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## The two sides of Islamophobia and the perception of threat from Islamic terrorists

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## **Running head: Islamophobia and terrorist threat**

### **The two sides of Islamophobia and the perception of threat from Islamic terrorists**

**ABSTRACT:** There is a heightened interest concerning the understanding of prejudice toward Muslims in Europe, steadily increasing since 2001. This study aimed at investigating whether the phenomenon of Islamophobia could have two different manifestations (i.e., Islamoprejudice and Secular Critique of Islam). In particular, we assessed whether two social attitudes, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA, i.e., Authoritarian Aggression and Conservatism) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), could predicted differently the two dimensions. Moreover, we wanted to investigate the different influence of the two dimensions in relation to the perceived threat from terrorism. A sample of 366 Italian adults participated in the study completing a self-report questionnaire. Data were analysed by means of a structural equation model. Results showed that RWA and SDO were differently related to Islamoprejudice and Secular Critique of Islam, suggesting that certain forms of critique of Islam should not be associated with individual prejudice, because are motivated by secular, democratic and universalistic convictions, denoting the traces of cultural biases. However, the apparently less problematic dimension of Islamophobia, i.e. Secular Critique, does not preserve people from perceiving threat from terrorism, in the same way as Islamoprejudice. Implications are discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** Islamophobia; perceived threat; European societies; Structural equation modelling.

## **The two sides of Islamophobia and the perception of threat from Islamic terrorists**

### **Introduction**

The perception of Islam and Islamic terrorism is a very critical topic in Western societies since 2001 terrorist attacks. Hostility towards immigrants from Muslim countries has increased in the last years, as well as the perception of threat from fundamentalist terrorism, which can lead to a loss of well-being and security (Helbling, 2010; Silver, Holman, McIntosh, Poulin & Gil-Rivas, 2002).

Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon influenced by historical, political, and social factors, which comprises a prejudiced view of Islam and Muslims, i.e., Islamoprejudice, and a critique of Islamic religion motivated by democratic, and universalistic beliefs, i.e., Secular Critique of Islam (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). In the European culture the fear of the Muslims is very old and can be traced back to the contraposition between the Christian European reigns and the Arabs caliphates first and the Ottoman empire later. Recently, in several geopolitical crises between Occidental and Middle East countries (e.g., the USA embassy hostages affair in Iran in 1979, the first Gulf war in 1991) both sides used religious differences as a mean of propaganda. Moreover, in the last decades Europe and North America received great inflows of immigrants from Islamic countries linking the prejudice against Muslims with xenophobia and ethnic prejudice. These macro level factors influence the diffusion of prejudice against Islam and Muslims, a phenomenon that can not be reduced to a matter of problematic individual beliefs. This hostility towards all that deals with Islam and Muslims seems to be related to a “cultural racism”, which is a result of colonial frameworks that legitimizes the Western world supremacy over Oriental cultures, considered as inferior (Grosfoguel & Mielants, 2006). However, people differentiate themselves to the extent of sharing of these ideologies constructed over the years by Western culture and society. Two of the most common ideological beliefs affecting the relations among social groups are Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA). Social dominance orientation is defined as “a

general attitudinal orientation toward intergroup relations, reflecting whether one generally prefers such relations to be equal, versus hierarchical” (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994, p.742). Instead, right-wing authoritarianism reflects the willingness to submit to legitimate authorities, observe traditional norms, and support the hostile and punitive treatment towards people who do not comply with them (Altemeyer, 2006).

Recently, several authors have debated about the nature of values and sentiments that are expressed in anti-Muslim attitudes, and are often confused under the overarching label of Islamophobia (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012; Van der Noll, Saroglou, Latour, & Dolezal, 2018). Indeed, scholars found that prejudiced views of Islam were empirically distinguished from a pattern of thought that did not seem to be contaminated with prejudices but was highly critical of certain practices commanded by Islam, motivated by secular and liberal values (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2014; Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012).

The aim of the present study was to extend past research on Islamophobia, to verify whether this phenomenon could really have different manifestations. Unlike previous work (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012), the present study did not only investigate the social ideologies (RWA and SDO) that predicted differently the two dimensions, but also aimed to assess the different influence of the two dimensions in relation to the perceived threat from terrorism, whose effects may include a loss of well-being and security (Castellini, Colombo, Maffei, & Montali, 2011). Moreover, we tested the mediational role of Islamophobia in explaining the relation between social ideologies and perceived threat. Finally, we considered the perception of threat both at a personal and at the societal level.

A better understanding of the complex phenomenon of Islamophobia could be helpful in reducing it; particularly, finding the existence of these two different attitudes towards Muslims and Islam is important to intervene in different ways, in order to try to change them.

## **Islamophobia: the two facets of prejudice toward Islam**

Anti-Muslim hostility is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1980s, Muslims migrated in large numbers from different countries arriving in Europe mainly as asylum seekers: in this period the term “Islamophobia” was coined, a sign of growing interest in prejudice and hostility targeted specifically toward Islam and Muslims (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Islamophobia can be defined as a negative attitude or feeling directed at Islamic religion or Muslim individuals originated in the fear of Islam (Bleich, 2011). After the terrorist attacks in Western Europe and in the United States since September 11, 2001, negative attitudes toward Muslim communities in Western countries have worryingly risen and several researchers have warned about a dramatic rise of Islamophobia (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; Sheridan, 2006). According to the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (1997), the main dimensions of Islamophobia refer to the perception of Islamic world as a uniform formation, different to Western world and subordinate. Moreover, Islam is viewed as a manipulative political ideology, criticism of the West made by Islam is a priori rejected, discriminatory behaviours against Muslims are considered legitimate, and prejudice and hostility toward Muslims are conceived as normal. Individual, social and cultural aspects play a role in influencing attitudes toward Muslims. In the particular case of anti-Muslim prejudice, a number of negative stereotypes has appeared in media and in the public discourse. Social scientists recognise that people create psychological images of the “Other”, in order to preserve their identity (Malek, & Wiegand, 1995). Today, modern technology has facilitated the spreading of information on other cultures, generally perceived as inferior to Western tradition. Following the definition of Malek and Wiegand (1995), the West encompasses “those nations with the capacity to dominate the world through economic, military, and ideological superiority” (p. 201). Western media have a great power in promoting Western ideals and worldviews, influencing the dominant value positions (Lau, Seedat, & McRitchie, 2011). Islamic culture is generally portrayed negatively and as inferior, and

Muslims are associated with stereotypes of terrorism and violence. Edward Said (1978) early described this process, defined as Orientalism, as a kind of intellectual power that European nations held on Orient, which primarily encompasses the Islamic world, during the period of colonization (from 1815 to 1914). Said (1978) talks about a relationship of power and domination between Occident and Orient, relationship of power that Europeans tried to maintain, perpetuating Western superiority over the values and behaviours of Orientals (Lau et al., 2011). After September 11, 2001 those Orientalist views have been intensified, and transformed into a neo-Orientalism towards Islam and the Muslim world (Kerboua, 2016). This neo-Orientalism is the reconstruction of Islamic world as a social and personal threat to the Western world and civilisation: contemporary Muslims is not only portrayed as inferior but mainly as violent and threatening. The social phenomenon of Islamophobia can be considered the most hostile manifestation of neo-Orientalism (Kerboua, 2016).

In the psychological literature, a number of researchers (Stolz, 2005; Strabac & Listhaug, 2008) have considered anti-Muslim prejudice as an expression of a general form of xenophobia, i.e the fear and distrust of that is perceived to be foreign (Bolaffi, 2003), directed toward this specific group. From this perspective, Islamophobia does not seem to be a new social process, but it only represents a more generalized feeling of prejudice toward immigrants (Helbling, 2010). However, other scholars (Imhoff & Recker, 2012) have felt the need for differentiating a prejudiced and closed view of Islam and Muslims, i.e., Islamoprejudice, from critique of Islamic religion motivated by democratic, and universalistic beliefs, i.e., Secular Critique of Islam. According to several authors (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2014; Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012), scholars have often combined these characteristics regarding attitudes about Islam, but actually they represent two distinct aspects. Indeed, anti-Muslim sentiment can not be exclusively reduced to xenophobia, as it comprises the conception of Islam as incompatible with liberal democratic values for its religious practices and dogma. Westerner people can perceive Muslims as belonging to a culture that promotes extreme submission to religion, a religion that has authority over worldly manners and contradicts liberal values such as individualism and autonomy: it might therefore be

that people for whom these values are very important see their societies in danger due to immigration from Muslim countries (Helbling, 2010). This criticism of Islam is different from a prejudicial view. Islamoprejudice consists of cognitive negative stereotypes of Muslims, the expression of negative affect toward them, and the readiness or intention for discriminatory behaviours toward the members of Islamic group. Instead, the Secular Critique of Islam can be described as a cognitive belief about critical aspects with respect to rules, norms and practices within the collective community of Islamic people (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016). This cognitive belief seems to be a form of bias, because it associates Islam with anti-liberal values, considered as negative and inferior to Western democratic values, obscuring the fact that even some Western religious communities have anti-liberal values. In this perspective, Islamoprejudice and the Secular Critique of Islam may represent respectively the individual bias against Muslims and the endorsement of cultural representations about Islam, which may combine into Islamophobia.

### **Prejudice and ideological beliefs: the role of RWA and SDO**

In literature, different ideological beliefs were found to be related with prejudice: in particular, scholars have pointed out that Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1981) and Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) are two of the strongest predictors of generalized prejudice (Asbrock, Sibley, & Duckitt, 2010). Some authors (Altemeyer, 1998; McFarland, 1998; Pratto et al., 1994) have considered them as individual and personality variables, but later scholars have highlighted that both variables do not pertain to personality traits, but rather express social attitudes and beliefs of ideological nature (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Saucier, 2000). These beliefs may be the ideological frameworks justifying prejudices towards minority groups and outgroups. RWA is a construct derived from the early work on the Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) and even if is drawn from a very old theory, recent research have found that this theory is still relevant in explaining a social attitude related to prejudice toward

various outgroups (Asbrock, Christ, Duckitt, & Sibley, 2012; Crawford, Brandt, Inbar, & Mallinas, 2016). RWA consists of three components: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and conventionalism. Authoritarian submission pertains to the desire to submit to authority; authoritarian aggression is the experience of feelings of aggression towards people who break the rules and do not submit to authority and conventionalism is the adherence to traditions, values and rules (Adorno et al., 1950). In more recent years, Duckitt & Fisher (2003) have combined authoritarian submission and conventionalism to re-identified them as conservatism, which is adherence to conventional rules, values, institutions and authorities. Although conservatism and authoritarianism proper, which comprises the authoritarian aggression component, can be empirically distinguished, most literature has considered RWA as a single broad dimension (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Helbling, 2012). Scholars have shown that global RWA can predict prejudice toward various outgroups, perceived to be threatening to social order (Duckitt, 2006; Duckitt & Sibley, 2009). People high on authoritarianism tend to feel hostility and endorse authoritarian aggression toward groups seen as menacing collective values, especially when this hostility is accepted by the authorities (Altemeyer, 1996; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005). RWA was found to predict prejudice against homosexual people (Crawford et al., 2016; Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2010), Muslim individuals (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández Guede, 2007; Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012), and immigrant groups (Asbrock et al., 2012; Zakrisson, 2005).

Social dominance orientation describes a general preference for hierarchies versus egalitarian relations between social groups (Pratto et al., 1994). Thus, SDO is the social attitude to consider some social groups as superior, with the will of maintaining inequality between groups. People with high levels of SDO need to legitimize and preserve hierarchies in social world, thus they devalue and experience prejudiced attitudes toward groups that are seen as inferior in status (Duckitt, 2006). Research has demonstrated that SDO strongly predicts prejudice: people with higher levels of SDO consider social world as a competitive jungle and are more prone to express both blatant and



explicit prejudicial attitudes toward outgroups (e.g., Asbrock, Sibley & Duckitt, 2010; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Passini & Morselli, 2016).

Thus, scholars have found that both RWA and SDO are ideological dimensions able to predict generalized prejudice (Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004; Whitley, 1999). However, since people who show negative attitudes toward a specific group may not inevitably be prejudiced toward other groups, recent research (Asbrock et al., 2010; Duckitt, 2006) has suggested different patterns of relationships between these social variables and prejudice. Prejudice against groups seen as a threat for society, but not socially inferior, could be predicted by RWA, but not by SDO. Prejudice toward outgroups that are perceived as low in status, but not socially threatening, could be predicted by SDO, but not by RWA. Finally, outgroups seen both as deviant and subordinate could be predicted by RWA and SDO jointly (Asbrock et al., 2010). In line with this conception, research about Islamophobia found a positive relation between Islamoprejudice and both RWA and SDO: people seem to have prejudiced attitudes toward Muslims because they consider this social group both socially threatening and inferior (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012). In contrast, Imhoff and Recker (2012) found a negative relation between Secular Critique of Islam and RWA: authoritarian people feel the duty to obey authority, whereas people who make a secular critique of Islam are opposed to the obligation of Muslims to follow religious norms firmly.

### **Perceived threat from Islamic terrorism**

Prejudiced attitudes are strongly connected to the perception of threat. The effects of perceived threat from Islamic terrorism may include a loss of well-being and security, affecting people's lifestyles and behaviours (Castellini et al., 2011; Torabi & Seo, 2004). Significant evidence supports the claim that perceived threat from terrorism vary along a range of individual indicators, such as sex, level of education, political affiliation. Women are consistently shown to see greater risk and display greater levels of anxiety regarding threat from terrorism (Huddy, Feldman, Taber,

& Lahav, 2005; Lerner, Gonzalez, Small, & Fischhoff, 2003). People with lower levels of education are also more likely to express greater perceived threat (Huddy et al., 2005), whereas lower risk perceptions are found among politically conservative people, who feel greater control over their surroundings (Slovic, 2000). It has also been suggested that authoritarianism predict different perceived threats (Stephan & Renfro, 2002), as people with authoritarian attitudes are more prone to see the world as a menacing place (Altemeyer, 1988; Eigenberger, 1988). To our knowledge, only one study (Crowson, 2009) has investigated the relationship between both the ideological beliefs explaining prejudice, i.e., RWA and SDO, and the perception of terrorist threat. Crowson (2009) found that RWA was a strong predictor of perceived threat from terrorists whereas SDO completely failed to predict it. Furthermore, recent research found that RWA influenced perceived threat, because people with higher levels of RWA are more sensitive to any source of threat (Cohrs & Ibler, 2009; Kauff, Asbrock, Issmer, Thörner, & Wagner, 2015). Conversely, people with high levels of SDO see the world as a competitive place, but not as dangerous, although they have been found to feel endangered by outgroups that were seen as direct competitors and with conflicting goals (Thomsen, Green, & Sidanius, 2008).

Some types of people are therefore more prone than others to perceive threats from outgroups, but also negative attitudes and related cognitions play a role in increasing the perceived threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2017). The classical prejudice approach (Bobo & Hutchins, 1996; Duckitt, 1992) has already emphasised that individuals who hold aversive attitudes and negative stereotypes toward a certain group are more likely to regard outgroup members as a threat. Indeed, recent research (Pereira, Vala, & Costa-Lopes, 2010) have found that negative feelings or beliefs about a disliked social group could predict different kinds of threats, suggesting that prejudice could lead individuals to perceive other groups as threatening. Moreover, a negative and stereotyped view of outgroup members, seen as violent, dishonest and inferior, has been found as an antecedent of several types of menace (Stephan, Boniecki, Ybarra, Bettencourt, Ervin, Jackson et al., 2002; Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). However, to our knowledge, no study has assessed whether

Islamoprejudice could increase the perception of threat from Islamic terrorism. In previous work (Imhoff & Recker, 2012), people high in Islamoprejudice were found to implicitly associate Muslims with threat, thus it might be that people with a prejudiced attitude toward Islam are more prone to associate the figure of the Muslim with that of the threatening terrorist.

### **The present study**

The present study aimed at demonstrating the empirical distinctness between a prejudiced view of Islam and Muslims (i.e. Islamoprejudice) and a criticism of Islamic religion motivated by secular and democratic values (i.e. Secular Critique of Islam), two different aspects often confused under the label of Islamophobia. We explored the relations between two ideological belief dimensions (i.e. RWA and SDO), the two dimensions of Islamophobia, and the perception of a threat from Islamic terrorism. Since that previous work (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003) has suggested that RWA can be distinguished into two dimensions, we decided to investigate the possibility of empirically separating the two aspects of authoritarian aggression and conservatism, in order to observe whether they might differentially affect Islamophobia and the perceived threat from Islamic terrorism. Moreover, since that terrorist threat can take several forms, we differentiated the experience of danger as an individual from the concern for one's country, also in a more symbolic way. Finally, we investigated whether a prejudiced attitude toward Islam and Muslims, i.e. Islamoprejudice, could play a mediational role in explaining the relation between the ideological beliefs dimensions (RWA and SDO) and the perceived threat from Islamic terrorism. Indeed, we expected that people with high levels of RWA and SDO would have negative attitudes and cognitions toward Islamic world for different reasons (Imhoff & Recker, 2012), and in turn, this prejudiced view would make them more prone to perceive outgroup members as a threat (Pereira et al., 2010). Specifically, following the above literature review, we hypothesised as follows:

1. Right wing authoritarianism would be positively associated with Islamoprejudice and negatively with Secular Critique of Islam (Asbrock et al., 2010; Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016 ; Imhoff & Recker, 2012).
2. Right wing authoritarianism would be positively associated with the perception of terrorist threat (Cohrs & Ibler, 2009; Kauff et al., 2015).
3. Social dominance orientation would be positively associated with Islamoprejudice (Asbrock et al., 2010; Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016 ; Imhoff & Recker, 2012).
4. Islamoprejudice would be positively associated with the perception of terrorist threat (Bobo & Hutchins, 1996; Imhoff & Recker, 2012; Pereira et al., 2010).

## **Method**

### *Participants*

We recruited participants in Torino, a large city in the North of Italy, and its Province via a convenience sampling method. Even if this technique does not consist of a random sampling, we tried to reach a large range of people, considering their socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, educational level, and occupational status. People participated voluntarily to the study and anonymity was guaranteed. All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were approved by the Italian Society of Community Psychology (SIPCO) and were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The sample included 366 adults (42.9% males, 57.1% females; average age = 39.86 years,  $SD = 17.09$ ). For what concerns the educational level, 19.3% of the participants were college graduates, 60.6% were high school graduates, and 20.1% had an educational level lower than high school. Of the respondents, 44.2% had never been married, 44.5% were married, 8.5% were divorced, and 2.8% were widowed. Concerning occupational status, 66.6% were working, 16.0%

were student, 7.5% were retired, 5.2% were unemployed, and 4.7% were housewives. Finally, of the participants, 33.8% lived in a city with more than 100,000 inhabitants, 22.1% in a city with a population of 30,000–100,000 inhabitants, 19.6% in a city with a population of 10,000–30,000 inhabitants and 24.6% in a small town with less than 10,000 inhabitants.

### *Measures*

Data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire. We used in the analyses the following indicators:

1. The Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale, short version (Manganelli Rattazzi, Bobbio, & Canova, 2007) composed by 14 items rated on a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from -3 (totally disagree) to +3 (totally agree). The scale is made of two subscale measuring Authoritarian aggression, composed by 7 items (e.g., ‘Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us’) ( $\alpha=.83$ ), and Conservatism, composed by 7 items too (e.g., ‘A lot of our rules regarding sexual behavior are just customs which are not necessarily any better or holier than those which other people follow’) ( $\alpha=.74$ ).
2. The Social Dominance Orientation Italian scale (Di Stefano & Roccato, 2005) including 7 items (e.g., ‘To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups’) ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Items were rated on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
3. The Scale for Islamoprejudice and Secular Critique of Islam (SIPSCI) (Imhoff & Recker, 2012) composed by 15 items rated on a 7-point likert-type scale ranging from from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale is made of two subscale measuring Islamoprejudice, composed by 9 items (e.g., ‘Islam is an archaic religion, unable to adjust to the present’) ( $\alpha=.80$ ), and Secular Critique of Islam, composed by 6 items (e.g., ‘The strict division of

church and state is a Western accomplishment that would be a progress in many Islamic shaped countries') ( $\alpha=.68$ ).

4. Two items investigating the perception of a terrorist threat. One asked "Do you think the Islamic terrorism threaten your country?" and the other "Do you think the Islamic terrorist threaten you and your family?". Items were rated on a 5-point likert-type scale which ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).
5. A brief list of sociodemographic items.

### *Data analyses*

First, we conducted preliminary descriptive and correlational analyses among our study's variables. Then, we tested the hypothesized relations via structural equation modelling using the bootstrap procedure to examine indirect effects.

## **Results**

### *Preliminary analyses*

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the scales and the correlations between them. Concerning RWA, participants scored higher on authoritarian aggression than on conservatism. They had higher scores of Secular Critique of Islam and lower scores of Islamoprejudice. All the scales correlated positively with the others except for the Secular Critique of Islam. This subscale did not correlate with authoritarian aggression and correlated negatively with conservatism and SDO. Concerning the perception of a terrorist threat, the estimated threat for the country was higher than the estimated threat for the individual and his/her family. The two perceptions correlated positively with all the scales with the exception of the correlation between the personal threat and the Secular Critique of Islam.

### *Hypotheses verification*

We examined a structural equations model, assuming the following relations between variables: (1) Right wing authoritarianism would increase Islamoprejudice and reduce Secular Critique of Islam; (2) Right wing authoritarianism would increase the perception of terrorist threat for the country and for the individual; (3) SDO would increase Islamoprejudice; (4) Islamoprejudice would increase the perception of terrorist threat for the country and for the individual. We used a partial disaggregation approach randomly aggregating the items of the scales into two indicators for each scale. This aggregation decreased the number of variables in the model that could have produced a significant reduction of the fit, though it still allowed for an estimation of the measurement error of the latent variables. As usually suggested, we tested the model fit using different indexes to reduce the impact of their limits (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The model was satisfactory indicating a good fit between the model and the observed data:  $\chi^2(38) = 91.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2/\text{gdl} = 2.41$ ; CFI = .97; TLI = .95; RMSEA = .062. Figure 1 shows the model in graphic form. Authoritarian aggression increased Islamoprejudice ( $\beta = .42$ ), and the perception of terrorist threat for the country ( $\beta = .33$ ) and the individual ( $\beta = .32$ ). Conservatism decreased Secular Critique of Islam ( $\beta = -.43$ ). SDO increased Islamoprejudice ( $\beta = .23$ ). Islamoprejudice increased the perception of terrorist threat for the country ( $\beta = .24$ ). Secular Critique of Islam increased the perception of terrorist threat for the country ( $\beta = .21$ ). The paths linking Authoritarian aggression to Secular Critique of Islam, Conservatism to Islamoprejudice and the perception of terrorist threats and the paths linking both dimensions of Islamophobia to the perception of terrorist threat for the individual were not significant. Bootstraps showed the indirect effect of Authoritarian aggression on the perception of terrorist threat for the country ( $\beta = .12$ ; 95% CI = .06 to .21;  $p < .02$ ; S.E. = .05) and of SDO on the perception of terrorist threat for the country ( $\beta = .06$ ; 95% CI = .02 to .13;  $p < .01$ ; S.E. = .03). The model explained the 46% of the variance of Islamoprejudice, the 15% of that of Secular Critique of Islam, the 33% of that of the perception of terrorist threat for the country, and 20% of that of the perception of terrorist threat for the individual.

## **Discussion**

In this paper we investigated the relations among two ideological belief dimensions, i.e. RWA and SDO, Islamophobia and the perceived threat from Islamic terrorism. For what concerns the relationship between RWA and Islamophobia, we found results consistent with previous work (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012), that has ascertained a positive correlation between this social attitude and Islamoprejudice, but a negative one with the Secular Critique of Islam. However, in this previous study, RWA was considered as a single broad dimension. Instead, we chose to distinguish two dimensions of authoritarianism, i.e., authoritarian aggression and conservatism. We found an interesting result, which seems to suggest the possibility of empirically separating these two aspects, when considering RWA: in fact, only authoritarian aggression was positively associated with Islamoprejudice, whereas only conservatism was negatively related to the Secular Critique of Islam. Authoritarian aggression implies the support for punitive and repressive social control of deviance and dissidence (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003): this social attitude may justify the hostile prejudice against Muslims, because they are viewed as threatening to collective security. Instead, people with a conservative attitude do not seem to have prejudiced attitudes toward Muslims: although conservatism involves the idea of an abstract and symbolic social control, some scholars (Feldman, 2003) have pointed out the little evidence of the fact that conservatism leads the desire for social conformity to converge into prejudice.

People high in conservatism do not seem to have a prejudiced and closed view of Islam and Muslims, on the contrary they are more likely to not condemn Islamic norms. Subjects who endorse a secular critique of Islam are against the obligation of Muslims to strictly follow the Islamic norms, whereas authoritarian people show obedience to authority (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). In particular, it is precisely the dimension of conservatism to be related to respect for and conformity to traditional and conventional social values, institutions and authorities (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). Thus, people high in conservatism are more likely to not criticise Islamic values probably because they could better understand Muslims' observance for their religious laws.



The two dimensions of RWA seem then to represent two different aspects of a common ideology having different relations with Islamophobia. Authoritarian aggression justifies the hostility towards all the deviant groups considered threatening the whole society (and Muslims may be considered a deviant group). Conservatism promotes the respect of traditional values in general and then may foster a positive attitude toward the Islamic traditionalism too. In line with previous work (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012), we found that people with a social dominance orientation show prejudicial attitudes toward Islam and Muslims: since people with high levels of SDO assume that one's own group is superior and have negative attitudes toward outgroups seen as socially inferior (Asbrock et al., 2010), our results seem to suggest that Islamic group is not only perceived as socially threatening, but also as subordinate.

Western institutions and governments created negative knowledge about the Orient, in order to strengthen the European domination on the "Other" and the Westerner power and hegemony (Kerboua, 2016). The historical context represents Islam and Muslim world as threatening and inferior, continually reconstituting Islamophobic hearts and minds. This cultural construction, often passing through the media and modern technology, probably facilitates the assumption of social attitudes like SDO and RWA (in its dimension of authoritarian aggression), which in turn influences the prejudicial attitudes toward this group. These social attitudes do not influence the Secular Critique of Islam. People with conservative attitudes seem to show solidarity with the collective community of Islamic people, so the cognitive belief about critical aspects with respect to Islamic norms and practices is maintained by people with more liberal and democratic values. Identifying the different variables that affect the two aspects of Islamophobia is important to understand at what level is necessary to intervene to reduce both phenomena. Indeed, even if the Secular Critique of Islam seem to be a less problematic phenomenon, since that it is not characterized by explicit cognitive negative stereotypes, negative affect, and the intention for discriminatory behaviours toward Muslims, this dimension of Islamophobia keeps track of the beliefs socioculturally

constructed over the years on the inadequacy of the practices and norms of the “Other”, compared to the Western ones considered as the right way to behave.

For what concerns the perception of a threat from Islamic terrorism, our result is in line with previous research on terrorist threat (Crowson, 2009), which found that people with high levels of RWA strongly perceive threat from terrorism, whereas people high in SDO do not. However, we expanded these results differentiating RWA into two dimensions. We found that only authoritarian aggressive people perceive threat for the country and for the individual, whereas having strong conservative values was unrelated to the measures of perceived threat. It has yet been suggested that RWA has an influence on the perceived threat, due to an increase in sensitivity for threatening issues in the individuals having this social attitudes (Kauff et al., 2015). Probably, it is mainly the aspect of authoritarian aggression that is linked to the perception of the world as a threatening place, where must be established order and security, repressing dangerous groups.

Moreover, our findings reveal that people with prejudicial attitudes toward Islamic world perceive a greater threat from terrorism, but only for the country: perhaps, a negative view of Islamic group leads people to associate Muslims with terrorists, considered as a threat for society. However, negative affects and cognitions do not lead people to perceive a personal risk to become a victim of terrorism.

We found also a positive relation between Secular Critique of Islam and perceived threat. Such result was unexpected, as people who make this secular critique are not considered as prejudicial toward Muslims and do not consider Muslims to be dangerous (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). This result seems to be in contrast with previous research (Imhoff & Recker, 2012), which considered the Secular Critique of Islam as a less problematic phenomenon than Islamoprejudice. Indeed, even if Islamoprejudice seems to represent a more individual bias towards Muslims and the Secular Critique of Islam the endorsement of cultural biased representations about Islam, both the dimensions are related to the identification of Islam and Muslims with a danger for our society.

People who make a secular critique report more rationalized and socially accepted considerations to justify the Islamic threat, such as certain Islamic practices and religious dogma about worldly issues, that are seen as a menace because can undermine values, belief system, morality or worldview of Western societies. However, their ideas seems to denote the traces of cultural racism, associated with the neo-Orientalism, that has reconstructed the Islamic world as a social threat to the Western world and civilisation (Kerboua, 2016).

Therefore, Islamoprejudice and Secular Critique of Islam seem to differentiate with regard to the social attitudes that predict them, but not for what concern their influence on the perception of terrorist threat. As mentioned before, the aspect of only condemning Islamic norms and practices, without having toward Islamic group a prejudicial attitude, can not be defined as a non-problematic phenomenon, in fact it does not preserve people from perceiving threat from terrorism, in the same way as Islamoprejudice. Moreover, the present study aimed at assessing whether RWA and SDO could be related to the perceived threat from Islamic terrorism through the indirect effect of prejudice toward Islam. For what concerns RWA, we found a relation between the dimension of authoritarian aggression and the perception of terrorist threat for the country only partially mediated by Islamoprejudice. People with high levels of authoritarian aggression have negative feelings and beliefs about Islamic group and this attitude, in turn, is positively associated with a greater perception of a social threat from Islamic group members, associated with terrorism. However, for highly authoritarian people, perceived terrorist threat is probably also expression of a more general sensitivity for every potentially threatening situation, posed not only to social security, but also to the personal one. In fact, authoritarian aggression is also related to the terrorist threat for the individual, but this aspect is not mediated by prejudice toward Islam. About SDO, we found that Islamoprejudice totally mediate the relation between this social variable and the perception of terrorist threat for the country. Unlike authoritarian people (Kauff et al., 2015), individuals with high levels of SDO have not generally an increased sensitivity for threatening issues. However, their negative attitudes and cognitions about Islamic world could have influenced their perceived

social threat from terrorism, perhaps facilitating the association of Muslim individuals with that of terrorists.

A better understanding of factors that can affect the perceived threat from terrorism is important in order to try to reconsider it. Perceived threat can lead to negative outcomes (Tartaglia, Conte, Rollero, & De Piccoli, 2018). Indeed, the effects of both real and perceived terrorism include adverse health consequences in the community, such as a loss of well-being and security, which could lead to avoidant behaviours and psychological distress (Castellini et al., 2011; Eisenman, Glik, Ong, Zhou, Tseng, Long et al., 2009). Our social context tends to overestimate the threat posed on the West. In particular, mass media focus on current terror attacks, often employing dramatic elements, such as mentioning emotions, dramatizing the speech, showing the victims and counter-terrorism operations (Eyssel, Geschke & Frindte, 2015). This can cause physiological arousal and trigger negative emotions, such as fear (Winterhoff-Spurk, 2004). The results of our study suggest that Islamophobia could make people more vulnerable to believe in the representation of threatening Islam given by the social context, increasing the perception of threat. Intervention should focus on changing some social attitudes, in order to reduce level of distress of people.

The present study has some limitations. The research is based on correlational data, which weakens the evidence in support of the direction of the relationships among ideological belief variables, prejudice and perceived threat. Indeed, some have argued that perceived threat can cause prejudice toward outgroups (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan & Chow, 2009; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan & Martin, 2005) and can influence a social attitude like RWA, because under conditions of threat, people show increases in authoritarian behaviours and attitudes (Doty, Peterson, & Winter, 1991; Stenner, 2005). The correlational design of our research makes it hard to reach a conclusion about the causality of these effects. Further studies should try to replicate the findings, using other types of methods. In addition, the two items measuring perceived threat were very broad and the participants might have interpreted in different ways, assessing thus different types of threat. Future

research should use scales which measure specific kinds of threat: specifically, more realistic threats, which refer to the physical and economic well-being of the group and the individuals, should be distinguished from more symbolic threats, which concern values and beliefs.

## **Conclusion**

Our study contributes to the literature on Islamophobia, providing further knowledge on this phenomenon that seems to have different manifestations. Consistent with previous studies (Heyder & Eisentraut, 2016; Imhoff & Recker, 2012), our results suggested that certain forms of critique of Islam should not be automatically associated with explicit prejudice, because some criticisms of Islamic religion are motivated by secular, democratic and universalistic convictions. However, the apparently less problematic dimension of Islamophobia, i.e. Secular Critique, does not preserve people from perceiving threat from terrorism, in the same way as Islamoprejudice. We may argue that the effects and the manifestations of racism against Muslims are the result of the interplay between individual, social, and cultural dimensions. Indeed, individuals may have inclinations to be unbiased, but they can nevertheless be agents of racism or Islamoprejudice to the extent that their secular critique draws upon cultural representations, associated with Orientalism and societal racism, that disproportionately associate Islam with anti-liberal values.

Our study has also provided a new view on the relationship between social attitudes and perceived threat from Islamic terrorism. In fact, even if RWA and SDO predispose people to having prejudiced attitudes toward Muslims for different reasons, the resulting negative view of Islamic world seems to have a role in increasing the perception of a social threat from Islamic terrorism, perhaps due to the association between Muslims and terrorists. Finally, our study has shown the different predictive value of two dimensions of RWA, authoritarian aggression and conservatism. We found that they differentially related to Islamophobia and the perception of a threat from Islamic terrorism, supporting the finding that they can be empirically distinguished (Duckitt &

Fisher, 2003). In particular, authoritarian aggression seems to characterize a more emotional aspect of RWA, related to the individuals, their fears and the way to defeat them; on the contrary, conservatism seems to represent the more ideological dimension of RWA, expressing more a value promoted by social institutions.

Taken together, the present findings may suggest some helpful applied consequences. The challenge of coping with anti-Muslim attitudes is particularly cogent in contemporary Western societies and understanding the key variables and processes related to prejudice is critical in decreasing it.

Campaigns and interventions aimed at reducing ethnic prejudice may consider the multiple dimensions that compose Islamophobia, with the awareness of having to do with two different phenomena to be contrasted. Indeed, even if previous studies (Imhoff & Recker, 2012) have considered the Secular Critique of Islam as a non-prejudicial attitude, this dimension keeps track of the beliefs socioculturally constructed over the years on the inadequacy of the practices and norms of the “Other”, compared to the Western ones considered as the right way to behave. Therefore, it is not enough to intervene on the personal attitudes of people, but the discourse is wider, including the consideration that should be changed the cultural structures that continually reconstitute Islamophobic affects and cognitions.

Moreover, the issue of threat from Islam represents a critical topic in Western governments’ agenda. The EU’s response to such menace involves different aspects – internal and external, legislative and operational, repressive and preventive – and, among them, the socio-psychological processes may not be neglected (Monar, 2007). This study can contribute to better address such processes and their roots.

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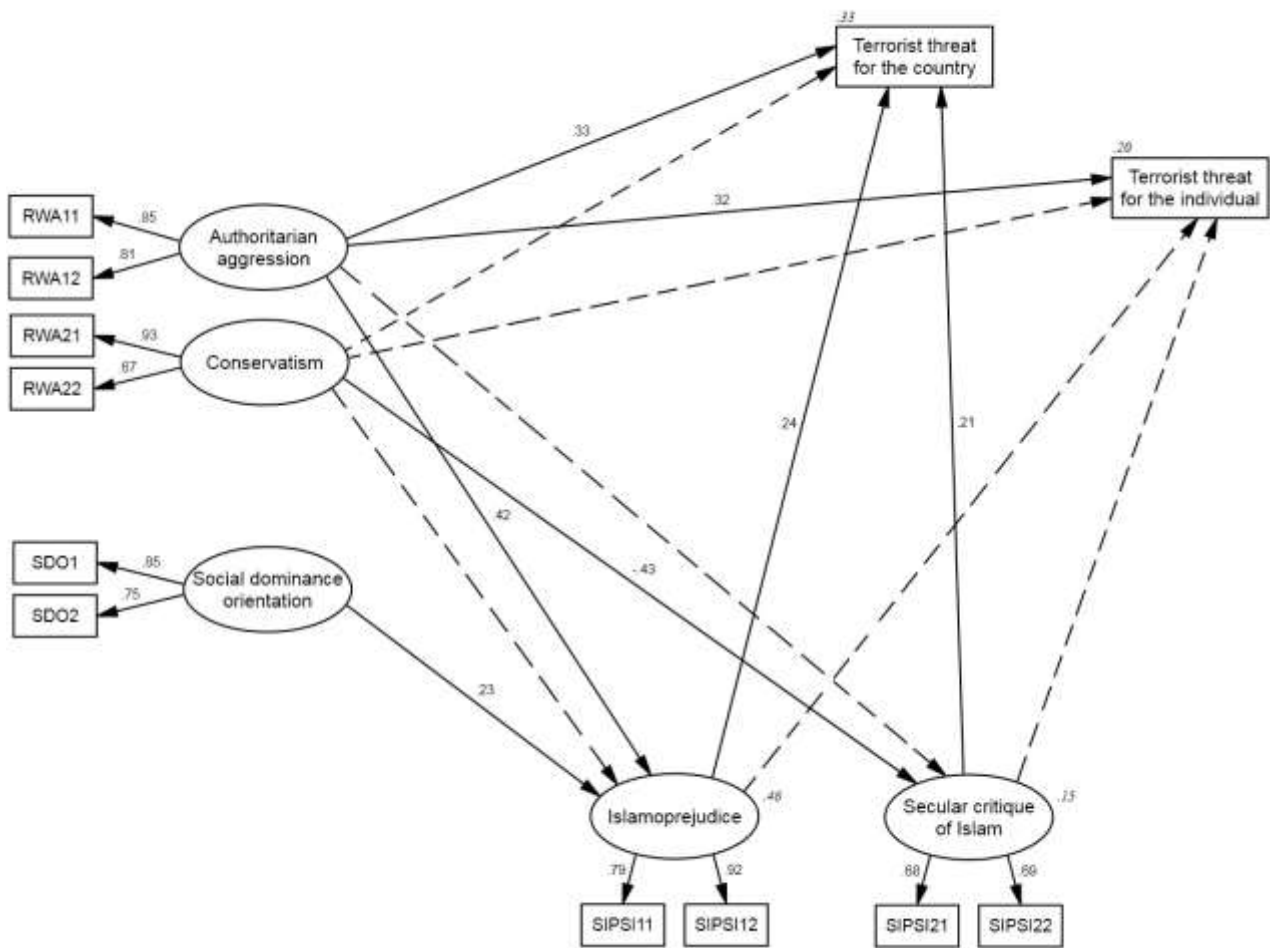
## TABLES

Table 1. *Descriptive statistic and correlations among variables.*

	Mean	SD	Person's r					
			1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SDO	2.13	.77						
RWA								
2. Authoritarian aggression	-.40	1.42	.47**					
3. Conservatism	-1.37	1.00	.46**	.40**				
SIPSCI								
4. Islamoprejudice	3.80	1.12	.47**	.53**	.37**			
5. Secular critique of Islam	5.57	.98	-.12*	-.07	-.31**	.16**		
6. Terrorist threat for the country	3.43	1.06	.19**	.43**	.21**	.47**	.17**	
7. Terrorist threat for the individual	2.48	1.11	.23**	.38**	.25**	.35**	.04	.57**

\*\* p<.01; \* p<.05

Figure 1. *The structural equation model: Standardized regression weights and variances.*



Errors and correlations were omitted from the figure in order to make it easier to view.

Correlations: SDO and Authoritarian aggression  $r=.57$ ; SDO and Conservatism  $r=.61$ ; Authoritarian aggression and Conservatism  $r=.48$ ; Islamoprejudice and Secular critique of Islam  $r=.51$ ; Terrorist threat for country and for individual  $r=.45$ .