

"The "Others": The Dehumanization and Political Isolation of Muslim Americans."

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Abstract:

The 2016 presidential campaign arguably situated Muslim Americans at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Though scholarly research has documented negative attitudes towards Muslim Americans, it remains an open question whether the public dehumanizes them compared to other groups. Dehumanization – per an emerging literature in psychology – is a type of discrimination that not only calls into question our standards of political equality, but may also lead to severe punitive policies that can disproportionately affect marginalized groups. Yet, few studies in political science have explored attitudes of dehumanization and their consequences for political outcomes, though studies in psychology have found that dehumanization is associated with less sympathy and more aggression. Given the speed and extent to which Muslim Americans have experienced discrimination in American politics today, this project unpacks how dehumanization attitudes are consequential for American Muslims. In a national survey on 1070 respondents, we explore how dehumanizing attitudes moderate preferences towards policies that severely and disproportionately affect Muslim Americans. Across the board, we find that Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans consistently dehumanize Muslim Americans. These dehumanizing attitudes, moreover, affect respondents' policy preferences towards banning Muslims from the United States, encouraging them to stay out politics completely, and increasing patrols of low income Muslim neighborhoods – policies that were pushed for by Republican presidential hopefuls in the 2016 presidential election. These results have troubling implications for the status of outgroups in American democracy. Among those who viewed Muslim Americans as less evolved and more threatening, respondents were explicitly more willing to support policies that limited their freedoms and otherized an already targeted group – even further.