

Title: **The level of knowledge and perception of Islam in Czechia and Slovakia:
does ignorance determine subjective attitudes?**

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Abstract

In this article, we examine existing levels of knowledge about Islam and the world of Islam in regard to attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in Czechia and Slovakia. The analysis draws on a representative questionnaire survey among university students and on in-depth interviews with experts from relevant fields. We ascertained that factual knowledge about Islam is biased and insufficient in regard to Islam's current geopolitical significance and prominence in public debate. We found that the level of knowledge determines the perception of Islam and Muslims including more favourable attitudes towards Muslim immigrants and the level of fear of Islamic terrorism. Among other factors, religious affiliation has been confirmed as correlating significantly with both the level of knowledge and subjective attitudes in terms of the more negative views on Islam and Muslims reported by Roman Catholic respondents and the better knowledge of Islam revealed by adherents of 'minor' (other than Roman Catholic) religions.

Keywords: attitudes, Muslims, Islam, knowledge

Introduction

Despite several historical affinities and relative geographical proximity, the mutual understanding between the Western and the Islamic world has always been full of misconceptions and prejudices (Said 1978, Hitti 1962, Malik et. al 2010). A confrontational view has often been propagated for political purposes and has become especially apparent after recent events such as the 11 September 2001 attacks in USA, the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ including the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the bombings in Madrid and London, or the international turmoil after the publication of the Prophet Mohammed cartoons. In addition, given the international migration trends and divergent demographic projections, the practical consequences of unfavourable relations between Muslims and non-Muslims both within Western countries and internationally are likely to be accentuated (Smil 2005). There is thus widespread interest in understanding what the areas of friction are and how they can be dealt with.

This study seeks to contribute to this understanding by analysing links between the objective knowledge and subjective views on Islam, Muslims, and the world of Islam in Czechia and Slovakia. Differently from Western and Southern European countries, the attitudes to Islam and Muslims in the considered societies have been only minimally influenced by personal contacts with Muslims or by accidents attributable to Islamic terrorism.¹ In spite of this, the attitudes towards both Muslims and immigrants are more negative in Eastern European countries than in Western Europe (Strabac and Listhaug 2008). The two most important channels through which the knowledge and subjective views on Islam and Muslims are constructed are popular media and school education. While the distorted and fragmented images of Muslims in Czech popular media have recently been examined by Křížková (2007), the context of this study will be linked to the latter channel. The analysis is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative research including a

survey of 716 questionnaires among Czech and Slovak university students, 17 in-depth interviews with experts in relevant fields, and a supplementary analysis of 32 secondary school textbooks.

The paper is structured as follows. The second section gives a brief overview of the theoretical and empirical starting points. In the third section some general research questions are formulated. The methods of analysis are clarified in the fourth section and experts' views on investigated issues as they have emerged from the interviews are outlined in the fourth section. The fifth section presents the descriptive and analytic results from the questionnaire survey. The article then summarises the most interesting findings in its conclusion.

Some theoretical and empirical premises

From a large body of related literature, at least four different strands of research that are relevant to this analysis should be mentioned. These involve the theories and empirical research on determinants of prejudices and stereotypes, the studies dealing specifically with hostile attitudes towards Muslims, the literature focusing on the construction of stereotypes about 'other' worlds, and the literature dealing with education about Islam in schools.

A concise overview of the main theoretical approaches to the study of prejudice can be found in, for example, Strabac and Listhaug (2008) who draw mostly on Duckitt (1992). These authors describe the shift from concepts based on psychological explanations of prejudice (Authoritarian Personality Theory) to more sociologically based approaches that view prejudice and negative stereotypes (as a base of prejudice) as being more socio-culturally determined by historically embedded values. Among other group-focused explanatory theories of prejudice, a notable one is the Realistic Group Conflict Theory that relates prejudices to various forms of existing or anticipated inter-group competition.

There are then numerous studies that examine the role that individual characteristics of respondents play in various empirical surveys. Among other factors, the correlates such as education, socio-economic status and urban residence have been suggested as being negatively associated with the extent of reported prejudice and the age of respondents or their level of religiosity have been found positively associated (Carter et. al. 2005, Hello et. al 2002, Evans and Need 2002, Semyonov et al. 2004, Chandler and Tsai 2001, Scheepers et al. 2002, Coenders and Scheepers 2008). While the results on education seem to be quite robust (Hello et. al 2002), inferences for other factors are often dependent on the specifications of particular studies (Strabac and Listhaug 2008: 270-272). For example, although religiousness has long been considered as a determinant of prejudice, it is acknowledged that it very much depends on how religiousness is defined (Batson and Stocks 2005). Although most of the studies quoted above do not address prejudices specifically against Islam or Muslims, their findings are still inspiring for this analysis because they suggest some expectations and factors that can be examined.

As far as prejudices targeted specifically against Muslims are concerned, the term 'Islamophobia' is often used. A large part of the studies on Islamophobia addresses issues related to the integration of Muslim immigrants. Usually they explore how globalised images of Islamic terrorists are imposed on Muslim communities and individuals. More generally, they deal with the construction of negative stereotypes and narrative images in the media and in various public discourses as well as with how these representations are (mis)used in practice (Halliday 1999, Richardson 2004). These stereotypes are commonly based on perceived threats that can be categorised into three groups according to the level at which they are active. At a global or international level, these threats are most often connected with military extremism and Islamist terrorism. At a national level, they commonly ensue the notion of the irreconcilability of Islam with democracy and Western-style modernisation.

Finally at a local level these threats ensuing from various cultural traits such as fanaticism or oppression of women often imputed to Muslims with implicit or explicit reference to their incompatibility with Western values. Both the questionnaire form and the topics for interviews were selected in order to address these different levels at which the stereotypes tend to operate.

The thinking about Islam and Muslims is often embedded in antithetical collective identities that are being ascribed to Muslims as in opposition to non-Muslim groups. The relatively recent concept of Islamophobia can be related to older literature on ethnocentric abstractive representations of other cultures with the influential concept of ‘Orientalism’ in the forefront (Said 1978). It shows how the false generalisations of the East (with a particular focus on the Arab world) have emerged as irrational constructs that are largely independent of the objective facts and insensitive to considerable diversity of the actual world. The political aspect of these authoritarian visions of reality, in which the fabrication of knowledge is intrinsically linked to unequal power relations, has also been pointed out (Said 1994). Although the original arguments of Said’s Orientalism refer to the era of European imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the idea has a more general relevance even regarding contemporary intercultural and geopolitical relations. For this study, the concept of Orientalism is an inspiring example of symbolic geographical imagination illustrating how symbolic socio-cultural boundaries are (either intentionally or unintentionally) constructed.

A quite different but similarly relevant source of motivation provides discussions on teaching about Islam in schools. Normatively, it appears straightforward that ‘teachers have an obligation to teach about world religions and their profound impact on human civilizations without proselytizing or expressing personal views’ (Moore 2006: 139). When it comes to practice, the situation may nevertheless be more ambiguous. Irresponsible interpretations and

excessively ethnocentric views of the teacher may obviously be a problem that can be determined not only by an ideological bias but more often by the teacher's own ignorance about Islamic issues (Mastrilli and Sardo-Brown 2002, Douglass and Dunn 2003, Salahuddin 2005). Similarly important challenge represents a balanced coverage of these issues in curricula that would appropriately and non-rigidly address sensitive topics (Mastrilli and Sardo-Brown 2002, Moore 2006, Coles 2004, Otterbeck 2005). For the present analysis, some of the themes associated with the teaching of Islam have been incorporated into the structure of interviews held with experts, of whom some are experienced teachers and policy makers in the field of education.

In addition, there also exist a number of empirical studies that have a focus more close to that of this analysis. At the cross-national level, patterns of knowledge and subjective views on Muslims and Islam have been mapped out in surveys organised within the Pew Global Attitudes Research Project (Pew Research Centre 2005, 2006). In the cross-country analysis of anti-Muslim prejudices based on a perceived social distance to Muslims reported in the European Values Survey, Strabac and Listhaug (2008) found that there were more prejudices against Muslims than against other groups of immigrants. At the same time they detected higher level of prejudice in East European countries. Changes in the Czech religious landscape have been recently examined by Havlíček and Hupková (2008). Some minor surveys of public opinions on Islam and Muslims have also been published in Czech and Slovak periodicals (Břešťan 2006, Němeček 2006, SME 2005). Although this evidence is rather anecdotal, some interesting features have been indicated such as more negative attitudes to Islam among religious people in Slovakia (SME 2005).

Research questions

Two types of research questions can now be formulated for the descriptive and analytic aims of this study:

1. What is the level of knowledge about Islam and the Islamic world, what are the most common biases, and what recommendations can be suggested for an educational program focusing on these issues? What are the subjective views on Islam and Muslims and which attitudes exist towards Muslims in Czechia and Slovakia?
2. What are the observable correlates of the level of knowledge about Islam and subjective views on Islam and Muslims? Does the level of knowledge determine subjective views on Islam and Muslims?

Methodical comments

Interviews with experts

The 17 in-depth interviews with experts were conducted between April 2008 and March 2009 in order to obtain some qualitative insights and review particular issues that would be relevant for the quantitative examination by questionnaire survey. The experts with different backgrounds relevant to the investigated topics were interviewed with sample selected using purposive snowball sampling. As the interviewees were ensured to be kept anonymous, we use the abbreviations e1-e17 for referring to particular interviews with the following list of the experts' specialisations:

- e1 – Czech specialist on Central Asia and Muslim issues
- e2 – renowned Czech academic specialised in Islam and Islamic countries
- e3 – senior Slovak academic specialised in Arabic philology and the Arab World
- e4 – senior researcher from Slovakia specialised in the modern history of the Arab World
- e5 – Czech expert on Islamic theosophy
- e6 – leading member of the Czech Islamic Centre
- e7 – Czech political scientist and social anthropologist
- e8 – Slovak political scientist specialised in International Relations and world terrorism
- e9 – officer from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs with experience in the diplomatic service in the Arab World
- e10 – Czech expert on religions and Protestant priest
- e11 – journalist specialised in International Security topics and the Middle East

e12 – Czech sociologist specialised in Islam and research on education

e13, e14, e15, e16, e17 – experienced secondary school teachers of geography, history, and social sciences

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured with different attention given to particular issues considering the expert's specialisation. Four broad areas were covered including the general views and attitudes towards Muslims in Czechia and Slovakia, problems with the integration of Muslim immigrants, the quality of education and educational curricula (with respect to Islamic issues), and opinions on the spatial extent and territorial cohesion of the Islamic world.

Questionnaire survey

The main part of the exploratory work was the questionnaire survey conducted among Czech and Slovak university students. Obviously, the selection of university students does not allow generalising the results to the overall population. This option was nevertheless preferred for several reasons. University students are a more homogeneous group so that statistical representativeness can be reached more easily. In addition, it is not unreasonable to expect that there is a relatively lower level of knowledge about Islamic issues among the overall population with the prevalence of the most pronounced stereotypes. It can be assumed that the analysis conducted among university students may uncover some more nuanced features. University students also represent a segment of the next generation decision-makers with expected above-average influence for future societal arrangements. Not least, as they are recent high-school graduates, their knowledge and opinions are more likely to reflect something about the information acquired in the course of the education process.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections dealing with the following matters: knowledge about Islam as a religion, geographic knowledge about the Islamic world, subjective views on Muslims and Islam, and individual characteristics of respondents. It

consisted of 45 closed questions, four open questions, and a task to delineate the Islamic countries on a world map with predefined country borders and labels. The survey was carried out among second year and older undergraduate students at Czech and Slovak university centres including Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň, Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, and Košice during May and June 2008. Stratified sampling was applied by obtaining the sample structured approximately proportionally to the actual distribution of students on the basis of their specialisation and regional allocation. The selection of students was then made on a random basis by contacting them personally in the halls of their universities. In this way, a statistically appropriate sample size of 716 valid questionnaires was gathered. We do not expect any significant bias associated with non-participation in the survey (the most common reason was a lack of time, while there was only one case of a student who refused to participate due to aversion to the topic), or with non-response to individual questions (non-response was not higher than 12 per cent with an average of 4 per cent).

Textbook analysis

Additionally, 32 secondary school textbooks, of which 20 Czech and 12 Slovak, of geography (14), history (9), and social science (9) were collected and analysed for their coverage of topics related to Islam and Muslims. All of these are recent textbooks published in the post-communist period which are used in practice. The list of considered textbooks can be obtained from the authors upon request. Because of the supplementary nature of the textbook analysis, the results will not be described in a separate section but several references to the textbook analysis will appear throughout the text.

Experts' views: some indicative findings

In a condensed form, this section presents some indicative findings that emerged from the interviews with experts. One purpose was to identify and introduce some issues and opinions that we could then examine further in the questionnaire survey.

Public attitudes, existing knowledge, and education about Islam

Most of the interviewed experts regard the attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in Czechia and Slovakia to be negative or very negative and heavily influenced by popular media. Several comments were made in the following fashion: ‘The awareness of Islam was raised by the media but the media provided a one-sided, negative picture. For someone who is not interested in this religion, Islam may just stand for bombing attacks’ [e5]. Occasionally, some more positive developments were also mentioned such as that ‘we have enough objective literature about Islam’ [for those who want to read it], or that ‘there are also many well made and objective TV programmes about Islam, although mostly less advertised and usually broadcasted late at night’ [e13], and that ‘there is a growing interest in Islamic studies at universities and there are better opportunities for travel to Islamic countries’ [e9]. In a similar sense, the interviewees mostly considered the level of knowledge of Islam in Czechia and Slovakia to be very low and inadequate with regard to current international political events. ‘Most people have a minimal knowledge of Islam, and even this small level of knowledge is then distorted by the media’ [e6].

One can hardly expect that the character of broadcasting will significantly change or that more responsible journalism will automatically change public opinions about Islam (Toru 2006). Another important (and perhaps more effective) channel through which knowledge and attitudes toward Islam are formed is the coverage of related issues in schools. Particularly those interviewees who do not work as secondary school teachers (e1-e12) expressed their concern in this respect. ‘The level of knowledge [about Islam] should be better; school

textbooks are obsolete and provide only the minimum of information about Islam' [e5]. By contrast, the interviewed secondary school teachers (e13-e17) were mostly convinced that the knowledge of (their) students was at the level that it should be according to the educational curricula. At the same time, however, this second group of interviewees admitted that the coverage of Islam is, in many respects, superficial and that the quantity of relevant information about Islam presented in schools should increase.

Some of the suggestions for textbooks and curricula improvements addressed issues that are already covered. One example is 'the explanation of the fundamentals of Islam as a religion and a description of the elementary history of Islam and its expansion' [e6], which is present in many of the analysed textbooks. Some other recommendations were nevertheless more innovative. In particular, there was among interviewees an apparent concern to express the need for bridging the gap caused by a rigid and narrow understanding of Islam. A wider perspective should be provided that would include a 'window' into the actual way of life of Muslims, and describe Islam as a living and lived religion that is also an integral part of our European reality. More focus on 'modern Islam and its manifestations (including Islamist terrorism), and on the current geographical and geopolitical aspects of Islam' [e3] was also suggested.

Among a wide range of responses to common stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, the three most frequently reported were the opinion that each Muslim equals a terrorist, *jihad* uniformly understood as holy war, and the stereotype of a subordinate status of women in Islamic society. Several complaints were also expressed regarding misleading view of Islam and the Islamic world as a monolithic and homogeneous entity. 'Despite the existence of such institutions as the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference differences between some Islamic states are even bigger than between Islamic states and Western countries' [e8]. 'Islam is rather an all-society phenomenon' [e7]. 'No boundary

between Islam and the West exists; The Islamic world penetrates Europe more than the Christian world ever penetrated the Islamic world' [e1]. 'If there are any borders, then they are in the minds of people' [e6].

As a matter of fact, these biases are rather poorly addressed in the reviewed textbooks. For example, each time a reference to *jihad* is made (this is only the case for some history textbooks), the interpretation as holy war is followed without further explanation. A rather unfortunate exception is a widely used history textbook by Čornej (2006: 21) that additionally describes *jihad* as 'a state of war' by quoting an inaccurately translated fragment of the Koran (a part of Sura 47:4) wrenched out of its context. Another stereotype that is commonly reproduced by the secondary school textbooks is the exclusive identification of Islam with Arab culture (information about contemporary Islam supplements a description of the history of the Arab conquest).

Muslims in Czechia and Slovakia

Most of the interviewees agree that Muslims living in Czechia and Slovakia do not represent a problem that would require special attention from the government administrative. The main reason is obviously their small number. Even with respect to the future, no sharp increase of Muslims is expected. 'I think that it is unlikely that Czechia will become a preferred country for Muslims like, for instance, France or Germany. We don't have a colonial past and most of our economic immigrants come from Eastern Europe' [e1]. 'I expected that there would be a higher growth, but until now it doesn't look like we are an attractive country for Muslims, not even since the EU accession in 2004' [e10].

Regarding the future coexistence of Muslims and the major population, the forced assimilation is not considered to have a desired effect. Due to their small number and diverse geographical roots, Muslims living in Czechia and Slovakia are not likely to form any ghettos.

Therefore, gradual integration is viewed as the prevailing model and appropriate state policies should be tailored accordingly. However, differences between particular groups of Muslims should be acknowledged. ‘Currently, the Muslims in Czechia and Slovakia can be divided into four groups: well-integrated ones—mostly former students who came during the socialist era, businessmen, local novices, and refugees seeking asylum. But I really wouldn’t be surprised if a new group in terms of immigrants looking for work will form in the near future’ [e12].

Although on the basis of the aforementioned comments, one would expect that international events would be perceived as the main conflict topics, the answers of interviewed experts were not consistent in this respect. ‘If there appears any violence resulting, for example, from accusing a Muslim of a crime that could be connected to his faith, an escalation and radicalisation of conflicts could easily emerge’ [e10]. On the other hand, ‘until now, the well-known international issues have not affected local Muslims considerably’ [e6]. While there are some fears that ‘the negative images of Muslims could lead to xenophobic reactions from local extremists’ [e14], none of the experts expressed serious concerns about Islamic extremism in Czechia or Slovakia or about an escalation of this type of extremism in the near future.

Results of the questionnaire survey among Czech and Slovak university students

The results obtained from the questionnaire survey are presented in three steps. Firstly, the respondents’ answers to individual questions are described. Secondly, the bivariate statistical associations between the level of knowledge, subjective views, and characteristics of respondents are examined. Finally, some of the bivariate links are further explored by multivariate analysis.

Level of knowledge and subjective views: a description of patterns

The description of responses to individual questions begins with Table 1, which shows the percentage of correct answers to multiple-choice questions on the knowledge of basic facts about Islam. Although university students are familiar with most of the notable facts, their knowledge is rather weak when it comes to slightly less well-known issues. For example, only a minority of the respondents is aware of the relationship between Jesus Christ and Islam or of the actual meaning of the term *jihad*. While the majority of students recognised the Islamic Star and Crescent among the symbols of eight other religions, interestingly, one tenth of them confused it with the Jewish Star of David and 12 per cent with the Hindu Aukmar.

Table 1. Knowledge of basic facts about Islam (multiple-choice questions)

	Valid answers	Percentage of correct answers
Holy Book of Islam	713	99
Founder of Islam	711	91
Two main branches of Islam	683	87
Symbol of Islam	652	72
Relationship between Islam and Jesus Christ	629	40
Percentage of Muslims of the world's population	708	34
Meaning of the word ' <i>jihad</i> '	705	13

Regarding the answers to other questions, less than 10 per cent of the respondents have read at least one passage from the Koran (this figure can be compared with 53 per cent for the Bible and 26 per cent reported for the Kamasutra). Two-thirds of the respondents knew at least one of the pillars of Islam, though only three per cent of them knew all five pillars. Although there was a relatively good awareness about the existence of the two main denominations of Islam, only one third of the informants knew that the number of Sunni Muslims exceeds the number of Shi'a Muslims.

The latter finding probably relates to a weak and distorted knowledge about the spatial extension of Islam. Only 40 per cent of the respondents correctly pointed out at least one of the four countries with the highest absolute number of Muslims (these are Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India) and only 12 per cent of them mentioned at least two of these countries. The most frequently given incorrect answers were Iraq (68 per cent of respondents), Iran (67), Saudi Arabia (41), and Afghanistan (39). As this question might seem somewhat tricky because of the different population sizes of the countries involved, the respondents were also asked to point out in the map the countries where the Islamic population has a dominant position. The comparison of the students' views and the actual situation is portrayed in Figure 1. First of all, it shows that there is an apparent ignorance of the importance of Islam outside southwest Asia. This is especially the case for the countries such as Bangladesh (only six per cent of respondents who answered this question marked this country as Islamic), Malaysia (6), and Indonesia (11), but it also holds for Muslim countries in Africa, central Asia, and southeast Europe. Although students underestimated the geographical extension of Islam, they at the same time tended to overestimate the percentage of Muslims in the world population. Two-thirds of the respondents assumed that Muslims represent more than 25 per cent of the world population. In addition, there seems to be little awareness of the difference between Muslim and Arab countries (though Arabs make up less than a quarter of the Muslims in the world). Almost 80 per cent of the respondents included Iran in the Arab world, while for Afghanistan the figure was 61 per cent, and for Pakistan 54 per cent. By contrast, more than 50 per cent of the respondents did not include any of the Arab (or Arabic speaking) countries in Africa in the Arab world.

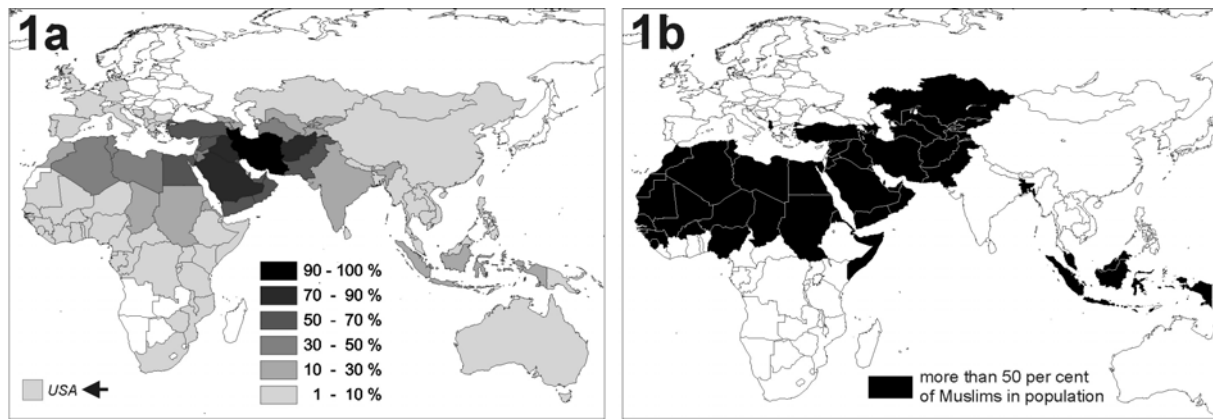


Figure 1. Geographical extent of the Islamic world: students' view and reality

1a – Students' view (share of respondents who marked respective countries as Islamic); 1b – Countries with more than 50 per cent of Muslims in population

Most of the respondents view Islam (its 'real nature') as a religion, while the second and third most frequent answers were a way of life and terrorism. Although only a minority of the interviewed students is afraid of Islamic terrorism in Czechia or Slovakia, most students expressed that they have some fears with regard to the situation at a European and global level. Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents' opinions regarding a comparison of Islam with Christianity. It reveals that Islam is seen as being more militant, dogmatic, and expansive, and it is also viewed as less socially sensitive and less tolerant to other world views than Christianity.

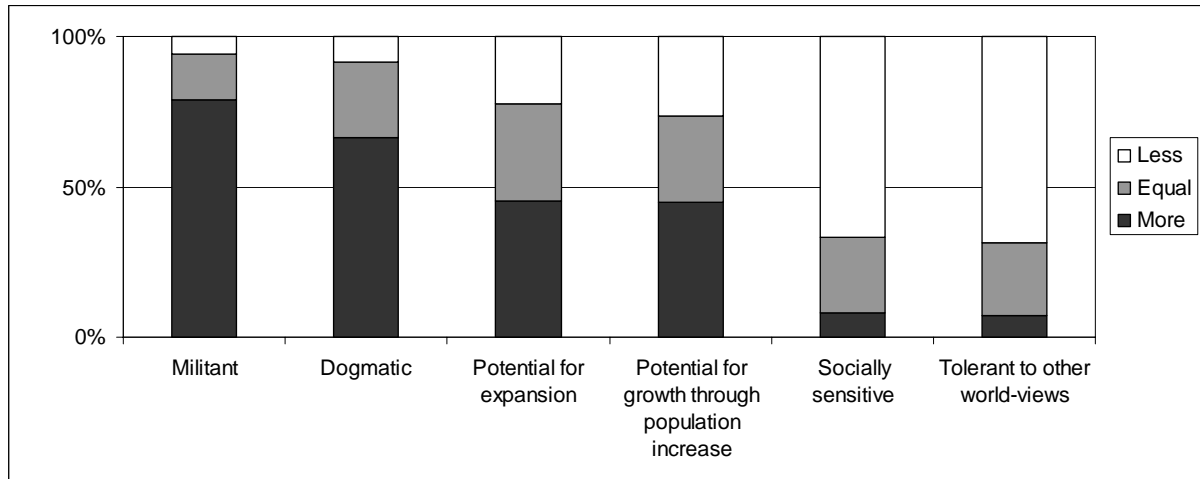


Figure 2. Comparison of Islam with Christianity

Four fifths of the respondents considered Islam to be incompatible with Western-style democracy. Almost two-thirds of them nevertheless believe that a religious Muslim can live in a Western society without substantial problems. Most of them would also agree with the building of a mosque in the place where they live. By contrast, (Arab) Muslims were considered as the second least acceptable neighbours out of a list of five minority groups with the average ranks corresponding to: 1.6 for German, 2.7 for Vietnamese, 2.8 for Ukrainian, 3.3 for Arab Muslim, and 4.5 for Romany (differences are statistically significant at the .01 level except that between Vietnamese and Ukrainian).

Finally, Figure 3 depicts results of the comparison of a Muslim with a typical Czech/Slovak citizen by considering 11 different human attributes. It reveals that Muslims are regarded as significantly more devout, fanatical, impulsive, and hospitable and considerably less greedy and immoral, but also less tolerant and respectful to women. Insignificant differences between Muslims and typical Czech or Slovaks have been reported with respect to attributes such as honesty, cunning, and arrogance.

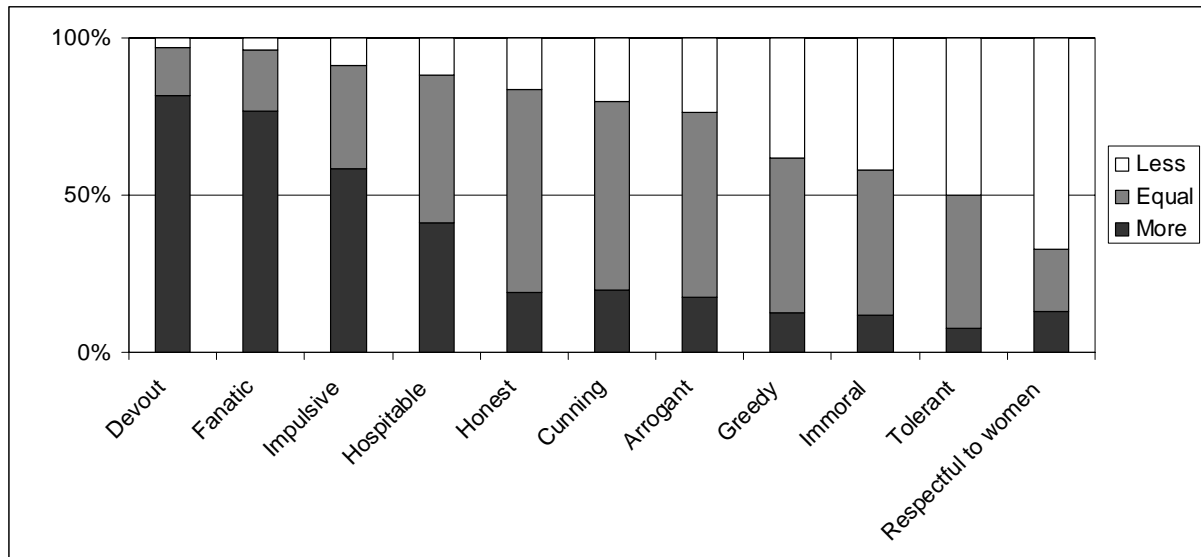


Figure 3. Image of a Muslim in comparison to a typical Czech/Slovak

Level of knowledge, subjective views, and characteristics of respondents: bivariate associations

Although the description provided above is interesting in itself, it does not allow us to make any inferences about the underlying factors. Therefore, the next step is to evaluate various bivariate statistical relationships between the different variables. These statistical associations can be investigated either by considering answers to individual questions as separate variables or by applying some composite indices. We combine both of these alternatives. The composite scores of the overall level of students' knowledge about Islam (K_K) and the extent of negative views on Islam and Muslims (K_N) are considered basing on the responses to relevant questions.² Since the questions that saturate K_N are quite heterogeneous and due to the fact that this indicator addresses only the negative views of respondents, individual questions have also been examined separately.

We began with testing links between the level of knowledge and subjective attitudes. Although only a weaker negative correlation ($p=.056$) has been found between K_K and K_N , some significant statistical associations have been revealed when considering, instead of K_N ,

individual subjective views as separate variables (Table 2). These results indicate that respondents who share a broader view on Islam (e.g. regard it also as a system of law or a social system) have on average a higher K_K . The same holds for those who see the integration of Muslims into Czech/Slovak society as less problematic; acknowledge the social sensitiveness of Islam; or are not afraid of Islamic terrorism. On the other hand, those who think that Muslims are more respectful to women than typical Czechs/Slovaks, as well as those who believe that security reasons were the main motives for the intervention in Iraq, have on average a lower K_K .

Table 2. Level of knowledge (K_K) and subjective views on Islam and Muslims

Subpopulation of those respondents who:	N	Mean K_K (subpop.)	Mean K_K (rest)	Stat. sig. (difference in means)
View Islam as a system of law	42	8.4	7.0	.00
View Islam as a social system	86	7.6	7.0	.02
Believe that a religious Muslim can live without substantial restriction in our society	459	7.3	6.7	.00
View Islam as more socially sensitive than Christianity	56	8.3	7.0	.00
Believe that Muslims are more respectful to women than typical Czechs/Slovaks	92	6.3	7.2	.00
Believe that security reasons were the main motive for the intervention in Iraq	126	6.6	7.2	.02
Have no fears of Islamic extremism in Czechia/Slovakia	232	7.5	6.9	.00
Have no fears of Islamic extremism in Europe	56	8.1	7.0	.00

In a similar way, Table 3 shows some statistically significant relationships between K_K and individual characteristics of respondents. Slovak respondents have been found to have a higher K_K than Czech students. This is, however, mostly attributable to students interviewed in Bratislava, while those interviewed elsewhere in Slovakia have on average lower knowledge. Rather unsurprisingly, students of social sciences are less ignorant of the basic facts about Islam than technically oriented students. The results also suggest that respondents

who have visited an Islamic country or who have had some contact with Muslims show a significantly higher K_K . Perhaps a more interesting finding represents a higher K_K seen for adherents of minor religions (other than Roman Catholics – mainly Protestants but also several other religions). Other personal characteristics of respondents, such as their reported household income, urban-rural origin, or gender have not been found to be significant correlates of K_K .

Table 3. Level of knowledge (K_K) and individual characteristics of respondents

Subpopulation of those respondents who:	N	Mean K_K (subpop.)	Mean K_K (rest)	Stat. sig. (difference in means)
Have Slovak nationality	301	7.3	6.9	.04
Were interviewed in Bratislava	143	8.0	6.9	.00
Were interviewed in Banská Bystrica and Košice	143	6.6	7.2	.01
Study technical disciplines	197	6.4	7.3	.00
Study economics and law or humanities	375	7.5	6.6	.00
Belong to minor religions*	80	7.7	7.0	.01
Have or had at least some personal contact with Muslims	234	7.6	6.8	.00
Have visited an Islamic country	157	7.7	6.9	.00

*Other than Roman Catholics.

Analogically, Table 3 depicts some statistically significant relationships between the composite score of negative views (K_N) and characteristics of respondents. Again, the Slovak respondents seem to differ from the Czech ones – in this case, they have on average higher K_N . Students of humanities tend to have more positive views on Islam than others. Adherence to the Roman Catholic religion has been indicated as an important correlate of K_N and this is apparently related to the finding of a significant positive association of K_N with the religious activity (K_N is even higher for the group of 86 most religiously active respondents). In addition, those with a Muslim friend have significantly less negative views on Islam and Muslims.

Table 4. Negative views on Islam (K_N) and individual characteristics of respondents

Subpopulation of those respondents who:	N	Mean K_N (subpop.)	Mean K_N (rest)	Stat. sig. (difference in means)
Have Slovak nationality	301	4.7	4.3	.04
Study humanities	179	4.0	4.6	.00
Are Roman Catholics	228	4.9	4.2	.00
Regularly attend church	208	4.8	4.3	.01
Have or had a Muslim friend	69	3.8	4.5	.04

Finally, from examining a matrix of possible bivariate relationships between responses to separate questions addressing subjective views and characteristics of respondents, the following statistically significant findings have emerged. Respondents adhering to minor religions and students of humanities tend to view Islam as more socially sensitive than the rest of our sample. By contrast, religiously more active respondents view Muslims as less hospitable, greedier, and trickier than the rest of the sample. The same statement holds for Slovak respondents in comparison to Czech respondents. Those who have ever visited an Islamic country or who have had at least some contact with Muslims tend to regard Islam as less militant and are also less afraid of Islamic terrorism. The opposite is the case for Roman Catholics as well as for religiously active students who regard Islam as comparatively more militant and who are also more concerned about Islamic terrorism.

Multivariate analysis

Now, some of the detected two-way relationships will be re-examined by multivariate statistical techniques. Firstly, the composite scores of the level of knowledge (K_K) and subjective views (K_N) will be considered as dependent variables (approximately normally distributed). Secondly, we will investigate the impacts of K_K on dependent variables referring to selected subjective views on Islam and Muslims. In both cases, the set of other independent

predictors is specified with consideration given to the indicated bivariate relationships, some logical assumptions about possible causalities, and methodical requirements. More concretely, we have selected factors such as the impact of religious affiliation, students' specialisation, contact with Muslims, previous visit of an Islamic country, and place of questionnaire collection. Some other variables, such as gender, age, urban-rural origin, household income, or religious activity, were also tested but have been found redundant.

Results obtained by the maximum likelihood estimates using simple (main effects only) generalised linear models (GLM) are shown in Table 5. The most interesting finding is probably the confirmation of the impact of religious affiliation on K_K as well as on K_N . The respondents of minor religions have a better objective knowledge of Islam, while Roman Catholics tend to express more negative subjective views on Islam and Muslims. The impact of the students' fields of study is also notable in terms of a significantly lower K_K found for students of technical and natural science and lower K_N confirmed for those studying humanities.

Table 5. Correlates of the level of knowledge about Islam (K_K) and negative views on Islam and Muslims (K_N): maximum likelihood GLM estimates

Dependent variable	K_K		K_N	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Intercept	6.99	(.232)***	4.398	(.205)***
Roman Catholic	-.210	(.205)	.549	(.180)***
Minor religions Atheist (dummy)	.620	(.278)**	-.093	(.245)
Technical	-1.235	(.229)***	.020	(.202)
Natural science and medicine	-.747	(.254)***	-.067	(.224)
Humanities Economics and Law (dummy)	-.081	(.235)	-.647	(.207)***
Have or had a Muslim friend	.853	(.293)***	-.810	(.258)***
Some contact with Muslims	.515	(.208)**	-.041	(.183)
No contact with Muslims (dummy)				
Visited an Islamic country	.551	(.210)***	.054	(.185)
Bratislava	1.136	(.255)***	.208	(.224)
Slovakia–rest	-.025	(.264)	.424	(.232)*

Prague Czechia–rest (dummy)	.091	(.224)	.024	(.197)
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*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Table 6 depicts the results of binary logistic GLMs for five different dependent variables (for which K_K has been identified as a significant predictor) when controlling for a set of potential covariates. These five binary dependents measure the ratios of respondents who: (1) acknowledge the social sensitivity of Islam, (2) share a broader view of Islam (consider it also as a social system or a system of law), (3) regard the integration of a religious Muslim into our society as unproblematic, (4) don't have any fears of Islamic terrorism, and (5) stress economic reasons as the dominant motives for the intervention in Iraq. The beta coefficients and exponential beta coefficients for K_K appear in the first two lines of table 6. For example, the exp(B) in the case of model (3) implies that, if other variables controlled, a one-unit change in K_K would theoretically increase the ratio between those who regard the integration of a religious Muslim unproblematic and the rest of the respondents by 13 per cent.

Table 6. Impacts of the level of knowledge (K_K) on selected subjective views of Islam and Muslims: binary logistic GLMs

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
K_K (B)	.196***	.104*	.122***	.097***	.087**
Exp(B)	1.217	1.110	1.130	1.102	1.091
<i>Other control variables (B)</i>					
Roman Catholic	-.791**	-.467	.089	-.503**	-.018
Minor religions	.406	.299	.070	-.622**	.232
Atheist (dummy)					
Technical	-.580	-.878**	.018	.211	.267
Natural science and medicine	.363	-1.235***	.182	.312	.120
Humanities	.482	-.716**	.037	.326	-.166
Economic and Law (dummy)					
Have or had a Muslim friend	.592	.820**	.243	.591**	-.134
Some contact with Muslims	-.453	.853***	.005	.085	.258
No contact with Muslims					

(dummy)					
Czech nationality	.034	-.280	.116	-.234	.437**

(1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) are binary dependent variables of subjective views on Islam and

Muslims explained in the text.

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

The impacts of K_K on particular dependent variables can be either direct or they can be moderated by interactions with some other variable(s). Therefore, we additionally tested for the two-way interactions of K_K with the main effect factors (those that have been found significant in Table 6) by a step by step inclusion of respective interaction terms into particular models. These tests of interactions (performed at the .05 level) have revealed that, while the un-moderated effects of K_K prevail with respect to models (1) and (3), regarding other models, the impacts of the level of knowledge on dependent variables are rather conditional to the students' field of study (especially to their technical orientation) in the case of model (2), to the religiosity of respondents in the case of model (4), and to their nationality in model (5).

Concluding remarks

This study examined the knowledge and perception of Islam, the world of Islam, and Muslims in two post-communist societies, namely Czechia and Slovakia. The focus was predominantly on positive evidence (what the knowledge and attitudes to Islam are) and not so much on normative arguments (what the knowledge should be). Notwithstanding this, the opinions of interviewed experts and the results obtained in a questionnaire survey among university students allow us to state that the knowledge about Islam is quite biased and mostly limited to a few popularly-known facts. This is clearly inadequate when considering the importance of

these issues in the current geopolitical situation as well as the prominent place of these issues in the area of every day public discourses.

Besides the presentation and representation of Muslims and Islam in the media, the knowledge and subjective views are considerably influenced by school education. In this regard, both the interviews and the analysis of secondary school textbooks (and also the results of the questionnaire survey) have indicated that the information provided to students is usually quite fragmented. The history textbooks generally provide a more comprehensive coverage of Islam (the description of historical background and basic facts about Islamic faith) than the geography and social science textbooks. However, it has been suggested that a more complex discussion of contemporary diversities and controversies of modern Islam is needed. As Moore (2006: 140) for example recommends, instead of adopting a linear single-truth perspective, teachers should use controversial issues associated with Islam to help students understand that ‘writing of history is a social and political construction and involves competing interpretations, value judgements, partial truths, omissions, and distortions.’

Although the knowledge about Islam should be considered as a value in itself, this knowledge becomes especially important when it determines consequential attitudes. Therefore, one of the principal inquiries investigated here was whether and how the level of knowledge influences the subjective perception of Islam and Muslims. In this regard, the relationship between the composite scores of the students’ knowledge about Islam and their negative attitudes to Islam and Muslims has not been found significant when controlling for other factors. At the same time, however, the level of knowledge has been confirmed as an important determinant of: (1) a wider understanding of Islam in terms of acknowledging its social sensitivity and law-making functions; (2) more favourable attitudes towards the integration of Muslim immigrants and less fear of Islamic terrorism; and (3) the recognition of the superiority of economic interests over security or religious/cultural motives for the

occupation of Iraq. While all of these findings are interesting, the second one is particularly relevant from a practical point of view as it demonstrates straightforward links between education and knowledgeableness on the one hand and intercultural understanding and tolerance on the other.

In addition, the individual characteristics of respondents were examined as potential correlates of both the level of knowledge as well as negative attitudes to Islam and Muslims. Perhaps the most interesting result is the finding of the impact of respondents' religious affiliation. While religion has long been established as a frequent determinant of prejudices and stereotypes (here Roman Catholics have been found to have more negative views on Islam and Muslims than other respondents), this study has additionally found that adherents of minor religions have a better objective knowledge about Islam than other respondents. Although it has to be investigated further, a simple explanation may reside in heightened competitive pressures that stimulate the out-group awareness of other religions.

Notes

¹ Using projections from the official statistics, Topinka (2007) estimates that there were around 11 thousand Muslims in Czechia in 2005, from considerably diverse countries of origin. Although the real figure is probably higher due to a large number of illegal immigrants, the percentage of Muslims in the Czech population is negligible and the same can be expected in Slovakia.

² Each correct answer to closed questions (10 questions) attributes to one point of the value of K_K , while each correct answer to open questions (relating to the five pillars of Islam, forbidden meals and drinks, and four countries with the largest population of Muslims) accounts for $\frac{1}{2}$ of the point. As such, K_K can attain values between 0 and 16.5. The value of K_N is then saturated as follows: if Islam was viewed as less tolerant than Christianity (1 point),

less socially sensitive (1 p.), more militant (1 p.), more expansive (1 p.); if Muslims were perceived as less honest than the typical Czech/Slovak (1 p.), more fanatical (1 p.), more greedy (1 p.), more cunning (1 p.); and if Muslims were reported as a less acceptable neighbour (fourth or fifth position among four other social groups) one point was assigned. Therefore, K_N can fall into the interval between 0 and 9.

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