

Beyond Religious Categories: Understanding the Gap in Violence Acceptance between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Germany

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Abstract

Debates about the integration of immigrants have been accompanied by references to cultural differences between established members of immigrant-receiving societies and immigrants – especially regarding immigrants from Islamic countries and Muslim immigrants. At the same time, referring to Islam and Muslim culture as not compatible with the democratic norms of Western societies more often than not mirrors motives of immigrant exclusion. This study employs a survey experiment in Germany studying the differences in the acceptance of violence between Muslims and non-Muslims. Building upon previous research, we conceptualize being Muslim as a proxy for various social variables that might explain a gap in acceptance of violence. Focusing on sociocultural factors, unequal treatment, and political integration as competing explanations, we find that differences in traditional values, social trust, and internal political efficacy can be largely held accountable for the gap in the acceptance of violence. The results underline the critical relevance of political integration processes that may facilitate social cohesion of immigrant-receiving societies.

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Introduction

Migration and integration represent topics that have ignited intense debates, both within academia and the public arena. One critical controversy has been about immigration from predominantly Muslim-populated countries and whether or not Islamic religiosity hampers the integration process of Muslim immigrants in Western societies (Koopmans 2010; 2013). This debate has also underscored right-wing populist narratives centered on the incompatibility of the Islamic religion and the cultural values of the West (Betz 2013; Schmuck et al. 2017). For example, incidents of violence during New Year's Eve in Cologne (2015/16) and Berlin (2022/23) predominantly exercised by young men with a migration background from countries of the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa) resulted in a debate about failures of the integration of young Muslims, but also social and institutional discrimination that particularly disadvantage these groups of immigrants.¹

The present study examines the multifaceted integration process of Muslim immigrants (and those of Muslim immigrant descent) by employing a mechanism-based perspective on group-specific differences in the acceptance of violence. Focusing on explanations of violence and violence acceptance among Muslims, previous research has found differences in violence acceptance, as well as sociocultural attitudes such as gender role attitudes and views on pluralism, between the majority population in Western democratic countries and immigrants from predominantly Islamic-influenced countries (Diehl et al. 2009; Lewis and Kashyap 2013; Norris and Inglehart 2012). However, systematic causal explanations of these differences accounting for various social mechanisms are scarce. At the same time, violence is a topic that is highly publicly visible through mass media and political communication. Moreover, violence may undermine the monopoly of the state in exercising violence and goes beyond the limits of what can be tolerated in a liberal democracy (Trüdinger and Ziller 2023).

We approach the topic of violence acceptance from a mechanism-based theoretical perspective. This means that we conceptualize Muslim religiosity as a proxy variable

¹ <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/silvester-krawalle-berlin-fakten-polizei-100.html>, <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/239696/nach-koeln-ist-wie-vor-koeln-die-silvesternacht-und-ihre-folgen/>, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2010-06/islam-jugendliche-gewalt>

that is related to a variety of socially relevant characteristics. By explicitly accounting for these characteristics—which include socio-cultural values, discrimination, and political integration—we expect that the predictive capacity of the Muslim proxy will decrease. The extent to which such a (partial) mediation occurs will indicate the relevance of the respective mechanism. Our approach is related to debates about what race, ethnic minority background, and migration status actually stand for (Romero 2008), which factors (e.g., low education, disadvantages, discrimination experiences) they stand for (Morris 2007; Wang 2004), and whether we should use this as a predictor variable in social research at all (Garcia 2017). Among the most prevalent perspectives on ethnic or religious categories are socioeconomic status (e.g., education or income), chances and restrictions in the receiving society (e.g., discriminatory experiences), and characteristics of the own ethnic group (e.g., ethnic networks) (Grewal and Hamid 2022; Lewis and Kashyap 2013; Maliapaard and Alba 2016; Martén et al. 2019).

To test our argument empirically, we use a survey experiment on evaluating fictive violence between a mother and a child, which we conducted in 2022 in ten German cities with an oversampling of respondents from Islamic-influenced countries. Using an experimental framework enables causal inference for a topic prone to social desirability and confounding by unobserved respondent characteristics. The reference to everyday violence is furthermore supposed to increase respondents' evaluative engagement with the presented vignette. Specifically, we investigate differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in the treatment effects on how conflictual the situation has been assessed, whether or not respondents would intervene in the situation, and to what extent such a situation evokes perceptions of anomia regarding the neighborhood and society as a whole. Results from regression and path models reveal a substantial gap between the two groups in how conflictual the violent situation is assessed to be. This gap can be explained to a substantial degree by differences in traditionalism, social trust, and political integration. Our results move beyond religious group categories and have important implications for public debates about immigrant integration in ethnically diverse societies.

Muslim Religiosity and Acceptance of Violence

The question of whether and, if so, why Islamic religiosity propels acceptance of violence has been a controversial claim in public and scientific discourse (Hadjar et al. 2019). Islamic religiosity has often been identified as a barrier to adhering to Western core values such as pluralism and equality and, thus, to integration into Western European societies (Glas 2021; Norris and Inglehart 2012; Röder 2014). Similarly, the view that Muslim immigrants are more willing to exercise and accept violence is widespread and has been used by proponents of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim movements and political parties (Schmuck et al. 2017). To what extent Islamic religions themselves can actually be held accountable for promoting violence has been controversially debated (Koopmans et al. 2021; Hadjar et al. 2019). There is some evidence that religious scriptures that legitimize violence may elicit support for violent behavior (Koopmans et al. 2021). At the same time, particularly Islamic fundamentalism has been linked to greater hostility towards outgroups (Koopmans 2015). In contrast, research on the acceptance of violence more generally has heightened sources other than (fundamentalist) religious beliefs as relevant predictor variables, including individual socioeconomic characteristics, value orientations, as well as, or historical and other institutional factors (e.g., colonialism, political corruption) (Hadjar et al. 2019).

What has been overlooked in these strands of research is what being a “Muslim immigrant” actually stands for. “Being a Muslim immigrant” can be interpreted as a social category, containing an ethnic component as well as a religious component. These components are largely socially constructed and contain different social meanings such as specific group characteristics, personal qualities, social status, political views, and values (Lynch 2017; Wang 2004; Morris 2007). As such, they perpetuate group-based inequalities and discriminatory practices. This has significant methodological as well as socio-political consequences, since using the overarching category of “Muslim immigrant” may blur the actual underlying factors influencing the acceptance of violence. Thus, if we analyze differences in the acceptance of violence between Muslims and non-Muslims, we have to bear in mind the underlying compositional differences between these two groups.

Apart from the obvious difference in religious affiliation, the composition of age and gender differs between the group of Muslim immigrants and non-Muslims in Europe with a greater share of young and male individuals in the Muslim group – largely determined by the refugee influx to Europe in 2014-16 (Pfündel et al. 2021). At the same time age and gender differences are systematically related to violence with younger, and especially male, individuals being more likely to engage in and accept violent behavior (Hadjar et al. 2019; Baniamin 2022; Witt et al. 2021). Another critical difference refers to residential sorting and violence exposure. Muslim immigrants are more likely to self-select into socially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods (Pfündel et al. 2021). Living in these neighborhoods bears additional risks since there are considered to be more dangerous and violent (Kurtenbach and Rauf 2019). In the literature on neighborhood violence and crime, this is attributed to lower rates of collective efficacy in neighborhoods with higher concentrated economic disadvantage, higher immigrant concentration, and lower residential stability (Feldmeyer et al. 2019; Maxwell et al. 2018; Sampson et al. 1997). It is therefore important to control for compositional differences in sociodemographic and residential characteristics to ensure comparability between the two groups.

Explaining Differences in the Acceptance of Violence

Besides basic sociodemographic differences, a number of explanations may underline the relationship between “being Muslim” and the acceptance of violence. We focus on the following three areas: cultural-religious factors, unequal treatment, and political integration.

Cultural-Religious Explanations

This pillar of argument refers to socialization processes, subjective religiosity, and traditional values. Muslim individuals living in Germany are likely to have an immigrant background. Immigrants migrate from various countries of origin, with different political systems and prevalent social norms. Major countries of origin of Muslim immigrants are located in the MENA region and are characterized by comparatively low economic development, low degrees of democratization, low state capacity, and a higher propensity for violent conflicts (Josua and Edel 2021).

Furthermore, Muslim individuals with an immigrant background have distinct socialization experiences in these countries of origin. Apart from direct experiences with war or violent conflicts (e.g., as an Afghan or Syrian refugee), the institutional and normative fabric of the societies immigrants grew up in may have shaped their experience with and perceptions of violence. For example, forms of corporal punishment of children are explicitly forbidden in Germany, where there is typically no general prohibition of violence against children in predominantly Muslim countries (see <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/>). Whereas the legal ban on corporal punishment against children has led to the reduction of violence against children in Germany (Bussmann 2004; Witt et al. 2021), corporal punishment is still quite frequent in Muslim countries (Baniamin 2022). This is crucial since it has been shown that in contexts, where corporal punishment is common, other types of violence are also more accepted (Lansford und Dodge 2008).

Differences in the degree and practice of religious faith can be identified as relevant differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western societies (Norris and Inglehart 2012; Röder 2014). For example, mosque attendance is shown to be positively related to holding more patriarchal values (Alexander and Welzel 2011). Moreover, strong Muslim religiosity is considered to predict hostility towards outgroups (Koopmans 2015). Regarding the acceptance of violence, studies on Muslim adolescents reveal a positive relationship between subjective religiosity and higher levels of violence (Baier 2014). In a similar vein, Carol et al. (2020) find that Muslim religiosity is only related to higher levels of violence if adolescents identify as religious without actually practicing the abstinent lifestyle promoted by religion. Consequently, there are strong arguments to assume that Muslim's subjective religiosity is positively related to acceptance of violence.

Muslim religiosity is associated with more traditionalist attitudes and less egalitarian attitudes, regarding gender roles in particular (Lewis und Kashyap 2013; Maliepaard und Alba 2016; Röder 2014). In turn, adherence to more traditionalist values is generally connected to higher acceptance of violence. In a similar vein, Baniamin (2022) has shown that holding egalitarian and emancipative values leads to lower acceptance of

corporal punishment. Hence, it is important to include immigration background, subjective religiosity, and traditionalism into account.

Unequal Treatment

Apart from cultural-religious differences, experiences of unequal treatment, such as discrimination, may influence the acceptance of violence. Given that Muslims are more prone to experience unequal treatment, it is critically important to incorporate discrimination as an explanatory factor. Indeed, Muslims living in Western societies are over-proportionally exposed to discrimination, especially discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds (Lindemann and Stolz 2021). Research on the consequences of perceived discrimination demonstrates that perceived discrimination is correlated with higher support for and willingness to use violence (Grewal and Hamid 2022; Mansoury Babhoutak et al. 2020). Although these findings refer mainly to political violence, they can also be transferred to acceptance of violence in a more general way.

Experiencing discrimination may have far-reaching psychological consequences, such as reduced well-being and self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, and depression (Oskooii 2020). These feelings, in turn, might lead to an anomic feeling of “not caring for anything” and just accepting violent acts in everyday life. Furthermore, experiencing discrimination might trigger perceptions of belonging to a group that is threatened, which in turn leads to higher support of violence as a means to protect the own group. Experiencing inequality points in the same direction. Studies on young Muslims in the Netherlands have shown that perceptions of injustice, as well as collective relative deprivation, lead to grievances and feelings of inferiority, which result in higher support of violence (Doosje et al. 2013; van Bergen et al. 2015). In a related vein, it has been illustrated that under certain conditions local economic deprivation (especially if made salient through discriminatory practices), makes minorities more prone to engage in violent unrest (Dancygier and Laitin 2014).

To depict the phenomenon of unequal treatment we hence not only include measures of personal experience with discrimination, but also the broader concepts of social trust and political trust. Social trust refers to the overall quality of horizontal relations with other citizens that are shaped by repeated social interactions which go beyond specific

acts of discrimination. Political trust reflects vertical relations with representatives of the state and is expected to be informed by institutional forms of discrimination (e.g., stop and frisk by the police) and the evaluation of life chances more generally.

Political Integration

With this category, we refer to the political integration of individuals in a society. Political integration concerns the incorporation into the political system through citizenship, the right to vote, informal political participation, and forms of political engagement (Röder 2019). Obtaining citizenship is a crucial step in the integration of an individual, as with this status an individual also becomes legally a full member of a society. Nevertheless, citizenship has not only a legal component but also an identificatory component which consists of a feeling of belonging to the respective society (Yazdih 2019). The underlying assumption here is that the better-incorporated individuals are in a society, the more they accept the prevailing legal norms and social values, such as a ban on corporal punishment, and are less supportive of violence in general.

Research on the political integration of immigrants has shown that citizenship increases individuals' identification with the receiving society (Bilodeau and White 2016). Identification and feelings of connectedness have been identified as important factors that reduce support for violence (Simon and Ruhs 2008; van Bergen et al. 2015). Moreover, specific political attitudes such as the perception of political authorities as illegitimate, increase the likelihood to support violence (Doosje et al. 2013). Similarly, Grewal and Hamid (2022) also suggest political integration as an effective approach to reducing support for violence and increasing support for democracy. As citizenship can be considered the (legally) strongest form of political integration, holding citizenship of a country is expected to lead to lower acceptance levels of violence.

Furthermore, political integration refers to civic skills and competencies such as political interest, political engagement, and internal political efficacy. Internal political efficacy refers to "one's belief in his or her ability to understand and effectively participate in politics" (Norris 2015). Regarding political integration, this means that individuals who score high on internal political efficacy know the rules of the political

game and feel confident to take part in political affairs. Moreover, higher political efficacy facilitates political tolerance and the acceptance of minority rights (Brader et al. 2008; Ziller and Berning 2021).

Data and Methods

Data and Variables

For the empirical analysis, we use the first wave of the *Leben im Viertel* (Life in the neighborhood, LiV) survey. This survey was conducted in 40 neighborhoods of ten German cities (four neighborhoods per city). The cities were pre-classified into four classes and we then randomly drew 2-3 cities from each class.² The classification process was led by two criteria: a curvilinear indicator of ethnic diversity (share of inhabitants born abroad) that takes on high values for a medium degree of diversity and low values for specifically low or high diversity and a linear measure of the degree of poverty (share of inhabitants that receive SGB II – basic security payments for long-term unemployed persons). We used median values on both indicators, which enabled the classification of cities or neighborhoods into quadrants: Q₁ – high poverty and high or low ethnic diversity, Q₂ – low poverty and high or low ethnic diversity, Q₃ – low poverty and medium ethnic diversity, and Q₄ – high poverty and medium ethnic diversity.

The following ten cities were randomly drawn from these quadrants: Berlin, Bochum, Bremen, Cologne, Dresden, Halle, Karlsruhe, Mainz, Nurnberg, and Stuttgart. The same classification procedure was carried out for the neighborhoods of each city. Four neighborhoods per city were randomly selected, one from each quadrant based on the two classifiers at the neighborhood level. Subsequent to the neighborhood selection, we used a random sample from the city registers to conduct (a) an oversampling of non-nationals from predominantly Muslim countries that correspond to the main Muslim-sending countries between 2014 and 2016: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria. Besides, we use (b) a random sample from the registers regarding residents with German nationality and nationalities other than the five nationalities used in the first strata (a).

² We only included cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants in order to be able to oversample non-citizens from countries that we classified as having a predominantly Muslim population.

The survey was fielded between October and December 2022 in a mixed-mode design (PAPI and CAWI). All participants received a printed questionnaire in German with an unconditional incentive of 5 Euros. We also included a flyer in German, English, Arabic, and Farsi with a link and QR code directing respondents to participate in the survey via a web questionnaire. In the online survey, participants had the option to complete the questionnaire in German, English, Arabic, or Farsi. In total 2,318 respondents completed the survey. Due to item non-response, our analytical sample contains 1,747 respondents.

We identify Muslims and Non-Muslims in our sample using the survey question “Do you belong to a religious organization and if so, which one?”. Respondents that answered “A Muslim religious organization” are considered Muslims, all others as non-Muslims. In total, our sample includes 328 Muslim respondents and 1,419 non-Muslim respondents.

To test our hypotheses, we use a factorial experiment embedded in the main survey. Respondents were presented with the following situation: “You go for a walk in your neighborhood. You notice a mother talking with her primary school-aged child. **You know the family because they also live in your neighborhood.** The discussion gets very heated **and the mother slaps the child in the face.**” Then those involved calm down and keep walking. The survey included four questionnaire splits and we randomly varied if the family is known by the respondent or not and if the mother slaps the child in the face or not. Consequently, we have four groups with the following characteristics: (1) the family is not known by the respondent/the mother doesn’t slap the child, (2) the family is known by the respondent/the mother doesn’t slap the child, (3) the family is not known by the respondent/the mother slaps the child, and (4) the family is known by the respondent/the mother slaps the child. While we control in each model for whether or not the family is known, we focus on the variable discussion (groups 1 and 2) versus violence (groups 3 and 4) as the core treatment variable of interest.

The experiment has received full ethical approval from [University] on mm/dd/yyyy.

As outcome variables, we use *conflict perceptions* (“How conflictual do you consider this situation to be?” measured from not conflictual at all (= 1) to very conflictual (= 5)), *willingness to intervene* (“Would you intervene in the situation and confront the

mother?” measured from definitely not (= 1) to yes definitely (= 4), and two items of *anomia* (“If people in the neighborhood behave like that then the neighborhood is in a poor state.”, and “If people in the neighborhood behave like that then society as a whole is in a poor state.”). Both items were measured with a five-point Likert scale ranging from completely disagree (= 1) to completely agree (= 5).

To test the role of cultural-religious factors, we include *personally rated religiosity*, *foreign-born status*, and *traditionalism*. For personally rated religiosity respondents were asked “Independently of whether you feel you belong to a specific religion, how religious would you consider yourself to be?” from not religious at all (= 1) to very religious (= 11). *Foreign-born status* is included as a dummy variable with 1 = born in a country other than Germany and 0 = born in Germany. *Traditionalism* was measured with an approval rating of the following item “According to my views, the man should have the saying in a family” with response categories ranging from completely disagree (= 1) to completely agree (= 5).

For investigating the explanations for unequal treatment, we employ the variables *experiences with discrimination* (0 = never happened, 1 = at least some encounter of discrimination based on ethnicity or religion), *social trust*, and *political trust*. Social trust was measured using the item “In general terms, do you believe that you can trust most people or that you can't be careful enough when dealing with other people?” with an 11-point Likert scale ranging from “you can't be to careful” (= 1) to “most people can be trusted” (= 11). Political trust is measured using four different items. In the LiV survey respondents were asked how much they trust the German federal government, the German parliament, the justice system, and political parties on an 11-point Likert scale from “I don't trust them at all” (= 1) to “I completely trust them” (= 11). We calculated an index of these four items, whose reliability was confirmed by a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.89.

Finally, for probing the political integration explanation, we use the variables *citizenship*, *attachment to Germany*, and *understanding of political issues*. Citizenship is included as a dichotomous variable with 0 = No German citizenship and 1 = German citizenship. For attachment to Germany, respondents were asked “How closely do you feel attached to Germany?” with answer options from “not attached at all” (= 1) to “very closely attached” (= 5). The variable understanding of political issues was captured with

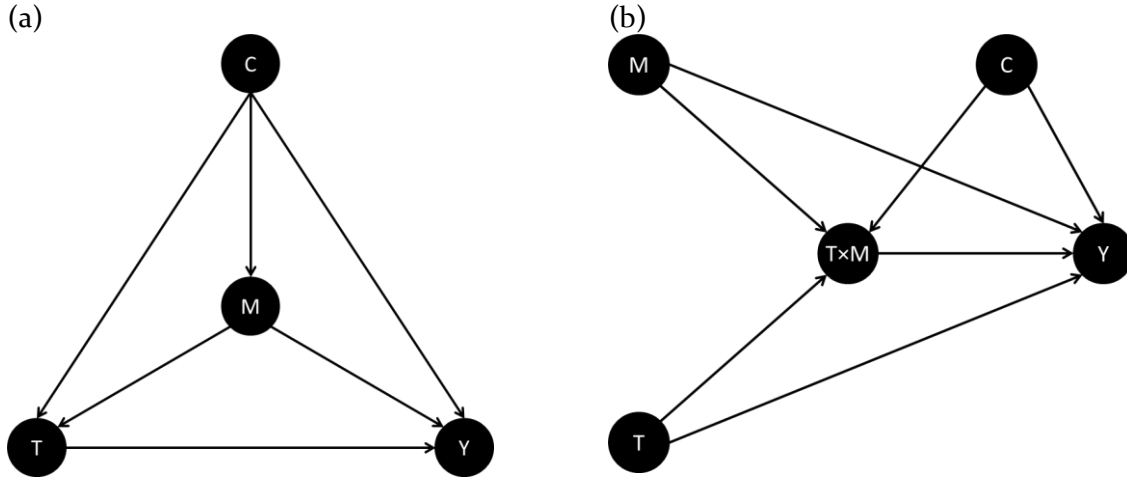
the item “How well do you understand current political topics that affect the Federal Republic of Germany?” measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “not well at all” (= 1) to “very well” (= 5).

Variables descriptives and a correlation matrix of the included variables appear in Table A1 and A2 in the online appendix.

Methods

The analysis of treatment effects is conducted by using a linear regression framework. Specifically, we estimate average treatment effects on the treated for the whole sample and subsequently focus on conditional treatment effects using Muslim religiosity as the moderator variable. To mirror our theoretical framework, we stepwise include additional mechanism-related variables interacted with the treatment variable and assess the extent to which their inclusion affects the anticipated group differences (Muslim versus non-Muslim) in acceptance of violence. Figure 1 presents directed acyclic graphs (DAGs) that depict the causal structure of the variables’ relationship of interest. Panel (a) refers to the classic DAG notation in which direct paths from adjusted variables may (or may not) represent an interactive relationship (Greenland et al. 1999). In an adaption of the DAG notation, Attia et al. (2022) opt for including an additional node that represents the moderation of a causal effect as an additional exposure variable (panel b). Both DAGs correspond to each other since the confounding back-door path from C could also be captured by arrows from C to both T and M if the $T \times M$ node were omitted. To estimate the causal effect of the treatment variable (exposure to violence treatment) on the outcome (assessment of violence), it is necessary to adjust for both Muslim religiosity M and relevant covariates C, which are linked to Muslim religiosity and assessment of violence.

Figure 1: DAGs on the Conditional Causal Relationship



Note: T refers to the treatment variable (exposure to violence treatment), Y refers to the outcome variable (assessment of violence), M refers to the Muslim variable, and C refers to a set of covariates related to Muslim religiosity and assessment of violence.

Translating the DAG diagram into a regression framework, the models to be estimated are represented by the following formula:

$$Y = \beta_1 T + \beta_2 M + \beta_3 T \times M + \gamma_1 T + \gamma_2 C + \gamma_3 T \times C + \phi_1 M + \phi_2 C + \phi_3 M \times C + \varepsilon$$

where Y is the outcome variable, β the coefficients for the interaction between treatment and Muslim religiosity, as well as the corresponding constitutive terms, γ the coefficients for the interaction between treatment and alternative explanatory factors, and ϕ the coefficients for the interaction between Muslim religiosity and alternative explanatory factors. Considering collinear coefficients of the constitutive terms, the reduced estimation function is given as:

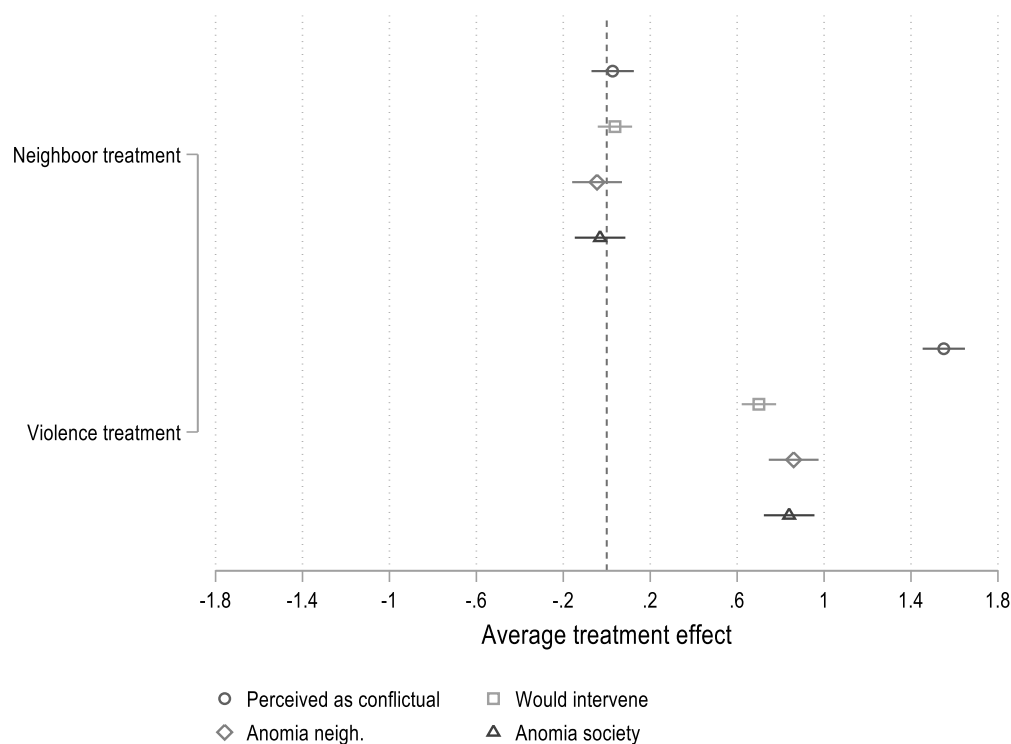
$$Y = \beta_1 T + \beta_2 M + \beta_3 T \times M + \gamma_2 C + \gamma_3 T \times C + \phi_3 M \times C + \varepsilon$$

while we critically focus on the partial mediation of β_3 through γ_3 and report indirect effects and the proportion of the total effect that is mediated.

Empirical Results

In the first step, we analyze the impact of the neighbor (or familiarity) and violence treatment variables as the average treatment effect on the treated. Figure 2 displays the corresponding coefficient estimates. Regarding information on whether the mother in conflict with her child is familiar as a neighbor, we find virtually a null effect on the various outcomes. In contrast, priming violence leads people to assess the situation to a greater extent as being conflictual ($B = 1.42$) which corresponds to more than one standard deviation ($SD = 1.23$), a greater readiness to intervene ($B = 0.68$, $SD = 0.84$), and greater perceptions of anomia with regard to the neighborhood ($B = 0.79$, $SD = 1.22$) and the society ($B = 0.79$, $SD = 1.22$).

Figure 2: Average Treatment Effects on the Treated



Note: Bars reflect 95 percent confidence intervals.

In the next step, we focus on conditional treatment effects using being Muslim as a moderator. The corresponding coefficient estimates of the treatment-Mulsim-

interactions that essentially represent the average group difference in the treatment effect are shown in Figure 3. Besides the treatment-Muslim-interactions, all models include interactions with (and constituent terms of) age, gender, and neighborhood type (quadrant from the sampling procedure) as baseline covariates accounting for compositional differences between respondents. The baseline model reveals a statistically significant difference in how Muslims and non-Muslims assess the violent situation as being conflictual. The difference of -0.50 thereby corresponds to more than one-third of a standard deviation on this variable in the outcome variable and can thus be considered a substantial effect.

For the other outcome variables, the found group difference regarding willingness to intervene ($B = -0.14$, not significant) and the anomia indicators ($B = -0.33$, $p < 0.05$; $B = -0.30$, $p < 0.05$) is less indicative. While the first intuition regarding the anomia indicators is that Muslims perceive an occurrence of violence as less problematic for common norms in neighborhood and society, a closer look at the group-specific means in Figure 4 reveals that anomia levels in the comparison group (verbal argument) are higher for Muslims, which largely drives the found results. This means that Muslims (compared to non-Muslims) assess a verbal argument in the streets as being more disruptive for common norms instead of perceiving violence as less problematic. This is an important finding and may point to a more prominent role of social control mechanisms in religious social contexts.

In a set of models probing cultural-religious factors, we additionally include personally rated religiosity, foreign-born status, and traditional values as competing explanations. The results indicate a partial mediation for each of the outcome variables with differences in the anomia variables becoming indistinguishable from zero. The effect difference in conflict perception remains significant but loses in magnitude. Considering exposure to unequal treatment measured by discrimination experiences, social trust, and political trust, we find no indication of partial mediation of the “Muslim effect”. Instead, the estimated group differences are comparable to those found in the baseline models. Looking at the role of political integration, we encounter diminishing group differences, especially for conflict perception and anomia as outcomes. This means that accounting for different levels of political integration among the Muslim

and non-Muslim groups leads to a less pronounced difference in how violence is assessed. Finally, we include all explanatory factors and even find more evidence for the contention that Muslim status appears to be confounded by the cultural and socio-political factors that we have specified. It also can be noted that with the full set of explanatory variables, we now find no substantive differences between the two groups in the control group (see Panel b in Figure 4).

To explore the factors that have led to a (partial) mediation of the “Muslim effect” on conflict perceptions as a dependent variable, we estimated seemingly unrelated regressions and calculated the indirect effect as a product of the coefficients of (a) Muslim religion status regressed on potential mediators and (b) the conditional treatment effect between the treatment variable and the mediator.³ The indirect effect, test statistics, and the proportion of the indirect effect that is mediated are presented in Table 1.

³ An equivalent procedure would be to regress the Muslim variable on confounders, store the residual values, and use them in for estimating conditional treatment effects. However, this will not recover the correct standard errors and it is not possible to estimate variable-specific indirect effects and test statistics.

Figure 3: Conditional Treatment Effects

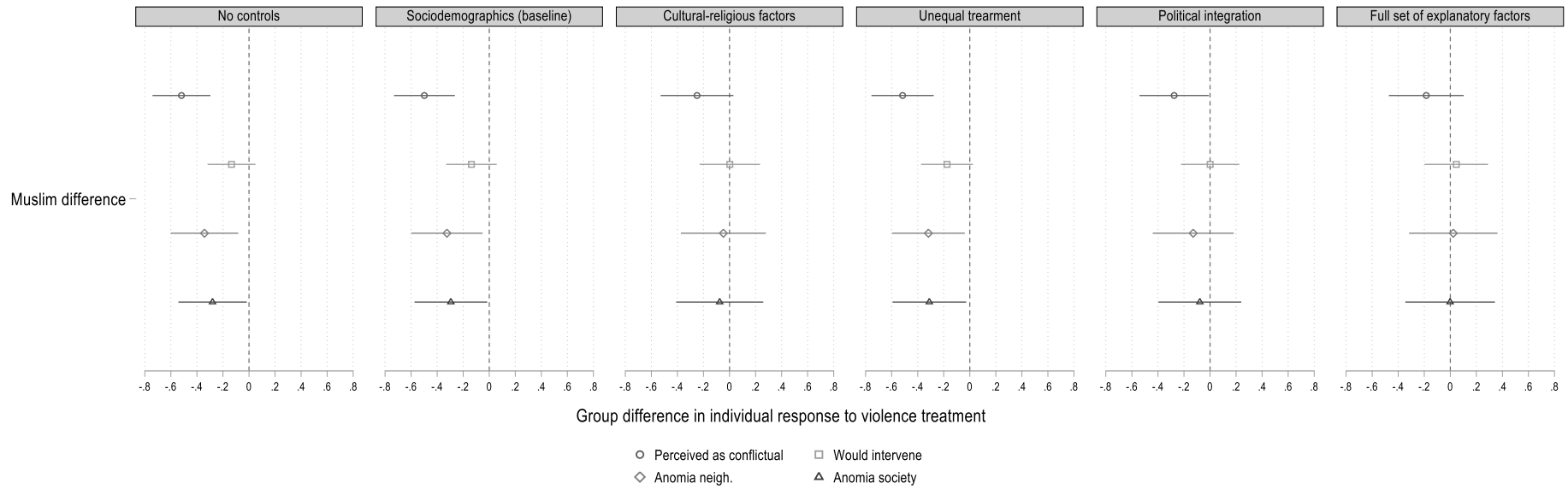
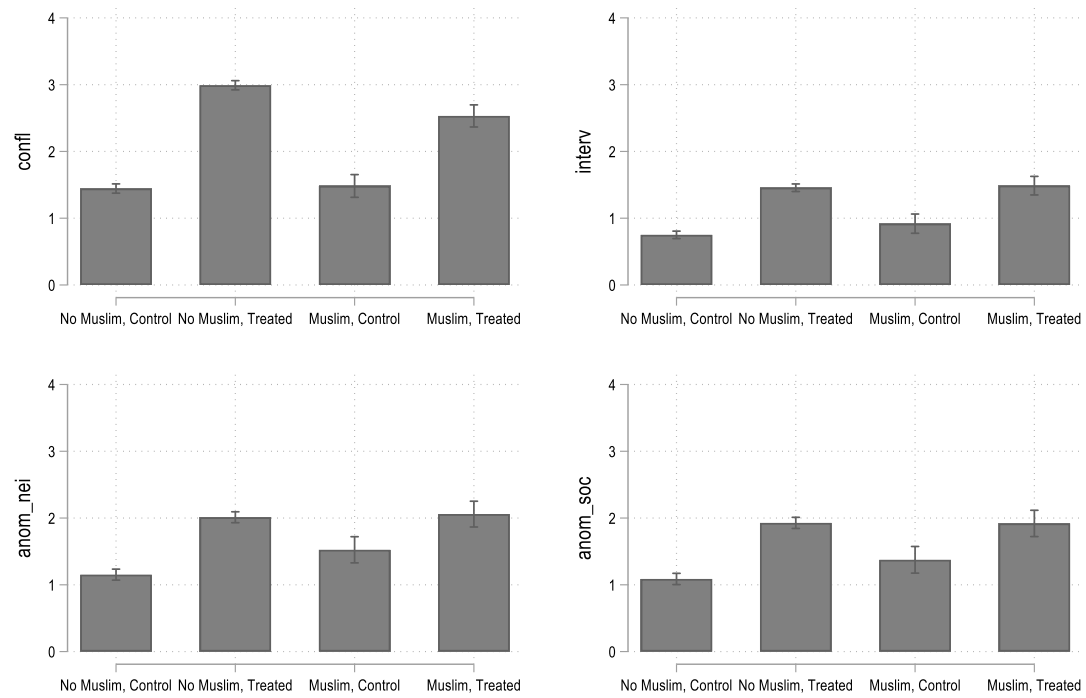


Figure 4: Means for Different Outcome Variables

(a) *Baseline*



(b) *Full set of explanatory factors*

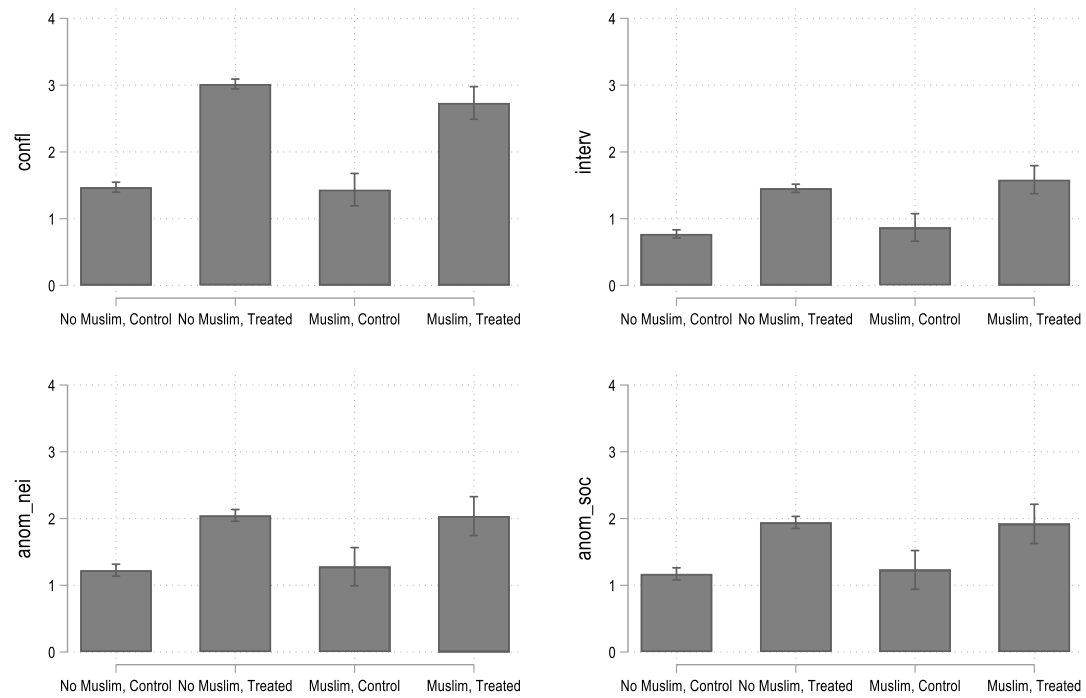


Table 1: Indirect Effects Mediating the “Muslim Effect” on Perceived as Conflictual (Dependent Variable)

Explanatory variable	Indirect Effect	Proportion of the "Muslim effect" mediated
<i>Cultural-religious factors</i>		
Being foreign-born	-0.138 (p = 0.060)	
Subjective religiosity	-0.058 (p = 0.139)	
Traditional values	-0.114 (p = 0.006)	22.9%
<i>Unequal treatment</i>		
Social trust	-0.040 (p = 0.009)	8.0%
Discrimination experience	0.025 (p = 0.188)	
Political trust	0.021 (p = 0.101)	
<i>Political integration</i>		
National attachment	-0.002 (p = 0.792)	
Citizenship	-0.148 (p = 0.045)	29.7%
Internal political efficacy	-0.089 (p < 0.001)	17.9%
<i>Full set of explanatory factors</i>		
Being foreign-born	-0.092 (p = 0.261)	
Subjective religiosity	-0.069 (p = 0.087)	
Traditional values	-0.087 (p = 0.044)	17.5%
Social trust	-0.034 (p = 0.022)	6.8%
Discrimination experience	0.031 (p = 0.120)	
Political trust	0.022 (p = 0.077)	
National attachment	-0.003 (p = 0.719)	
Citizenship	-0.052 (p = 0.575)	
Internal political efficacy	-0.057 (p = 0.014)	11.4%

Note: Bold entries indicate statistically significant indirect effects at $p < 0.05$ (two-sided tests). As a reference, the total Muslim group difference is -0.498 ($p < 0.001$).

For tests on cultural-religious factors, we find a statistically significant mediation via traditional values, meaning that the group difference in perceptions of violence between Muslims and non-Muslims is partially due to Muslims being more conservative about socio-cultural issues such as gender roles and family values. At the same time, subjective religiosity or being foreign-born are not systematically relevant once value orientations are accounted for.⁴ For unequal treatment, we find a statistically significant negative indirect effect for social trust, but not for discrimination experience or political trust.

⁴ When including only one cultural-religious mediators at a time, traditional values and being foreign-born yield negative and statistically significant indirect effects.

However, the magnitude of the indirect effect of social trust in terms of the proportion of the total effect that is mediated is small in comparison.

Looking at factors related to political integration, we find that internal political efficacy and particularly citizenship substantially mediate the Muslim-non-Muslim difference in evaluating violence. In other words, adjusting for different levels of political integration makes Muslims and non-Muslims more similar in the way they assess a violent situation as being conflictual. It is important to note that omitting the political efficacy indicator leads to a greater indirect effect of the citizenship variable ($B = 0.229$, $p = 0.002$), which, in other words, is partially mediated by political efficacy. In substantive terms, this means that the formal status of obtaining citizenship is only part of the mechanism and that civic skills and adherence to democratic principles appear to be critical as well.

Including all mediator variables at once leads to further partial controlling among the variables of interest. Specifically, the indirect effect of citizenship is no longer statistically significant as it is partially taken up by being foreign-born, which is highly correlated with citizenship. Traditional values, internal political efficacy, and social trust yield statistically significant indirect effects and in combination account for about 25% of the initial Muslim group effect. The remaining direct effect of the Muslim variable is not statistically significant.

Conclusion

This study set out to study group differences in the acceptance of violence between Muslims and non-Muslims applying a mechanism-based perspective. Starting from the premise that public discourse oftentimes conflates religious background and other relevant socio-economic or socio-cultural characteristics, our study aimed at shedding light on the black box of Muslim group status. Specifically, we draw on previous research and focused on cultural-religious factors, unequal treatment, and political integration as intermediary variables. Using experimental data from a survey experiment conducted in ten German cities with an oversampling of respondents from Islamic-influenced countries, the results show that a violent situation in which a mother slaps her daughter

is perceived as less conflictual by Muslims compared to non-Muslims. Accounting for intermediary explanations, we find that higher levels of traditionalism and lower levels of social trust and internal political efficacy on the side of Muslims largely explain the found difference between the two groups. At the same time, we find no substantial differences between Muslims and non-Muslims regarding their willingness to intervene and perceptions of anomia after controlling for basic socio-demographic differences (age, gender, neighborhood status).

In terms of theory, our study contributed to critical studies of race and ethnic minority status, as well as the literature on the foundations of violence and social problems. Critical race studies have emphasized that racial or ethnic minority status is predominantly socially constructed (Morris 2007; Nagel 1994). In turn, the degree to which this status produces social characteristics is critically determined by the stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices in institutions and everyday life. Putting these contentions to an empirical test, we find evidence that socially relevant characteristics substantially override religious group status which highlights underlying social mechanisms connecting religious categories and socio-political outcomes. The literature on determinants of violence acceptance has produced ambiguous results regarding the role of ethnic minority status and religiosity—especially concerning Muslim immigrants (Carol et al. 2020; Koopmans et al. 2021; Hadjar et al. 2019). Potential reasons for this divergence include different conceptualizations of Muslim belonging or Islamic beliefs, a non-explicit classification in control and mediator variables, underpowered analyses from small samples, as well as potential social desirability in the reporting of violence or violence acceptance.

Our study improved some of the mentioned shortcomings due to the experimental setup and a register-based random sampling strategy of non-nationals from specific countries. At the same time, several limitations call for improvement in further studies. While we argued that everyday violence makes the presented vignette situation more relatable, reference to further types of violence (e.g., youth gangs, violence for a good cause, criminal acts) would allow for broader tests of the relevance of the found mechanisms related to values and social and political integration. Similar to most survey experiments, the external validity of responses to the treatment cannot be determined

sufficiently. This calls for the use of field experiments, which in turn would require careful and responsible research ethics.

In terms of practical relevance, the findings of our study suggest that addressing gaps in the acceptance of violence can be achieved through the promotion of openness and the adoption of more progressive family and gender norms (Baniamin 2022). Additionally, enhancing social trust through social inclusion and interethnic networks (Grewal and Hamid 2022; Kotzur et al. 2018) as well as ensuring political inclusion (Hainmueller et al. 2015) can contribute to mitigating these gaps. Regarding political integration, it is important to highlight the significance of citizenship as a crucial factor but also that the extent to which immigrants feel politically efficacious and committed to democratic rules and norms of non-violence appears to be a driving force in ameliorating gaps in violence acceptance. Although the extent to which integration courses effectively convey such norms remains uncertain, it is crucial to consider this aspect in the broader context of civic education.

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Online Appendix

Table A1: Descriptives

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Willingness to intervene	1,577	1.13	0.84	0	3
Anomia neighborhood	1,703	1.65	1.22	0	4
Anomia society	1,701	1.55	1.22	0	4
Conflict perceptions	1,747	2.23	1.23	0	4
Treatment familiarity	1,747	0.50	0.50	0	1
Treatment violence	1,747	0.50	0.50	0	1
Muslim	1,747	0.19	0.39	0	1
Age	1,747	45.06	17.13	18	92
Quadrant					
1	1,747	0.21	0.41	0	1
2	1,747	0.29	0.45	0	1
3	1,747	0.26	0.44	0	1
4	1,747	0.24	0.43	0	1
Female	1,747	0.48	0.50	0	1
Traditional values	1,747	1.45	0.96	1	5
Subjective religiosity	1,747	4.41	3.23	1	11
Being foreign-born	1,747	0.40	0.49	0	1
Social trust	1,747	6.12	2.57	1	11
Discrimination	1,747	0.62	0.49	0	1
Political trust	1,747	6.54	2.38	1	11
Attachment Germany	1,747	3.82	0.85	1	5
Citizenship	1,747	0.72	0.45	0	1
Understanding political issues	1,747	3.72	0.96	1	5

Table A2: Correlation Matrix of Included Variables

Variables	-1	-2	-3	-4	-5	-6	-7	-8	-9	-10	-11	-12	-13	-14	-15	-16	-17	-18
1 Willingness to intervene	1																	
2 Anomia neighborhood	0.334*	1																
3 Anomia society	0.294*	0.785*	1															
4 Conflict perceptions	0.502*	0.376*	0.333*	1														
5 Treatment familiarity	0.046	-0.005	-0.007	0.033	1													
6 Treatment violence	0.409*	0.326*	0.300*	0.593*	0.029	1												
7 Muslim	0.092*	0.109*	0.087*	-0.031	-0.004	0.003	1											
8 Age	-0.02	0.011	0.009	-0.070*	-0.004	-0.005	-0.225*	1										
9 Female	0.053	-0.013	0.008	0.084*	0.009	0.047	-0.068*	0.008	1									
10 Traditional values	0.052	0.117*	0.098*	-0.047	0.005	0.045	0.327*	-0.059	-0.125*	1								
11 Subjective religiosity	0.073*	0.056	0.062	0.002	0.037	0.021	0.319*	0.059	0.038	0.197*	1							
12 Being foreign-born	0.104*	0.187*	0.152*	-0.056	0.003	0.023	0.476*	-0.137*	-0.125*	0.356*	0.196*	1						
13 Social trust	0.006	-0.144*	-0.159*	0.087*	-0.02	-0.005	-0.099*	0.054	-0.015	-0.085*	0.032	-0.108*	1					
14 Discrimination	0.051	0.048	0.02	0.069*	-0.028	0.004	0.196*	-0.385*	0.143*	0.074*	0.062*	0.205*	-0.038	1				
15 Political trust	0.009	-0.057	-0.125*	0.005	-0.07	-0.02	0.083*	-0.022	-0.071*	0.039	0.076*	0.143*	0.155*	0.004	0.206*	1		
16 Attachment Germany	-0.019	-0.005	-0.03	-0.070*	0.032	-0.049	-0.066*	0.228*	-0.043	0.059	-0.015	0.079*	-0.141*	0.216*	0.081*	0.268*	1	
17 Citizenship	-0.093*	-0.18*	-0.144*	0.031	-0.024	-0.027	-0.506*	0.250*	0.127*	-0.394*	-0.203*	-0.711*	0.128*	-0.369*	-0.155*	0.083*	0.268*	1
18 Internal pol. Efficacy	-0.02	-0.126*	-0.131*	-0.02	-0.002	-0.05	-0.172*	0.105*	-0.129*	-0.218*	-0.036	-0.244*	0.152*	-0.054	0.107*	0.226*	0.268*	1

* p < 0.05