This publication is the first policy brief produced on the issue of Muslim integration in the United States and Europe by the Division of Global Affairs (DGA) at Rutgers Newark. The product of a policy forum held in Paris in March 2009, it constitutes part of a larger report entitled ‘Integration and Security: Muslim Minorities and Public Policy in Europe and the United States’ to be published by DGA in the late summer of 2009. The report tackles the complex, important and sensitive issue of the integration of Muslim minorities across the Atlantic, and the important balance between the preservation of civil liberties and enhancement of security in the current policy climate. Based on a three-year study conducted in collaboration with the CEVIPOF of the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Sciences Po, Paris), the final report reflects the discussions, findings and recommendations of a group of academics and senior practitioners who participated in the policy forum. Both the policy forum and publication of the report were generously funded by a grant from the National Program of the Carnegie Corporation of New York (Grant identification number D 08080).

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Summary

Muslim immigrants and their children are commonly depicted in the popular European press as lacking convergent values with the broader public. Often suspected of disloyalty, they are characterized as lacking a sense of national loyalty and a distain for integrated living. In this policy brief, the work presented by Zsolt Nyiri suggests that no ‘clash of civilizations’ in fact exists. Rather, there is a clash of perceptions among the general publics of Germany, the United Kingdom and France about Muslim attitudes. In contrast to accusations of national disloyalty and a preference for isolation, survey results conducted in the three countries show that members of the minority Muslim community are loyal and favor living in a ‘mixed’ neighborhood.

Bumps in the road to a promising coexistence

Islamic communities are not in conflict with the West, nor are the national loyalties of Muslims questionable. They are mistakenly perceived to be so by politicians and the media. At the DGAs’ policy forum Integration and Security: Muslim Minorities and Public Policy in Europe and the United States, held at the CEVIPOF, Sciences Po, Paris, Dr. Zsolt Nyiri† presented his survey research, comparing the civic values of Muslim and non-Muslim populations in the countries with the three largest Muslim Populations in Europe. The results reveal a ‘clash of perceptions’ between Muslims and the general public.

The Division of Global Affairs (DGA) is an interdisciplinary graduate studies and research institution at the Graduate School of Rutgers University-Newark. Dr. Simon Reich is the Director of the DGA and is also the Co-Principal Investigator of this project with Dr. Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia of the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers-Newark.

The DGA was ranked 5th in the nation in research by The Benchmarking Academic Excellence Survey of Top Universities in Social and Behavioral Sciences Disciplines (2006-2007).

DGA’s research initiatives are housed in the Rutgers Institute for the Study of Emerging Threats in the 21st Century (ET21). ET21’s mission is to address how stakeholders from various policy arenas can best respond to threats that confront vulnerable civilian populations, such as ecological, technological, political or resource-driven threats.

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public of Germany, the United Kingdom and France on attitudes about issues such as national loyalty and integrated living, not a clash of values.

The lack of adequate mechanisms for inclusion of Muslim immigrants and their children in public dialogue, and a lack of knowledge about Europe’s Muslim communities, have served to reinforce a negative public image of Muslims in some European countries. Academics, politicians and media commentators have claimed that Europe’s own growing Muslim population brought Samuel P. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” to European soil. Some proponents of this view even claim that Muslims have no intention of integrating into mainstream culture, of adopting European values or even existing peacefully in Europe. Events, both within and outside of Europe, have generated views of Islam as a violent culture that aims to undermine Western values. They ignore the fact that the vast majority of Europe’s Muslims reject radical Islam and actively seek to integrate. The alleged “clash of civilizations” needs to be demythologized by recognizing the true problem: a “clash of perceptions.” Nyiri’s survey data demonstrates that broad public’s perceptions of Muslims in Germany, UK and France are somewhat negative and that there are differences between the attitudes Muslims have and the perceptions the general public have of their attitudes. More optimistically, however, the results of the data also show the promise of better coexistence if these misperceptions can be overcome.

The feeling is mutual when it comes to national loyalty

Are Muslims loyal? As shown in Graph 1, over 70 percent of Muslims surveyed in Berlin, London and Paris believe that Muslims in their country are loyal citizens. In contrast, the survey responses from the general public nationally reflect a disconcerting perception: only one-third of Germans, and under half of French and British citizens, feel that Muslims in their country are loyal citizens. This public suspicion about Muslim minorities in all three countries about their national affinity, coupled with the inaccuracy of those perceptions, has repeatedly proven to be divisive in national debates.

Graph 1

Data Source: Gallup World Poll Nov. 2006 – Feb. 2007

* Representative Muslim populations were surveyed in the capital cities (Berlin, London and Paris).
And integration for all
How do Muslims feel about living in integrated neighborhoods? They are often depicted in public discourse as being insular and parochial in their preferences. Both Muslims and the general public were asked in which type of neighborhood they prefer to live. Both sets of respondents were asked to select from three options: “segregated,” “integrated,” and “isolated” neighborhoods. Graph 2 reflects the responses. Amongst both groups, over 50 percent expressed a preference for living in an integrated neighborhood. Muslims in Berlin, London and Paris consistently showed a greater openness to living in an integrated neighborhood than the general public surveyed, suggesting that the greater resistance to integration comes from the general public.

Graph 2

Data Source: Gallup World Poll Nov. 2006 – Feb. 2007

Headed for Common Ground?
Civic participation, next stop
Post 9/11 policies and counter-terrorist rhetoric have discouraged Muslims from practicing their religion freely, such as wearing headscarves. Yet, national loyalty should not be defined as being a choice between religion and nationality. No other religious group is asked to make such a choice. As with the treatment of other religious groups, these qualities should be regarded as compatible. The survey results, discussed more extensively in our final report, support the claim that Muslim immigrants and their children are no less loyal to their country of residence than the general public in those countries. Muslims are at least as open to integrated living as is the general public in Germany, UK and France, and are more tolerant of other religions than the general public believes. The results demonstrate the need for greater efforts; to combat Islamophobia, dispel misperceptions of the general public about Muslims and to encourage more engagement and dialogue.

‡ ‘Segregated’ = mostly made up of people who share your religious and ethnic background; ‘Integrated’ = Made up of a mix of people, those who share your ethnic and religious background and others who do not; ‘Isolated’ = Mostly made up of people who do not share your ethnic and religious background.

Dr. Zsolt Nyiri is the Gallup World Poll’s Research Director for Europe. Dr. Nyiri has been responsible for the design, implementation, and analysis of surveys in more than 30 European countries. In addition, he developed innovative methodologies for polling hard-to-reach populations in Europe, including Muslims.

Dr. Nyiri’s current interests are in European integration, gender and political participation, and Muslims in Europe. He has published his research in books and refereed journals, including Political Research Quarterly, Harvard International Review, and Foreign Policy Magazine. He has also been an invited speaker at various academic conferences and has regularly been asked to brief policy makers about his findings.

Dr. Nyiri holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and Public Opinion from the University of Connecticut.
The DGA’s more comprehensive analysis of the issues discussed in each policy brief will be published in a report available in August 2009.

An extended discussion of the issues raised in this policy brief and many more will be addressed in a forthcoming book co-edited by Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia and Simon Reich to be published by Rutgers University Press in the winter of 2010.

Managing Ethnic Diversity After 9-11: Internal Security and Civil Liberties in Transatlantic Perspective

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