheist» item, to create an index for anti-religiosity. The factor and reliability analysis of this scale is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1. Factor and reliability analysis for the Anti-Religiosity scale

Item	Factor Loading
Convinced Atheist?	0.87
Confidence in church low?	0.87
Eigen value	1.52
R^2	0.76
Cronbach's α	0.64
N	25,718

Source: EVS 2008.

Anti-Muslim sentiment is our second dependent variable. There is one particular question in this dataset that evaluates respondents' attitude towards Muslims. It is a so-called «social distance» question, about which groups of people respondents find undesirable as neighbours. The question is as follows: «On this list are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours?» The list consists of fourteen groups, among which «Jews», «Homosexuals», «Drug addicts», «Large families» and «Muslims». Response to the last item, concerning Muslim neighbours, is coded into a dummy variable, with score 1 if the respondent mentions Muslim neighbours as undesirable and 0 if not. Since this dichotomous measure is a somewhat crude to use singularly, we also use several items that ask for anti-immigrant attitudes. There are two reasons to do so. Firstly, almost all larger immigrant minorities in Western Europe have a Muslim background. When people are asked to think of immigrants, they tend to think about Muslims

most of the time² (Spruyt, Elchardus 2012; see also Strabac, Listhaug 2008). Also, several studies have shown that anti-Muslim sentiment is closely related to ethnocentrism (van Bohemen *et al.* 2011; Ribberink *et al.* 2017) cultural and economic xenophobia (Elchardus, Spruyt 2014) and other general measures of prejudice and authoritarianism (de Koster *et al.* 2010). Secondly, using the dichotomous «Muslim as neighbour» item, we conducted a linear probability multilevel analysis to check whether the results from the extended scale are comparable with the responses to the dichotomous variable. We found the results to be similar in such a way that we are confident that our more robust, combined scale measures anti-Muslim sentiment as effectively as the dichotomous social distance variable does. The items used (8) inquire about the respondents' attitude towards immigrants getting jobs, undermining cultural life, place in welfare system, influence on crime, and about the number of immigrants. All items were coded in such a way that high scores indicated negative attitudes towards immigrants and Muslims. The items were standardized and linearly combined to create a scale for anti-Muslim sentiment.

TAB. 2. *Factor and reliability analysis for the Anti-Muslim sentiment scale*

Item	Factor Loading
Immigrants will become a threat to our society	0.85
There are too many immigrants	0.80
Immigrants undermine our cultural life	0.79
Immigrants are a strain on our welfare system	0.79
Immigrants take jobs away from our people	0.77
Immigrants increase crime problems	0.73
Immigrants make me feel a stranger	0.68
When jobs are scarce, give priority to native inhabitants	0.62
I do not like having a Muslim as a neighbor	0.39
Eigen value	4.75
R ²	0.53
Cronbach's α	0.87
N	23,806

Source: EVS 2008.

² Of course, this is a generalization or even a bias. Even within the Muslim-category, there are many differences in attitudes, convictions and beliefs (Modood 2003). However, what we use here is the way in which people have a similar attitude towards Muslims as to immigrants in general in Western Europe.

Non-religiosity is a very complex concept and can be approached from many angles. One could look at people's (lack of) beliefs, religious practice, affiliation, values, attitudes, openness to spiritual experiences and so on and so forth (e.g., Lee, Bullivant 2016; Quack 2014). Where to fit in those people who consider themselves not religious, but identify themselves with Christianity and Christian values in some nostalgic way (what Voas [2009] calls «fuzzy fidelity»)? How to disentangle these «cultural Christians» from people who are religious ignorant or consciously indifferent (cf. Bruce 2014; Lee 2014; Siegers 2010)? In this article, we are interested to test two theories which relate people's non-religiosity to anti-religious attitudes in general, and anti-Muslim sentiment in particular. As our dependent variables thus relate to attitudes, we do not want to use a measure of non-religiosity which includes attitudes or values as well. We do not want to measure non-affiliation either, as this still would exclude many people who are Church members since birth, but for whom this is a cultural identity, rather than a religious endorsement. In the literature that discusses these issues, the preferred measure of non-religiosity is based on people's religious attendance (Bagg, Voas 2010; Bruce 2014; Voas 2009; Ribberink *et al.* 2015). We therefore also use the church attendance item, which indicates whether people actively practice their religion. We calculated a score on people's attendance by using answer categories ranging from several times a week (coded 1) to never, or practically never (coded 7)³.

A similar reasoning lies behind the way we operationalize country level secularity. The differences between European countries are very large, depending on what measure of non-religiosity one chooses. Compared to other former Protestant countries, the Scandinavian countries particularly boast low levels of non-affiliates and much higher levels of non-attendance. In these countries, for many people who belong to the Lutheran Church, this ties in with their national identity and only for a few people it involves religious practice. As we want to assess the extent as to which people still practice their religion on a national level, country-level secularity is again based on people's religious attendance. This measure is made by aggregating the

³ As one would expect, this measure correlates with the dependent variable of anti-religiosity (Pearson's $r = 0.615$, $p < 0.001$), but not enough to create multicollinearity in the multilevel model.

individual scores for non-religiosity (operationalized above with the attendance measure) for each country (see table 4).

We use several control variables, both on the individual level and the country level. First, on the individual level, we include in our model Protestant denomination and Orthodox beliefs. This is based on the literature which argues that in secular contexts, perhaps not the non-religious become more intolerant, but the religious minorities become extremely active and fervent (Wilkins-Laflamme 2014). This literature particularly points to Protestants, whose numbers declined strongly in the last decades, and who arguably are prone to reinvigoration and fundamentalism (Berger, Zijderveld 2009; Betz, Meret 2009; Wilkins-Laflamme 2016)⁴. Protestant denomination is measured by coding 1 all respondents who indicate to be a member of a Protestant denomination (all Protestant Churches, including the Free Church) and all others are coded 0. We also used respondents' Orthodox beliefs to assess the attitudes of these religious minorities. To measure this, we used several indicators of religious convictions. We constructed a combined scale of five items that ask for respondents' belief in God, life after death, heaven, hell and sin (with answers «yes» coded as 2, «no» coded as 0, and «don't know» as an intermediate position, coded as 1). The average score for these five items was calculated and standardized to create the variable for Orthodox beliefs. Table 3 presents the reliability and factor analysis of this measure.

Other individual control variables are gender, age (16-108 years), level of education (as coded in EVS in six stages) and income (recoded in five categories: € 0-1500/month, € 1500-2500/month, € 2500-5000/month, € 5000 or more/month and a non-reporting category⁵).

⁴ It would be very interesting to assess more specific groups than just these Christian religious minorities' attitudes towards Muslims. Apart from minorities from other religious backgrounds, there is a large group of people in the middle ground between self-conscious non-religiosity and convinced and committed Christian belief (Siegers 2010; Voas 2009). For example, the earlier mentioned group of «cultural Christians» could be relevant in this respect, as they regard Christian values part of their identity and for that reason might be opposed to the presence of Muslims in their communities. Apart from the fact that this group is hard to single out precisely, we choose to limit ourselves to Orthodox Christian religious minorities, as our theories mainly deal with the effects of religious decline and privatization on these groups. However, we do refer to non-religious people with traditional values in our discussion session, as there are relevant observations to make about these people.

⁵ The EVS-dataset has 23.1% missings on this income-measure. Following Savelkoul *et al.* (2011) we added the category of non-reported-income, to our list of dummy

TAB. 3. Factor and reliability analysis for the orthodox beliefs scale

Item	Factor Loading
Belief in heaven	0.87
Belief in hell	0.81
Belief in sin	0.79
Belief in afterlife	0.75
Belief in God	0.73
Eigen value	3.14
R ²	0.63
Cronbach's α	0.85
N	26,719

Source: EVS 2008.

In the literature on Muslim integration and discrimination, several relevant country level variables are presented, which could influence the possible opposition to Muslims in European countries. As we discussed in the theoretical section, when Muslims mobilize themselves and become politically active, this might attract resistance, as they are seen to challenge the secularist status quo. Therefore, we will assess the presence of Muslims in European countries as well as the opportunities they may or may not have in participating in the public domain, for example via the national policies towards immigrants, which impact the possibilities Muslims have for integrating in their host societies (Cinalli, Giugni 2011; 2016; Koopmans *et al.* 2005; Schnyder 2015). The Muslim presence variable is simply measured as the percentage of Muslims per country, as provided by the Pew Templeton Religious Futures Project⁶. For the political opportunities variable, we use the migrant integration policy index (MIPEX⁷), which is an index of country's policies toward migrants with topics covering promotion of political participation, education, access to naturalization, anti-discrimination, etcetera. The overview

variables, in order to include all respondents. This category gives similar results as the lower income groups.

⁶ www.globalreligiousfutures.org (Web 23 Feb. 2016).

⁷ We used the 2011 dataset, only for Iceland we used the 2015 data, as it was not available for 2011. www.mipex.eu/ (Web 17 August 2017).

of the MIPEX index, the unstandardized⁸ percentages Muslims per country, and the country's level of secularity measure can be found in table 4.

TAB. 4. *Overview of country-level religiosity measures*

Country	Level of secularity	Integration index	Muslim presence
Sweden	5.90	78	.05
France	5.76	51	.08
Finland	5.54	69	.01
Germany	5.52	57	.06
Great Britain	5.52	57	.05
Belgium	5.51	67	.06
Norway	5.40	66	.04
Iceland*	5.30	45	.01
Switzerland	5.27	43	.05
Denmark	5.22	53	.04
Spain	5.18	63	.02
Luxembourg	5.16	59	.02
Netherlands	5.08	68	.06
Austria	4.77	42	.05
Portugal	4.03	79	.01
Northern Ireland	3.89	57	.05
Italy	3.71	60	.04
Greece	3.62	49	.05
Ireland	3.60	49	.01
Malta	2.33	37	.01

Source: EVS 2008, MIPEX III 2011, Pew Research Forum 2010. *MIPEX 2015 data used.

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for each of the variables that were thus created.

⁸ In the multilevel analysis, we worked with the standardized score in order to be able to compare the effects better.

TAB. 5. *Descriptive statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/ Percentage	Std. Deviation
Anti-Islamic attitudes scale	26,119	-1.74	1.54	0.010	.71388
Anti-religiosity	27,244	1.00	4.00	2.0142	.71785
Country-level Secularity	20	2.33	5.90	4.8412	.92807
Muslim presence	20	.01	.08	.0385	.02131
Integration index (MIPEX)	20	37	79	57.5904	11.26058
Non-religious (ind.)	27,222	1.00	7.00	4.8406	2.02508
Protestant denomination (ind.)	27,166	.00	1.00	.2468	.43114
Orthodox beliefs	26,719	.00	2.00	1.0158	.72707
Age	27,307	16	108	48.820	17.937
Sex respondent	27,391	1	2	1.550	.4980
Education level (recoded)	27,063	0	6	3.000	1.455
Income <1500 (dummy)	27,403	0	1	.25	
Income 1500-2500 (dummy)	27,403	0	1	.28	
Income 2500-5000 (dummy)	27,403	0	1	.15	
Income >5000 (dummy)	27,403	0	1	.08	
Income non-report (dummy)	27,403	0	1	.23	
Valid N (list wise)	25,222				

5. Results

We used ordinary least squares linear multilevel analysis with maximum likelihood estimation to test our hypotheses. We did so for two reasons. First and foremost, multilevel analysis makes it possible to simultaneously estimate effects of individual-level variables and country-level variables. Our data are structured in such a way that there are two levels: 25,222 *individuals* with certain characteristics (e.g. affiliation, attitudes, etc.) are nested in 20 *countries* with certain characteristics (aggregated level of secularity, percentage of Muslims). In such cases, multilevel analysis is the most suitable option. Secondly, as we aim to investigate whether and how non-religious individuals respond to differences in country-level secularity, multilevel analysis is particularly suitable as it allows for testing these expected cross-level interactions. We estimated different models with different

effects. Models A1 and B1 show the effects of variables at the individual and the country level. Models A2, A3, B2 and B3 also contain so-called random effects. These effects, noted as variances, are estimations of the variability of the effect of non-religiosity. That non-religiosity affects the dependent variable differently across contexts is a necessary condition for testing our cross-level interactions, which is done in models A3 and B3. These models include the interaction effect between non-religiosity and secular contexts. These models are therefore most relevant, as they allow us to see whether the non-religious people are indeed more anti-religious (model A3) or anti-Muslim (model B3), when they live in contexts that have secularized more. Table 6 shows the results of our analysis, with models A featuring anti-religiosity as dependent variable and models B, featuring anti-Muslim sentiment as dependent variable.

The analyses presented in table 6⁹ allow us to compare explanations for anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment by the non-religious in contexts with a varying degree of secularity. Our first hypothesis predicted strongest anti-religiosity among non-religious in the most secular contexts (hypothesis 1). From table 6, we understand that there is a strong link between non-religiosity and anti-religiosity, as one would expect to find. However, there is no significant relation between the level of secularity in a country and people's anti-religiosity. Model A3 also shows that there is no interaction effect of non-religiosity and country-level secularity. This indicates that non-religious people's anti-religiosity does not increase when they live in contexts where religion has declined

⁹ From this table, we have left out the control variables age, gender, education and income. Including these would make the table too complex to read. In the appendix, which can be found on the dedicated web page for the special issue, the full model is shown. This appendix shows that our control variables do influence people's anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment. Males show to be particularly intolerant both in general and towards Muslims, compared to females. Higher education makes on much more tolerant towards Muslims. These outcomes are in line with the literature on these matters (see Hello *et al.* 2002; Houtman 2003; Savelkoul *et al.* 2011). The model shows that people with Orthodox beliefs are very tolerant towards religion in general, but not so tolerant towards Muslims. The same is true for Protestant Church members. On the country level, we observe that the presence of Muslims incites anti-Muslim sentiment to a certain extent, which is logical as we would not expect people to oppose Muslims when there are no Muslims in people's vicinity. The same is true for the index on country's integration policies, which mitigates anti-Muslim sentiment, but not significantly so. What is important, is that these control variables do not explain away the outcomes of non-religiosity and secular country and their interaction.

TAB. 6. *Explaining anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment (OLS multilevel analysis, Maximum Likelihood, N=25,222 in 20 countries)*

Dependent variable:	Anti-Religiosity			Anti-Muslim Sentiment		
	Model A1	Model A2	Model A3	Model B1	Model B2	Model B3
Model:						
Constant	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)
Country-level Secularity	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.20* (0.07)	-0.19* (0.07)	-0.19* (0.07)
Muslim presence	0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.08 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)
Integration index (MIPEX)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.06)
Protestant denomination	-0.10*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Non-religious	0.36*** (0.01)	0.36*** (0.02)	0.36*** (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.06** (0.02)
Orthodox beliefs	-0.42*** (0.01)	-0.41*** (0.01)	-0.41*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Country-level Secularity X Non-religious	--	--	-0.00 (0.02)	--	--	0.04* (0.02)
-2loglikelihood	54182.23	53970.53	53976.64	66051.23	65972.73	65974.56
Variance individual level	0.46	0.45	0.45	0.79	0.79	0.79
Variance country level	0.028	0.026	0.026	0.067	0.066	0.065
Variance non-religious	--	0.0060	0.0064	--	0.006	0.005

~p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (two-tailed test for significance).

more. Post-secular theory predicted the emergence of anti-clerical European atheism in contexts of religious decline. As far as this finding goes, there is no sign of this anti-religious attitude or a «post-secular consciousness» of hardening secular intolerance towards religious groups. Figure 1 is a visual representation of this finding concerning anti-religiosity.

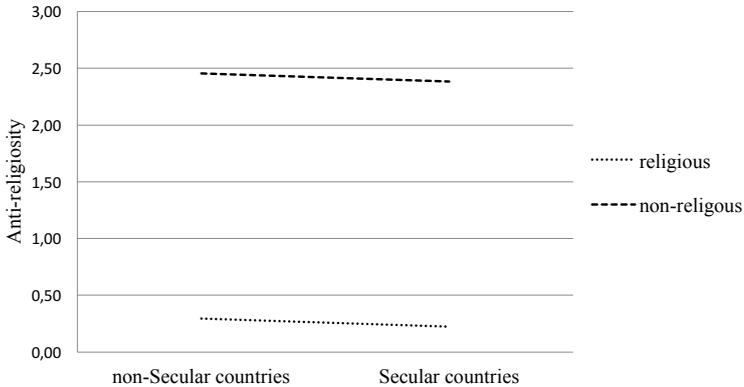


FIG. 1. Predicted anti-religiosity for religious and non-religious in countries with low and high levels of secularity (EVS 2008).

This disproves the prediction of post-secular theory that the non-religious in secular contexts would stand out in their negative attitude towards religion.

This picture changes when we look at anti-Muslim sentiment. Post-secular theory's second prediction deals with anti-Muslim sentiment among non-religious people. It said that that the non-religious would be the ones opposed to Muslims most strongly in the most secular contexts. Looking at the contextual level first, we find that in secular contexts, the average level of anti-Muslim sentiment is lower, indicating that only there where many *religious* people live, there is a stronger anti-Muslim sentiment. By contrast, the individual non-religious' anti-Muslim sentiment is existent, although it is not as strong as their anti-religiosity (see models B in table 6). However, most relevant for our hypothesis, the interaction effect in model B3 does show how the non-religious' anti-Muslim sentiment becomes stronger when they

live in secular contexts. This is salient since on average, these contexts are more tolerant towards Muslims. Figure 2 is a visual representation of this finding concerning anti-Muslim sentiment.

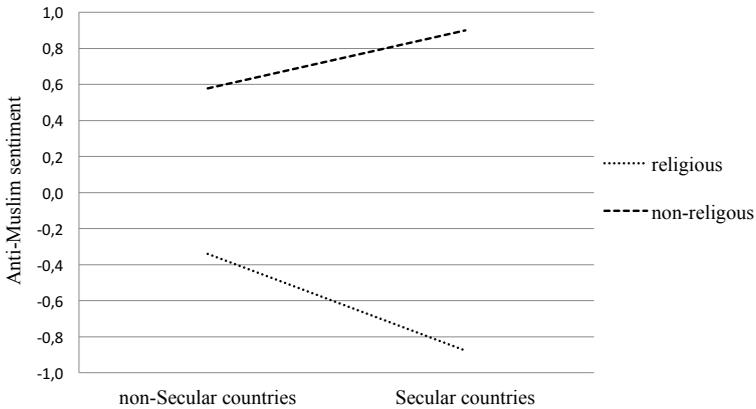


FIG. 2. Predicted anti-Muslim sentiment for religious and non-religious in countries with low and high levels of secularity (EVS 2008).

This image illustrates, that the non-religious do contest Muslims more in contexts where religion declined, as post-secular theory maintains. However, the remarkable difference between non-religious anti-religiosity (figure 1) and non-religious anti-Muslims sentiment (figure 2) in secular contexts indicates that these attitudes are very different from each other. In fact, it remains unclear why the non-religious are so opposed to Muslims, when their environment is so secular and this attitude is not related to a general opposition to religion. This is one of the issues that we will discuss in our final discussion section.

6. Discussion

The central question of this paper was whether examples of religious resurgence and contestation indicate that Europe has become «post-secular». These examples would indicate that religion still is present at – or is returning to – the public domain

and to the individual consciousness of secular Europeans. This contestation would oppose the privatization theory, which predicts religious indifference for the non-religious in secular contexts. Now, religion might have become more visible through increased media coverage, among others through online/social media. Yet, as far as our analysis shows, religion in general does not arouse intense contestation. What we found is that the non-religious do not contest religion more in the most secular contexts. If anything, the non-religious «deprivatize» in *religious* contexts (also see Wilkins-Laflamme 2014; Ribberink *et al.* 2013; forthcoming). Only in contexts where religion has a public role and significance, it would be apparent that non-religious minorities oppose to this role of religion. In secular contexts, this is not the case. In fact, what our findings point to, is that the religious minorities are the ones who are very fervent and tolerant in secular contexts.

As several observers noted that the increased visibility of Islam in Europe and the increased public consciousness among Europeans of Muslims seems to be at issue, we investigated whether negative attitudes towards religion in general among the non-religious are similar to negative attitudes towards Muslims. Indeed, post-secular theory's hypothesis that in secular contexts, the non-religious will have higher levels of anti-Muslim sentiment finds support in our models. This confirms Dillon's contention (2010) that «across Europe, where one might expect that a deeply rooted secular culture might welcome the freedom of expression of different standpoints, this is not so». Apparently, in secular contexts the place of Islam is a contested one. Nonetheless, we cannot endorse the post-secular idea of a general secular opposition to religion in these societies. The differences between anti-religious attitudes and anti-Muslim sentiment are very large. In fact, we think the opposition to Islam is mistaken for a general religious contention. Our analysis fits with the idea of religious indifference among the non-religious when it comes to general religiosity. We think this is good reason to let go of the confusing discourse on post-secularity as the next phase in secularization all together. Although Muslims do not seem to fit in well, religion in general is very much privatized still, and even when religion «deprivatizes», this does not change the general privatization notion that much more than in the past, religion has to follow secular rules of engagement (Glendinning, Bruce 2011). Addressing religious attitudes among the non-religious, we

have shown that privatization theory fits very well with what we can observe in Western Europe today. Studying the non-religious by using an aspect of the «old-fashioned» secularization theory thus opens debates and lines of inquiry that sometimes seem to have evolved into a trench warfare (cf. Stark 1999; 2015; Bruce 2002; 2011). Nonetheless, the rejection of Islam by the non-religious still asks for further explanation, as a general religious contestation is not at issue.

Some have suggested that a value-conflict (secular reactions to Muslims' traditional morality) could explain this attitude. «[W]hile conservative religious people are expected to tolerate behaviour they may consider morally abhorrent, such as homosexuality, liberal secular Europeans are openly stating that European societies ought not to tolerate religious behaviour or cultural customs that are morally abhorrent in so far as they are contrary to modern liberal secular European norms» (Casanova 2004, 10). However, we have tested this hypothesis and found out that in fact, people with progressive secular-liberal values are more tolerant towards Muslims compared to people with traditional values, also when the latter are non-religious (Ribberink *et al.* 2017). This suggests that perhaps an explanation can be found beyond religious attitudes as such and perhaps in the direction of racism or ethnocentrism. It would be interesting to see whether those who have fewer opportunities, for example because of a lower level of education, would have higher levels of anti-Muslim sentiment, when they see the opportunities Muslims are granted or even only when there are more Muslims present in their respective countries (cf. Cinalli, Giugni 2011). Even though that clearly calls for further in-depth research, our analysis indeed suggests that anti-Muslim sentiment has more in common with ethnic prejudice and xenophobia than with anti-religiosity in general (cf. de Koster *et al.* 2014). In fact, our finding¹⁰ that the lower educated have strongest anti-Muslim sentiments provides support for the thesis that a post-Christian cultural conflict might be looming, central to which is a cultural polarization between the lower and higher educated about the question how to deal with ethnic diversity (Houtman *et al.* 2011).

On a more methodological level, there are issues that deserve more and better study as well. We differentiated anti-Muslim

¹⁰ See appendix, models B.

sentiment from anti-religiosity. There is room for improvement in this area, as we were limited by the data available in the EVS survey, which in turn was the most complete European cross-country survey available. Therefore, we could not assess more precise attitudes, which would possibly provide better insight in this dynamic. We would have preferred to better distinguish general anti-religiosity from negative attitudes towards specific religious expressions. For example, do Western European people have more affinity and less problems with a Catholic or Protestant leader who tries to influence governmental decisions, than with the Dalai Lama or a Muslim Imam doing the same? Are they more tolerant towards immigrants, when those immigrants are Christian, than when they are Muslims (or vice versa)? Do people differentiate between their national religion (as in religious cultural heritage) and other religions? As many Europeans embrace the different types of spirituality associated with the Easternization of the West, is it «religion» in general what they oppose, or do they oppose the traditional Christian religion that has been a dominant authority for centuries in Europe (Campbell 2007; Chaves 1994)? In a way, all scientific research entails simplification and quantitative research most certainly does. However, in order to be able to study something as complex as religious attitudes, broad generalizations cannot pass muster. If we want to improve our assessment of distinctions in anti-religiosity quantitatively, we really need more survey data that cover attitudes towards diverse religions and religious practices. This would enable us to differentiate between different kinds of anti-religiosity, which in turn would help much in understanding the place religion currently has in secular society.

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A post-secular turn in attitudes towards religion? Anti-religiosity and anti-Muslim sentiment in Western Europe

Post-secular theory nowadays critiques the secularization notion that religion has increasingly become a private issue. It does so by pointing out how religion has once again become paramount to public and political debate, central to which are assertively voiced critiques of Muslims and Islam. Therefore, in this paper, we analyse cross-national survey data from Western Europe to study the attitudes of the non-religious vis-à-vis religion in general and vis-à-vis Islam in particular. Consistent with privatization theory and inconsistent with the post-secular theory, we find that the non-religious do not contest religion more in the most secular countries. As to anti-Muslim sentiment in Western Europe, however, a markedly different pattern emerges. The non-religious are more intolerant towards Muslims in the most secular countries. Rejections of Islam and of religion generally hence appear driven by different logics. Even though that clearly calls for further in-depth research, indeed anti-Muslim sentiment appears to have more in common with ethnic prejudice and xenophobia than with anti-religiosity in general.

Keywords: anti-Muslim sentiment, anti-religiosity, post-secularity, secularization, Western Europe.

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