

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

September 5, 2005, the *Jyllands-Posten*, a newspaper based in Aarhus, a university town in Denmark, published twelve cartoons, some satirizing the prophet Mohammed. The announced reason: the free expression of ideas was being stifled for fear of offending Muslim sensibilities. Now forgotten, or more likely never noticed, many of the cartoons aimed their barbs at those who were complaining of being stifled—mocking the newspaper itself, for example, by showing a boy pointing to a blackboard behind him with an inscription in Persian that “*Jyllands-Posten*’s journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs.” Another cartoon caricatured the Danish author who won attention for a book he had under way by complaining of self-censorship, showing him with an orange on his head labeled “PR–Stunt.” (Regrettably, the reference to an orange requires a Danish funny bone to appreciate).¹ Still, one cartoon depicted Mohammed with a bomb in his turban, and another showed him shouting to suicide terrorists lining up to enter heaven, “STOP, STOP, we have run out of virgins!” A political firestorm erupted.

This is a study of that political controversy. The reactions of some Middle Eastern governments and religious leaders outside Denmark, not to mention those of some Danish politicians, could not have been better calculated to provoke a backlash against Muslims in Denmark. But there was no backlash. That fact is, by orders of magnitude, our most important finding.

¹ The use of the orange in the turban means to get something unexpected and without real effort (i.e., the metaphor is that you walk underneath an orange tree and an orange drops down to you).

It is not immediately obvious why a study of something that did not happen is significant, and still less something that did not happen in a faraway country—a country to admire in many ways, to be sure, but all the same one of background importance strategically and economically. By way of self-promotion, we could respond that what continues to happen—let alone what already has happened—should compel attention. The newspaper that published the cartoons continues to be a target of terrorists. There has been a conspiracy to shoot up its editorial offices, and another to send a letter bomb to blow them up, not to mention repeated efforts to assassinate the cartoonist who depicted Mohammed with a bomb in his turban, with the most recent effort featuring an ax-wielding attacker breaking into the cartoonist's house and attempting to kill him. We could also respond that the issue of self-censorship raised by the publication of the cartoons has crossed over many borders, including those of the United States, most controversially inducing a leading US university press to excise reproductions of the cartoons from a book about the crisis for fear of the violent reaction it might provoke. But these are reasons why a study of the Cartoon Crisis might be engrossing, not why it would be important.

What, then, was our reason for studying it? In our view, a democratic politics cannot escape challenges to civil liberties and civil rights. And the best and perhaps only way to test the sincerity as well as strength of citizens' commitment to the values of a democratic politics is to assess their willingness to defend them in the face of the full headwind of a genuine crisis.

THE STUDY

Libraries are overflowing with multicountry studies of the attitudes of national majorities toward Muslim immigrants. Ours is an exploration of only one country, and what is more, of only one issue that occupied its politics for only a brief period of time: no more than four months and a bit. So it is more than fair to ask, What can this study offer that its many predecessors have not?

Here are four answers as a starting point. The first has to do with the issue itself. The drive to publish cartoons satirizing Islam and the furious reaction to them dramatically symbolized the divide between “us”

and “them” in their opposing conceptions of ways of life. From a Danish perspective, what was at stake was a foundational value of liberal democracy: freedom of speech. Foreign governments demanded that freedom of speech had to be subordinated in deference to their values. As if that were not enough, these foreign governments and mullahs also insisted that Danish newspapers apologize, the Danish government acknowledge that Islam had been wronged, and the government take “all necessary measures” to prevent similar affronts in the future.²

To say that the furious storm of demands for apologies and self-censorship might provoke defenders of liberal values is akin to asserting that ice storms just might bring down power lines. To reject efforts to impose prior restraints on what a newspaper may publish—as opposed to holding them responsible for what they publish (libel, for example)—is the minimal position that a committed free speech advocate must take. True enough; also reasonable enough as a political position. But there is a perversity to democratic politics. Defending toleration of the expression of ideas with the ardor it deserves, in circumstances like these, can spark intolerance of minorities. Criticizing Muslims for threatening free speech opens the door for those who fear or resent Muslim immigrants out of ignorance or self-interest to join in the hue and cry. Foreign governments insisting on the priority of “their” values on behalf of a foreign religion—how much better can it get for the mobilization of prejudice and chauvinism? The irony is too obvious to miss. Because the crisis was framed as a defense of democratic values, those intolerant of Muslims lucked into a tailor-made opportunity to pass themselves off as defenders of tolerance. And for just this reason, we lucked into a tailor-made opportunity to gauge the full force of their rhetoric when circumstances legitimized anti-Islamic reactions.

The narrative line of the Cartoon Crisis is the clash between the values of liberal democracy—above all, freedom of expression—and the demands of faith—above all, the responsibility of the faithful to protect the honor of the prophet Mohammed. Some extremists aside, this narrative of a “clash of civilizations” is by no means clearly right. At least, it is not apparent to us. Recall the reactions of many in the

² Klausen 2009, 70.

United States—including major political leaders—to the exhibition of Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine. And lest there be any suggestion that this is somehow a peculiarly US susceptibility to moralistic outrage, it is worth also recalling that on Palm Sunday 2011, climaxing an “antiblasphemy” campaign, French fundamentalists took hammers and destroyed the photograph when it was on exhibit in Avignon. Yet rightly or wrongly, participants on both sides framed the conflict over publication of the cartoons as a clash between Western and Islamic values. The Cartoon Crisis thus provides an extraordinary opportunity to plumb the challenge of the inclusion of Muslims in western Europe, and above all, assess the reactions of the majority to a Muslim minority in the crucible of a crisis over “special” rights claimed by Muslims.

Another reason for a study of the Cartoon Crisis is the intensity of the conflict. *Crisis* is a term that has suffered abuse from excessive use. The Cartoon Crisis was not a crisis in the sense that the Cuban Missile Crisis was one. There was no mortal peril for entire societies. It was not even a top-of-the-chart political crisis. The governing parties were never at risk of being toppled. Still, diplomatic interventions by foreign governments, an embassy being burned, the staging of demonstrations and boycotts, and the posting of a one million dollar bounty for killing one of the cartoonists all give a legitimacy to the term *crisis*, as do the actions and reactions of Danish politicians. For one, the prime minister pronounced the controversy as Denmark’s “worst international crisis since the Second World War.” Others railed against foreign interference and Muslims generally. At the least, the Cartoon Crisis provides an opportunity to observe how ordinary citizens react in an extraordinary situation.

Timing is yet another consideration. Studies of citizens’ commitment to civil liberties and civil rights characteristically have been carried out *after* the immediate crisis has passed—indeed, usually after a considerable time has passed—and understandably so.³ It is in the nature of things that one cannot predict when a crisis will erupt, or still less anticipate the particular form it will take. The Cartoon Crisis

³ Samuel Stouffer’s (1955) classic study, which was carried out when McCarthyism was at its zenith, is a monumental exception. For important post-crisis-peak studies, see Davis 2007; Brooks and Manza 2013.

serendipitously (for us) had an unusual life history, however.⁴ The cartoons were published at the beginning of September 2005. Some diplomatic activities by Middle Eastern governments took place through October, and there were some isolated actions in November and December. But the crisis only boiled over in late January, with the boycott of Danish goods in the Middle East and recall of ambassadors. By then, our surveys were under way. The data on which this study is based thus offer a rare opportunity to observe how ordinary citizens discharge the duties of democratic citizenship at the very time they are under the most stress.⁵

The framing of the issue as a clash between the claims of Islam versus freedom of speech, the intensity of the clash between the two, and the intersection of the timing of the crisis and our study, allowing us to gauge the reactions of the majority to Muslim immigrants at the peak of the crisis, are three advantages that our analysis has enjoyed. And there is one more: how members of a national majority feel about a minority matters; how they treat them matters far more. To what degree do they discriminate against them by opposing the benefits of the welfare society that they will extend to fellow Danes? To what extent do they impose requirements for receiving benefits on Muslim immigrants that they do not impose on fellow Danes? To what extent do they deny them the core rights of democratic citizenship that they willingly extend to fellow Danes? These questions manifestly deserve answers. Now, thanks to the power of randomized experiments, our results can supply responses to these questions—rough-and-ready answers, to be sure, but ones that possess a degree of trustworthiness that traditional studies of public opinion cannot provide.

THE STORY

Our concern is the temper of contemporary liberal democracy. Democracies do face external threats, including some from Muslims. But the internal threats they face go deeper. The test of a democratic politics—the ultimate test, some would argue—is how conscientiously

⁴ For a detailed account of the development of the crisis, see Klausen 2009. For a detailed timeline, see chapter 2 and appendix A.

⁵ For a description of our data, see appendix B.

the majority safeguards the rights of an unpopular minority. The inclusion of Muslim immigrants is currently challenging western Europe. Accordingly, the question at the heart of this study is, How conscientiously will the majority safeguard the rights of Muslims, not in a time of political calm, but rather in light of a storm of demands by Muslims that the claims of their faith trump the values of liberal democracy?

There is no shortage of evidence to back skeptics of the democratic idea. The economy of expression is nevertheless an intellectual value. H. L. Mencken captured the heart of the matter with his signature venom. “Democracy,” Mencken (1926) declared, “is a pathetic belief in the collective wisdom of individual ignorance.” Social scientists write with duller pens. Still, their conclusions tend to be better grounded. It is therefore all the more discouraging that study after study has shown the strength of prejudice along with the weakness of support for civil liberties and civil rights.

You may now be expecting to read that we will show that the conventional wisdom is wrong; not at all. Though some more Menckenesque assessments of the incompetence of voters are over the top, the evidentiary record of the shallowness of voters’ understanding of public affairs and democratic values is unassailable. To be unmistakably clear, not the least of our objectives is to demonstrate that Muslims are victims not merely of prejudice—that is, ill feelings—but also discrimination—that is, unfair treatment.

But if that is all there is to say, what is there left to say, other than that the best that can be hoped from ordinary citizens is that they will stay out of the way, and leave decisions of policy and principle in the hands of their betters, the politically aware and engaged? If previous research documenting the limitations of ordinary citizens is right, how can our claim that citizens withstood the pressures and temptations to demonize Muslims, and instead stood up and defended the rights of an unpopular minority at the height of a crisis, also be right?

The route we traveled to answer this question does not conform to the textbook model of science. The prescribed path is to begin with the statement of a theory, then deduce—by a sometimes more and sometimes less rigorous process—a brace of hypotheses, and then finally, at the critical moment, present the empirical findings, which curiously in social science, almost always support the hypotheses. Of

course, everyone knows that this is not the way that work is actually done. Research is invariably herky-jerky, typically kick-started by an intuition, sustained by preliminary results, and followed by a campaign of research advances, detours, and outright defeats, only to culminate (sometimes only near the end) in a coherent organization of ideas and evidence.

The analogy to a military campaign is more apt than it may seem at first sight. The presentation of research corresponds to the practice of it much the way a military historian's God's-eye account of a battle corresponds to the fog of actual war. It is not precisely that the former is a falsification of the latter. Then again, the presentational style of neither the military historian nor the social scientist is a true-to-the-facts tumult of a battle or the research process.

Why are we saying publicly what everyone knows privately? We are doing so in order to give a deservedly self-deprecating introduction to the most striking result of our study. Every study of which we are aware has shown that there is an overflow of suspicion, resentment, and hostility in western Europe toward Muslim immigrants. And every theory of prejudice of which we are aware predicts that the fear, anger, and desire for retribution that so many now feel toward Islamic fundamentalists will spill over and undercut support for the rights of Muslims. Yet our study has uncovered striking evidence of a solid defense of the rights of Muslims.

It would be pleasant to pass this discovery off as confirmation of a hypothesis we had formulated *ex ante*. But we are not quite entitled to receive congratulation. On the one hand, we had not elaborated a principled basis for a prediction that ordinary citizens would draw a sharp distinction between Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists. On the other hand, the whole point of the key experiment in our study was to allow for the possibility that they would treat Muslims and Islamic fundamentalists differently.⁶ We thus owe our most arresting result to the nineteenth-century logician William Whewell's understanding of a hypothesis: a "happy guess." Thanks to the power of randomization,

⁶ In the experiments, respondents are randomly assigned to distinct treatment conditions. Some are asked to make judgments about the rights of Muslims, and others about those of Islamic fundamentalists. For a detailed description of the group categorization experiment, see chapter 2.

we have confidence in the happy guess that produced far and away the most important outcome of this study: At the height of a political firestorm over cartoons satirizing the prophet Mohammed, with Muslims by the hundreds of thousands demonstrating in the streets, their country's embassy being burned, Middle Eastern governments demanding that their government apologize and ensure that nothing similar happens in the future, a decisive majority of ordinary citizens defended the civil liberties and civil rights of Muslims. It was in specifying a mechanism that would account for this noteworthy result that we reasoned our way to the principal ideas of our account. Three of these deserve special emphasis.

The first has to do with the role of categorization in political judgments. Ordinary citizens deal with the complexity of deciding the rights of controversial groups by making use of a simple rule. We spell out the mechanics of this rule in the empirical analysis. Here we want to stress that this rule is both simple and reality-oriented. Thanks to both of these properties, its application can be widely agreed on. And applying this specific rule has the quite extraordinary effect of highlighting equal support for the civil liberties of Muslim immigrants and indisputably legitimate groups in Danish politics like born-again Christians.

The second idea underpinning our account is the notion of opposing forces. Previous research has rightly focused on intolerance. How far is prejudice driving the political choices that the majority makes about issues that bear on minorities? Is it as widespread as ever or is it possibly decreasing? Where does it have its strongest hold on the electorate and where is its grasp the weakest? These are all questions that demand and deserve the attention that they have received. But the answers add up to a story about only one of the set of forces at work: those working for the exclusion of minorities. It is our hypothesis that there is an opposing set of forces: the values of liberal democracy. We will concentrate on only one of these values: tolerance.

Focusing on tolerance will seem an odd choice, since it conventionally is taken to mean no more than a willingness to put up with those one disagrees with or dislikes.⁷ In contrast, we will argue for the

⁷ There is manifestly much to recommend this conception of tolerance. For a philosophical justification, see Scanlon 2003; Williams 2005.

recovery of an older understanding of tolerance. In this older understanding, tolerance is positive, affirmative, and supportive; it means to nourish, sustain, and succor. Operationally, what does this require? Thinking well of Muslim immigrants is insufficient. Treating them well is required. And what exactly does treating them well mean? It means the inclusion of Muslim immigrants as full members of a common community entitled not only to exercise all the political rights of any other community member but also to receive all the benefits of the welfare state *without their having to sacrifice their identity as Muslims*. Since the inclusion of minorities as full members of a common community is our criterion, we will call this form of tolerance *inclusive tolerance*.

It is by bringing out the importance of inclusive tolerance in the contemporary ethos of liberal democracy that we aim to open up for discussion and further investigation of the hypothesis that the politics of minorities is a politics of opposing forces—those long recognized as working for exclusion, with intolerance chief among them—but also those yet to be properly taken into account, with the values of liberal democracy chief among them.

The third idea we center on is the paradoxical ethos of liberal democracy. Thus, the most striking result of our study—a solid wall of support for the rights of Muslims at the height of the Cartoon Crisis—is testimony to the strength of liberal democracy. But a major theme of our study is that some of the strengths of democratic values, contrary to received opinion, entail weaknesses.

There are two paradoxes in particular that we will bring out. The first is that the same rule of judgment in categorizing groups that helps provide necessary protection of the civil rights of Muslims strips Islamic fundamentalists of the protection necessary for their civil rights. The second is that the moral covenant that underpins the welfare state simultaneously promotes equal treatment for some immigrants and opens the door to discrimination against others.

What, then, is our farthest-reaching claim? The well-documented weaknesses of citizens have obscured their strengths. That is part one, but there is also a part two. Their strengths, life being what it is, inevitably entail not yet appreciated weaknesses.