

## BOOK REVIEW

### OUTSIDERS AT HOME: THE POLITICS OF AMERICAN ISLAMOPHOBIA

Lajevardi, N. (2020). *Outsiders at Home: The Politics of American Islamophobia*. Cambridge University Press.

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Islamophobia has been part of the Muslim-American experience for the last two decades. Ever since 9/11, Muslims have been exposed to several kinds of discrimination in the US and abroad. Several books and articles demonstrate the Muslim-American experience of discrimination. However, most of the research on Muslim Americans has been either qualitative, anecdotal, or based on small samples. Moreover, the prior literature does not assess the issues of negative attitudes that Muslims face at several levels. In light of this, Nazita Lajevardi's "Outsiders at Home: The Politics of American Islamophobia" is a welcome contribution, focusing on the status of Muslim Americans in the context of US Democracy. Lajevardi looks at the issues of discrimination faced by Muslims on several levels, including the lens of public opinion, attitudes of legislators at both the Federal and State level, and the media. Moreover, Muslim-Americans themselves are internalizing their experiences of discrimination. Overall, Lajevardi finds that Muslims face discrimination at all levels of society and are acutely aware of this discrimination on different levels.

Lajevardi starts by introducing the Muslim-American experience by situating it within her own experiences growing up after 9/11. Chapter 2 situates the experiences of Muslim Americans within the overall debates on racial and religious minorities in the US. Chapter 3 introduces a novel way of measuring attitudes towards Muslims by introducing the Muslim American Resentment Scale. She demonstrates how various scale measures affect political preferences, attitudes, and

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behaviors towards Muslims. The Scale provides evidence that negative attitudes towards Muslims affect vote choice and preferences for policies that target Muslims. For instance, negative attitudes towards Muslims drive stronger preferences for policies that aim to restrict immigration from Muslim-majority countries. Chapter 4 uses a candidate evaluation experiment to show that the public holds hostile attitudes towards Muslims and is also unwilling to vote for Muslim American candidates.

Chapter 5 uses sentiment analysis to assess how 9/11 affected the portrayal of Muslim-Americans and compares it with other groups like Hispanics and African-Americans in the US. Chapter 6 uses survey experiments to assess the impact of the media on mass attitudes towards Muslims through survey experiments. It demonstrates that opinions towards Muslims can be improved through improved media portrayals. Chapter 7 leverages audit studies to test legislators' responsiveness to Muslim constituent requests. It reveals that legislators discriminate against Muslims irrespective of party lines. Chapter 8 focuses on Muslim Americans themselves in terms of trying to understand their responses to discrimination. It shows that Muslims are aware that they are discriminated by both the public and the government sector in the United States because of their religious identity. Nazita concludes the book by looking at perspectives for future research and thinking about notions of allyship and how Muslim-Americans have found allies with people of other racial and religious minorities.

This book excels in many ways. First, by using several methodologies, including surveys, audit experiments, survey experiments, and text-as-data, the book demonstrates how scholars can effectively use and triangulate these methods towards studies of racialized minorities. The use of the Muslim American Resentment scale is innovative and very useful for further research on Muslim-Americans. Second, Lajevardi takes a multi-tiered approach towards the discrimination faced by Muslims at several levels of influence, including the media, legislatures, and public opinion. Third, by situating the Muslim-American experience by comparing it with issues faced by other minorities, the book situates the everyday experiences and the uniqueness of the Muslim experience.

However, at the same time, the book could have been enriched by looking at some qualitative methods to get a more grounded approach to the Muslim-American experience. Similarly, while it does an excellent job of nuancing Muslim-American experiences, it may also need to focus on the support Muslims have found, at least in some circles, and the dichotomy of the "Good Muslim" and the "Bad Muslim." For instance, in some of my research on Muslim-American nonprofits, while there was

an increase in negative media sentiment towards Muslim-Americans, the media also liked to distinguish between “Good Muslims” and “Bad Muslims.” While it associated “Bad Muslims” with terrorism, it also associated “Good Muslims” as victims. Adding some of those nuances in the literature would have enriched the scholarship.

Overall, this book is an excellent resource for anyone interested in Muslim-Americans and other racial and religious minorities in the US. It is also an excellent resource for people interested in studying Muslim philanthropy if they want to improve the self-perceptions and discrimination issues that also shape modern Muslim charity.

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