Intersectional assessments of female Muslim politicians and the limits of interacting experimental conditions

Sanne van Oosten
Postdoctoral Researcher
University of Oxford
sanne.vanoosten@compas.ox.ac.uk

Abstract
Many party selectors and voters alike want politics to be more diverse, but fear the electoral consequences of including more Muslims, women and ethnoracially minoritized politicians. The literature mainly approaches this from a unitary perspective, focusing on either female or black politicians. Do (intersections of) politician religion, gender, and ethnorace influence how voters assess them? I ran survey experiments amongst 3056 respondents in France, Germany, and The Netherlands and presented 18,336 randomly constructed profiles of hypothetical politicians varying their religion, gender, and ethnorace. Voters have a strong negative bias against Muslim politicians. When being a Muslim woman is significantly different from both non-religious women and Muslim men, I consider this to be an intersectional effect. However, I find no such outcomes. Voters do not assess female Muslim politicians significantly differently than their male counterparts. These conclusions have implications for researchers studying intersectionality quantitatively and researchers concerned with the electoral consequences of diversity in politics.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Muslims, Islamophobia, Muslim women, Descriptive representation

Introduction
As concerns about Joe Biden's age grew during his second campaign against Donald Trump in 2024, there was great doubt whether Kamala Harris would be a wise choice as successor[1]. Although her initial nomination as vice president was viewed as a strategic move to attract votes due to her race and gender[2], these same factors were later perceived by some as electoral liabilities when she was being considered for the top of the ticket[3]. An intersectional lens helps explain how Harris's race and gender—like those of other racially minoritized women in politics—jointly influence her trajectory and public perception, rather than focusing on just one aspect of her identity (Ward, 2016, 2017).

[1] https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/07/21/replace-biden/
[2] https://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/14/poll-biden-black-vp-185043
[3] https://www.thecut.com/article/black-women-president-kamala-harris-trump-survey-august-2024.html

An intersectional analysis is distinct from a *unitary* or *multiple* one (Hancock, 2007). Where a *unitary* analysis foregrounds one background characteristic (race *or* gender) and a *multiple* analysis adds up the effects of multiple ones (race *and* gender), an *intersectional* analysis highlights the interaction between them (race *interacts with* gender) (idem). In order to quantitatively study the intersectional position of minoritized women in politics, many scholars call the use of interaction effects and candidate experiments viable methodological solutions (e.g., Klar & Schmitt, 2021, p. 493, 495). This paper tests the limits of both methods by studying what is arguably a most-likely case: female Muslim politicians.

Though there has been much research on intersectionality and politicians in the US (Brown, 2014a, 2014b; Collins, 1998; Holman & Schneider, 2018; Lemi & Brown, 2019; Reingold et al., 2020), the European context is poorly understood. In Europe, Muslim women play a crucial role in many nationalist debates in western countries such as France, Germany and The Netherlands (e.g., Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2021). The general framing tends to imply that Muslim women are significantly different from *both* non-Muslim women *and* Muslim men because being Muslim influences what it means to be a woman and being a woman influences what it means to be Muslim. As Islam and gender are thus "mutually reinforcing", an intersectional lens is indispensable (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). This is particularly apparent when female Muslim politicians attempt to enter politics (Dancygier, 2014; Hughes, 2016; Murray, 2016).

Across Europe, Muslims are underrepresented in politics (Aktürk & Katliarou, 2021). Party elites tend to cause underrepresentation of minoritized politicians (Dancygier et al., 2021), possibly out of fear of electoral backlash leading to strategic discrimination (Bateson, 2020). But is this fear of voter backlash real? In order to study this, I presented 3056 respondents in France, Germany, and The Netherlands a total of 18,336 short bios of hypothetical politicians while randomizing their religion, ethnorace and gender. I asked respondents to assess these politicians by asking evaluation and choice-questions. Candidate conjoint experiments rarely include Islam as an experimental condition and when they do, intersectional analyses are rarely conducted (one notable exception being Benstead et al., 2015).

In line with Hancock (2007), I analyze the results in a *unitary, multiple* and *intersectional* way. In the intersectional analysis I use interactions while controlling for direct (unitary) effects. Although I do not find voters assess women and ethnoracially minoritized politicians negatively, I find robust and consistent evidence that voters have a strong negative and unitary bias against Muslim politicians. However, this analysis not garner any evidence for intersectional effects of religion and gender. Given the sizable sample and effect sizes, I do not consider a lack of statistical power the cause of these null results.

In intersectional analyses using interaction effects, I expect null results are not as uncommon as the lack of publications highlighting such results might suggest. Publication bias could be causing many papers pointing towards such outcomes to end up in a file drawer (Quintana, 2015, pp. 6–7). In this paper, I outline possible reasons why null effects might be a consequence of design and analytical choices. 1) The experimental design: evaluating short experimental profiles might flatten the contextual factors within which intersectional dynamics exist. 2) The type of analysis: interaction effects are not the only useful tools to study intersectionality quantitatively. As a quantitative analysis remains strategically important (McCall, 2005), we should broaden our methods of design and analysis beyond interacting experimental conditions.

Theoretical framework

Do (intersections of) politician religion, gender, and ethnorace influence how voters assess them? Taking an intersectional perspective directs our understanding from being unitary ("race *or* gender") via multiple ("race *and* gender") to intersectional ("race interacts with gender") (Hancock, 2007, p. 67). This means that in an intersectional approach, the effects of race and gender are not merely added together but are 'more than the sum of mutually exclusive parts' (2007, p. 65).

In this theoretical framework, I discuss how racism, sexism, and Islamophobia are widespread and how ethnoracial minorities, women and Muslims are underrepresented in politics. We know political elites can thwart the ambition of minoritized candidates (Dancygier et al., 2021) as they might have reasons to expect that members of these groups might not do well at the ballot box. Yet, experiments in which candidate attributes are randomly presented to respondents reveal that voters are generally slightly more positive about ethnoracially minoritized, women, and Muslim politicians than about their majoritized counterparts (Aguilar et al., 2015; Bai, 2021; Brouard et al., 2018; Campbell & Cowley, 2014; Carnes & Lupu, 2016; Hainmueller et al., 2014; Schwarz & Coppock, 2021; Visalvanich, 2017; Weaver, 2012). That is why I pre-registered[4] hypotheses stating that I expect respondents to not be biased towards politicians with these background characteristics. But what if these background characteristics are combined? I discuss the literature on intersectionality and possible quantitative operationalizations of the concept, whilst structuring the theoretical framework with Hancock's (2007) three distinctions of a *unitary, multiple* and *intersectional* analysis.

Unitary analysis of ethnorace, gender, and religion

I turn to the largely separate literatures on the underrepresentation of 1) ethnoracial minorities, 2) women, and 3) Muslims. First, ethnoracial minoritized citizens. We know racism is widespread, also across Europe (Benson & Lewis, 2019; FRA: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017; Lentin, 2008). It reaches across many domains of life: social media (Patton et al., 2017), education (Harwood et al., 2018), night life (May & Goldsmith, 2017), sports (van Sterkenburg & Blokzeijl, 2017). Moreover, we know racist attitudes shape voting behavior (Weller & Junn, 2018). Ethnoracially minoritized politicians are underrepresented in most parliaments (Fernandes et al., 2016, pp. 2, 4; Hughes, 2013). We know from the US that party leaders are more hesitant to select and support Black and Latinx candidates (Doherty et al., 2019) and the same applies to candidates of immigrant descent in Europe (Dancygier et al., 2021). Is this fear of electoral repercussions real? Do voters discriminate against ethnoracially minoritized politicians? Much experimental research has been done on this in in the US (Lerman & Sadin, 2016) and some in Brazil (Aguilar et al., 2015), Uganda (Carlson, 2015), Afghanistan (Bermeo & Bhatia, 2017), and Europe (Brouard et al., 2018). Although old-fashioned racism has been shown to influence attitudes and subsequent voting behavior in some groups of individuals (Tesler, 2012, 2013, 2015), experimental research averaging out all respondents together rarely shows a statistically significant negative direct effect of bias on voter assessments of ethnoracially minoritized politicians (e.g., Aguilar et al., 2015; Brouard et al., 2018; Carnes & Lupu, 2016; Hainmueller et al., 2014; Visalvanich, 2017; Weaver, 2012) though some researchers sporadically find negative effects (Krupnikov et al., 2016; Peterson, 2017; Sances, 2018).

Second, we also know sexism is widespread (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Hall et al., 2019), spanning many domains of social life: the workplace, academia and STEM (Bocher et al., 2020; Phipps et al., 2018), health care (Verdonk et al., 2009), and media coverage of female politicians (Aaldering & van der Pas, 2020); and women in politics have to deal with more harassment and violence than men do

[4] The pre-registration can be viewed here: osf.io/jtdqw

(IPU, 2018; Krook, 2018, 2019). Women are descriptively underrepresented in national parliaments across the world (EIGE, 2019; Hughes, 2013, p. 501), so much so that young girls think that politics is more for men (Bos et al., 2021). Party elites are hesitant to support female candidates due to the fear that *others* will not support the candidate, leading to so-called strategic discrimination: party selectors may not be inhibited by sexist ideas themselves, but they are hesitant to select women to top positions due to a fear that voters will punish them for it (Bateson, 2020). Is this fear of electoral repercussions real? Do voters discriminate against female politicians? Experimental research rarely shows a statistically significant negative direct effect of bias on voter assessments of female politicians, in fact, the female candidate does better than the male one on average (Schwarz & Coppock, 2021).

Third, we know Islamophobia is widespread across western countries (Cesari, 2013; Lajevardi & Oskooii, 2018): from the United States (Lajevardi, 2020) to Europe (Abdelkader, 2017; Finlay & Hopkins, 2020; Simon & Tiberj, 2018) and Australia (Mansouri & Vergani, 2018). It reaches across many domains of life: social media (Awan, 2014), finding a job (Di Stasio et al., 2019; Weichselbaumer, 2020), even mere interactions with people on the street (Choi et al., 2021), and much more (Helbling & Traunmüller, 2018; Meer & Modood, 2012). Muslims are underrepresented in national legislatures (Hughes, 2016), especially in France and Germany (Aktürk & Katliarou, 2021, p. 393). Political parties struggle with dilemmas of including Muslims: one the one hand they want to convey to voters that they are dedicated to diversity, on the other hand they fear a possible backlash from voters who scrutinize Muslim political leaders on liberal values and individual freedoms (Dancygier, 2017). Is this fear of electoral repercussions real? Do voters discriminate against Muslim politicians? Little experimental research has been done on this, yet US and UK research points towards no statistically significant direct effects of politicians being Muslim on assessments by voters (Bai, 2021; Campbell & Cowley, 2014). This has never been researched in mainland Europe though, where outcomes might be different than the US and UK. Research in Denmark shows that voters do penalize candidates with an Arabic (versus Danish) last name (Dahl & Nyrup, 2021, p. 209); this might extend to Muslim politicians outside of Denmark.

In summary, existing research from a unitary perspective suggests an absence of singular effects of ethnorace, gender, and religion by themselves. I thus expect to find null effects for my unitary analysis.

Therefore, I pre-registered[5] the following hypotheses at OSF:

- H1.a. Voters prefer ethnoracially minoritized politicians equally to ethnoracially majoritized politicians.
- H1.b. Voters prefer Muslim politicians equally to Christian and non-religious politicians.
- H1.c. Voters prefer female politicians equally to or more than male politicians.

Multiple analysis of Islam and gender

Do voters tend to discriminate against politicians with *multiple* underrepresented or minoritized background characteristics? In political science, gender and ethnorace are commonly studied together (Brown, 2014a, 2014b; Celis et al., 2014; Collins, 1998; Holman & Schneider, 2018; Hughes, 2013; Lemi & Brown, 2019; Reingold et al., 2020), which extends to experimental studies (Campbell & Cowley, 2014; Krupnikov et al., 2016). Because Islam is so rarely included in experiments or studies

[5] The pre-registration can be viewed here: osf.io/jtdqw

on descriptive representation and politics (except Dancygier, 2017; Hughes, 2016), we know very little about the dynamics of descriptive representation of Muslim women in the west (except in Tunisia, Benstead et al., 2015; in Jordan, Kao & Benstead, 2021). Beyond (experimental) political science on descriptive representation, however, Muslim women have received much (scholarly) attention (e.g., Ahmed, 2020; van Es, 2019; Zimmerman, 2015).

We know many accounts in which Muslim women are discriminated against: for instance, we know that Muslim women are less likely to be invited to job interviews than white women and men (Weichselbaumer, 2020). The discrimination against Muslim women even applies in seemingly mundane situations. When a Muslim woman drops a bag of oranges on the street, research (Choi et al., 2021) shows that they receive significantly less help from passersby. This is particularly the case amongst Muslim women who had conveyed to these passersby that they have more conservative views on gender equality issues, a penalty that does not apply to non-Muslim women (idem).

Muslim women are the objects of fierce femonationalist debates. The literature on femonationalism contends that critics of Islam weaponize gender equality as a cause in order to discredit Muslims (Farris, 2017; Rahbari, 2021; van Oosten, 2022ab; 2023a; 2024cdef), thus causing Muslim women to occupy a particularly contentious place in societal debates (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2021). Liberal values such as gender equality pose dilemmas of inclusion for party selectors who want to diversify their ranks but fear including Muslims will make their party vulnerable to criticisms concerning, particularly, gender equality (Dancygier, 2013; Dancygier, 2017). However, in proportional systems with relatively long party lists, party leaders will be more keen on selecting Muslim women than Muslim men through their embodiment of Islam and female empowerment simultaneously (Dancygier, 2017), often conditional on the denouncement of conservative values that are seen as inherently Muslim (Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016; Bird, 2005, p. 439; Kundnani, 2012; Murray, 2016). However, to what extent are these studies on Muslim women intersectional? In the following section I will discuss Hancock's (2007) distinction between a *multiple* and an *intersectional* analysis.

Intersectional analysis

Intersectionality as a research paradigm (Hancock, 2007) criticizes the analysis of *unitary* categories as "discrete and pure strands" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). Simply adding up the effects of *multiple* categories also is not sufficient as the categories are considered to be "mutually reinforcing" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283). Indeed, researchers cannot categorize individuals into singular neat straightforward boxes, but all individuals are located on the intersection of numerous categories that arguably influence each other back and forth. This applies to both subordinate (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and dominant (Carbado, 2013) background characteristics (Hancock, 2013, p. 506).

Hancock (2013; 2007) is the clearest critic of additive conceptualizations of intersectionality. Indeed, an intersectional approach is more than just adding up the effects of being Muslim and being female. Understanding intersectionality as *more than a sum of its parts* is key to its conceptualization and operationalization. Without understanding intersectionality in this way one would not be able to make sense of some otherwise puzzling phenomena. Indeed, research on politicians' multiple identity categories reveal mutually reinforcing mechanisms that occasion either "strategic advantage" or "double disadvantage" (Gershon & Lavariega Monforti, 2021). Double disadvantage posits that the disadvantages politicians face are *more than a sum of* their subordinate group memberships. Strategic advantage means that multiple disadvantaged background characteristics could amount to *less disadvantage than a sum of its parts,* in other words, belonging

to more than one disadvantaged group actually cancels out part of the negative effect of the disadvantaged categories. Indeed, Muslim women tend to outnumber Muslim men in politics, especially in proportional systems (Hughes, 2016) in which Muslims are a relatively large part of the electorate such as Germany and The Netherlands (Dancygier, 2017). This means that having multiple disadvantaged background characteristics simultaneously could end up being an advantage compared to those who are only singularly disadvantaged (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) such as Muslim men or non-Muslim white women.

In quantitative experimental research, one often mentioned yet "underutilized" (Klar & Schmitt, 2021, p. 495) operationalization of intersectionality is to use interaction effects (Bowleg, 2008, p. 319; Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 146; Cole, 2009, p. 177; Hancock, 2007, p. 70; McCall, 2005, p. 1788) to measure whether the combination of two factors is more than a sum of its parts.[6] Since the introduction of conjoint experiments (Hainmueller et al., 2014, 2015), it is increasingly common for researchers to randomize multiple attributes at the same time, such as ethnorace *and* gender (Atkeson & Hamel, 2020; Lemi & Brown, 2019). Although some researchers find that combining certain categories leads to more than a sum of its parts (Golebiowska, 2001; Philpot & Walton, 2007; Weaver, 2012), some researchers test for interaction effects but find no statistically significant results (Doherty et al., 2019, p. 1288; Kao & Benstead, 2021, pp. 16–17; Ono & Burden, 2019, p. 604).

The studies that report not finding any statistically significant results when using interaction effects in conjoint experiments, might only be the tip of the iceberg. There are three main reasons why null results might be the most common outcome, even though this remains relatively invisible in the literature. First, studying social phenomena with interaction effects requires high levels of statistical power. With limited sample sizes, interaction effects could more easily give false negatives. Second, in academia, publishing relatively large effect sizes over null effects is favored by journals, making publication bias a problem (Quintana, 2015, pp. 6–7).[7] Third, the difficulty of including contextual factors might be the most important reason why null results tend to persist when quantitative researchers study intersectionality.

The way in which intersectional effects play out varies from one context to the next and this contextual understanding of intersectionality is key (Anthias, 2008; McCall, 2005, p. 1791). I study intersectionality within the context of French, German and Dutch politics. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss some elements of these contexts which increase the likelihood that voters assessing politicians will highlight Islam specifically instead of understanding ethnorace, gender *and* religion intersectionally. Petsko et al. (2022) discuss how underlining certain contexts causes respondents in experimental studies to favor certain unitary "lenses" when assessing intersectional objects in experimental studies. If the researcher lays out a context in which race is deemed important and underplays the importance of gender, respondents will evaluate, say, black women on the basis of their race. Conversely, respondents evaluate black women on the basis of their gender if the researcher lays out a context in which gender is more important than race. This effect

[6] McCall (2005) links intersectionality to an intracategorical approach that is situated at the middle of the continuum between anticategorical and intercategorical approaches (2005: 1773). On the one hand, intersectionality rejects categories by revealing the intracategorical complexities within them and on the other hand intersectionality embraces categories as strategic (McCall, 2005: 1773).

[7] Publication bias hinders scholarly advancement because researchers do not know the full scope of research findings when formulating their own research questions. In order to counter this, I am motivated to publish whatever results I find, even if I do not find a statistical effect of intersectionality.

is particularly salient in situations where "Lens accessibility", "Lens fit," "Perceiver goals," and "Distinctiveness" are high (Petsko et al., 2022, pp. 4–5). In the following paragraphs I will explain why all four lenses are present in the French, German, and Dutch contexts.

First, all three countries have witnessed members of parliament espousing Islamophobic rhetoric, for instance, Marine LePen in France, Thilo Sarrazin in Germany, and Geert Wilders in The Netherlands (van Oosten, 2023b; 2024a; Vermeulen, 2018, p. 3). In addition, citizens of all countries display Islamophobia and anti-Muslim ideas, most virulently in The Netherlands and less so in France followed by Germany (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1193; European Commission, 2016; Heath & Richards, 2019, p. 25; Ribberink et al., 2017, pp. 264, 266). Indeed, stereotypes of Muslims are very widespread and therefore easily accessible to voters ("Lens accessibility" as described by Petsko et al., 2022: 4).

Second, all three countries are familiar with specific forms of nationalisms termed, for instance, secularist nativism (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019) or civilizationism (Brubaker, 2017). Within these forms of nationalism, liberal values such as secularism, freedom of speech, gender equality and LGBT rights are wielded to discredit cultural others, particularly Muslims. Especially within secular contexts such as France (Kuru, 2008), these forms of nationalism explain the status quo *and* help the majoritized group feel better about themselves on account of their liberal values ("Lens fit" and "Perceiver goals" as described by Petsko et al., 2022: 4).

Third, explicitly practicing Muslim politicians are very uncommon in national parliaments (Aktürk & Katliarou, 2021, pp. 392, 393). More often, politicians of Muslim origin make a point of showing their commitment to the country they are representatives in (Dancygier, 2017, p. 179) or be explicitly outspoken against Islam (what Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2021 call "codebreakers"). This makes Muslim politicians "rare and thus attention-grabbing" ("Distinctiveness" as described by Petsko et al., 2022: 5). The presence of these contextual factors increases the likelihood that respondents will assess politicians in a *unitary* instead of *intersectional* manner even when Muslim women are so central to nationalist debates in France, Germany, and The Netherlands.

Methods

Although candidate experiments date back to the eighties (Sapiro, 1982), they now more commonly take the form of conjoint experiments (Hainmueller et al., 2014, 2015; van Oosten et al., 2024a) and in that form are currently booming in the field of political science (e.g., Kao & Benstead, 2021; Leeper et al., 2019; Martin & Blinder, 2020; Reeves & Smith, 2019). Just as in most other candidate experiments, I present the respondent with profiles of hypothetical politicians, whilst randomly varying the attributes religion, gender, and ethnorace. See Table 1 for the values of each attribute per country. After respondents have viewed the profiles, I ask them to evaluate each single politician and choose between pairs of two politicians. The possibility to study multiple group memberships at the same time with conjoint experiments enables an intersectional analysis, yet this possibility is still "underutilized" (Klar and Schmitt, 2021: 495).

In Europe, ethnoracially minoritized groups are most often referred to as having a "migration background" (Rosenberger & Stöckl, 2018; Verkuyten et al., 2016), possibly as a way to avoid references to ethnicity or race (Simon, 2017: 2328). We adopt the same operationalization because we expect our respondents to become confused if we present them profiles referring to a politician's ethnorace, as this is not a way people are generally accustomed to discussing ethnoracial difference in Europe. In each country, I chose the most common migration backgrounds with populations that are most likely to experience discrimination (FRA: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights,

2017). There are two exceptions: 1) politicians with a Turkish background in France, which I chose in order to have one common migration background in all three countries (Ersanilli and Saharso, 2011). 2) politicians with a background in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in Germany, which I chose in order to have a case in which ethnicity is seen as white, while they have a migration background nonetheless (Goerres et al., 2018; Spies et al., 2020). I matched a common name to their ethnic/racial group and signaled gender through first name and pronoun she/he. An example of a profile is: "*Sebnem Yılmaz has a Turkish background and she practices Islam*", followed by a randomized policy position on socio-economic and socio-cultural issues. I constructed the profiles in the third person to mimic a journalist describing them. Moreover, a politician explicitly stating migration background and religion in the first person could seem unconvincing to respondents.[8]

Table 1: attributes and levels of the experimental profiles

Attributes	Levels	France	Germany	Netherlands
Religion	Muslim	x	x	x
	Christian	x	x	x
	Non-religious	x	x	x
Gender	Female	x	x	x
	Male	x	x	x
Ethnorace	No migration background	x	x	x
	Turkey	x	x	x
	Maghreb	x		
	SSA	x		
	FSU		x	
	Morocco			x
	Surinam			x

Example of a profile: 'Sebnem Yilmaz has a Turkish background and she practices Islam' or 'Jan de Jong has a Dutch background and does not practice any religion' followed by a randomized policy position

I presented 18,336 randomly constructed profiles to 3056 citizens of France (N=1199), Germany (N=954), and The Netherlands (N=903), administered by survey agency Kantar Public between March and August of 2020 (van Oosten et al., 2024bcd).[9] Kantar Public has many policies in place to ensure high attentiveness in their panelists. Members of the Kantar panel only receive invitations to participate in their surveys once a month. In all three countries participants received 5 euros' worth of points for their participation, with which they can buy small items in a gift shop. This means that

[8] All combinations of ethnorace and religion were possible. Some combinations are less likely to be encountered in real life (such as a politician with an FSU background who practices Islam, a politician with a Turkish background who practices Christianity or a politician with a French background who practices Islam) but none of the combinations are impossible so I kept them in anyway.

[9] While planning these online survey experiments I did not know I would be collecting data during the outbreak of a pandemic. Fortunately, replications of online surveys and experiments show that data collected in spring 2020 does not significantly differ from data collected before the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdowns. If anything, outcomes are more conservative, making the chance of false negatives more likely than false positives due to some respondents being less attentive (Peyton et al., 2021).

although respondents are externally motivated to participate, the rewards are not high enough and the invitations are not frequent enough to create a following of online workers clicking through surveys in order to receive as many rewards as possible. Indeed, respondents gave lengthy answers in the comment box at the end of the survey, showing how involved respondents felt with the questions, revealing their internal motivation to give well-thought-through answers. Moreover, Kantar imposes policy to achieve what they call "panel-hygiene". Kantar pays explicit attention to how fast people answer surveys and when they answer the surveys too quickly or with too many repetitive answers they get expelled from the panel and do not receive any more invitations. Kantar reaches out to communities underrepresented in their panel, to increase their panel being a reflection of the citizenry of each country.

In the survey, I presented a single politician profile and asked respondents to answer the following three questions on a scale from 0 to 10: *Do you think this politician represents you? How much do you trust this politician? How capable do you think this politician is of performing well on the job?* I then presented another politician profile and asked the same three questions. Then I asked respondents to choose between one of the two profiles by asking *Which politician are you most likely to vote for?* In my analysis I distinguished two dependent variables, evaluation and choice. I constructed the evaluation variable by adding up the scores of the questions on representation, trust, and capability (Chronbach's Alpha: 0,89). I recoded both the evaluation and choice variables to range from 0 to 1.

I prepared the data using R-package "tidyr" (Wickham, 2020), ran analyses using "miceadds" (Robitzsch et al., 2021) and made visualizations with "ggplot2" (Wickham et al., 2020). First, for the *unitary* analysis, I ran linear regression models with politician religion, gender and ethnorace as separate independent variables. Second, for the *multiple* analysis, I ran linear regression models with recoded dummy variables indicating whether a respondent saw a profile of a politician who was either a female Muslim, male Muslim, female Christian, male Christian or female non-religious politician, compared to male non-religious politicians. Third, for the *intersectional* analysis, I ran linear regression models while interacting religion and gender and controlling for the main effect. In all models, I 1) controlled for respondent age, age squared, and sex, 2) used population weights based on respondent level of education, migration background, region, urbanization, and gender and 3) clustered at the level of the respondent. I accepted hypothesis tests with a p-value of smaller than 0.05. Before gathering the data, I pre-registered[10] the hypothesis and methods at Open Science Framework (OSF).

Results and discussion and implications for further research

Do (intersections of) politician religion, gender, and ethnorace influence how voters assess them? I structure this section in the same way as I structured the theoretical framework: according to Hancock's (2007) distinction between *unitary, multiple* and *intersectional* analyses. Figure 1 presents the results of the *unitary* analysis, Figure 2 of the *multiple* analysis and Figure 3 presents the results of the *intersectional* analysis. Although I find a consistently strong negative bias against Muslim politicians, Muslim women and Muslim men do not seem to be assessed differently from one another. I discuss the possible causes of these findings and implications for future research.

[10] The pre-registration can be viewed here: osf.io/jtdqw

Unitary analysis

First, I take a unitary approach to the research question. Here, I analyze religion, gender, and ethnorace unitarily, i.e. as separate categories. I ran linear models with each attribute value (Muslim, Christian, female, Turkish etc.) as an independent variable, excluding the reference categories (non-religious, male, without migration background). This is the most common method of analysis and presentation in studies using conjoint experiments (e.g., Dahl & Nyrup, 2021; Hainmueller et al., 2014, 2015).

Figure 1: Unitary analysis - singular treatment effects
Do religion, gender and ethnorace influence how citizens rate and choose politicians?

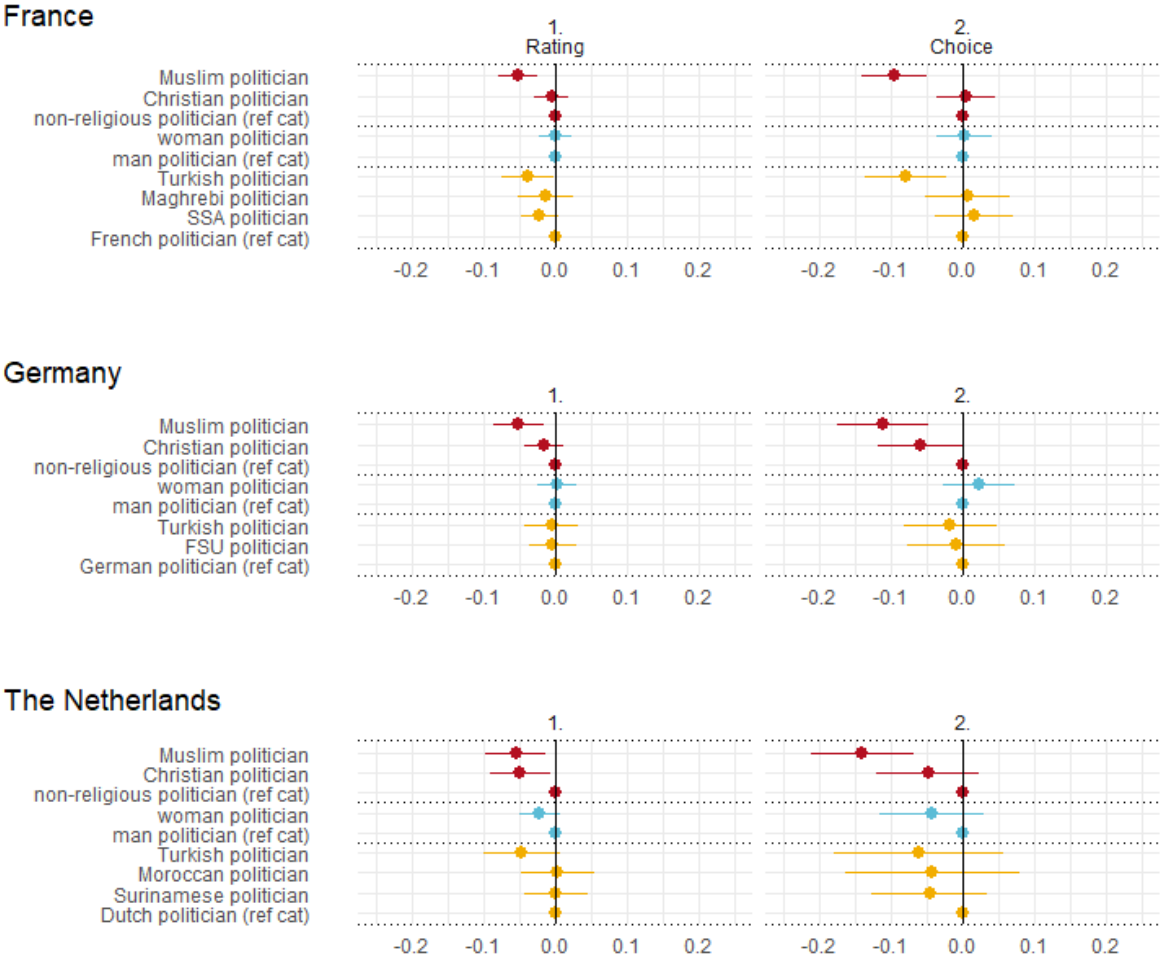

Figure 1.
Linear models, due to repeated measures (6x) I cluster at the level of the respondent. The rating dependent variable (column 1) is made up of three variables in which respondents answer on an 11-point scale: a) 'Do you think this politician represents you?' b) 'How much do you trust this politician?' c) 'How capable do you think this politician is to perform well on the job?'. The items scale with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92. For the choice dependent variable (column 2) I present respondents the two profiles they just rated and ask 'which politician are you most likely to vote for?' I control for age, age squared and sex. I apply weights for migration background, sex, education, region and urbanization. Errorbars indicate the 95% confidence interval.

The most important outcome of Figure 1 is very straightforward: voters have a strong negative bias against Muslim politicians compared to non-religious politicians. This outcome holds across all three countries and both dependent variables. For the rating-dependent variable, effect sizes range from

5.2 (France, Germany), to 5.6 percent (The Netherlands). Effect sizes are, as usual, larger in the choice-dependent variable[11] and range from 9.5 (France), to 11,0 percent (Germany) and 14.0 percent (The Netherlands). This effect is in contrast with previous research in the US and UK (Bai, 2021; Campbell & Cowley, 2014) yet similar to research in Denmark varying Arabic and Danish names (Dahl & Nyrup, 2021). In The Netherlands, the negative bias against Muslim politicians is most pronounced, which could be a consequence of there being more Islamophobia in The Netherlands than in France and Germany (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1193; European Commission, 2016; Heath & Richards, 2019, p. 25; Ribberink et al., 2017, pp. 264, 266). Alternatively, the stronger negative bias against Muslim politicians in the Netherlands could be explained by the presence of a political party which represents Muslims substantively, DENK (van Oosten et al., 2024e) and that Muslims in the Netherlands are most inclined to vote for the in-group (van Oosten., 2023c).

In comparing France, Germany, and The Netherlands some oddities stand out. First, Germany takes up an intermediate position in this analysis whereas research reveals less Islamophobia in Germany, compared to French and Dutch society (ibid). Second, on one of the two dependent variables in Germany and The Netherlands I also find a negative bias towards Christian politicians compared to non-religious politicians, whereas I do not find this in France. This is surprising given the French political history of secularism (Kuru, 2008) where one would be more inclined to expect that a politician who explicitly confesses practicing Christianity would be penalized by voters. In fact, in Figure 1 (France/choice), French voters are statistically significantly more negative against Muslim politicians than Christian politicians, whereas the confidence intervals overlap in Germany and The Netherlands. Indeed, in all other models the bias against Muslim politicians is strongly negative compared to non-religious politicians, but not statistically significantly more so than the bias against Christian politicians. Third, Figure 1 also shows that French voters have a negative bias towards Turkish politicians. This is surprising because the Turkish community is relatively small and very diverse in terms of migration histories in France, especially compared to Germany and The Netherlands (Ersanilli & Saharso, 2011). In The Netherlands, we also see voters have a negative bias against Turkish politicians, though barely missing the test of significance. Germany has the largest population of citizens with a Turkish background of the three countries and this is the only country where assessments of Turkish politicians are the closest to zero.

Figure 1 also shows that German voters are slightly more likely to *choose* a female politician than their male counterpart, though this does not pass the test of significance. This trend is not reflected in how German voters *evaluate* female politicians. In France, I find no negative bias against female and male politicians. In The Netherlands, however, I find a negative bias against female politicians both in the way they are evaluated and whether voters are likely to choose them.

Multiple additive analysis

I also take a *multiple* approach to the research question. For the purposes of parsimony, societal relevance and to fill gaps in the literature, I focus on religion and gender (particularly Muslim women) instead of any other combination of the three attributes I randomize in this study (ethnorace, religion, and gender). Here, I analyze religion and gender in an "additive" (Hancock, 2007, p. 70) or *multiple* sense. I ran linear regression models with recoded dummy variables indicating whether a respondent saw a profile of a politician who was either a female Muslim, male

[11] This is very common when comparing dependent variables measuring rating and choice, see Hainmueller et al. (2014).

Muslim, female Christian, male Christian or female non-religious politician, compared to male non-religious politicians (the reference category). The "quick addition" (Hancock, 2007, p. 64) I use thus consists of adding up the levels of the gender and religion attributes respondents saw, not adding up effect sizes.

Indeed, Figure 2 shows that in France and The Netherlands, voters are statistically significantly more negative about male *and* female Muslim politicians than non-religious men. The analysis in which I flip the reference categories so non-religious men are the independent variable and all others are the reference categories, shows that in France and The Netherlands, voters are statistically significantly more likely to choose male non-religious politicians than any other combinations of gender and religion. These differences between France and The Netherlands on the one hand and Germany on the other are in line with the literature on Islamophobia in all three countries (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1193; European Commission, 2016; Heath & Richards, 2019, p. 25; Ribberink et al., 2017, pp. 264, 266).

Figure 2: Multiple analysis - combined treatment effects
Do combinations of religion and gender influence how voters choose politicians?

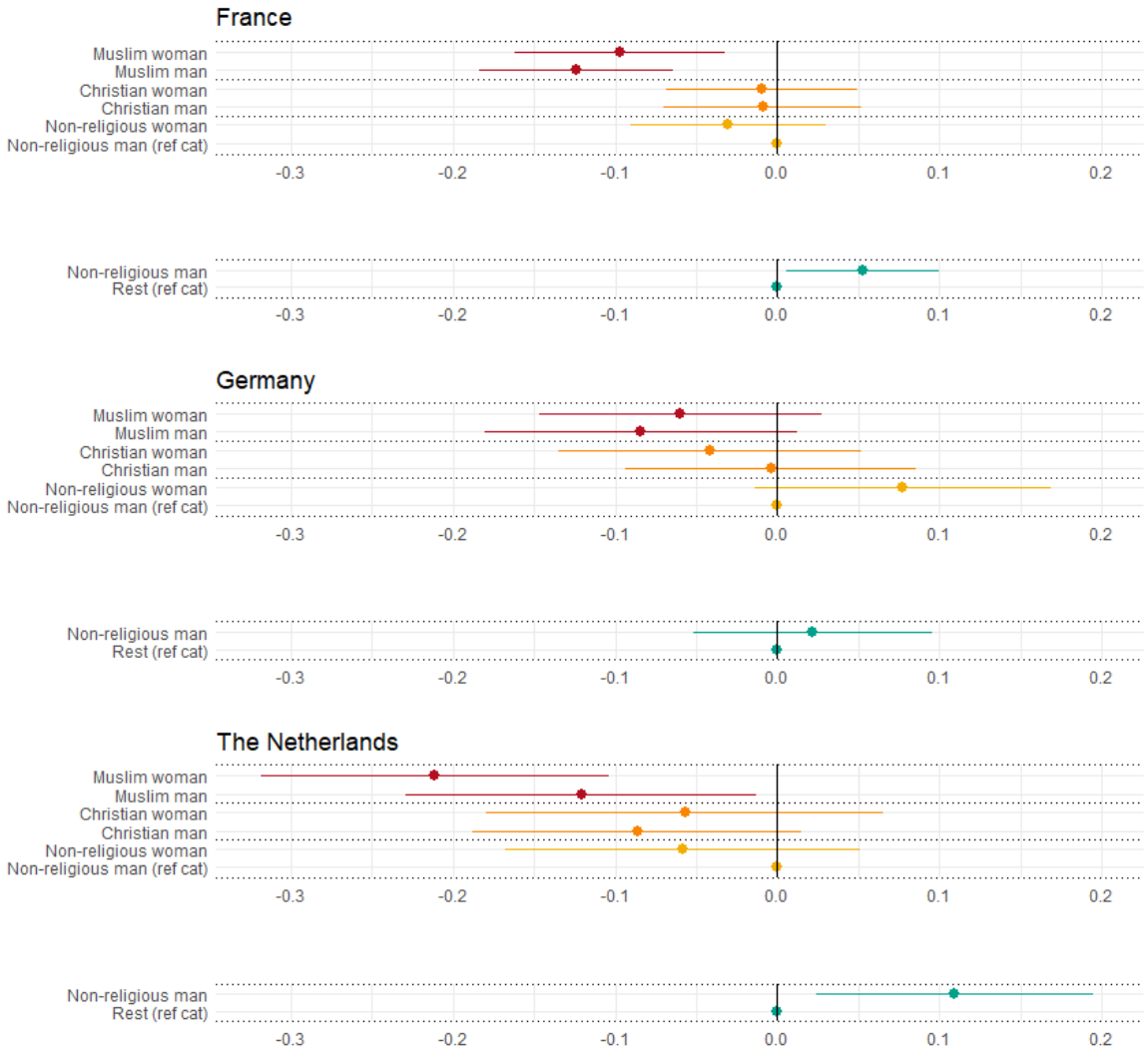

Figure 2.
Linear models, due to repeated measures (6x) I cluster at the level of the respondent. Independent variables: I recode dummy-variables in which I combine religion and gender (not ethnorace). I conduct multivariate regression analyses without interaction effects. Dependent variable: I present respondents the two profiles they just rated and ask 'which politician are you most likely to vote for?' I control for age, age squared and sex. I apply weights for migration background, sex, education, region and urbanization. Errorbars indicate the 95% confidence interval.

In France and Germany, male Muslim politicians receive slightly more negative assessments than female Muslim politicians. In the Netherlands, the opposite is true. This points towards "double disadvantage" in The Netherlands and "strategic advantage" in France and Germany (Gershon & Lavariega Monforti, 2021). Although we know that party selectors are more prone to choose Muslim women over Muslim men in proportional systems (Dancygier, 2017; Hughes, 2016), pointing towards "strategic advantage", this suggests voters in France and Germany do the same, to a slight extent. In The Netherlands it seems that Muslim women face "double disadvantage" (Gershon & Lavariega Monforti, 2021), although only slightly compared to Muslim men.

The major caveat of Figure 2 is that the confidence intervals overlap. This means that although some combinations of politician attributes might be statistically significantly different from the reference category, none of the categories with at least one subordinate element are statistically significantly different from *each other*. This means that these categories are not "more than the sum

of mutually exclusive parts" (Hancock, 2007, p. 65). I could have used various methods for this multiple additive analysis. For instance, I could have also added up the effect size of being Muslim and that of being female. The approach I chose, however, approximates but fails to reach the intersectional analysis. Therefore, this approach allows me to be more clear about what I understand the distinction between a multiple and an intersectional analysis to be. In my approach to a multiple additive analysis, the independent variables are additive dummy variables of more than one attribute (religion and gender) whereas an intersectional analysis comprises interaction effects between attributes (religion *interacts with* gender) while controlling for the main effects of each separate direct effect (religion, gender). In other words, a multiple additive analysis adds up the sum of all parts, an intersectional analysis is *more* than the sum of its parts. In the following section I will articulate this further.

Intersectional analysis

In the intersectional approach to the research question I analyze religion and gender intersectionally, i.e. as "mutually reinforcing" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283) categories that comprise *more* than the sum of their parts. I continue to focus on the attributes of religion and gender. I ran linear models with two-way interaction effects controlling for the direct effect of each attribute.

Figure 3 does not reveal any statistically significant interaction effects. The direct (unitary) effect of being a Muslim politician is statistically significant in France (12.4 percent) and The Netherlands (12.1 percent), though not in Germany where the analysis does not reveal statistically significant interaction effects. This is surprising given 1) the centrality of gender equality mobilized to discredit Muslims in (femo)nationalist debates (Farris, 2017; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2021; Rahbari, 2021; Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021); 2) the literature stating that Islamophobia impacts Muslim women particularly (Choi et al., 2021; Weichselbaumer, 2020); and 3) the literature on Muslim women who strategically resist the combined impact of being female and Muslim (Ahmed, 2020; van Es, 2019; Zimmerman, 2015). One could argue that the intersection of Islam and gender would be a most likely case of finding statistically significant interaction effects and the null effects in this study are, therefore, telling.

Beyond experiments and interaction effects

Despite multiple calls for using interaction effects to estimate intersectionality quantitatively (Bowleg, 2008, p. 319; Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 146; Cole, 2009, p. 177; Hancock, 2007, p. 70; McCall, 2005, p. 1788), this analysis does not find any statistically significant effects. Does this mean intersectionality does not play a role in how voters assess politicians? Possibly, but not necessarily. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss four potential explanations for these null findings in ascending order of importance: 1) false negatives, 2) heterogeneous treatment effects, 3) elimination of campaigning effects and most importantly, 4) contextual factors causing unitary effects. Throughout this paragraph I discuss whether experiments and interaction effects are sensible methods to study intersectionality. I will conclude this section with implications for further research.

Figure 3: Intersectional analysis - interaction effects
Do interactions between religion and gender influence how citizens choose politicians?

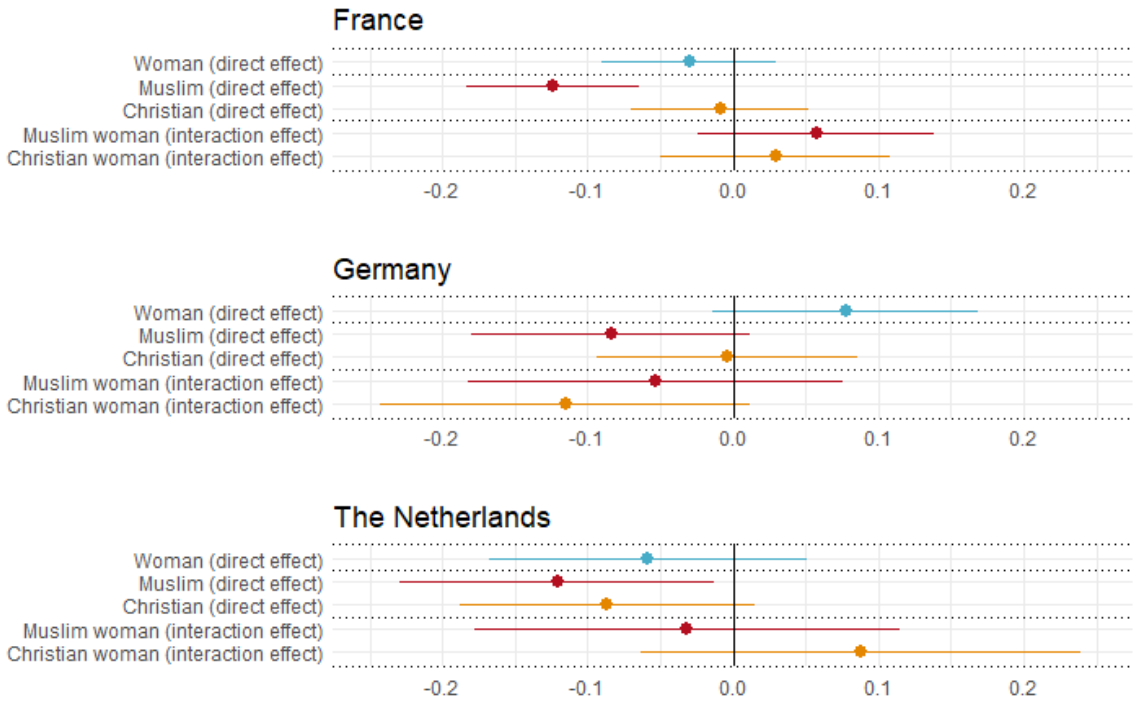

Figure 3.
Linear models with two-way interactions. I cluster at the level of the respondent. Independent variables: I visualize the interactions between religion and gender (not ethnorace). I conduct multivariate regression analyses with interaction effects. Dependent variable: I present respondents the two profiles they just rated and ask 'which politician are you most likely to vote for?' I control for age, age squared and sex. I apply weights for migration background, sex, education, region and urbanization. Errorbars indicate the 95% confidence interval.

First, with small effect sizes, limited sample sizes and thus limited statistical power, interaction effects are more likely to give false negatives. The sample sizes in this study were quite large. In total, I presented 18,336 randomly constructed profiles to 3056 citizens, repeating the experiment six times for each respondent. I presented 7194 profiles to citizens of France (N=1199), 5724 in Germany (N=954) and 5418 in The Netherlands (N=903). The effect sizes for Muslim politicians are also much larger than what all similar experimental studies find for minoritized politicians (e.g., Bai, 2021; Campbell & Cowley, 2014; Carnes & Lupu, 2016; Hainmueller et al., 2014; Kirkland & Coppock, 2018; Krupnikov et al., 2016; Visalvanich, 2017; Weaver, 2012). The high sample and effect sizes reveal that statistical power is probably not causing false negatives in this particular study. Whatever the cause, I expect that similar experimental studies have produced null results more often, though due to publication bias the scope of this is largely unknown (Quintana, 2015, pp. 6–7).

Second, hetereogeneous treatment effects could obscure findings. Possibly, some female Muslim politicians have a "strategic advantage" whereas others have a "double disadvantage" (Gershon & Lavariega Monforti, 2021). Together, these effects average out to null effects. We know that in some electoral contexts, party elites prefer selecting Muslim women over Muslim men, whereas in other electoral contexts Muslim men are at an advantage (Dancygier, 2017; Hughes, 2016). Possibly, some voters advantage Muslim women, whereas others advantage Muslim men. One average, this results in null effects. Finding out what causes some voters to prefer one intersection over the other could elucidate future findings.

Third, I measure voter reactions at first glance without any effect of possible (hate) campaigns. We know from research on candidate gender that stereotype reliance only happens when stereotypes have been activated during a campaign (Bauer, 2015) and counterstereotypic campaigning improves voter evaluations (Bauer, 2017). In addition, we know that stereotypes of Muslims can be mobilized to influence voting behavior (Jardina & Stephens-Dougan, 2021). In campaigns and press coverage, minoritized women are more visible yet receive more negative coverage (Ward, 2016, 2017). We know very little about which politician background characteristics tend to be foregrounded in campaigns. Quick experiments like the one at hand tend to eliminate the effects of (hate) campaigns, interactions with other actors and the time to develop a narrative surrounding a politician upon which a voter might be able to reflect on what their evaluation and subsequent choice might be. Beyond the effects of campaigns, other contextual factors can influence voter assessments causing one unitary background characteristic to be foregrounded. That is the fourth explanation for the null findings. I turn to this next.

Inherent to survey experiments is that potentially disturbing and noisy contextual factors are eliminated in favor of unearthing "discrete and pure" effects (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). This is generally viewed as an advantage to survey experiments, yet it can also be a disadvantage to studying intersectionality where context is key (Anthias, 2008; Lim et al., 2024; McCall, 2005, p. 1791). Within specific contexts some attribute values (such as Islam) are highlighted over others, making direct (*unitary*) effects more common compared to interaction (*intersectional*) effects: Petsko et al. (2022) outline four factors that cause respondents to focus on one attribute value over others, making intersectional effects more difficult to measure. As discussed above, these factors are "Lens accessibility", "Lens fit", "Perceiver goals" and "Distinctiveness" (2022, pp. 4–5). In the following paragraphs I will discuss how these factors might influence the outcomes of this study.

Although all three countries are familiar with Islamophobia in public narratives (Vermeulen, 2018, p. 3), this is least visible in Germany compared to France followed by The Netherlands (Brubaker, 2017, p. 1193; European Commission, 2016; Heath & Richards, 2019, p. 25; Ribberink et al., 2017, pp. 264, 266). We know that one of the factors that increases the likelihood that voters highlight certain attribute values over intersectional effects is "Lens accessibility", or the "ease with which a social lens can be retrieved from memory" (Petsko et al., 2022, p. 4). Possibly, French and Dutch voters can more easily retrieve negative stereotypes about Muslims than their German counterparts can, causing the more clear *unitary* findings in Figure 3 in France and The Netherlands compared to Germany.

We also know "Lens fit" and "Perceiver goals" (ibid) can cause stronger unitary effects. If 1) a certain stereotype easily fits into already known patterns (Muslims as a danger to our liberal democracies) as underscored in secularist nativism (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019) or civilizationism (Brubaker, 2017) and 2) these patterns might help achieve a certain goal (feeling better about oneself and one's nation), unitary effects are more commonly observed (Petsko et al., 2022, p. 4). As secularist nativism or civilizationism are most commonly observed in The Netherlands followed by France, this again explains why unitary outcomes are more pronounced in France and The Netherlands, while being less pronounced in Germany.

Given the underrepresentation of Muslim politicians across Europe, especially politicians who embrace their religion explicitly (Aktürk & Katliarou, 2021, pp. 392, 393), Muslim politicians are "rare and thus attention-grabbing" and therefore "distinctive" (Petsko et al., 2022, p. 5). Moreover, when Muslim politicians make it to politics, they will often explicitly signal their commitment to the country they live in over their heritage (Dancygier, 2017, p. 179), deliberately distancing themselves

from their religion (Stephens-Dougan, 2020), and thus serve as "codebreakers" (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2021), broadening their electoral appeal by distancing themselves from their minoritized group (termed "broadstancers" see van Oosten, 2024b). This makes explicitly stating that a politician "practices Islam" without any reservations or criticisms of Islam, which is what happens in the experimental setting, even more rare than the underrepresentation of (presumed) Muslim politicians would suggest. The "distinctiveness" of Muslim politicians is therefore even higher in the experiment, warranting assessments more unitarily driven by the fact that the (hypothetical) politician is a practicing Muslim (Petsko et al., 2022, p. 5).

In sum, although I do not find any statistically significant interaction effects in this study, I cannot rule out that intersectional effects are not present in real life. As the sample and effect sizes of this study are considerable, I do not expect that false negatives due to limited statistical power are causing null effects. The many contextual factors mentioned above might be causing unitary effects to persist. Future research needs to ask whether heterogeneous treatment effects, campaigning effects, "Lens accessibility", "Lens fit", "Perceiver goals" or "Distinctiveness" (or a combination of all these factors) are causing the unitary effects I find in the present study. Is the flattening of contextual factors in this study causing null findings or does the cause lie in the fact that intersectionality plays a very limited role in how voters assess politicians in real life?

The flattening of contextual factors could be overcome in two main ways: through 1) hypothetical experiments or 2) real-life politicians. Future hypothetical experimental studies should test the influence of intersectional framing of politicians by randomizing unitary and intersectional priming of respondents (Petsko et al., 2022, pp. 21, 23). In such a study, one-third of the respondents receive a prime in which the intersectional relationship between Islam and gender is highlighted, another third receives a unitary Islam prime and the last third receives a unitary gender prime. Does unitary or intersectional priming influence the lens with which voters assess politicians?

The second way to overcome the flattening of contextual factors might be to ask voters to assess real-life politicians who have already been subjected to nationalist discussions and (hate) campaigns – which arguably are intersectional frames. Many national election surveys already survey voter assessments of party leaders or otherwise high-ranking politicians. As female Muslim politicians rarely lead parties in western countries and usually take up lower-ranking positions (Dancygier, 2017, p. 165; van der Zwan et al., 2019), this sort of data has yet to be gathered. A difficulty is that lower-ranking politicians are by definition lesser known to the general population and surveying voter assessments of such lesser-known politicians might, therefore, not make sense. A solution could be to ask party elites to assess female Muslim politicians, as they are making the decisions of who to select anyway (Bateson, 2020; Dancygier et al., 2021). Another difficulty is that very few Muslim politicians call themselves Muslim explicitly: whether a politician is Muslim is often concluded from the name or migration background (Aktürk & Katliarou, 2021, p. 392). Moreover, denouncing many of the stereotypes of Muslims seems to be mandatory for any female Muslim politician wishing to survive in politics (Aydemir & Vliegenthart, 2016; Bird, 2005, p. 439; Kundnani, 2012; Murray, 2016). A possible solution lies in Hancock's (2007, p. 71) interpretation of "fuzzy-set logic": instead of seeing Muslim politicians as a binary (either a Muslim or not), future researchers could study the extent to which they publicly embrace or denounce their personal connection to the Muslim faith.

In point of fact, study design might not be the only facet of this study up for reconsideration; the frequent calls for interaction effects (Bowleg, 2008, p. 319; Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 146; Cole, 2009, p. 177; Hancock, 2007, p. 70; McCall, 2005, p. 1788) need thorough reconsideration as well.

High-N studies could use techniques we know from Structural Equation Modeling such as Multivariate Mixture Estimation and Cluster Analysis to understand better which combinations of attributes are grouped together. Low-N studies, as studies of real-life politicians will likely be, could consider Qualitative Comparative Analysis. There are a host of methods and techniques out there to take on these research questions. Indeed, though quantitatively researching intersectionality might have its drawbacks, it has strategic advantages that made it worthwhile doing (McCall, 2005).

Conclusion

Do (intersections of) politician religion, gender, and ethnorace influence how voters assess them? Hancock's (2007) distinction between *unitary, multiple* and *intersectional* analyses has been indispensable to structuring this paper. This study reveals voter have a strong negative and unitary bias against Muslim politicians. Whereas politician ethnorace and gender do not make a consistent difference in how voters assess politicians, religion (especially Islam) does. The intersectional analysis reveals no statistically significant interaction effects. Although we find some suggestions of both strategic advantage *and* double disadvantage for female Muslim politicians, the findings point towards unitary effects of a politician being Muslim on the assessments of voters.

I do not rule out the existence of intersectional effects in real life. I argue there are two important reasons I do not find any intersectional effects: design and analysis. First, design: experiments are inherently good at eliminating noisy contextual factors and allowing "discrete and pure strands" to feature in the results (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76, again). Whereas this is generally seen as an advantage to experiments, it complicates finding intersectional effects. The second reason might lie in the analysis: interaction effects might be an overrated method and we should expand the quantitative arsenal towards many other quantitative methods of analysis.

Unitary effects are especially common in a situation where one "lens" is highlighted (Petsko et al., 2022), which I argue is particularly the case in this study. In the design of this study I unintentionally highlighted Islam in the profiles of politicians that voters assess in three main ways: due to 1) the prevalence of Islamophobia, 2) the nationalist need to distinguish oneself from others, in this case in terms of secularist notions of civilization and 3) the fact that politicians who explicitly and unapologetically call themselves practicing Muslims are a rarity across Europe. I argue all of these factors steer respondents to focusing on only one factor when assessing politicians, namely whether the politician is Muslim or not. Another viable possibility is that interaction effects should not be heralded as the natural go-to technique to study intersectionality but that many other quantitative methods should be considered.

In real life, it is more common that multiple lenses are highlighted at the same time, especially with Muslim women and men. Stereotypes of Islam are extremely gendered: Muslim stereotypes of safety and threat center on Muslim men (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2021) while Muslim stereotypes of illiberal values center on Muslim women (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2021). Indeed, Islam and gender are "mutually reinforcing" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1283): their gender changes what it means for them to be Muslim and their religion changes what it means for them to be a woman or a man. We know intersectionality is key in understanding the press coverage of female ethnoracially minoritized politicians (Ward, 2016, 2017). Given the gendered Muslim stereotypes that Muslim women (van Es, 2019) and female Muslim politicians (Murray, 2016) need to resist, the framing in press coverage of female Muslim politicians is likely to be particularly intersectional. An intersectional lens therefore remains indispensable to understanding how voters assess female Muslim politicians.

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