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Do Burqa Bans Make Us Safer? Veil Prohibitions and Terrorism in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, several European states have moved to ban or restrict the wearing of Islamic face veils. Supporters of these bans maintain that they are necessary to ensure national security and cultural assimilation. Opponents, on the other hand, argue that prohibitions on the veil unjustly restrict the religious liberty of Muslim women. Interestingly, though, despite the controversy surrounding restrictions and bans on the veil and conflicting expectations on the effects of these limitations, little research has attempted to rigorously analyse their effect on radicalization. We seek to address this gap through a statistical analysis of the effects of these laws on Islamist terrorism in the states of Europe. We find that states that enforce veil bans are indeed statistically much more likely to experience more and more lethal Islamist terrorist attacks than countries where such laws do not exist.

Keywords: Burqa Bans, Europe, Islam, Terrorism, Women's Rights, Veils

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, France became the first European country to pass a nation-wide ban on the full-face Islamic veil in public spaces—a law that was passed nearly unanimously by the French parliament and upheld by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2014. In its ruling, the ECHR declared that veiling could be restricted in favour of the French principles of “living together” (*le “vivre ensemble”*) and “promoting a culture of dialogue, openness and moderation” (European Court of Human Rights 2014, 6). A similar ban came into effect in Belgium that same year. The Bulgarian parliament voted in 2016 to fine and withhold benefits from women who covered their faces in public. In 2017, Austria moved to ban full-face veils in courts and schools. In 2018, a ban on the full-face veil in certain public buildings came into effect in the Netherlands. Denmark quickly followed suit two months later in banning the full-face veil, sparking protests and counter-protests throughout the country. Other countries like Italy, Spain and Switzerland enforce partial veil prohibitions in certain cities or regions. While these laws do not mention Islam or Islamic headgear by name but instead refer generally to any garments covering the face in order to avoid violating anti-discrimination provisions, they are widely believed to be targeted at Muslims and, for this reason, are often referred to as “burqa bans.”

Supporters of these bans claim that they are necessary to ensure national security. Opponents, on the other hand, aver that such laws impede religious liberty and women’s rights, promote Islamophobia and social stigmatization and encourage radicalization. Interestingly, though, despite the controversy surrounding restrictions and bans on public veiling and conflicting expectations on the effects of these limitations, little research has attempted to rigorously analyse their effect on radicalization. We seek to address this gap through a statistical analysis of the effects of veil restrictions on terrorism in the states of Europe.

This article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we examine the claims made by those who support prohibitions on the Islamic veil. Thereafter, we offer a normative argument for why these claims are unfounded and why restrictions on the veil result in *more and more lethal* terrorist attacks. The third section discusses the data and methods used in the analysis, while the fourth presents the results. A concluding section discusses the policy implications of our findings.

RESTRICTIONS ON THE VEIL AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Virtually all of the scholarly literature on veil bans concerns the normative, human rights and legal implications of banning veils. The identity politics literature seeks to understand the impact of veil bans on the identities of Muslims, particularly Muslim women, and how these identities are interpreted by non-Muslims (Croucher 2008, Brems 2014, Golnaraghi and Dye 2016). Feminist work in this vein examines how veil bans seek to “naturalize” the bodies of veiled women (Al-Saji 2010, Chakraborti and Zempi 2012, Spohn 2013, Selby 2014, Crosby 2014). Both sets of literature approach the issue of veil bans from the perspective of Edward Said’s conception of “orientalism” (Said 1979). Legal scholarship examines instead the compatibility of veil bans with domestic and international laws, especially with respect to human rights and religious freedom (Chakraborti and Zempi 2013, Powell 2013-14, Laegaard 2015, Marshall 2015). In addition, some work looks at the background conditions leading to prohibitions on the veil (Behiery 2013, Ferrari and Pastorell 2013). Very little work, though, examines the *broader social consequences* of such bans for Muslim communities or society at large (Syed 2013).

To date, no work attempts to consider empirically the national security implications of veil bans. Yet policymakers and public intellectuals who support these prohibitions tie them explicitly to the security concerns of the state. For this reason, it is important to assess if these

bans achieve the desired result of protecting states from the threat of Islamist extremism—the goal of the present article.

Proponents of restrictions on Islamic dress make three arguments. First, they claim that enveloping Islamic veils present a physical security threat, insofar as Muslim women might use these traditional Islamic garments to conceal weapons or explosives. “You could carry a rocket launcher under your veil,” explained the former president of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga (Martyn-Hemphill 2016). Similarly, Paul Nuttall, former leader of the UK Independence Party, justified banning the burqa on similar physical security grounds: “Obviously we have a heightened security risk at the moment and for CCTV to be effective, in an age of heightened terror, you need to be able to see people’s faces” (Warren 2017). Finally, future British prime minister, Boris Johnson, compared Muslim women in veils to letter boxes and bank robbers (*BBC News*, 2018).

Second, some claim that the veil represents a lack of proper Muslim integration into mainstream European society, which, in turn, creates populations vulnerable to radicalization. By banning outward symbols of Islam, so the argument goes, European Muslims will be better able to integrate into mainstream culture, insofar as the different Islamic headgears cover the face and prevent the participation of Muslim women in society. As explained by Belgian politician Bart Somers, “All clothing which covers nearly the entire face dehumanizes the individual who wears it. It alters the capacities of the human being as a social, communicative, and participatory individual, as a human being capable of recognizing others and able to be recognized in society” (Baehr and Gordon 2013, p.274). In a similar vein, political scientist Federiga Bindi argues that “Wearing the burka...goes against the most basic Western principle: looking into someone’s eyes as the way to build trust. With no eye contact there is no mutual trust, and with no mutual trust there is no way to make integration work” (Dempsey 2016). Even German chancellor Angela Merkel, an individual widely criticized for being naïve about

the dangers of Islam, contended that “the full veil should be forbidden wherever legally possible,” insofar as it encumbers “communication between people” and proper assimilation (John 2016). Soon after Merkel’s comments, Germany approved a partial ban on Muslim veils. In short, the veil hinders Muslim integration in society by impeding the development of shared values based on secular Enlightenment principles.

Third, some see the veil as a powerful symbolic threat associated with terrorism. For example, in 2016, the Mayor of Cannes, France, David Lisnard, prohibited the wearing of the “burkini”—a full-body Muslim bathing suit—on the beaches of the French Riviera resort. Over 30 French coastal towns followed suit in outlawing the burkini at French beaches. Lisnard explained his decision saying, “I simply forbid a uniform that is the symbol of Islamic extremism. We must stop wanting to caricature this order” (*BBC News* 2016). Likewise, Migoule Thierry, General Manager of Services, described burkinis as “Ostentatious outfits that reference allegiance to terrorist movements that make war on us” (*Le Monde* 2016). Both Lisnard and Thierry made a causal connection between the burkini and terrorist attacks in France.

All three of these arguments are grounded in the “securitization of Islam” (Cesari 2013). Buzan et al. (1997, p.23-24) define securitization as meaning that “an issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.” In Europe, conservative Muslim practices, such as the donning of traditional Islamic garb, are frequently seen as attempts to promote a radical political ideology of Islamism throughout the continent. The securitization of Islam constructs Islam as a direct security threat that needs to be addressed apart from normal legal and political processes, including restrictions on the dress of Muslim women. Some empirical studies have corroborated the securitization thesis by revealing the considerable rise of governmental and

societal discrimination against Muslims in Western democracies (Fox and Akbaba 2015, Fox 2019, Fox et al. 2018).

WHY RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC VEILING ENCOURAGE TERRORISM

The previous section has covered the claims made by those who believe that banning the Islamic veil promotes cultural integration and combats Islamist extremism. In the present section we argue against this perspective, offering an explanation for why Islamic veil bans have the *opposite* effect of *impeding* assimilation and *fostering* radicalization. Put simply, veil prohibitions simultaneously target the two core identities of Muslim women living in Europe: gender and religion. Both restrictions heighten the likelihood of radicalization and terrorism.

First, proponents of veil bans argue that these laws promote assimilation of Muslims by freeing Muslim women from the bondage of traditional cultural mores, which inhibit communication and participation in public life. However, available evidence suggests that veil bans have the opposite effect. Instead of encouraging integration, they result in greater *isolation* of Muslim women who feel as if they are not free to be themselves in public, owing to social stigmatization, scapegoating and even physical attacks (Open Society Foundation 2011). In this sense, face veils can be seen as *empowering* for Muslim women, while restrictions on these garments compromises their psychological, emotional and even physical security.

But how does the suppression of the right of women to don the veil in public and the consequent isolation of these women foster Islamic extremism? Accumulating evidence suggests that women have a unique and powerful role to play in the making of terrorists. Women are often the first to notice behavioural changes and symptoms of radicalization in their family members and are thus often the first line of defence against terrorism. Harris and

Milton note, for example, that “women having more clout in their homes, communities, and nations at large, [allows] them to act as veto players in each of these settings, which alters the decision-making calculus of an individual considering resorting to terrorism as a means to achieve change” (Harris and Milton 2016, p.65). The flipside of this argument is that if women are the targets of subjugation, particularly on the basis of their faith, they will naturally be more accepting of the idea that violence is an appropriate way to change the status quo and less likely to play the role of veto player in the process of radicalization. Indeed, research shows that states that trample on the rights of women experience greater levels of interstate violence (Caprioli 2000, Caprioli and Boyer 2001, Caprioli 2003, Melander 2005, Capriole and Trumbore 2006) and intrastate violence (Caprioli 2005, Hudson et al. 2012, Hudson and Leidl 2015), including terrorism (Cameron and Milton 2016, Saiya et al. 2017, Huber 2018). Sometimes, women themselves might even take up the gun (O’Rourke 2009, Bloom 2001, Spencer 2016).

Second, veil restrictions represent restrictions on religious expression. A growing body of scholarship has shown how these kinds of restrictions can produce violent backlash, frequently resulting in terrorism (Toft et al. 2011, Grim and Finke 2011, Henne et al. 2012, Satana et al. 2013, Saiya, 2015; Saiya 2017; Saiya 2018; Saiya 2019). According to this line of research, religious discrimination leads to the generation of resentment on the part of minorities and heightens the likelihood that they will take up the gun against governments deemed to be acting unfairly towards them. As Akbaba and Taydas (2011, p.277) explain:

Members of the religious minority perceive discriminatory policies as fundamental threats to their moral framework and develop antagonistic feelings towards the perpetrators of such policies. Acts of discrimination are perceived by the victims as evidence of the government’s intolerance and lack of respect for other belief systems. Rebels who feel subordinate stop perceiving the state

as a neutral entity but rather identify the state as an agent responsible for promoting the identity of the dominant group.

Religious restrictions are particularly dangerous in that they target the religious practices of both genders. In the case of restrictions on the veil, many Muslim men and women, citing passages in the Qur'an and statements attributed to the Prophet Mohammed in the Hadiths, consider veiling to be a divine obligation for adult Muslim women as a sign of modesty, a method of curbing male sexual desire and an outward expression of obedience to God.¹ Accordingly, Muslim men may arrive at the conclusion that they have a moral responsibility to protect their faith from external assaults, including limitations on religious dress. Indeed, restrictions on veiling have been used as a powerful recruitment tool by Islamist extremist groups who claim that such restrictions amount to an attack on Islam. In short, veil restrictions are dangerous because they engender grievances, facilitate collective action and, sometimes, provoke violent backlash.

For example, many recruits joined the terrorist organization ISIS over the restriction of the veil by their home country. Consider Gulmuod Halimov, the former head of Tajikistan's security forces, who left his station and joined ISIS, in part, because the Tajik state no longer permitted Muslims to "wear Islamic hijabs" (RFE/RL 2015). A strikingly similar story has been told by many other men who have left their countries to fight in Syria: one of the most important motivators in their decision to join ISIS or affiliate groups involved what they perceived to be attacks on Islam, especially bans on the veil (De Féo 2018). In summary, bans and more limited restrictions on the Islamic veil are likely to engender resentment, sometimes resulting in terrorism via two pathways, one related to gender, the other to religion. First, where

¹ Qu'ran 7:46; 19:16-17; 24:30-31; 32:32-33; 33:53; 33:58-59; 41:5; 42:51.

Muslim women cannot wear the veil in public in accordance with their religious convictions, they are likely to cling more tightly to their faith, become more isolated from society and grow resentful at repressive state policies and social discrimination and harassment, in the process becoming less likely to play the role of “veto player” in the process of radicalization and more accepting of the use of force. Second, Muslim populations in general are likely to see such prohibitions as attacks on their culture and values and grow increasingly resentful; some might even become convinced that they have no choice but to turn to the gun.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to analyse the relationship between veil bans and terrorism, we test for the claim that these bans make countries more secure and less susceptible to terrorism. In order to test for this hypothesis, we compiled a panel dataset of 28 European countries for the period 2003 to 2017 (a time period corresponding to data availability). The dataset contains information on different kinds of veil bans; a number of political, economic and demographic control factors; and different operationalizations of our dependent variable, Islamist terrorism. Our dependent variables are non-negative event counts unevenly distributed across observations and are likely to be dependent on each other. Hence, we employ negative binomial regression with robust standard errors clustered on countries in our main models.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables operationalize four different constructs of terrorism. The first dependent variable, *TerroristAttacks*, is defined as the total number of Islamist terrorist attacks in a given country in a given year. Following Piazza (2009, p.64), an Islamist terrorist attack is defined as any attack “committed by groups [or individuals] that are primarily motivated by interpretations of Islamic political principles or by a Muslim religious and communal identity.” A second dependent variable, *TerroristCasualties*, measures the number of victims killed or injured by Islamist terrorist attacks in a specific country-year. A third dependent variable, *TerroristFatalities*, is defined as the number of people killed in Islamist terrorist attacks. The final dependent variable, *TerroristInjuries*, is a count of the number of people injured due to Islamist terrorist attacks. The data for these dependent variables were sourced and coded from the Global Terrorism Database (START 2012).

Independent variable

Our theoretically central independent variable is the presence or absence of any kind of restriction on the Muslim veil as a result of laws or policies prohibiting face coverings. These restrictions can include nation-wide bans on the veil in public spaces, limitations on the wearing of the veil by civil servants or in government buildings or localized bans in particular cities or towns. The restricting of the veil in any of these manners (*VeilBan*) is, hence, a binary variable coded as “1” if a ban on face coverings exists in a given country in a particular year and “0” otherwise. Table 1 presents the different kinds of bans on face coverings that exist in Europe today along with the countries that fall into each category.

Table 1: Veil Bans in Europe

[Insert here]

Control variables

A number of control variables are used to account for other factors that may influence terrorist activities in a given country. These include political, demographic and economic factors in line with past research on the structural correlates of terrorism.

We first control for a country's regime characteristics in terms of its level of institutional democracy (*Polity2*) and the durability of its regime (*Durable*). *Polity2* measures a country's regime type using a scale ranging from -10 (strongly autocratic) to +10 (strongly democratic). We include this variable to account for divergent findings that democracy may encourage or undermine terrorism. *Durable* measures the number of years a regime has been in place without change. It is expected that the older the regime, the less likely the incidence of terrorism. Both variables are taken from the Polity IV database (Marshall, Gur and Jaggers 2019).

Our second group of control variables takes into account the structural characteristics of states apart from its regime. We thus include the log of a state's population (*logpop*), the log of its GDP per capita (*logGDP*), the log of its geographical area (*logarea*) and its level of state fragility (*sfi*). The first two variables are taken from the World Bank Development Indicators (World Bank Development Indicators 2019), while the third comes from the Centre for Systemic Peace (Marshall and Marshall 2017). Log of population and log of geographical area are included to control for the idea that larger populations and geographical areas make it relatively easier for terrorist activities to take place. Log of GDP is included as a covariate to control for the finding that economically better performing countries may experience fewer terrorist attacks. State fragility index (*Sfi*) is a variable that captures the effectiveness and

legitimacy of a country on security, political, economic and social dimensions, ranging from a score of 0 (no fragility) to 25 (extreme fragility). It is expected that a country's fragility is closely associated with its capacity to hold terrorism at bay. State fragility is thus expected to be positively related to the incidence of terrorism.

A competing explanation for terrorism in Europe finds roots in Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis (Huntington 1996). Huntington argued that cultural differences based primarily in religious distinctiveness would be one of the biggest contributors to violence in the post-cold war world. Theoretically, the clash thesis suggests that religious heterogeneity should breed conflict. We thus test for the clash thesis in two ways. First, we include a variable for Muslims' share of population within each country (*Muspc*). This variable was sourced from the Religious Characteristics of States dataset (Brown and James, 2018). Second, we control for countries located in southern and Eastern Europe (*Region*) in accordance with a finding from a survey by the Pew Research Centre revealing that these countries exhibit higher rates of anti-Muslim sentiment relative to counties located in northern and western Europe (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Using a classification scheme developed by the United Nations, *Region* is thus a binary variable whereby countries in Southern and Eastern Europe were coded with a "1" and "0" otherwise.

Summary statistics of the variables are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

[Insert here]

RESULTS

We deploy four different models, one for each of our dependent variables, to test our hypothesis that veil bans lead to increased Islamist terrorism. Table 3 presents the results for the four main models. Specification of each remains the same except in how the dependent variable is defined. All covariates have been lagged by one time period ($t-1$) to account for delayed effects of regressors on our dependent variables.

Table 3: Main Results

[Insert here]

The results clearly show that veil bans are positively correlated with terrorist activities, irrespective of how we define the dependent variables measuring terrorism. In Models 1 and 3 the main independent variable of interest, veil bans, is statistically significant at the 1% level of significance. In Models 2 and 4, it holds statistical significance at the 5% level. Thus, veil bans remain statistically significant across all four model specifications, supporting our hypothesis that restricting the wearing of the Muslim veil does not reduce terrorism but rather contributes to it. Among the control variables, level of institutional democracy gives mixed results (without any statistical significance), while durability of a regime has a positive coefficient with statistical significance in two of the four models. The positive sign is contrary to our expectation that older regimes are less likely to experience terrorism. State fragility index has a positive coefficient but without any statistical significance across the four models. The coefficient for log of population is signed in the expected positive direction in all the models and holds statistical significance, indicating, expectedly, that more populous countries are more

at risk for terrorist attacks. The variable log of GDP is not found to be statistically significant in any of the models. Geographical area also shows inconsistent results across models.

Our tests for the clash of civilizations thesis find little support. The variable for the Muslim percentage of a country's population (*Muspc*) is found to be positive and statistically significant only in one of the models. The geographical location of countries also lacks statistical significance.

Table 4: Substantive Effects

[Insert here]

Given that we use negative binomial models, we analyse the incidence rate ratios (IRR) to understand the substantive effects of the models. The ratios shown in Table 4 report the predicted number of terrorism incidents and casualties owing to veil bans. The statistically significant results underscore the impact of veil bans on terrorist events. In Model 1, the IRR of 15.26 indicates that countries with such clothing bans experience almost 15 times more cases of Islamist terrorist attacks than countries without such bans. In Model 2, the IRR of 90.92 reveals that countries with veil bans could experience over 90 times more cases of victims killed or injured due to Islamist terrorism than countries without them. Similarly, in Model 3, the IRR of 17.12 tells us that countries with veil bans are likely to witness 17 times more cases of victims killed due to Islamist terrorism compared to countries without such bans. And lastly, the IRR of 60.28 in Model 4 shows that countries with veil bans may experience close to 60 times more cases of victims injured owing to Islamist terrorism than countries without these

bans. (The predicted number of casualties and injuries are substantially higher than the number of attacks and fatalities, thus explaining the relatively larger substantive effects for the former two variables.

ROBUSTNESS TESTS

In addition to our main analysis, we ran several methodological robustness checks to validate our results. Our first set of tests checks for reversed causality. Might it be the case that we have the argument backwards—that veil bans come into effect after terrorist attacks? We address this issue in a number of ways. First, we employ structural equation modelling. We regress the dependent variables (different measures of terrorism) on all control variables except the variable measuring the presence or absence of veil ban. Then we predict the number of incidents. In stage two, we regress veil restrictions on predicted events and other control variables and found that predicted events do not play a role in explaining veil bans.

In another test of reverse causality, we invert the models. To test for an impact of terrorist events in time period $t-1$ on veil bans in time period t , we run logit models with presence or absence of veil restrictions as the dependent variable while using the lag of the different terrorism variables as regressors. The coefficients were found to be positive in two models but not statistically significant. As a further check, we also lagged the terrorist events by two time periods ($t-2$) to test the impact on veil bans in time period t . The coefficient is *negative* and statistically significant in one of the models and not significant in the others, indicating that terrorist events do not contributing to veil restrictions. Finally, descriptive statistics also show that terrorism occurs after the introduction of veil bans. Looking at the number of terrorist incidents that occurred before and after the introduction of these bans, we

find that 8 attacks occurred before and 54 after. Together, these tests provide solid evidence that the direction of causality is as we theorize.

A second set of robustness tests deals with the issue of causal heterogeneity. It might be argued that veil bans and terrorism are actually independent of each other and the correlation we find between the two is caused by the existence of an unassimilated Muslim population. To check for codetermination, we add a covariate “*Negative_views*” to our models which is a proxy for the cultural integration of Muslims. This variable is based on a report by the Pew Research Centre, which asked respondents how likely they would be to welcome Muslims as members of their family (Pew Research Centre, 2018). The existence of negative sentiments towards a religious group acts as a deterrent to cultural assimilation and is likely to create more hostile feelings towards the group’s religious practices (like veiling) as well. Our variable thus measures the percentage of the overall population that say they would be willing to accept Muslims as members of their families. After controlling for this variable, the results remain unchanged. We also separately control for restrictions on religious minorities, a variable sourced from the Religion and State Project (Fox 2008; 2016). The variable is constructed as a sum of all variables measuring various religious restrictions on minority groups, reflecting the varying regulations across countries that might hinder assimilation of minority groups. Even after controlling for this new covariate, veil restrictions continue to exert a positive and statistically significant influence over the dependent variables. Further, we also include both cultural assimilation of Muslims as well as restrictions on religious minorities as covariates simultaneously instead of one at a time, and our results continue to hold. As a further check for heterogeneous observations and skewed distribution, we conduct jack-knife tests for all our main models. Similar to bootstrapping, jack-knifing is a resampling method that drops one observation at a time from the sample to give an improved estimate. All our jack-knife estimators are found to have positive coefficients along with statistical significance as was the

case for our main models. Our final robustness test checks for outlier effects. We recoded all of the dependent variables as binary (the presence or absence of terrorism or victims of terrorism) and reran the models using logistic regression. The results remain unchanged, with coefficients found to be statistically significant and signed in the expected positive direction.

THE CASE OF FRANCE

Recall that earlier we argued that veil prohibitions engender terrorism via two different pathways, one related to gender, the other related to religion. In this section, we take a succinct look at the case of France—the first European country to enforce a nation-wide ban on the veil in public spaces and arguably the most aggressively secular country in all of Europe—with respect to both of these causal mechanisms. The Pew Research Center documents that France was one of only two countries in 2015 that had more than 200 cases of government force against religious groups – mostly instances of individuals being punished for violating the ban on face coverings in public spaces and government buildings (Pew Research Center 2017). The deeply entrenched bias against veils found in France makes it an ideal case study regarding the connection between veil prohibitions and terrorism.

First, restrictions on public veiling diminish women’s agency. Paris justified the prohibitions on the veil on the grounds that it prevented women from being full participants in society and contradicted “French values.” The evidence suggests, however, that bans on

Islamic clothing ironically discourage Muslim female integration. A 2013 report by Open Society Foundations revealed that more Muslim women were staying home in France, because after the ban they felt considerably less secure, owing to harassment and violence targeted at them by the general public. In other cases, some young Muslim females began to express bitterness towards French society and doubled down on head-covering as a form of defiance. "It's my way of fighting, to say no to the government, who took away my liberty," declared one woman who began to veil herself after 2010 (Samuel, 2018). Moreover, women who choose to remain veiled after the passage of full or partial veil bans reported increased incidents of Islamophobia and physical assaults. Perhaps the most disturbing of these incidents involved a veiled pregnant Muslim who was violently attacked by two men; shortly after the attack, she suffered a miscarriage (Erlanger 2013). Thus, "restrictions on the movement and security of women in the public space has had significant detrimental consequences on their physical and mental health and on their relationships" (Open Society Foundations, 2013, pg. 17).

Not only are Muslim women less likely to be integrated into French society as a result of veil restrictions, some have even become terrorists. For example, the first all-female ISIS terrorist cells emerged in France in 2014, and 40 percent of young French foreign fighters in Syria were women (Rubin and Breeden, 2016). In 2014, two girls were arrested for conspiring to carry out a suicide bombing against a synagogue in Lyon (Grant, 2014). In 2016, three women plotted to blow up a car packed with gas canisters near the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris (Chrisafis, 2016). In 2019, the Paris Criminal Court sentenced to prison two Muslim women for plotting attacks (*France 24*, 2019). Nowhere else in Europe can be found the level of radicalization among females as in France.

Veil restrictions are also seen as an attack on Islam. Sociologist Agnès de Féo remarks that "Those who have left to go and fight in Syria say that this law (ban on Islamic

veils) is one of things that encouraged them. They saw it as a law against Islam. It had the effect of sending a message that Islam was not welcome in France” (McPartland, 2015).

France has produced more foreign fighters than any other Western country. Benmelech and Klor (2018) estimate that as many as 2500 French citizens or residents have joined ISIS as foreign fighters. These individuals have also declared war on a French state they believe to be subjugating Islam.

Islamist terrorist organizations have exploited restrictions on the veil as a tool of recruitment. For example, the extremist organization al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) devoted an entire article in the first issue of its magazine *Inspire* to the topic of France’s ban on the face veil. In like fashion, in various articles in its online French magazine, *Dar al-Islam*, ISIS argues that the ban on religious garb constitutes part of France’s larger campaign against Islam (Islamic State 2015, 2016a, 2016b). This theme would be taken up in several of the Islamic State’s online recruitment videos as well. These articles and videos make the case that limitations and prohibitions on the veil are tantamount to an attack on Islam itself.

The implementation of the veil prohibition in public spaces corresponded with a marked increase in terrorist attacks. From 2011-2017, France witnessed 34 identifiable Islamist terrorist attacks within its borders. In several of these attacks, restrictions on the veil were cited by terrorists as an important motivating factor. In the seven years before the ban took effect, the country experienced not a single identifiable Islamist terrorist attack.

In short, the observable defiance, and in some cases, radicalization of some French Muslim women, the evident heightened grievances among French Muslim communities over the veil ban and the timing of Islamist terrorist attacks together suggest that the move to restrict veils in public places has not served to empower women, promote cultural integration

or curb religion's perceived divisiveness. Instead, the evidence suggests that veil ban has backfired by stigmatizing Islam and making the turn to the gun more likely.

CONCLUSION

As seen in the statements earlier, proponents of veil bans believe that they promote the cultural integration of Muslims by removing an obstacle to full Muslim participation in society, namely the veil. This, in turn, has the effect of reducing isolation and tendencies towards violence. However, the empirical evidence presented in this article demonstrates otherwise. Countries with such bans are *more* likely to experience terrorism events and casualties from those attacks. Bans on Islamic face coverings can be critiqued from a human rights perspective, insofar as they violate rights to free religious expression and non-discrimination for Muslim women. As this article has shown, such bans also have dramatic security implications.

Bans on Islamic headgear are currently being debated globally. While the majority of countries enforcing full or partial prohibitions on the veil lie in Europe, a growing cadre of African states—including Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, Niger, Congo and Algeria—have recently adopted full or partial bans on face coverings. The Canadian province of Quebec became the first place in North America to institute a ban on the wearing of religious symbols—including the veil—for certain government workers. Australia is currently engaged in debates about whether or not to institute a similar ban. In the wake of the Easter Sunday bombings in Colombo, one of the first actions taken by the Sri Lankan government was to ban the veil.

It is important for governments to consider not only the human rights implications of restricting religious expression and women's rights in the name of combatting terrorism, but the social, political and economic consequences as well. Such measures are also a matter of both national and international security, given the transnational nature of modern terrorism

coupled with the fact that veil restrictions are clearly directed at a particular religious group. Finally, our findings underscore the need for cultural and religious sensitivity towards immigrant groups as the foundation for effective religion and gender related policies.

Replication Materials

Supporting data and materials for this article can be accessed on the Taylor & Francis website, doi:

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