

ARE MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF CULTURAL INTEGRATION?

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Abstract

Using the UK Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, we document differences in integration patterns between Muslims and non-Muslims. We find that Muslims integrate less and more slowly than non-Muslims. In terms of estimated probability of having a strong religious identity, a Muslim born in the UK and having spent there more than 30 years is comparable with a non-Muslim just arrived in the country. Moreover, higher levels of income as well as higher on-the-job qualifications seem to be associated with a stronger religious identity for Muslim immigrants only. Finally, we find no evidence that segregated neighborhoods breed intense religious and cultural identities for ethnic minorities, in general, and, in particular, for Muslims. (JEL: A14, J15)

1. Introduction

An intense political and intellectual debate is taking place in Europe on the effects of immigration inflows. Rather than being centered on the economic costs and benefits of such inflows, the debate has instead focused on the perceived costs and benefits of cultural diversity.

This debate has been particularly intense with regards to Muslim immigrants. The recent (November 2005) riots in Paris’ suburbs, the terrorist attacks in Madrid (March 2004) and London (July 2005), and the riots in many Muslim communities after the publications of vignettes representing the prophet Mohammed (February 2006) are all sparking doubts and worries about the ability and the willingness of Muslim immigrants to assimilate into Western societies.

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Using the UK Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (FNSEM), we attempt a first empirical analysis of religious identity. We especially examine whether there are quantitative and qualitative differences in the process of cultural integration between Muslims and other UK minorities (e.g., Caribbeans, Chinese, non-Muslim Indians). Little is in fact known, even at the descriptive level, about patterns of integration and about the relationships between the strength of ethnic identity and socio-economic characteristics across groups.

Descriptive statistics show clearly a stronger intensity of religious identity on the part of the Muslims. Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants, however, differ also in terms of several demographic and socio-economic characteristics, as, for example, age of arrival in the UK, education, and income, which could in principle explain their different observed attitudes towards religious identity and integration. A multivariate regression analysis of the relationship between the intensity of religious identity and these variables documents that the integration pattern adopted by Muslim immigrants in the UK contains in fact several important specific aspects. In particular, Muslims do not seem to assimilate with the time spent in the UK, or, at least, they seem to do so at a much slower rate than non-Muslims. Also, education does not seem to have any relationship with the attenuation of identity for Muslims. Finally, job qualification as well as living in neighborhoods with low unemployment rates seem to be associated with a higher rather than lower sense of identity.

Moreover, for Muslims more so than for non-Muslims, there is no evidence that segregated neighborhoods breed intense religious and cultural identities. On the contrary, keeping constant other demographic and socio-economic characteristics, intense identities in our data are more prominent in relatively mixed neighborhoods. We cautiously interpret this last result as casting some doubts on current integration policies in Europe, which seem to identify geographical with cultural integration and consequently seem to favor the formation of mixed neighborhoods.

2. Description of the Data

The FNSEM was collected in 1993–1994 in the UK by the Policy Studies Institute. The FNSEM over-samples ethnic minority groups (see Modood et al. 1997 for details) and provides extensive information about respondents' identification with their own ethnic and religious group. The ethnic population is composed of six groups (Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, African-Asian, Bangladeshi, and Chinese),¹

1. For historical reasons black Africans were not included. Furthermore, the survey only covers England and Wales.

several of which having a significant Muslim component; notably Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are predominantly Muslim, whereas Indians and African-Asians have substantial Muslim minorities. The data are merged with the 1991 census in order to get valuable information of each individual's residential ward.²

The FNSEM contains a number of questions providing information on different dimensions of identity, in particular (i) importance of religion, (ii) attitudes towards inter-marriage, and (iii) the relevance of ethnicity in influencing the kind of school families want for their children. We use the answers to these questions to measure the intensity of each individual's religious identity. Each answer is coded as a dichotomous variable. The first (i) takes value one if the individual considers very important the role of religion in his/her life and zero otherwise; the second (ii) takes value one if the individual would mind very much if a close relative were to marry a white person; and the third (iii) takes value one if the reported (desired) proportion of one's ethnic group in the children's school is more than a half and zero otherwise. These three alternative indicators of religious identity are used in our analysis in turn. We obtain a final sample of 5,963 individuals, divided between 3,594 non-Muslims and 2,369 Muslims (roughly 40% of the total).

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of our variables, differentiating between Muslims and non-Muslims. The average Muslim individual clearly appears to be more attached to his/her culture of origin. Indeed, regardless of the dimension of identity considered, the percentage of Muslims having an intense religious identity is roughly twice as large as that of non-Muslims. A greater resistance to cultural integration is also signaled by the percentage of Muslims speaking English at home or with friends, always significantly lower than for non-Muslims. Finally, Muslims have almost twice the probability of having a marriage arranged by their parents than non-Muslims, also a sign of attachment to cultural and religious traditions. Importantly, the stronger resistance to integration for Muslims can hardly be related to differences in the time spent in the UK since it is (on average) not statistically different between Muslims and non-Muslims. On the other hand, Muslims are on average less educated than non-Muslims, with a lower household income, and with more than a double probability to be unemployed. Muslims also live in more ethnic segregated areas, which have higher unemployment rates. Is it then the case that those individuals with lower education, household income, and job prospects are the ones who harbor the most intense religious identity in the Muslim communities?

2. A UK census ward contains on average 3,000–4,000 residents.

TABLE 1. Description of data.

Variable	Explanation of the Variable	Muslim (n = 2,369)		Non-Muslim (n = 3,594)	
		Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.
Importance of religion***	In the text	79.15	13.32	42.05	16.66
Attitude towards inter-marriage***	In the text	70.10	10.42	36.91	12.43
Importance of racial composition in schools***	In the text	64.65	21.34	33.45	15.35
Age at arrival*	Respondent's age in years at arrival in the UK.	39.18	12.68	42.57	13.20
Female	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent is female.	0.47	0.50	0.48	0.50
Born in the UK***	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent is born in the UK.	0.21	0.24	0.28	0.30
Arranged marriage***	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the husband/wife of the respondent has been chosen by the parents.	0.22	0.16	0.12	0.11
Discrimination	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent had been refused a job at least once or had been treated unfairly at work with regard to promotion or a move to a better position or has been attacked or insulted in the last year for reasons to do with race or color, or religious or cultural background.	0.17	0.22	0.19	0.27
Children**	Number of respondent's children.	2.17	1.24	1.68	0.75
Years since arrival	Number of years since respondent's arrival in UK.	26.43	10.27	27.08	10.03
No British education**	Dummy variable taking value one if the respondent has no UK qualification.	0.81	0.37	0.52	0.50
British basic education**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent has a UK basic level of education.	0.06	0.24	0.13	0.36
British high education**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent has a UK A-level (or equivalent) or above qualification.	0.08	0.17	0.16	0.46
Foreign education	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent has a qualification achieved abroad.	0.25	0.43	0.29	0.46
Unemployed**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent is unemployed.	0.19	0.39	0.08	0.27
Self-employed**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent is self-employed.	0.09	0.29	0.14	0.34
Manager**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent is a manager.	0.02	0.11	0.04	0.20

(continued)

TABLE 1. (CONTINUED).

Variable	Explanation of the Variable	Muslim (n = 2,369)		Non-Muslim (n = 3,594)	
		Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.
Employee***	Dummy variable taking value 1 if the respondent is an (unskilled) employee.	0.38	0.49	0.59	0.49
No parents**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if both respondent's parents are dead or if both live away from respondent.	0.34	0.47	0.32	0.47
Parents' physical contacts**	Number of times the respondent has seen the parents in the last 4 weeks.	3.05	7.01	3.87	7.06
Parents' telephone calls***	Number of times the respondent has spoken to the parents on the telephone in the last 4 weeks.	3.38	7.05	4.74	7.48
Parents' letters***	Number of letters received by the parents in the last 4 weeks.	0.67	1.10	0.37	0.77
English spoken at home (older)***	Dummy variable taking value one if English is the language normally spoken at home by the respondent to members of the family who are older.	0.03	0.18	0.08	0.27
English spoken at home (younger)**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if English is the language normally spoken at home by the respondent to members of the family who are younger.	0.20	0.40	0.25	0.43
English spoken with friends**	Dummy variable taking value 1 if English is the language normally spoken with friends (outside work) by the respondent.	0.22	0.42	0.27	0.44
English spoken at work***	Dummy variable taking value 1 if English is the language normally spoken at work by the respondent.	0.19	0.40	0.27	0.44
Household income***	Respondent's household total income from all sources, before tax (divided in 16 classes, mean value taken for each class).	200.74	135.31	330.26	207.72
Discrimination of own ethnicity*	Percentage of own ethnic group individuals that have experienced racial discrimination.	21.16	17.09	18.08	16.90
Ward density of own ethnicity**	Percentage of residents of the respondent's ethnic group in the ward.	15.20	11.20	11.63	9.96
Ward unemployment rate**	Ward unemployment rate.	16.67	4.46	12.60	5.07

Notes: *t*-tests for differences in means across groups are performed.
 *Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; ***significant at 1%.

3. Which Socio-Economic Factors Correlate with Strong Religious Identity?

We estimate a probit model in which the outcome variable is the intensity of religious identity. Our three indicators of identity are used as three alternative dependent variables. The estimation results for these three different specifications are reported in Table 2, for Muslims and non-Muslims separately. In addition to an extensive set of individuals' observable characteristics, we introduce variables aiming at capturing the influence of the social environment (family, friends, neighbors, workplace) in which individuals live. Differences in income and wealth across individuals are accounted for by the inclusion of household income. We also include the ward percentage of own ethnic group residents and the ward unemployment rate. Finally, we include a measure of the average discrimination suffered by individuals in the sample for each ethnic group. We report in Table 2 the estimation results for the model specifications that include the more extensive set of explanatory variables.

This econometric exercise is clearly subject to potential endogeneity and simultaneity problems and we therefore interpret our results as descriptive rather than causal. We find that the responsiveness to the different variables varies largely between Muslims and non-Muslims. For the latter, a high education level (being highly educated in Britain) and a high qualification level (being a manager) are among the factors that show the highest negative correlation with identity. For Muslims, instead, education does not seem to have any relationship with the attenuation of identity and, on the contrary, being a manager as well as having a high income seem to be correlated with a stronger religious faith. Also, Muslims living in areas with a lower unemployment rate seem to display a higher sense of identity. Having in mind Table 1, the picture that emerges is that, although Muslims are poorer and less likely to become managers than non-Muslims, those who succeed show a stronger religious faith.

Most importantly, even after conditioning on the various individual and contextual demographic and socio-economic characteristics discussed previously, the speed of cultural integration is lower for Muslims than for non-Muslims. Whereas for non-Muslims, the longer the time spent in the UK, the more attenuated is the attachment to their culture of origin, for Muslims the number of years since arrival does not seem to be related to their inclination to assimilate.³ Being born in the UK is negatively correlated to intensity of religious identity also for Muslims, but the correlation is more than twice as high for non-Muslims than for Muslims. Furthermore, keeping constant the time spent in the UK, age at arrival, although not statistically significant, is negatively correlated with identity for Muslims and positively

3. We tend to cautiously interpret this correlation causally. Although reverse causation is clearly possible (e.g., if non-Muslim individuals who find it harder to integrate return to home countries while Muslims do not), we find these explanations hardly plausible.

TABLE 2. The development of an identity. Dependent variable: (1) Importance of religion, (2) Attitude towards inter-marriage, (3) Importance of racial composition in schools.

Variable	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	Marginal Effect (p-value)		Marginal Effect (p-value)		Marginal Effect (p-value)	
	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Non-Muslim
Age at arrival	-0.0069 (0.1754)	0.0081 (0.3302)	-0.0046 (0.2317)	0.0058 (0.3993)	-0.0106 (0.2175)	0.0098 (0.3630)
Female	0.0177 (0.2155)	-0.0191 (0.3144)	0.0217 (0.2015)	0.0112 (0.3011)	0.0451 (0.2661)	-0.0319 (0.3331)
Born in the UK	-0.0089** (0.0151)	-0.0189** (0.0188)	-0.0133** (0.0120)	-0.0389*** (0.0085)	-0.0210** (0.0251)	-0.0418** (0.0388)
Arranged marriage	0.0119** (0.0153)	0.0236 (0.1221)	0.0311** (0.0103)	0.0523 (0.0666)	0.0541** (0.0111)	0.1023 (0.1002)
Discrimination	0.0672** (0.0450)	0.0405** (0.0379)	0.0650** (0.0451)	0.0398** (0.0307)	0.0965*** (0.0074)	0.0554*** (0.0037)
Children	0.0759** (0.0120)	0.0605** (0.0295)	0.0799** (0.0115)	0.0669** (0.0209)	0.1575** (0.0120)	0.1306** (0.0129)
Years since arrival	-0.0070* (0.0722)	-0.0212** (0.0190)	-0.0079 (0.1022)	-0.0259** (0.0112)	-0.0107 (0.1001)	-0.0475** (0.0201)
No British education	0.0210 (0.4039)	0.0599 (0.2997)	0.0249 (0.4153)	0.0665 (0.2655)	0.1024 (0.3970)	0.1575 (0.2876)
British basic education	0.0002 (0.3645)	0.0015 (0.2370)	0.0001 (0.3224)	0.0010 (0.2095)	0.0100 (0.2465)	0.0201 (0.1720)
British high education	-0.0513 (0.3457)	-0.0807*** (0.0010)	-0.0533 (0.3045)	-0.0888*** (0.0007)	-0.0633 (0.4335)	-0.1070*** (0.0026)
Foreign education	0.0346 (0.2425)	0.0501*** (0.0032)	0.0366 (0.2624)	0.0601** (0.0123)	0.0469 (0.2825)	0.0580** (0.0223)
Unemployed	-0.0542 (0.2190)	0.0003 (0.3971)	-0.0492 (0.1990)	0.0985 (0.3884)	-0.0742 (0.2905)	0.1440 (0.4559)
Self-employed	0.0105 (0.2219)	0.0048 (0.2950)	0.0118 (0.3192)	-0.0085 (0.3504)	0.0105 (0.1870)	-0.0034 (0.2512)
Manager	0.0651** (0.0235)	-0.0499* (0.0813)	0.0617** (0.0204)	-0.0485** (0.0487)	0.0717** (0.0211)	-0.0928*** (0.0078)

(continued)

TABLE 2. (CONTINUED).

Variable	(1) Marginal Effect (<i>p</i> -value)		(2) Marginal Effect (<i>p</i> -value)		(3) Marginal Effect (<i>p</i> -value)	
	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Non-Muslim	Muslim	Non-Muslim
Employee	0.0672 (0.5020)	0.0605 (0.6042)	0.0702 (0.5332)	0.0635 (0.6217)	0.1720 (0.5920)	0.1663 (0.6817)
No parents	0.0508** (0.0144)	0.0122 (0.1121)	0.0598** (0.0164)	0.0169 (0.1320)	0.0435** (0.0105)	0.0115 (0.1066)
Parents' physical contacts	0.0464** (0.0130)	0.0158 (0.1765)	0.0699** (0.0099)	0.0300 (0.1585)	0.0434** (0.0333)	0.0113* (0.0918)
Parents' telephone calls	0.0349** (0.0405)	0.0070 (0.3345)	0.0432** (0.0345)	0.0175 (0.4053)	0.0243** (0.0459)	0.0037 (0.3445)
Parents' letters	0.0708*** (0.0076)	0.0205** (0.0302)	0.0678** (0.0162)	0.0211** (0.0212)	0.0978** (0.0062)	0.0520*** (0.0012)
English spoken at home (older)	-0.0999** (0.0177)	-0.0755** (0.0209)	-0.1091** (0.0195)	-0.0555** (0.0225)	-0.1901*** (0.0003)	-0.1555** (0.0129)
English spoken at home (younger)	-0.0458** (0.0117)	-0.0321 (0.1436)	-0.0576** (0.0312)	-0.0389 (0.1036)	-0.0596** (0.0412)	-0.0369 (0.1553)
English spoken at work	0.0707* (0.0762)	0.0198* (0.0798)	0.0697* (0.0902)	0.0210* (0.0989)	0.0509* (0.0602)	0.0102* (0.0799)
English spoken with friends	-0.0672** (0.0306)	-0.0340** (0.0478)	-0.0671*** (0.0077)	-0.0414** (0.0500)	-0.0772*** (0.0076)	-0.0540** (0.0482)
Household income	0.0009** (0.0201)	-0.0005 (0.4557)	0.0017** (0.0253)	-0.0010 (0.4253)	0.0019** (0.0121)	-0.0015 (0.4075)
Discrimination of own ethnicity	0.0801*** (0.0066)	0.0500** (0.0135)	0.0880*** (0.0026)	0.0560*** (0.0093)	0.1400*** (0.0026)	0.1131*** (0.0035)
Ward density of own ethnic group	-0.0193** (0.0128)	-0.0098** (0.0345)	-0.0173** (0.0180)	-0.0086** (0.0359)	-0.0201** (0.0185)	-0.0058** (0.0450)
Ward unemployment rate	-0.0280** (0.0413)	0.0199 (0.3269)	-0.0289** (0.0430)	0.0189 (0.3355)	-0.0442** (0.0370)	0.0192 (0.3009)

Notes: Marginal effects at the sample means; results weighted for population proportions; a constant and regional dummies are included.

*Significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; ***significant at 1%.

correlated for non-Muslims. If we interpret this correlation causally, it possibly indicates that a strong identity is picked up by the Muslims in the UK, rather than being carried over from personal experiences or memories from the country of origin.⁴ This also appears as a specificity of the Muslims' integration pattern.

Interesting (and perhaps surprising) results are obtained also with regard to the dependence of identity on the neighborhood composition. We find that living in a more integrated neighborhood (i.e., with a lower percentage of own ethnic/religious minority group) and speaking English at work, which signals a mixed working environment, are both associated with a higher sense of identity. This integration pattern is common to both Muslims and non-Muslims, but it appears to be more marked for Muslims. It suggests that intense forms of identities appear, perhaps we can even say "are formed," in social contexts in which the minority ethnic/religious trait is more exposed to the interaction with the majority norm of behavior.

It should be noted that in our data episodes of harassment and discrimination tend to have relatively higher frequency in less segregated neighborhoods. Indeed, our analysis shows a positive relationship between the (average) discrimination of own ethnicity experienced by individuals in the sample and identity. Furthermore, such correlation is stronger for Muslims than for non-Muslims.⁵

However, if ethnic minorities congregate in specific neighborhoods because of some unobservable characteristics that affect their religious identity, our analysis of the relationship between neighborhood segregation and identity would be invalid and the estimates biased. More specifically, to invalidate our analysis, it would be required that immigrants with stronger preferences for religious identity endogenously choose to reside in less segregated neighborhoods. Although this appears counter-intuitive, we formally and directly address this issue in Bisin et al. (2007) by showing that results are qualitatively unchanged when we restrict the sample to a subset of respondents who are arguably "constrained" on where they live.

4. Discussion of Results

Muslims in our data integrate less and more slowly than non-Muslims, even after conditioning on a rich set of individual, contextual demographic, and

4. Also in this case, a reverse causality chain (e.g., if a strong religious faith induces Muslim individuals to leave their country of origin earlier and non-Muslims later on in life) is possible but not so obvious.

5. We shy away of even suggesting a causal interpretation here, because the issue of reverse causality is most severe in the case of the relationship between discrimination and identity. Although identity can be a psychological reaction to being discriminated against, it might as well be that episodes of discrimination are more likely to occur to (or to be perceived as such by) individuals showing exterior signs of intense identity, for example, Muslim women wearing a head scarf or Sikh men wearing a turban.

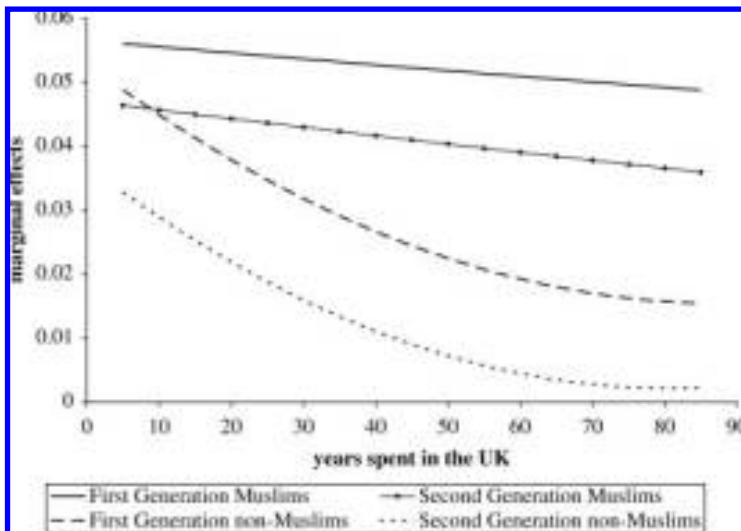


FIGURE 1. Integration patterns over time.

socio-economic characteristics. As an illustration, we show in Figure 1 the integration patterns over time for first- and second-generation immigrants, for Muslims and non-Muslims separately. These results are obtained from the estimation of a specification of our model where interaction terms between the dummy “born in the UK” and “time spent in the UK” (that is equal to “age” if born in the UK and to “years since arrival” otherwise) and its square have been added. We plot the marginal effects (i.e., the changes in the average probability of having a strong religious identity following a one-year increase) for each point in time that are obtained when using “importance of religion” as dependent variable.⁶

Within each group, second-generation immigrants have a lower probability of showing a high attachment to their culture of origin over time, but this reduction is more marked for non-Muslims than for Muslims. More interestingly, years spent in the UK is negatively associated with the level of religious identity of non-Muslims, whereas it has virtually no relationship with the Muslims’ identity. The marginal effects (i.e., changes in the probability of having a strong religious identity following a one-year increase in the time spent in the UK) decline for both Muslims and non-Muslims, but the average effect over time is less than 1% for Muslims and more than 3% for non-Muslims. Figure 1 also shows that, when the effects of our large set of individual and contextual characteristics have

6. The graphs remain qualitatively unchanged when using our alternative measures of religious identity.

been accounted for, a Muslim born in the UK and having spent there more than 50 years has on average the same probability of having a strong religious identity as a first generation non-Muslim who has been in the UK for less than 20 years. Second-generation Muslims never achieve the (lower) level of probability of having a strong religious identity of second-generation non-Muslims at any point in time.

These results are at odds with those of Manning and Roy (2007) who, using the UK Labour Force Survey in 2001, find “no evidence of a culture clash in general, and none connected with Muslims in particular.” More specifically, Manning and Roy adopt a measure of integration constructed from answers to the question: “What do you consider your national identity to be? Please choose as many or as few as apply.” Using this measure they document that a large fraction of those individual in the sample who are born in Britain actually report a British national identity and that such fraction is larger for third than for second-generation immigrants. The measure of integration adopted in our paper is, however, conceptually distinct, as it is constructed from questions regarding importance of religion, attitude towards inter-marriage, and importance of racial composition in schools. It is very possible that integration in terms of national identity follows a very different pattern than the integration in terms of attitudes towards religion, marriage, and schooling. Consistent with this explanation, Constant et al. (2006) adopt a definition of integration that accounts for several cultural and religious factors, including social interactions, and find significantly different integration patterns for Muslims and Christians in Germany.

Another result of our analysis is that we find no evidence that segregated neighborhoods breed intense religious and cultural identities. Although this result might appear surprising, it is consistent with other documented evidence of identity formation. Notably, Fryer and Torelli (2005) find that “acting white” behavioral norms among blacks in the US (i.e., associating academic success to lack of identity) are more developed in racially mixed schools. Putnam (2007) also documents a negative effect of ethnic heterogeneity at the neighborhood level on social capital in the US. Finally, Bisin, Topa, and Verdier (2004) show that religious socialization across US states is more intense when a religion is in minority.

This is important because it stands in contrast with the intellectual foundation of most immigration policies in Europe, which advocate social mixing in order to assimilate or integrate ethnic minorities. The recent ethnic and racial riots mentioned in the Introduction are certainly an indication that the different European integration policies have not been very successful. Our empirical results suggest that the intense and oppositional identities that give rise to such social conflicts are not directly favored by the segregation of the neighborhood in which ethnic and racial minorities tend to live.

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