

# Don't Ban the Muslims: Security and Immigration under the Terror Threat

Marco Giani

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## **Abstract**

How do terror attacks shape the public opinion? Using the shooting perpetrated by *Al-Qaeda* against the headquarters of *Charlie Hebdo* as a natural experiment, I test the short run effect of terrorism in the support for institutions and policies. Support increases for all institutions, yet relative support is biased towards executive institutions. Support for reducing Muslim immigration surprisingly decreases, and no discrimination takes place when comparing Muslim immigration against Jew and Gypsy immigration. This result suggests that there exists no public opinion law connecting Islamic terrorism with Muslim discrimination.

# 1 Introduction

Since the public opinion is key in shaping government action, several scholars seek to understand the public opinion dynamic under increased level of threat. Populist leaders argue that restoring homeland security against the terror threat requires, among other interventions, to foreclose immigration movements from targeted countries. They stress that their policy orientation merely prioritize the will of the majority, concerned about security, over the criticism that arises from intellectual elites, concerned about policy discrimination. Are discriminatory policies really demand-driven?

I study the effect of terror attacks, equated to exogenous increases in security concerns, in the public support for institutions and policies. In particular, I focus on whether the public jointly supports a stronger executive power on the one hand, and stricter immigration rules against Muslims on the other hand. This focus seeks to respond to a major worry among scholars. Fostering through public support a stronger executive power and the discrimination of the Muslims threatens democracies (Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009) and may be counterproductive in fighting Islamic terrorism (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007).

The effect of terror attacks on support for institutions marks the object of an important strand of the literature (Mueller, 1970; Brody, 1991). Terror attacks often result in short-lived spikes of support for a wide range of national institutions (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003; Parker, 1995; Dinesen and Jaeger, 2013). While rally effects are diffuse, they may alter relative support for executive agencies (Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009), possibly reinforcing the abuse of executive discretion in relationship with the emergence of terrorism (Dragu, 2011). I study whether a *rally effect* takes place and whether the latter results in *executive imbalance* when comparing the executive to the judicial and legislative powers.

Terror attacks also alter policy support on key issues (Huddy et al, 2005), often increasing the appeal of policies that engage abroad and protect within, such as immigra-

tion policies (Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009; Legewie, 2013). Since Islamic terrorism leads to negative attitudes towards the Muslims (Canetti-Nisim et al, 2009), the support for stricter immigration policies may be even higher if they target Muslims. Donald Trump proposal to set a temporary ban on Muslim immigration, for instance, was approved by 57% of the respondents in December 2015. I study whether the public support a *Muslim ban* on immigration and whether this ban entails *discrimination* when comparing to other stigmatized minorities.

Testing the causal effect of terror attacks on the public support for both institutions and policies is a complicated task. Whereas these effects are expected to be stronger in the short-run when the crisis is salient, both the low frequency at which polls are collected and the common lack of detailed individual level data disable from implementing robust causal inference methods. In addition, since terror attacks are unpredictable, the data collection effort to track political preferences starts only after the shock takes place, and counterfactuals must be constructed by pooling different surveys. I rely on the following design to overcome the highlighted obstacles. The fieldwork period for the French section of the European Social Survey (ESS7) lasted from October 31, 2014 to March 3, 2015. The headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* came under the attack of *Al-Qaeda* in the late morning of January 7, 2015. Consequently, this terror event falls inside the survey period range. The ESS7 combines random sampling, detailed individual-level information about socio-economic status, political orientations and the exact timing of interviews. Exploiting this coincidence, I study the causal effect of terrorism on related political evaluations as a natural experiment, tackling those measurement issues that arise in observational studies by relying on non-parametric pre-treatment matching techniques based on Iacus et al. (2012). Being the largest terror attack perpetrated in Europe since the London Bombing in July 2007, the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting represents an exceptional case study to assess whether the emergence of the terror threat leads the public to associate security concerns with restrictive immigration policies towards Muslim citizens.

	<i>PS</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN</i>	<i>MODEM</i>	<i>FDG</i>	<i>EELV</i>
Population	29.35	27.12	13.6	9.13	6.91	5.46
ESS7 sample	31.63	28.31	12.15	6.43	3.71	7.13
<b>Difference</b>	<b>+2.28</b>	<b>+1.19</b>	<b>-1.45</b>	<b>-2.7</b>	<b>-3.2</b>	<b>+1.67</b>

Table 1: First-round voting in the 2012 legislative elections for the main parties, French population *vs* the ESS7 sample.

I analyze the support for institutions by exploiting the large availability trust-related items in the dataset. After assessing the size and time-path of *rally effects*, I focus on the *trias politica* and analyze whether the public support for the executive power increases more than that for the judicial or legislative powers. Identifying the support for reducing Muslim immigration is challenging. An increase of it may not reflect a mandate for discrimination, but rather omitted time-varying concerns for cultural or economic issues. I focus on the effect of terrorism on immigration policies targeted to the specific group from which terrorists are recruited, the Muslims, and compare outcomes across groups that are similarly stigmatized but excluded from the set of potential recruits, the Gypsies and the Jews.

## 2 Data and Hypotheses

### 2.1 Data and Identification

Data come from Round 7 of the European Social Survey. The survey is constructed using a strict random probability sampling and highly rigorous translation protocols, and its previous rounds have been widely used by social scientists. The fieldwork period for the French section of the survey lasted from October 31, 2014 to March 3, 2015. Consequently, the 7th of January 2015 falls inside the survey period range. Table 1 shows that the survey is highly representative of the French population with regards to political orientations.

While representative for the whole fieldwork period, the daily collection protocol I

exploit may be biased by, for instance, geographic imbalance. In the Appendix I extensively deal with the common pitfalls associated to the fundamental problem of causality in observational studies by mimicking a block randomized experiment in the spirit of Iacus et al. (2012), using Coarsened Exact Matching. The latter allows to best control for sample imbalance prior to the inference by matching untreated and treated units based on key unbalanced socio-economic and voting behavior covariates.

## 2.2 Hypotheses

Terrorism triggers a concern for enhanced security is one of the most important and uncontroversial findings in the literature (Davis and Silver, 2004; Hetherington and Suhay, 2011). Revised priorities towards security can be traced in individual attitudes towards the role of the government (Davis and Silver, 2004). I proxy the concern for security by survey responses to the following item: “Government must ensure security and be strong in defending citizens.” 1: Agree ; -...- ; 6: Disagree and test:

$H_1$  (*security*): Concern for security increases following terror attacks.

$H_1$  simply provides a justification for equating a terror attack to an exogenous increase in the level of threat to security.

**Support for institutions.** *Rally effects* arise when specific, dramatic, and sharply focused externally driven threats increase the support of national institutions. Terror attacks evoke patriotic feeling (Mueller, 1970), spur cooperation among misaligned political leaders (Brody, 1991) and emphasize the national identity over partisan ones (Kamos and Ram, 2008). These forces jointly explain why international events *elicit al- legiant feelings toward many of society’s political institutions* (Parker, 1995 p527), causing diffuse rally effects.

Exceptionally, a bad crisis management provokes sharp electoral effects that the scholars brilliantly identify (Bali, 2007, Montalvo, 2011). But to an extent mitigated by

the number of casualties (Kamos and Ram, 2008), terror attacks often result in short-lived spikes in diffuse *rally effects* across several institutions (Parker, 1995; Hetherington and Nelson, 2003; Dinesen and Jaeger, 2013). Adding up a French case study to a largely US based literature, I test:

$H_2$  (*rally effects*): Support in the executive/judiciary/legislative increases following terror attacks.

I add politicians and parties analysis in the Appendix. I proxy support for the executive, judiciary and in the legislative using: “Do you trust the Police/Legal system/Parliament?” 0: Not at all ; -...- ; 10: Completely. Trust in the legal system and in the parliament are sufficiently general proxies for, respectively, support for the judiciary and the legislative. On the other hand, even if the police represents one of the most involved operative branch of the executive, trust in the police may be too idiosyncratic to proxy the support for the whole executive. In the Appendix, I use an alternative survey item for support for the executive: “Are you satisfied with the current Government?”. While this alternative survey question better proxies for the whole executive, it entails an imperfect comparison between “satisfaction” and “trust”. However, to the extent that trust is often defined as the difference between expected and actual performance of institutions (Hetherington and Husser, 2012), and since this proxy is scaled in the same way as all others, the comparison between “satisfaction” and “trust” is a meaningful one.

Importantly, rally effects may be asymmetric across political institutions. In particular, as emergency protocols confer special powers to the executive branches (Howell, 2010), salient security issues highlight the role of executive agencies over the role of the the judiciary and the legislative (Merolla and Zechmister, 2009; Dragu, 2011). The doctrine that “certain kinds of issues, like national security issues, are appropriate for executive, not judiciary, resolution” (Schwinn, 2016, p4) leads to expect that terror attacks alter relative support towards executive agencies. Whether the public support *executive imbalance* following terror attacks is an open question. In Parker (1995), fol-

lowing the Gulf crisis, the support for the federal government increased by 12% while the support for the Congress by 7%. By contrast, in Dinesen and Jaeger (2013), following the Madrid bombing, trust in executive, legislative and judiciary agencies display a closer path. I test:

*H<sub>3</sub> (executive imbalance)*: Support for the executive increases more than support for the judiciary and the legislative following terror attacks.

**Support for policies.** The terror threat may rouse support for a set of related international and domestic policies (Huddy et al., 2005), including immigration policies (see e.g. Economou et al., 2014). For instance, Finseraas et al. (2011) show that the Murder of van Gogh on the 2nd of October 2004 increased the support for restrictive immigration policies across European respondents. A similar result is found in Legewie (2013), who shows that the Bali attack on the 12 of October 2012 increased concern for immigration in nine European countries.

This work shares similarities with the design of Finseraas et al. (2011) and Legewie (2013). However, two major differences stand out. Firstly, I focus on the effect of terror attacks in the targeted country and abstract from transnational effects. Secondly, I focus on the support for targeted immigration policies, and in particular on whether Islamic terrorism increases the support for restrictive immigration policies targeting Muslims.

Focusing on Muslim immigration in correspondence with episodes of Islamic terrorism seems appropriate. Evidence documents an increase in discriminatory attitudes against the Muslims in the US following 9/11 (Panagopoulos, 2006, Davis 2007), Israeli Palestinians in Israel following a series (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009) or Arabs in Spain following the Madrid bombing (Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede 2006). Long-run policy discrimination against the Muslims in the housing market in the Netherlands (Gautieret al, 2009) and the UK (Ratcliff et al., 2014) is well documented. I assess the possibility that the public supports the discrimination of the Muslims within the immigration issue through a two-steps identification scheme.

I proxy the public support for reducing Muslim immigration through an ideal survey item: “To what extent you think France should allow Muslims from other countries to come and live in France?” The answers are ordered from “Allow many Muslims to come and live here” to “Allow none”. Higher scores mean therefore higher support for banning, partly or completely, Muslims citizens from entering the country. I test:

$H_4$  (*Muslim ban*): Support for reducing Muslim immigration increases following terror attacks.

The output of  $H_4$  tells us little about whether the support for reducing Muslim immigration reflects the scope of discriminating the aggrieved population. Movements in the Muslim immigration issue may reflect economic concerns or cultural ones. In order to identify a security-driven *discrimination* against the Muslims on the immigration issue, I must compare preferences on Muslim immigration against preferences on the immigration of minorities that are similarly stigmatized but that terrorists cannot recruit. I proxy support for reducing Gypsy and Jew immigration through the same survey item as for the Muslims, and test:

$H_5$  (*Muslim Discrimination*): Support for reducing Muslim immigration increases more than support for reducing Gypsy and Jew immigration following terror attacks.

The Appendix provides further analysis using two other proxies for economic and cultural concerns tied to immigration. I also study whether support for policies change on redistribution and LGTB rights, two issues unrelated to the attack.

### 3 Results

We compute the sample average treatment effect (SATT) according to three different approaches and varying sets of controls. In the first column, we simply compute the mean difference of the dependent variables before and after the attack. The “basic”

model includes only basic socio-economic covariates: household decile, education, gender, age and squared age and whether the respondent has immigration background. The “augmented” model add a dummy equal to one when the observation has voted one of the three main parties in last election (2012). The “full” model add region fixed effects. I provide outputs for both the simple OLS regression, which does not account for imbalance in weighting data, and the Coarsened Exact Matching approach (CEM), which deals with potential imbalance across control and treated units.

Table 2 reports the SATT after 30 days. Concern for security increases by slightly more or slightly less than 10%, depending on the specification. This finding backs the interpretation of the terror attack as a shock to security concerns. Its relatively modest magnitude is consistent with the observation that responses to terror attacks are correlated with the number of casualties (Kam and Ramos, 2008).

I find strong evidence for *rally effects*: support for in the executive, judicial and legislative branches (as well as parties and politicians, as the Appendix details) increases ( $H_2$  not rejected). Similarly, results in Table 2 provide weak evidence in favor of the *executive imbalance* hypothesis ( $H_3$  not rejected). The increase in the support for the executive is always significantly higher than that in the judiciary. It is also higher than the increase in the support for the legislative, but the result is significant at .05 only for some specifications. Increases in the support for the judiciary and for the legislative are, by contrast, never significantly different. The Appendix also provides the SATT after 15 and 45 days, detailing the short-lived nature of the described effects.

As we detail in the Appendix, where we provide a richer description of the political context, several observers expect the attack to foster support for strict immigration rules and discrimination against the Muslims. My results discards this possibility. Table 2 shows that the public strongly rejects a *Muslim ban*. On the contrary, the support for reducing Muslim immigration decreases ( $H_4$  rejected). This decrease, significant for most model specifications, is not significantly larger neither with respect to the one of the Gypsies, which is rather smaller, nor with respect with the one of the Jews, which

is slightly larger. In stark contrast with the literature (Davis, 2007; Canetti-Nisim, 2009; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede, 2006) the public displays no support for *Muslim discrimination* on the immigration issue ( $H_5$  rejected). Again, I provide the SATT for the same analyses after 15 and 45 days, but in this case the time-path is rather unclear and outcomes are more sensitive to the model specification.

Several idiosyncratic factors, and the lack of similar opportunities to answer my research question, disable from exporting our main result *mutatis mutandis* to other contexts and countries. But the main results provide a strong counter-example to the conventional wisdom. There is no spontaneous surge in the support for discriminatory immigration policies under a salient terror threat.

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	Mean-Difference	Basic		Augmented		Full	
		CEM	OLS	CEM	OLS	CEM	OLS
<b>Security (1-6)</b>	<b>.195</b>	<b>.239</b>	<b>.222</b>	<b>.244</b>	<b>.225</b>	<b>.291</b>	<b>.248</b>
SE	(.086)	(.093)	(.090)	(.093)	(.089)	(.097)	(.091)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	1585	814	1492	814	1492	814	1492
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	269	235	249	235	249	235	249
<b>Executive (0-10)</b>	<b>.855</b>	<b>.873</b>	<b>.855</b>	<b>.899</b>	<b>.886</b>	<b>.937</b>	<b>.934</b>
SE	(.124)	(.152)	(.146)	(.152)	(.146)	(.158)	(.150)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	1602	826	1504	826	1504	826	1504
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	273	236	250	236	250	236	250
<b>Judiciary (0-10)</b>	<b>.417</b>	<b>.401</b>	.319	<b>.438</b>	<b>.380</b>	<b>.551</b>	<b>.447</b>
SE	(.160)	(.176)	(.167)	(.173)	(.164)	(.180)	(.168)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	1601	821	1503	821	1503	821	1503
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	273	236	250	236	250	236	250
<b>Legislative (0-10)</b>	<b>.671</b>	<b>.494</b>	<b>.553</b>	<b>.550</b>	<b>.619</b>	<b>.617</b>	<b>.629</b>
SE	(.160)	(.178)	(.164)	(.176)	(.162)	(.182)	(.166)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	1578	816	1485	816	1485	816	1485
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	266	230	244	230	244	230	244
<b>Executive <math>\geq</math> Judiciary</b>	<b>8.29</b>	<b>6.84</b>	<b>11.92</b>	<b>7.02</b>	<b>11.32</b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>9.83</b>
<b>Executive <math>\geq</math> Legislative</b>	1.16	<b>3.09</b>	<b>2.83</b>	2.70	2.24	2.17	<b>2.82</b>
<b>Judiciary = Legislative</b>	2.33	.22	1.72	.32	.17	.11	1.04
<b>Immigration Muslims (1-4)</b>	<b>-.151</b>	<b>-.145</b>	-.091	<b>-.149</b>	<b>-.109</b>	<b>-.123</b>	-.099
SE	(.054)	(.060)	(.056)	(.059)	(.055)	(.061)	(.056)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	1557	802	1470	802	1470	802	1470
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	260	229	242	229	242	229	242
<b>Immigration Gypsies (1-4)</b>	-.064	-.082	-.016	-.087	-.036	-.106	-.062
SE	(.064)	(.066)	(.061)	(.065)	(.054)	(.067)	(.061)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	1563	810	1475	810	1475	810	1475
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	261	229	242	229	242	229	242
<b>Immigration Jews (1-4)</b>	<b>-.167</b>	<b>-.168</b>	<b>-.115</b>	<b>-.167</b>	<b>-.126</b>	<b>-.164</b>	<b>-.136</b>
SE	(.047)	(.056)	(.052)	(.056)	(.051)	(.057)	(.052)
N. Obs ( $T = 0$ )	260	796	1459	796	1459	796	1459
N. Obs ( $T = 1$ )	1822	227	240	227	240	227	240
<b>Muslims <math>\geq</math> Gypsies</b>	3.83	1.42	2.58	1.40	2.44	.10	.59
<b>Muslims <math>\geq</math> Jews</b>	.15	.26	.35	.16	.18	.75	.85
<b>Jews = Gypsies</b>	<b>3.41</b>	1.77	3.09	1.60	2.64	.78	1.74

Total number of observations is 1900, with 1604 untreated and 296 treated units. Bold: Significant at .05. CEM: Coarsened exact matching. OLS: Ordinary Least squares. Hypotheses on couples of SATT are tested by Wald test after regressing simultaneously our dependent variables. Bold: one-sided  $\chi^2$  statistic significant at .05 tested by Wald test after regressing simultaneously our dependent variables. Bold: one-sided  $\chi^2$  statistic significant at .05 for tests (i) and (ii) (implying two sided test significant at .1) or two-sided  $\chi^2$  statistic significant at .05 for test (iii).

Table 2: Sample average treatment effects on the treated for all models after 30 days, testing  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$  and  $H_3$ .

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