

## Muslim immigrants have come to expect discrimination in France because of their religion, and this is unlikely to change.

Blog Admin

*There is growing concern in France that Muslim immigrants from North Africa are poorly integrated into French society, often due to discrimination. But are they discriminated against because of their religion, or because of their national or ethnic origins? [Claire Adida](#), [David Laitin](#) and [Marie-Anne Valfort](#) address this very issue, and find that Muslims face significantly higher levels of discrimination from rooted French (defined as French nationals with four grandparents born in metropolitan France) than do their Christian counterparts, and that the dynamics leading to such discrimination are likely to endure.*



According to an IFOP [survey](#) conducted in October 2012 for the French magazine *Le Figaro*, 67 per cent of the French population believes that people of Muslim descent are poorly integrated into French society. This survey echoes [several studies](#) that have found evidence of discrimination against Muslim immigrants from the Maghreb (North Africa). But what, exactly, do these results highlight: Maghrebi-based or Muslim-based discrimination?



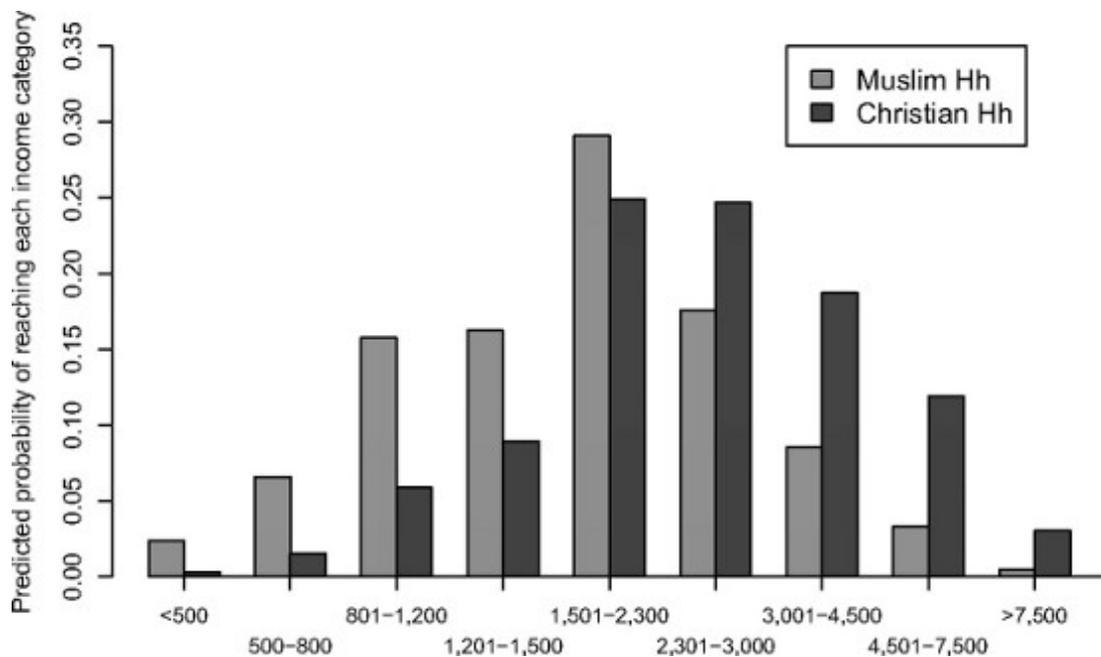
Since 2009, we have conducted research aimed at investigating the integration of Muslims in France. In Western Europe, France is home to the largest proportion of Muslims, or [7.5 per cent in 2010](#). Our goal was to answer the following questions: are Muslims discriminated as Muslims (rather than as Arabs or Maghrebis) in the French labour market? If so, what is the nature of such discrimination and what sustains it? We investigated these questions by focusing on a group of immigrants from two ethnolinguistic groups in Senegal, the Joolas and the Serers. These groups are divided by religion, with one portion of them being Muslim and another Christian. With the exception of religion, these Senegalese Muslims and Senegalese Christians are similar. They share the same culture and migrated to France in the same era (during the early 1970s) and with the same economic motivations. This sample therefore allows us to isolate the religious effect from national, ethnic and racial factors.



### **Are Muslims discriminated on the French labour market?**

Relying on a correspondence test in which we compared French companies evaluating CVs from otherwise identical Senegalese Muslim and Senegalese Christian applicants, we [found](#) significant levels of anti-Senegalese Muslim discrimination in job interview callback rates. Moreover, using a survey of 511 second and third-generation Joolas and Serers in France, we found an income differential between Senegalese Muslim and Christian households amounting to 17 per cent of France's median income. Monthly income differentials (in euros) across Senegalese Muslim and Christian households are shown in Figure 1 below. This result suggests that the discrimination Senegalese Muslim candidates face on the French labor market may have serious implications for their welfare.

### **Figure 1- Total income effect of Christian vs. Muslim household (Hh)**



### What is the nature of such discrimination?

We [investigate](#) the nature of anti-Muslim discrimination in France by relying on our survey of Senegalese Christians and Senegalese Muslims as well as field experimental data conducted in France among rooted French, Senegalese Muslims and Senegalese Christians. These experiments allow us to look at how Senegalese Muslims and rooted French behave toward each other (as compared to the way Senegalese Christians and rooted French behave toward each other) when altruism (i.e., unconditional generosity) and trust (i.e., beliefs about others' unconditional generosity) are at stake.

Results indicate that the Senegalese Muslim and rooted French participants are stuck in an unfortunate cycle of behavior, in which (i) the rooted French harbor a taste for discrimination against those individuals they can identify as *Muslims*, and (ii) Senegalese Muslims, anticipating such discrimination, withdraw from their host community, thus strengthening their identification as *Muslims* by the French participants.

#### *Muslims anticipate anti-Muslim discrimination and assimilate less*

Our survey data reveal that Senegalese Muslims anticipate anti-Muslim discrimination. Relative to their Christian counterparts, they trust French institutions less (police, immigration services, justice, school, businesses, national employment bureau...) and are more likely to reject the claim that such institutions treat all French people equally. Experience with discrimination often [explains](#), at least in part, community withdrawal. Our survey data confirm that Senegalese Muslims have a lower attachment to French people and culture and a higher attachment to their culture of origin than do their Christian counterparts. In other words, Senegalese Muslims assimilate less. Our experimental results are consistent with these findings: in this French context, Senegalese Muslims are less altruistic towards the other groups, than are their Christian counterparts (but, as shown in our survey, no less altruistic towards their communities back in Senegal).

#### *Rooted French Exhibit Taste-Based Discrimination against Muslims qua Muslims*

In our experiments, rooted French players could infer the religious affiliations of their game partners only through their first names, which subjects printed on a label and attached on their lapels. Our experimental results show that rooted French participants harbored a taste for discrimination against Senegalese Muslims: they are less altruistic toward Senegalese Muslims than toward Senegalese Christians. But, since all Senegalese Christians had recognizably French names (e.g. Christine) while the Senegalese Muslims had either Muslim names (e.g. Ibrahima) or African names (e.g. Astou), it is natural to wonder whether rooted French are simply reacting negatively to names foreign to their own identities. Our results indicate that this is not so: the French discriminate specifically against Senegalese Muslims with Muslim names.

And yet, this taste-based discrimination is not compounded in our experiments by statistical discrimination: although Senegalese Muslims are less altruistic than are Senegalese Christians, this pattern is not anticipated by rooted French players. Therefore, rooted French behavior cannot be explained by their beliefs about Senegalese Muslims' withdrawal. Such erroneous beliefs on the part of rooted French may derive precisely from their distaste for Senegalese Muslims, which prevents them from interacting with them and correctly updating their beliefs about their behavior.

However, a form of statistical discrimination may take place in the context of the French labour market. Here, HR personnel are better informed about the average characteristics of candidates from various communities. They are therefore more likely to discriminate against Muslim applicants because they **expect** them to assimilate less and thus to have deleterious effects on the esprit-de-corps of the company. This form of statistical discrimination reinforces the outcome that we have identified in our research, that Muslim immigrants and rooted French are stuck in a self-sustaining vicious circle of attitudes.

The recognition of this discriminatory circle gives us clues as to why the current situation is so difficult to overturn – no party has an incentive to change its behavior. But to simultaneously induce a change in Senegalese Muslims' expectations of discrimination by rooted French (and therefore encourage greater levels of assimilation) and a change in rooted French reactions to Muslim signals – such as first names – is a fundamental challenge to equality in our time.

*This article is a shortened version of the IZA paper [Muslims in France: Identifying a Discriminatory Equilibrium](#).*

*Professor David Laitin will also be speaking at the LSE on 28 February on this topic. [More information and event listing](#).*

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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