



universität
wien

What is Islamophobia? Disentangling Citizens' Feelings Towards Ethnicity, Religion and Religiosity Using a Survey Experiment

Dr. Marc Helbling

Monday, **October 23rd 2017**, 5:00 p.m.

Hörsaal 10, Rathausstraße 19, 1010 Vienna

What citizens think about Muslim immigrants is of great importance for some of the most pressing challenges facing Western democracies. To advance our understanding of what “Islamophobia” really is – i.e. whether it is a dislike based on immigrants’ ethnic background, their religious identity or their specific religious behaviour – we fielded a representative online survey experiment in the UK in the summer 2015. Our results suggest that in general Muslims are not viewed more negatively than Christian immigrants. Instead, we provide evidence that citizens’ uneasiness with Muslim immigration is first and foremost the result of a rejection of fundamentalist forms of religiosity. This suggests that common explanations, which are based on simple dichotomies between liberal supporters and conservative critics of immigration need to be re-evaluated. While the politically left and culturally liberal have more positive attitudes towards immigrants than right leaning and conservatives, they are also far more critical towards religious groups. We conclude that a large part of the current political controversy over Muslim immigration has to do with this double opposition. Importantly, the current political conflict over Muslim immigration is not so much about immigrants versus natives or even Muslim versus Christians as it is about political liberalism versus religious fundamentalism.

Marc Helbling is full professor in political sociology at the Department of Political Science at the University of Bamberg and a Research Fellow at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center where he has previously been head of the Emmy-Noether research group ‘Immigration Policies in Comparison’ (IMPIC).
