

# **The Attitudes of College Students Towards Muslims**

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## ملخص الدراسة

قُدمت هذه الدراسة للتعرف على توجهات طلاب الكلية نحو المسلمين. افترضت الباحثة أن الطلاب في المراحل الجامعية المتقدمة أكثر تسامحا من المستويات الجامعية الأولية. تم اختبار الفرضية على طلاب من مرحله البكالوريوس والدراسات العليا. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام قاعده البيانات العامة بجامعة كلارك أتلانتا (CAU GSS) ٢٠١٦. بجانب ذلك استخدمت الدراسة الاستبيان لجمع البيانات من ٧٠ طالب في الحرم الجامعي، ووقفت الباحثة بنفسها على جمع البيانات في سبيل التحقق من صحة و سلامة البيانات المعطاة و أيضا أن المبحوثين طلاب في الجامعة و ليسوا من خارجها. توصلت الدراسة للنتائج التالية : ٧٠٪ من الطلاب في الصفوف الأولية ونقصد بهم طلاب السنة الأولى و الثانية يرون أن المسلمين الذي يملكون إقامه شرعيه لابد إعطائهم تسهيلات في نظام التعليم و الخدمات الحكومية ، بينما يرى ذلك ٦٧٪ من طلاب الصفوف المتقدمة أي السنة الثالثة و الأخيرة من مرحله البكالوريوس، كذلك ٨٥٪ من طلاب الدراسات العليا. بالنسبة للسؤال الذي طرحه الباحث عن أهميه السماح بمشاركة المسلمين في الاقتصاد؛ ٥٢.٤٪ من الطلاب لم يكن لهم رأي بالموضوع بينما ٤٥.٧٪ من طلاب الصفوف المتقدمة و ٦١.٥٪ من طلاب الدراسات العليا كان لهم رأي إيجابي . أخيرا، يرى ٨١٪ من طلاب المرحلة الجامعية الأولية أهميه تطبيق قوانين الحقوق المدنية على المواطنين الأمريكان المسلمين، وذلك مقارنة برأي ٦٠٪ من طلاب الصفوف العليا، ٥٣.٨٪ من طلاب الدراسات العليا . و تعزي الباحثة الصعوبات التي و اجهتها ربما لحجم العينة، حيث كان مجموعها ( N=70 )، فربما لو كانت العينة أكبر لكان بإمكان الباحثة رسم صورته أوضح ، وأيضا من الممكن مستقبلا أن ندرج أسئلة لقياس مؤشر المسافات الاجتماعية. و مع ذلك، و اعتمادا على نتائج الدراسة بالعموم لم تستطع الباحثة إثبات وجود علاقته أكيدة بين المرحلة الدراسية و بين مستويات التسامح عند الطلاب غير المسلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية للبحث: ( الاتجاه ، التسامح، المسلمين، طلاب المرحلة الجامعية ، قانون الحقوق المدنية ، و التمكين من الخدمات الحكومية العامة ).

## Abstract

This paper has **examined** the attitudes of college students towards Muslims. This study **hypothesizes**, considering the available research on the topic, which students with more education will be less prejudice than students

with less education. The researcher had tested the hypothesis by surveying underclass, upperclassmen, and graduate students and compare these student's education level to their opinions about Muslims. The researcher has expected to find the firm correlation between the degree of education and students' feelings towards Muslims. **Data for this research project** was collected using the Clark Atlanta University General Student Survey 2016 (CAU GSS). Convenience sampling was the method used to collect data for this project. As one of the students in this class, the researcher approached potential research subjects on the campus of Clark Atlanta University (CAU), informed them about the purpose of the survey and verified that they were CAU students

and not students from neighboring colleges in the Atlanta University Center. **As a result**, the researcher sees a great deal of variation within and between each class level. Among the Underclass students, about 76% felt that Muslims who have legal residency should have access to public education and other government services compared with about 67% of Upperclass and nearly 85% of Graduate students. Regarding whether Muslims contribute to the U.S. economy, a majority of Underclass students (52.4%) did not have an opinion whereas 45.7% of Upperclass and 61.5% of Graduate students had a favorable opinion. **Lastly**, an ample 81% of Underclass students agreed that U.S. civil rights laws should apply to Muslim Americans compared with only 60% of Upperclass and 53.8% of Graduates students. **Part of the difficulty** in determining a pattern in these responses may lie in the fact that the sample size was fairly small (N=70). Also, we might have been able to gather a bigger picture about the views of CAU students had we administered a more detailed survey, possibly including social distance questions. **Nonetheless**, based on the study results the researcher conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between class level and prejudice towards Muslims.

**Research main keyword's:** (*Attitude, Tolerance, Muslims, Collage Students, Civil rights law, and access to public services*)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Religious freedom is one of the cornerstones of American government. The

First Amendment to the United States Constitution states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof (Establishment Clause). This opening to the Bill of Rights prevents Congress from passing legislation respecting an establishment of religion. The latter half of the statement bars the government from interfering in peoples' free exercise of their religious beliefs. Further, if there were still any doubt about the founders' intent to keep religion and government distinct, it should be removed by wording expressed. In the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli which states that the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion (Treaty of Tripoli). While it is documented that the nation's founders aimed to keep religion and government separate, the sentiment of the American people seems much different. Many tout America as a Christian or Judeo-Christian nation, claiming that the United States was founded on Christian principles. They refer to "rhetoric like 'one nation under God' in the Pledge and 'In God We Trust' as the national motto. Furthermore, there is an article at CNN website stated that, the evangelical efforts to make America a Christian nation justified territorial expansion, while division over slavery solidified competing visions of Christian nationhood (Was America founded as a Christian nation). Although religious freedom is a vital part of the foundation of American government, it does not preclude people from being prejudice and discriminating toward others based on their religion or lack thereof. Certain groups appear to be completely against the religious diversity that exists in America. They either want to impose one brand of religion upon all or, at least, eliminate a particular religion with which they disagree. While the law protects religious freedom, it is under serious threat by vigilantes who seek to take the law into their hands. In the United States and around the world, anti-Islamic sentiment currently exists. This attitude has been expressed in various ways. There have been hundreds of attacks on people perceived to be Muslim after 9/11. "Draw the Prophet (phub)" cartoon contests, billed as "free speech" events, convened in 2015 in Texas and Arizona. These events drew large crowds and participants on both sides were armed. Americans have expressed vehement opposition to mosques being established in various communities. Muslim women wearing the hijab, or headscarf, have been threatened and attacked for their beliefs and Islamic dress. Most recently, letters threatening the extermination of Muslims and praising President-elect Donald Trump were sent to mosques in three California cities. These caustic letters, along

with the hatred these letters represent, undermine the peace, harmony, and cooperation needed in a pluralistic, democratic society. Existing research has explored factors which allow for more tolerance among social groups, especially “nonconformist” groups. Research demonstrates that education often produces tolerance, and it is reasonable to believe that exposure creates the kind of understanding necessary to accept difference. For most students attending institutions of higher learning, liberal arts subjects, including philosophy, psychology, political science, and communications, allow students to broaden their views about the world and politics. Not only do college students study topics which broaden their intellectual understanding of these subjects, but they often receive this education in a diverse learning environment. Their interactions, along with their exposure to new ideas, create a tolerance for difference and new things that spill over into their everyday lives. This study hypothesizes, considering the available research on the topic, which students with more education will be less prejudiced than students with less education. The researcher will test the hypothesis by surveying underclass, upperclassmen, and graduate students and compare these student’s education level to their opinions about Muslims. The researcher expects to find the firm correlation between the degree of education and students’ feelings towards Muslims.

### **Methodology**

Data for this research project was collected using the Clark Atlanta University General Student Survey 2016 (CAU GSS). Questions for the survey were formulated through submission offered by graduate students enrolled in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice’s Fall 2016 Research Methods course. Each student turned in three to five questions to be included in the CAU GSS. The professor for the class reviewed the questions and compiled them in a single survey. Each student then administered approximately 10-15 surveys. Convenience sampling was the method used to collect data for this project. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which the sample does not have a known probability of being selected. This type of sampling method is based on human selection, rather than random selection, and involves either conscious or subconscious bias. Nevertheless, the advantages of this approach are that it is convenient and inexpensive, relying on easily available subjects. As one of the students in this class, I approached potential research subjects on the campus

of Clark Atlanta University (CAU). informed them about the purpose of the survey and verified that they were CAU students and not students from neighboring colleges in the Atlanta University Center. I read the informed consent agreement to each subject, received verbal consent, and waited while the subject completed the survey. Once all of the surveys were completed, I entered the responses into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database. Subsequently, all of the collected data was merged into a Master Codebook. A total of 102 cases were now available for analysis.

The effort was made to represent the small but growing Saudi Arabian student population at CAU. Clark Atlanta University has a majority African American/Black student population. However, in recent years, the number of international students, particularly from Saudi Arabia, has grown to approximately 300 out of a total student population of about 3,485. To represent these students in the CAU GSS, three Saudi students in the Research Methods class collected survey data from the Saudi student population. Data was collected on a total of 28 Saudi subjects, nearly representing the Saudi population compared to the total student population.

### **Literatures Review**

Here are literature sources which support as well as challenge our hypothesis. A 2008 study using data collected from 1999-2000 shows that prejudice toward Muslims existed before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). Using data from the European Value Study (EVS), which included about 41,000 individuals from 32 countries, the researchers compared prejudice against Muslims to prejudice against other immigrants in Eastern and Western Europe (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008). This study found that the level of anti-Muslim prejudice is significantly higher than prejudice toward other immigrant groups in both Eastern and Western Europe. Additionally, the study found that anti-Muslim prejudice decreases among people who have a college education (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008).

Another study examined the negative attitudes toward American Muslims after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 (Khan & Ecklund, 2012). Data from 204 Non-Muslim undergraduate students attending the California State University, Sacramento campus, were utilized for this study (Khan & Ecklund, 2012). The study argued that people with non-prejudiced orientations are more likely to respond with more

positive attitudes toward Muslim Americans (Khan & Ecklund, 2012). This study utilized the Situational Attitude Scale (SAS) to assess whether people would be more prejudiced toward Muslim Americans than others. The situations in this study were adapted from an earlier study which focused on Arabs (Sergent, Woods, & Sedlacek, 1992). In the 2012 study, "Muslim Americans" rather than "Arabs" were used to describe all Muslims (Khan & Ecklund, 2012). Ten situations were examined to determine participants' anxieties regarding Muslims on planes and buses. The study also asked participants about their prejudice toward Muslims related to other conditions. The study found that attitudes toward Muslims were not negative. Rather, participants reported that their anxieties toward Muslims were "situationally variant" (Khan & Ecklund, 2012).

One study examined the tolerance towards Muslims among middle and high school students. (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2007). The data were collected from more than 360 male and female students of Dutch ethnicity. The study aimed to test if the students at a lower level of age were less tolerant than the students at a higher standard of age. Additionally, the study sought to examine the adolescents' judgments toward the Muslim's beliefs and practices. The study found that participants were actively opposed to political rights for Muslims, to Muslims having their school and burning the national flag in a demonstration (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2007). Comparing with Non-Muslims, students showed less tolerance toward Muslims practices and beliefs such as the hijab (headscarf). However, the result demonstrated that there is no strong effect of age level on the tolerance towards Muslims practices and beliefs. For females, there were no age differences, and for males, there was an increase in intolerance with age (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2007).

A recent poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, conducted in August 2010 among 1,003 adults, found that opinions about Islam are less favorable than in a poll from the summer of 2005. In this 2010 opinion poll, when looking at age, level of education, and political party, it was found that Republicans, older people, and the less educated held less favorable views toward Islam. Specifically isolating the level of education category, college graduates were more likely to hold a favorable view of Islam than not (47% to 28%). Also, respondents with less education conveyed less favorable views about Islam. Among those with some college, 37%



regarded Islam negatively compared to 29%. Respondents with a high school or less education viewed Islam unfavorably by a margin of 45% to 20%.

A 2003 study involved 132 American high school students and examined their knowledge of Islam and attitudes and stereotypes about Muslims in the United States (Christian & Lapinski, 2003). The participants' average age was 16.5 years. The researchers were testing the contact hypothesis which held that one who had more "contact" or interaction with a minority/outgroup would be less prejudice toward that group. The researchers who conducted this study found that the students who had contact with and interacted with Muslims were, in fact, less likely to hold prejudicial views toward Muslims (Christian & Lapinski, 2003).

In a study which looked at Western attitudes towards Muslims, data was taken from a 2006 Pew Global Attitudes survey among non-Muslims in Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and the U.S. (Wike & Grim, 2010). The goal was to examine the determinants of Western views toward Muslims, and it was found that threat perceptions are the primary factor influencing these views. According to Wike and Grim (2010), for more than 50 years social scientists have explored the "determinants of political tolerance, as well as ethnic and racial prejudice," and these studies may shed light on the study of Western attitudes toward Muslims (Wike & Grim, 2010). In addition to threat perceptions leading to negative attitudes towards Muslim, demographic factors such as age, education, and socioeconomic status was also considered. Wike and Grim briefly noted that "in the United States, positive opinions of Muslims (Keeter & Kohut, 2003) have been found to be correlated with education. These findings are consistent with other research, which has continually demonstrated that individuals with more education tend to be more tolerant (Stouffer, 1955; Bobo & Licari, 1989; Gibson & Duch, 1992; Moore & Ovadia, 2006)".

Moore and Ovadia (2006) conducted a study which explored spatial variance in tolerance. They wanted to explain why, in general, Southerners and rural dwellers were less tolerant than those who lived outside of the South and those who lived in urban areas. They defined tolerance as "Americans' willingness to extend civil liberties to unpopular groups (Moore & Ovadia, 2006)." They discovered that, indirectly, education was a factor intolerant community; "residing in an area with a larger proportion of college graduates significantly increases individual levels of tolerance" while religion, specifically, evangelical Protestantism, had the opposite effect. "We find that the proportion of college-

educated individuals in an area explains the rural/urban gap in tolerance levels, while religious composition explains the Southern effect (Moore & Ovadia, 2006)".

Bobo & Licari (1989) explored the effects of education and cognitive sophistication on one's willingness to extend civil liberties to "nonconformist" groups. They explain cognitive sophistication as....

A 2003 study aimed to determine whether a correlation existed between increased years of higher education and tolerance toward women, immigrants, Muslims, and homosexuals (Webb-Halpern, 2003). The data for this study were collected from 95 Henderson State University students in four randomly selected classes (Webb-Halpern, 2003). The study created an overall summary tolerance variable. For each of the five summary tolerance variables, the mean tolerance increased from freshman to sophomore or junior year but declined for seniors (Webb-Halpern, 2003). The hypothesis that tolerance increases with additional years of higher education could not be supported in this study (Webb-Halpern, 2003). No statistically significant correlation was found between overall tolerance and class status. The correlation between tolerance and class status regarding women and for the specific question about working alongside a Muslim suggests that higher education may increase tolerance on specific issues. In fact, the study could not approve the hypothesis (Webb-Halpern, 2003).

Jackman (1973) brings up a methodological issue in her criticism of the education – tolerance hypothesis. She claims that acquiescent response bias is responsible for the connection between education and tolerance. "Acquiescence Response Bias is the tendency for survey respondents to agree with statements regardless of their content."

The research of Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus (1979) advances several criticisms of the education - tolerance association. First, the authors take issue with the fact that in a well-known earlier study examining the effect of education on tolerance (Stouffer, 1955), respondents were asked to consider their feelings toward marginal groups which were chosen by the researchers. The previous work was not as high as it was when Stouffer (1955) conducted his earlier work analyzing the impact of education on prejudice toward groups of left-leaning groups such as communists. They argue that the problem with previous efforts to measure tolerance have been that they have asked respondents about groups preselected by the investigators.

## Findings and result

In the following tables, the terms are defined as follows: “Underclass” includes undergraduate first-year students and sophomores; “Upperclass” comprises undergraduate juniors and seniors; and “Grad” represents graduate level students. Muslim students were excluded from analysis.

**Table 1: Muslim Access to Government Services by Class Level, CAU GSS 2016**  
**Question: Do you believe that Muslims residing in America legally should have equal access to public education and other governmental services?**

	Class Levels			Total
	Underclass	Upperclass	Grad	
Agree Count % within Class Level	16 76.2%	24 66.7%	11 84.6%	51 72.9%
Disagree Count % within Class Level	1 4.8%	7 19.4%	1 7.7%	9 12.9%
Undecided Count % within Class Level	4 19.0%	5 13.9%	1 7.7%	10 14.3%
Total Count % within Class Level	21 100%	36 100%	13 100%	70 100%

Chi-Square Test			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.756*	4	.440
*5 cells (55.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.67.			

In Table 1 above, 76% of Underclass students agreed that Muslims residing legally in the U.S. should have access to public education and other government services compared to 67% of Upperclass students and 84% of Graduate students. These percentages do not follow our expectation that tolerance should increase gradually from Underclass to the Graduate students. The chi-square value is 3.756, the

degrees of freedom (df) are 4, and the p value is .440 which is greater than .05 and therefore, not statistically significant. This means that we reject the null hypothesis that there is a relationship between class level and tolerance toward Muslims as relates to the above question. We accept the alternate hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between class level and tolerance toward Muslims.

**Table 2: Muslim Contribution to U.S. Economy by Class Level, CAU GSS 2016**  
**Question: Do you believe that Muslims living in America contribute substantially to the economic well-being of the United States?**

	Class Levels			Total	
	Underclass	Upperclass	Grad		
Agree	Count	10	16	8	34
	% within Class Level	47.6%	45.7%	61.5%	49.3%
Disagree	Count	0	6	2	8
	% within Class Level	0.0%	17.1%	15.4%	11.6%
Undecided	Count	11	13	3	27
	% within Class Level	52.4%	37.1%	23.1%	39.1%
Total	Count	21	35	13	69
	% within Class Level	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%

Chi-Square Test			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.858*	4	.210
*3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.51.			

In Table 2 above, the responses of Underclass students are divided between those who agreed (47.6%) and those who were undecided (52.4%). Remarkably, there was not a single “disagree” response from the underclass student category.

As in Table 1, Upperclass students who agreed with the question accounted for a lower percentage (45.7%) than the Underclass students albeit by a smaller

difference. Again, the Graduate level showed the highest percentage of agreement at 61.5%. The responses for all three class levels show a relatively high percentage who agreed with the question (> 45%), a low percentage who disagreed (< 17.1%), and a large percentage that were undecided (23-52%). It could be that respondents selected “Undecided” because they were concerned about being politically correct or perceived as prejudice. It may also be that they simply did not know enough about the topic to form an opinion. In this table, the chi-square value is 5.858, the df is 4, and the p value is .210 which is greater than .05 and therefore, not statistically significant.

**Table 3: Muslim Civil Rights by Class Level, CAU GSS 2016**

**Question: Do you believe that Muslim Americans should have the full protection of the United States civil rights laws?**

	Class Levels			Total	
	Underclass	Upperclass	Grad		
Agree	Count	17	21	7	45
	% within Class Level	81.0%	60.0%	53.8%	65.2%
Disagree	Count	1	10	3	14
	% within Class Level	4.8%	28.6%	23.1%	20.3%
Undecided	Count	3	4	3	10
	% within Class Level	14.3%	11.4%	23.1%	14.5%
Total	Count	21	35	13	69
	% within Class Level	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chi-Square Test			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.818*	4	.213
*4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.88.			

In Table 3 above, a sizeable 81% of Underclass students agree that Muslim Americans should have the full protection of U.S. civil rights laws while this is true for only 60% of Upperclass students and about 54% of Graduate students. This is, in fact, the reverse of what we would expect, believing that those with less education would demonstrate less tolerance for a minority group. In the previous

two tables, Graduate students represented the highest percentages in the “Agree” category among all class levels. However, in Table 3, while more than 50% of graduate students agreed with the above question, it was to a lesser extent than their cohorts. In this table, the chi-square value is 5.818, the df is 4, and the p value is .213 which is greater than .05 and therefore, not statistically significant.

Across the three tables, we see a great deal of variation within and between each class level. Among the Underclass students, about 76% felt that Muslims who have legal residency should have access to public education and other government services compared with about 67% of Upperclass and nearly 85% of Graduate students. Regarding whether Muslims contribute to the U.S. economy, a majority of Underclass students (52.4%) did not have an opinion whereas 45.7% of Upperclass and 61.5% of Graduate students had a favorable opinion. Finally, an ample 81% of Underclass students agreed that U.S. civil rights laws should apply to Muslim Americans compared with only 60% of Upperclass and 53.8% of Graduates students. Part of the difficulty in determining a pattern in these responses may lie in the fact that the sample size was fairly small (N=70). Also, we might have been able to gather a bigger picture about the views of CAU students had we administered a more detailed survey, possibly including social distance questions. Nonetheless, based on the data we did collect, we conclude that there is no statistically significant relationship between class level and prejudice towards Muslims.

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