



Inter-religious feelings of Sunni and Alevi Muslim minorities: The role of religious commitment and host national identification



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ABSTRACT

This paper examines inter-religious attitudes from the perspective of Muslim minorities living in Western Europe. We examine both Sunni and Alevi Muslims of Turkish origin living in Germany and the Netherlands, and focus on their global feelings towards multiple religious out-groups (Christians, Jews, Muslim out-group, and non-believers). We hypothesize that Sunnis would dislike religious out-groups more than Alevis, and that these group differences in religious out-group feelings can be explained by group differences in host national identification and the three B's of religious commitment: belonging (religious identification), behaviour (religious practices), and belief (liberal values). Sunnis were found to be rather negative towards Alevis, and Alevis were even more negative towards Sunnis. Furthermore, as expected, Alevis had more positive feelings towards Christians, Jews and non-believers, and this was related to their stronger host national identification, lower religious group identification, lower involvement in religious practices, and stronger endorsement of liberal values. We conclude by pointing at the need to distinguish between subgroups of Muslims instead of treating them as a uniform collective.

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1. Introduction

Many intergroup tensions and conflicts in the world have to do with religion. Religious group divides do not only exist in conflict regions such as Northern Ireland and the Middle East, but also in more peaceful contexts (Koopmans, 2015; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). The lack of knowledge about religious intergroup relations in these latter contexts is unfortunate, for at least two reasons. One is that religious differences are often of great importance to people's lives, and religious groups are among the more salient buttresses of identity (Seul, 1999). The other is that religious diversity has become a prominent issue in cultural diversity. In particular, immigration and integration debates in Western Europe often concern the inclusion of minorities of Islamic background, and this raises questions about the relationships between different religious groups (Alba, 2005; Zolberg & Long, 1999).

First and second generation Muslim immigrants are trying to integrate into historically Christian Western European societies that have gradually become rather secular. Recent research has therefore increasingly focused on understanding the nature and correlates of anti-Islam attitudes among native majority members (see Helbling, 2012). Yet, there is also the question of how Muslim minorities view other religious groups and non-believers. Some Muslims may hamper the

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development of more harmonious religious group relations by expressing quite negative opinions about, for example, Jews and non-believers (Koopmans, 2015; Verkuyten, 2007; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2009).

Muslim minorities, however, do not form a homogenous group, and there are important religious distinctions within their communities. For example, Sunni, Shia, and Alevi Muslim minorities might differ in their attitudes towards religious out-groups, and these different Muslim subgroups might not get along with each other very well either. The present study advances research on inter-religious attitudes by focusing on two Islamic subgroups from the same origin country and living in two countries of settlement: Sunni and Alevi Turkish Muslims in Germany and the Netherlands. The aim is to examine differences between Sunnis and Alevis in their feelings towards Christians, Jews, non-believers, and towards each other. Our research question is: do Sunni and Alevi minorities in Western Europe differ in their feelings towards religious out-groups, and if so, how can these differences be explained?

We investigate the three B's of religious commitment – behavior, belonging, and belief – as well as host national identification, as four mediating constructs that might account for the expected Sunni-Alevi differences in religious out-group feelings. As the four out-groups considered differ in religious identity content, it is important to establish whether the processes underlying the feelings towards each of these religious out-groups also differ. Therefore, we theorize separately about the role of host national identification and the three B's of religious commitment in shaping feelings towards each religious out-group, and we examine whether these mediating constructs can equally well explain the differences between Alevi and Sunnis' feelings towards all four religious out-groups.

1.1. *Sunni and Alevi Turkish Muslims*

Together with Sunni Islam, Alevism is one of the two main branches of Islam in Turkey.¹ It has been estimated that around three quarters of Turkish immigrant-origin minorities in Germany and the Netherlands are Sunni Muslims, and approximately 20% are Alevis (Buijs & Rath, 2002). Most of the Sunnis and Alevis have a similar history of labor migration, but some Alevis came to Western Europe as refugees. These groups share a relatively low socio-economic position in the host societies (Kaya, 2006). Furthermore, no distinction between the two groups is made in public discourse and governmental policies, because they are both defined and described as Muslims. However, Sunni and Alevi Muslims have a different understanding of what it means to be a Muslim, and they follow different religious practices. The substantial differences in religious beliefs and practices between these groups can be expected to have an impact on their feelings towards religious out-groups. Sunni Muslims ideally adhere to the five pillars of Islam: the declaration of faith, prayer (five times a day), fasting during the month of Ramadan, the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and Zakat (giving alms). Orthopraxy is central to the Sunni faith, which is not to say that all Sunni Muslims adhere to it. Bruce (2011) has argued that this emphasis on orthopraxy restricts a personal interpretation of Islam, creating higher levels of social conformity to religious dogmas than in other religions.

In contrast, almost none of the Alevis who self-identify as Muslims follow the five pillars of Islam in the way that Sunnis do. For instance, instead of going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, they pray at the tombs of Alevi-Bektashi, and they have more voluntary congregational meetings in Cem houses (*Cemevis*). These meetings feature music, singing, and dancing (*Samāh*) in which both women and men participate. The interpretation of Islam is for Alevi Muslims less dogmatic: instead of strictly following the Qur'an, they tend to adopt a spiritual and mystical outlook on their religion. Alevis are particularly concerned with treating others in a responsible and caring way, regardless of these people's religious convictions. Some argue that 'Alevis share with Germans and Europeans a democratic, laicist and egalitarian outlook' (Kosnick, 2004; p. 985).

Research in Western Europe has shown that Turkish Alevis display much lower levels of religious fundamentalism than Turkish Sunnis (Koopmans, 2015), and that humanitarian beliefs are associated with more positive feelings towards religious out-groups (Van der Slik & König, 2006). Given their humanistic and egalitarian outlook, Alevi compared to Sunni Muslims can be expected to have more positive feelings towards Christians, Jews and non-believers. Yet, Alevis would not necessarily have more positive feelings towards Sunnis than that Sunnis would have towards Alevis. Alevis might even dislike Sunnis more than that they are disliked by Sunnis in return. The reason is that Alevis tend to define the humanistic, virtuous and peace-loving nature of Alevism in contrast to the alleged dogmatic, violent and intolerant character of Sunni Islam (Van Bruinessen, 1995; Sökefeld, 2008; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012). Many Alevis consider Sunni Islam as a threat to their Alevi identity, not only in Turkey but also in the context of Western Europe (Massicard, 2013; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012). In sum, we hypothesise that, compared to Sunni Muslim minorities, Alevis have more positive feelings towards Christians, Jews and non-believers, and more negative feelings towards the Muslim out-group. Below we further theorize about the reasons for the expected group differences and we formulate hypotheses about mediation mechanisms.

¹ In Turkey, as well as within the Alevi communities in Western Europe, there is a continuing and intense debate on the most appropriate way to define Alevi identity (Van Bruinessen, 1995). Alevi identity is defined in linguistic, cultural, political, and religious terms (Shindeldecker, 2006). Here we focus on Alevis who self-identify as Muslims, and therefore we will use the term Alevi Muslims and consider Alevism as a branch of Islam.

1.2. Host national identification

We first turn to host national identification as a potential predictor of religious out-group feelings and explanation for some of the expected differences between Alevi and Sunni Muslims. According to the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) people develop more positive out-group attitudes through re-categorization. Identification with the host society implies a stronger endorsement of an inclusive national representation, which has positive effects on intergroup relations. The reason is that a shared category implies that out-group members (i.e. 'them') become fellow national in-group members (i.e. 'us'). Thus, a common national identity implies that religious group distinctions can be subsumed into a superordinate, shared category. There is clear evidence in support of this model (see Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007), also among Muslim minorities in the Netherlands (Verkuyten, 2007). Following the CIIM it can be expected that higher host national identification is associated with more positive feelings towards other religious groups in the host nation. Importantly, because all out-groups are defined as part of the shared national category, this association should hold across board. Furthermore, Alevi minorities have a stronger sense of similarity with and belonging to Western Europe than Sunnis because Alevis endorse freedom and humanistic values more (Kosnick, 2004; Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012). Therefore, they are more likely to identify with the host society. Thus, *we expected Alevis to have a more positive attitude than Sunnis towards all four religious out-groups (Christians, Jews, non-believers, the Muslim out-group) because they identify more strongly with the host society.*

1.3. The three B's of religious commitment

Religious commitment provides another possible explanation for Alevi-Sunni differences in feelings towards religious out-groups. For conceptualizing the dimensionality of religious commitment, Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt (1996) propose a distinction between three B's: belonging, behavior, and belief. These three aspects have been found to have different and sometimes contradictory effects on, for example, political and social tolerance (Ben-Nun Bloom & Arikan, 2012; Nunn, Crockett, & Williams, 1978; Postic, 2006; Stouffer, 1955).

First, *religious belonging* can be considered in terms of religious group identification. Some individuals feel a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to their religious group than others, and the sense of in-group versus out-group distinction is clearer for higher compared to lower identifiers. Social identity research has demonstrated that among minority groups a stronger sense of group belonging is often associated with a more negative attitude towards relevant out-groups (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Verkuyten, 2014). More specifically, stronger Muslim group identification has been found to be related to more negative attitudes towards religious out-groups among Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2009; see also Baum, 2009). Thus, higher Muslim group identification can be expected to be associated with less positive feelings towards other religious groups and non-believers. Additionally, the more individualistic and voluntary nature of Alevism makes it likely that Alevis have lower religious group identification than Sunnis. Thus, *we hypothesize that Alevis, compared to Sunnis, have more positive feelings towards Christians, Jews and non-believers because they identify less with the Muslim religious group.*

With respect to the Muslim out-group and drawing on the Common In-group Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), it can be argued that identification with a common religious group – Muslims – is conducive to more positive feelings towards the different subgroups of Muslims. On the other hand, both Sunnis and Alevis tend to claim to represent the 'true' Islam: Sunnis tend to consider themselves more as typical Muslims than Alevis, and for Alevis it is the other way around (Verkuyten, 2014). These claims imply a process of in-group projection (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2007) whereby the practices and characteristics of one's subgroup (Sunni or Alevi) are considered more representative of the common category (Muslims). As a result, the out-group is judged as deviating from this normative standard, and is therefore evaluated unfavorably. In-group projection has been found to lead to more negative out-group attitudes (Wenzel et al., 2007), also among Sunni Muslims with respect to Alevis (Lie & Verkuyten, 2012). Due to the contrasting processes captured by the Common In-group Identity Model and the In-group Projection Model we will explore the relationship between religious identification and feelings towards the Muslim out-group.

Second, people who are regularly involved in religious practices (*behavior*) tend to be less accepting of religious out-groups than those who are not involved in such practices (e.g., Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). The more emphasis a religion places on strict religious rules and practices, the less accepting followers will be towards groups that do not follow these particular rules and practices (Beatty and Walter, 1984; Froese, Bader, & Smith, 2008; Tutiya, 2005). One reason is that by attending religious meetings and participating in religious activities people are exposed to religious messages. Another reason is that religious identity is expressed in religious activities that mark the difference with outsiders. Identity enactment makes the boundary between the in-group and out-groups more visible and stronger, and can therefore be expected to lead to less positive feelings towards religious out-groups and non-believers (Ellemers et al., 1999). Specifically, this means that it can be expected that the more Sunnis and Alevis engage in their specific Muslim practices (e.g., mosque attendance versus Cem house meetings) the more negative they will be towards Christians, Jews and non-believers. In addition, and in line with the Ingroup Projection Model (Wenzel et al., 2007), practicing Sunnis and Alevis will also be more negative towards each other because their religious practices clearly differ and each group views their practices as more typically Islamic (Lie and Verkuyten, 2012). Importantly, the more individualistic and 'voluntary' nature of Alevism makes it likely that Alevis – compared to Sunni – are less involved in enacting their religious identity through religious practices. Therefore, we

hypothesize that *Alevis, compared to Sunnis, have more positive feelings towards Christians, Jews, non-believers and the Muslim out-group because they follow their religious practices less strictly.*

Third, several studies have contended that *religious belief* is the cause of low acceptance of other groups (Froese et al., 2008; Beatty & Walter, 1984; Tutiya, 2005). Religious belief is concerned with the moral good and divine truth that is difficult to reconcile with moral and epistemic diversity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Religious belief tends to be associated with dogmatism, and conservative and traditional values that stress social order and obedience to moral authority. Research has focused on Christian orthodoxy and fundamentalism, and has examined their role in negative out-group feelings and right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 2003; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). Fundamentalism has also been found to be related to negative out-group attitudes among European Muslims (Koopmans, 2015). Religious belief typically implies conservative values concerning gender, marriage, sex and abortion (Lewis & Kashyap, 2013; Phalet & Güngör, 2004). These values are intrinsically part of the religious belief and provide key normative guidelines stipulated in the holy books. Issues of gender, marriage and sexual liberalization also form the ‘most basic cultural fault line between the West and Islam’ (Norris & Inglehardt, 2004; p. 155). For Sunni Muslims it might be difficult to have positive feelings towards non-believers who implicitly challenge their religious worldview by endorsing liberal social and moral values. In a study in the city of Rotterdam, around 45% of Sunni Muslim participants indicated that they had ‘completely no sympathy’ for non-believers (Phalet & Güngör, 2004). In contrast, the more humanistic and individualistic belief of Alevi Islam might make it more easy to accept non-believers. Alevi minorities tend to appreciate West European democratic and liberal values that resemble their religious beliefs (Kosnick, 2004). In the current study we focus on the endorsement of moral and social values regarding abortion, gay marriage and euthanasia as key aspects of religious belief. We expected *Alevis to endorse liberal values more strongly than Sunnis, and that stronger endorsement of these values would be associated with more positive feelings towards non-believers.* We did not expect endorsement of liberal values to improve attitudes towards the three religious out-groups (Christians, Jews, and Muslim out-group) because the religious beliefs of these groups tend to go against homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia.

2. Method

2.1. Data and participants

The data used for the current study were collected in 2008 as part of a larger survey among Turkish Muslim minorities in the Netherlands and Germany that covered a range of topics (e.g., Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012; Verkuyten, Maliepaard, Martinovic, & Khoudja, 2014). For the present study, we focus on Sunni ($N = 464$) and Alevi Muslims ($N = 235$). The samples are not representative for Germany and the Netherlands because the snowball method was used. The reason for this choice of method is that these countries do not keep record of Muslim denomination from which a representative sample of Sunnis and Alevis could be selected. To ensure comparability, the data collection procedure was the same in the Netherlands and Germany and it took place simultaneously, with four interviewees of Turkish origin reaching the first participants through their own contacts and ensuring that these participants introduced them further to their personal network. The questionnaire was offered only in the official languages (Dutch and German), so it is likely that people with lower levels of proficiency in the host country language are underrepresented in the data.

Only participants aged 15 or older were recruited for the study, and the average age of the sample was 35.62 ($SD = 12.66$). In terms of gender distribution, 55% of the participants were males. More than two thirds (71%) were first generation migrants, i.e. born in Turkey. Regarding education, all levels were represented in the data, with 12% of participants having no formal degree and 13% only a primary school diploma, while 52% was in a possession of different types of secondary school diploma, and 23% held a tertiary degree. Alevis were on average higher educated than Sunnis, $\chi^2(8) = 82.35$, $p < .001$. Only 3% of them had no formal education, as opposed to 16% of Sunnis, while 32% had a tertiary degree, as opposed to 19% of Sunnis.

2.2. Measures

To measure *religious out-group feelings* – the dependent variables in this study – participants were given the well-known ‘feeling thermometers’. Feeling thermometer is a valid measure that has been successfully used in many intergroup studies among both ethnic and religious majority and minority members (e.g., Ysseldyk, Haslam, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011), including studies in the Netherlands (e.g., Verkuyten, 2007) and Germany (e.g., Schmid, Hewstone, & Al Ramiah, 2013). The exact wording of the instruction was: ‘Use the “feeling-thermometer” to indicate whether you have positive or negative feelings about different religious groups living in the Netherlands (Germany). One hundred degrees indicates very positive or warm feelings, zero degrees indicates very cold or negative feelings, and 50° means neutral feelings’. This instruction was intended to provide participants with meaningful reference points for indicating their negative, neutral or positive feelings. After the instruction, five religious groups were listed in the following order: Christians, Sunni Muslims, Jews, non-believers, and Alevi Muslims. Under each target group a scale was presented running from 0 to 100, with 10° increments. The attitude towards Shia Muslims was not asked because this is not a large enough minority in these two countries. We kept the items for feelings towards Christians, Jews and non-believers as they were, and we additionally computed a measure of feelings towards the Muslim out-group (Alevis for Sunnis, and vice versa). As we had specific predictions regarding the four religious out-groups, we treated each feeling thermometer as a separate (observed) dependent variable.

The main explanatory variable is *religious denomination*. This is a dummy variable contrasting Alevi participants (1) with Sunni participants (0). To understand why Alevis and Sunnis might differ in religious out-group feelings, we included four mediators, all of which were represented as latent constructs. *Host national identification* was measured with five items on a 7-point scale (with 1 as 'disagree strongly, 4 as "neutral", and 7 as 'agree strongly') taken from previous research among Turkish Muslim minorities (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007, 2009). Sample items are: 'I feel Dutch/German', and 'I identify with the Dutch/Germans'. Cronbach's alpha for the total sample was .88 (.86 for Sunnis and .88 for Alevis, separately).

Religious group identification was assessed with five items using the same 7-point scales as for national identification: e.g., 'My Muslim identity is an important part of me', and 'I identify strongly with Muslims'. These items have been used in previous Dutch studies among Turkish Muslim minorities and are similar to questions used in many other studies assessing religious group identification (e.g., Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007, 2009). Cronbach's alpha for these five items was .93 (.92 for Sunnis, .94 for Alevis).

Religious practice. For the Sunni participants this measure included three items (5-point scales) that asked how often participants fasted during the last Ramadan (1 = all days, 5 = none of the days), how often they performed daily prayers (1 = never, 5 = every day), and how often they visited the mosque (1 = never, 5 = more than once a week). For Alevis three similar items (with same scales) were: 'how often did you fast during the last twelve imams', 'how often do you participate in Cem ceremonies', and 'how often do you visit a Cem house?'. We reversed the scores on the items on fasting so that a higher score stood for more frequent practice. The items formed reliable scales ($\alpha = .79$ for Sunnis, .74 for Alevis).

The endorsement of *liberal values* was assessed with three questions regarding abortion, gay marriage and euthanasia, which are practices that were first legalized in the Netherlands and that represent Western European liberal values. On a seven point scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree), the participants were asked whether they agreed that euthanasia, abortion and gay marriage should be legalized ($\alpha = .84$; .83 for Sunnis, .73 for Alevis).

We ran a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus (version 7) to verify that the items for host national identification, religious identification, religious practice, and liberal values all represented separate empirical constructs. A model with four latent factors fitted the data well, $\chi^2(98) = 484.21$, $p < .001$, CFI = .944, TLI = .931, RMSEA = .075 (low = .068, high = .082), SRMR = .053, and all the items loaded on the designated factor with loadings ranging from .63 to .91. Importantly, due to a moderate correlation ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) we wanted to confirm that religious identification and religious practices represented two distinct constructs. A model that forced the items measuring religious identification and practices to load on a common factor had a worse fit, as indicated by a significant chi-square difference test, $\Delta\chi^2 = 437.11$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$. Similarly, we could confirm that identification with the host nation (which is a Western country) was not the same as support for liberal values. Combining these items into one latent factor also resulted in a poorer fit, $\Delta\chi^2 = 684.23$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .001$.

Next, we inspected whether the latent constructs had the same meaning for Sunnis and Alevis. A multi-group CFA with constrained factor loadings across groups yielded a model with a good fit, supporting the four factor solution specified above, $\chi^2(208) = 662.90$, $p < .001$, CFI = .929, TLI = .918, RMSEA = .079 (low = .072, high = .086), SRMR = .062. Relaxing factor loadings did not improve the model fit, as indicated by a non-significant chi-square change when compared to a fully constrained model, $\Delta\chi^2 = 20.49$, $\Delta df = 12$, $p > .05$. There is thus evidence for measurement invariance, which means that the items measure the latent constructs equally well for the two groups.

To isolate the differences in religious out-group feelings based on religious denomination (Alevis vs. Sunnis), we controlled in the statistical analyses for a number of socio-demographic characteristics: gender (1 = female, 0 = male), country of residence (1 = Germany, 0 = the Netherlands), migration generation (1 = second generation, 0 = first generation), length of residence and age (both continuous variables measured in years), and the level of education (measured on a 9-point scale ranging from no education to university degree).

3. Results

We present the results in two steps. First, and in order to give a full description of the data, we discuss means and correlations for the two Muslim subgroups. Second, we estimate a structural equation model to test our hypotheses.

3.1. Descriptive findings

Table 1 shows thermometer ratings of Christians, Jews, non-believers and the Muslim out-group separately for Sunni and Alevi participants. For these preliminary analyses we have grouped the answers into extremely negative feelings (0°), negative feelings ($10\text{--}40^\circ$), neutral feelings (50°), positive feelings ($60\text{--}90^\circ$) and extremely positive feelings (100°) to get a good overview of the distribution of scores. In addition, Table 1 presents mean scores and standard deviations on feeling thermometers towards each out-group for Sunnis and Alevis.

Alevis in our sample were more positive towards Christians than Sunnis: only 13.4% of Alevis had negative feelings towards Christians (out of which 8.2% reported extremely negative feelings), whereas this held for almost a third of Sunnis (31.3%, with 15.3% choosing the lowest possible score). Still, when testing the mean scores against the neutral midpoint of the scale (50°), both Sunnis and Alevis had slightly positive feelings towards Christians, $t(462) = 3.93$, $p = .011$, and $t(230) = 6.28$, $p < .001$, respectively.

Further, Alevis were overall more positive about Jews than Sunnis: one in four Alevi participants (28.8%) expressed negative feelings, compared to 50.4% of Sunnis. From the latter group one in four indicated the most negative feelings

Table 1

Distribution of thermometer-ratings of the four religious out-groups by Sunnis and Alevis.

	Thermometer ratings					Mean	SD
	0°	10–40°	50°	60–90°	100°		
Sunni participants (<i>N</i> = 464)							
Christians	15.3%	16.0%	24.0%	25.9%	18.8%	53.93 ^a	33.04
Jews	26.1%	24.3%	15.7%	17.0%	17.0%	43.04 ^a	36.51
Non-believers	35.9%	15.3%	15.7%	18.5%	14.6%	39.48 ^a	37.36
Alevis	15.9%	20.0%	21.7%	26.1%	16.3%	52.13 ^a	32.86
Alevi participants (<i>N</i> = 235)							
Christians	8.2%	5.2%	37.2%	27.7%	21.6%	61.65 ^b	28.21
Jews	11.8%	17.0%	38.9%	14.4%	17.9%	52.01 ^b	30.77
Non-believers	1.7%	6.9%	22.5%	29.0%	39.8%	76.28 ^b	26.26
Sunnis	19.5%	25.5%	31.6%	9.1%	14.3%	43.16 ^b	32.25

Note: Superscripts ^a and ^b indicate significant differences between Sunnis and Alevis in average thermometer ratings of the particular religious out-group.

Table 2

Correlations for the measures for Sunnis (above the diagonal) and Alevis (below the diagonal).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Muslim outgroup	1	.59***	.65***	.70***	.28***	-.22***	-.34***	.24***
2. Feelings Christians	.58***	1	.72***	.56***	.11*	.04	-.19***	.08
3. Feelings Jews	.66***	.81***	1	.69***	.21***	-.16**	-.23***	.19***
4. Feelings non-believers	.15	.41***	.42***	1	.32***	-.37***	-.38***	.26***
5. Host national identification	.02	.19***	.21**	.14	1	-.22***	-.19***	.40***
6. Religious identification	-.01	-.07	-.07	-.15*	-.05	1	.57***	-.40***
7. Religious practice	-.07	-.03	-.17*	-.26***	-.12	.19*	1	-.34***
8. Liberal values	-.12	.02	.02	.29***	.30***	-.02	-.19*	1

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

possible (0°). Compared to the midpoint of the scale, Alevis were neutral towards Jews, while Sunnis reported on average negative feelings, $t(459) = -4.09$, $p < .001$.

As to non-believers, a low 8.6% of Alevis reported dislike, which differed strikingly from 51.2% of Sunnis, with 35.9% of Sunnis indicating the most negative score (0°). Thus, Alevis in general liked this group and Sunnis clearly disliked them.

While Alevis evaluated Christians, Jews and non-believers more favorably, they were more negative towards Sunnis than that Sunnis were towards Alevis: only 23.4% of Alevis had positive feelings towards Sunnis, while twice as large group of Sunnis (42.4%) reported positive feelings towards Alevis. On average, Sunnis had neutral feelings towards Alevis, but Alevis showed negative feelings in return, $t(230) = -3.22$, $p = .001$.

Next, we inspected the correlations between the main explanatory constructs – the four mediators – and religious out-group feelings. We did so separately for Alevis and Sunnis to check whether the associations were similar for the two groups (Table 2).² Feelings towards religious out-groups were all positively correlated with each other for both subgroups of Muslims. Host national identification also correlated positively with all thermometer ratings, with the exception of Alevis' feelings towards Sunnis (no relationship). Religious identification and religious practice were negatively and significantly correlated with all out-group feelings for Sunnis (except for the non-significant relationship between religious identification and feelings towards Christians). For Alevis, all the relationships were also negative but only significant with respect to Jews and non-believers. Endorsement of liberal values was for both groups particularly correlated with more positive feelings towards non-believers.

3.2. Explaining differences in religious out-group feelings

We specified a structural (mediation) model for religious feelings towards four out-groups: Christians, Jews, non-believers and Muslim out-group. Next to these four dependent variables, the model included one independent predictor – religious denomination: Alevis vs. Sunnis – and four mediators: host national identification, religious identification, religious practice and liberal values. In addition, we controlled for country, length of residence, migration generation and education in relation to the four mediators. Gender and age were not related to any of the mediators and were omitted in order to improve the

² The correlations were obtained from SPSS and are presented for the valid sample ($N = 619$) for the reasons of consistency (that is, to avoid having different sample sizes behind each correlation coefficient). The main analyses conducted in Mplus were done on a larger sample ($N = 695$) because Mplus can impute missing values on the mediator and dependent variables, using full estimation maximum likelihood. Four participants from the total sample of 699 had missing values on the exogenous variables and were therefore excluded from the main analysis.

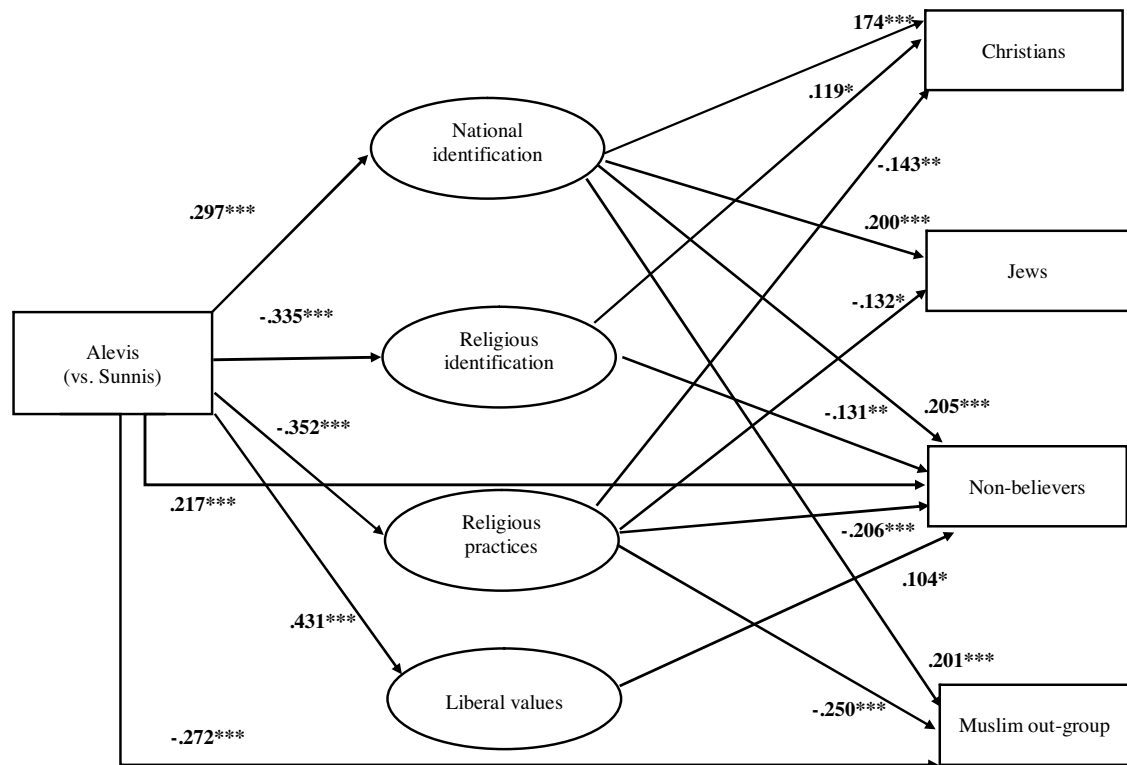


Fig. 1. Explaining differences in religious out-group feelings between Alevi and Sunni Muslims ($N = 695$).

Note: Standardized coefficients; only the significant paths from the structural equation model are presented. Correlations between the dependent variables and between the mediators have been accounted for.

Table 3

Feelings towards Christians, Jews, non-believers and Muslim out-group: Unstandardized estimates from a structural equation model, with standard errors in parentheses ($N = 695$).

	DV: Christians	DV: Jews	DV: Non-believers	DV: Muslim out-group
Alevis (ref. Sunnis)	1.610 (2.896)	-2.280 (3.219)	17.547 (2.943)***	-18.945 (3.037)***
Germany (ref. Netherlands)	15.603 (2.385)***	10.509 (2.654)***	6.733 (2.423)**	2.463 (2.504)
Host national identification	3.684 (.982)***	4.662 (1.094)**	5.236 (1.006)**	4.417 (1.033)***
Religious identification	2.152 (.924)*	-.231 (1.025)	-2.872 (.912)**	.761 (.977)
Religious practice	-4.340 (1.670)**	-4.423 (1.855)*	-7.527 (1.692)***	-7.896 (1.781)***
Liberal values	.256 (1.161)	1.298 (1.291)	2.635 (1.183)*	-.092 (1.221)

	DV: Host national identification	DV: Religious identification	DV: Religious practice	DV: Liberal values
Alevis (ref. Sunnis)	.941 (.124)***	-1.241 (.149)***	-.779 (.106)***	1.373 (.128)***
Germany (ref. Netherlands)	-.539 (.112)***	.527 (.133)***	-.013 (.083)	-.391 (.110)***
Education	.055 (.025)*	-.030 (.029)	-.001 (.018)	.119 (.025)***
Length of residence	.015 (.006)**	.019 (.007)**	.018 (.005)***	-.009 (.006)
Second generation (ref. first)	.554 (.137)***	.370 (.163)*	-.028 (.103)**	-.087 (.134)

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

model fit. Further, country was the only control variable significantly related to religious out-group feelings and therefore we only controlled for country differences with respect to the dependent variables. The correlations between the mediators, as well as the correlations between the dependent variables, were accounted for in the model. The model fitted the data well, $\chi^2(218) = 829.84$, $p < .001$, CFI = .933, TLI = .911, RMSEA = .064 (low = .059, high = .068), SRMR = .046.

The findings related to the hypothesized paths are presented in Fig. 1. We show standardized coefficients in this figure and in the text in order to provide information about effect sizes. The unstandardized coefficients and standard errors, also for the control variables, can be found in Table 3, whereas Table 4 presents a summary of total, direct, and indirect effects of religious denomination on religious out-group feelings per target group.

Table 4

Total, direct, and indirect effects of religious denomination on attitudes towards Christians, Jews, non-believers, and the Muslim out-group: standardized coefficients with *p*-values in parentheses (*N* = 695).

	Christians	Jews	Non-believers	Muslim out-group
Total effect (Alevi vs. Sunni)	.091 (.013)	.103 (.006)	.439 (.001)	–.139 (.001)
Direct effect (Alevi vs. Sunni)	.024 (.578)	–.031 (.479)	.217 (.001)	–.272 (.001)
Total indirect effect	.067 (.004)	.134 (.001)	.222 (.001)	.133 (.001)
Specific indirect effects via:				
National identification	.050 (.001)	.059 (.001)	.061 (.001)	.060 (.001)
Religious identification	–.040 (.025)	.004 (.835)	.044 (.003)	–.014 (.439)
Religious practices	.050 (.013)	.047 (.023)	.072 (.001)	.088 (.001)
Liberal values	.005 (.826)	.024 (.316)	.045 (.028)	–.002 (.940)

Note. Significant effects ($p < .05$) are shown in bold font.

The findings were largely in line with our expectations. Looking at the total effects of religious denomination (see Table 4), compared to Sunnis, Alevi evaluated Christians, $\beta = .091$, $t = 2.48$, $p = .013$, Jews, $\beta = .103$, $t = 2.73$, $p = .006$, and non-believers, $\beta = .439$, $t = 14.20$, $p < .001$, more positively, but they evaluated Sunnis (i.e. the Muslim out-group) more negatively than that Sunnis evaluated them in return, $\beta = -.139$, $t = -3.69$, $p < .001$. This is in line with our expectations. Regarding the control variable *country* (see Table 3 for the coefficients), feelings towards Christians, Jews, and non-believers were more positive in Germany than the Netherlands, whereas there were no country differences in Alevi and Sunni's feelings towards each other.³

The coefficients presented on the left-hand side of Fig. 1 confirm that, as expected, Alevi identified more strongly with the host nation and endorsed liberal values more than Sunnis. Furthermore, Alevi identified less with their religious group and engaged less frequently in religious practices. Regarding the associations between the control variables and the mediators (see Table 3), both national and religious identification were higher among second generation migrants and those with a longer length of stay. Further, national identification was higher in the Netherlands and among better educated, while religious identification was higher in Germany. Religious practices were less frequent among second generation and more frequent among participants with a longer residence. Finally, participants from the Netherlands and the higher educated ones endorsed liberal values more.

The coefficients on the right-hand side of Fig. 1 link the mediators to religious out-group feelings. Host national identification was positively associated with the evaluations of all four religious out-groups, which is in line with our expectations. Religious group identification was associated with more negative feelings towards non-believers. However, it was not associated with feelings towards Jews and Muslim out-group, and there was even a significant positive association with feelings toward Christians. This partly disconfirms our expectations because we expected religious identification to be negatively related to feelings towards Christians and Jews. Religious practices, on the other hand, were, in line with our predictions, negatively associated with feelings towards all four religious out-groups. Endorsement of liberal values was, as expected, related to more positive evaluation of non-believers only.

To test the mediation hypotheses, we obtained estimates for the indirect paths from religious denomination to each of the religious out-group feelings via the four mediators (see Table 4). Our hypotheses about mediation were largely confirmed. The indirect effects of religious denomination via host national identification on feelings towards Christians, $\beta = .050$, $t = 3.42$, $p = .001$, Jews, $\beta = .059$, $t = 3.79$, $p < .001$, non-believers, $\beta = .061$, $t = 4.44$, $p < .001$, and the Muslim out-group, $\beta = .060$, $t = 3.77$, $p < .001$, were all positive and significant. Alevi, compared to Sunnis, were more favorable towards Christians, Jews, non-believers, and the Muslim out-group because they identified more strongly with the host nation.

Furthermore, the indirect effect of religious denomination via religious identification on feeling towards non-believers was positive and significant, $\beta = .044$, $t = 2.96$, $p = .003$. As religious identification was related to more negative feelings towards non-believers, Alevi's lower religious identification is a reason why they like non-believers more than Sunnis do. However, contrary to the expectations, the indirect path running from religious denomination to the evaluation of Christians via religious identification was negative. Due to their lower religious group identification, Alevi, compared to Sunnis, had less positive feelings towards Christians, $\beta = -.040$, $t = -2.24$, $p = .025$. This is because religious identification was positively associated with the evaluation of Christians. In addition, differences in religious identification could not further explain the differences in the evaluations of Jews and the Muslim out-group, $\beta = .004$, $t = 0.21$, $p = .835$ and $\beta = -.014$, $t = -0.77$, $p = .439$, respectively, due to the absence of an association between religious identification and the evaluation of these two groups.

Regarding the third mediator – religious practice – all indirect effects were significant and in line with the predictions. Alevi had more positive feelings towards Christians, $\beta = .050$, $t = 2.48$, $p = .013$, Jews, $\beta = .047$, $t = 2.28$, $p = .023$, non-believers, $\beta = .072$, $t = 3.93$, $p < .001$, and the Muslims out-group, $\beta = .088$, $t = 3.91$, $p < .001$, because they less frequently practiced their religion than Sunnis.

³ Note that the paths from all the remaining control variables to religious out-group feelings were excluded because they were not significant. Including them only worsens the fit of the model, exactly due to the fact that they do not contribute to explaining differences in out-group feelings. The less parsimonious model that accounts for these non-significant relationships yields the same conclusions regarding the difference between Sunnis and Alevi with respect to religious out-group feelings.

Finally, differences in the endorsement of liberal values were part of the reason why Alevis were more positive than Sunnis towards non-believers, $\beta = .045$, $t = 2.20$, $p = .028$, but not towards other out-groups ($ps > .05$), thereby confirming our hypothesis.

After accounting for the four mediators, the differences between Alevis and Sunnis' feelings toward Christians and Jews were fully explained, as indicated by non-significant direct effects, $\beta = .024$, $t = 0.56$, $p = .578$ and $\beta = -.031$, $t = -0.71$, $p = .479$, respectively (Table 4). However, the difference in feelings toward non-believers became smaller but remained significant, $\beta = .217$, $t = 6.03$, $p < .001$, indicating partial mediation. The direct effect of religious denomination on feelings towards Muslim out-group, $\beta = -.272$, $t = -6.39$, $p < .001$, was twice as large as the total effect, and the indirect paths were all positive. This means that the initially found difference between Alevis and Sunnis' feelings towards each other was actually suppressed by the processes examined, and that the analysis did not explain Alevis' comparatively more negative view of Sunnis.

4. Discussion

Very few studies have examined religious group divides in peaceful immigration societies and from the perspective of immigrant-origin groups (e.g., Koopmans, 2015; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007; Verkuyten, 2007). Yet, intergroup tensions and conflicts are increasingly about religious differences, especially in Western Europe and in relation to Islam. Among Muslims living in Germany and the Netherlands, we found clear Sunni-Alevi group differences in feelings towards multiple religious out-groups. The most prominent difference was detected with respect to feelings towards non-believers. Sunni participants were on average rather negative, whereas very few Alevi participants disliked non-believers. This finding clearly suggests that religious denomination matters for how Muslim minorities react to out-groups. The humanistic and egalitarian outlook of Alevis makes them more accepting of non-believers, while for Sunnis particularly non-believers challenge their moral beliefs and divine truths.

Furthermore, Sunni participants were more negative towards Christians and Jews than Alevi participants. While the affective ratings towards Christians were among Sunnis around the neutral mid-point of the scale, half of the Sunni participants had negative feelings towards Jews and one in four had the most negative feelings possible. For the Alevis these percentages were lower but still more than 25% had negative feelings towards Jews. These findings indicate that anti-Semitism is not uncommon among Muslim Turks in Western Europe (Koopmans, 2015; Schoenfeld, 2004). These negative feelings are most likely related to the anti-Jewish sentiments that are present in many parts of the Islamic world and that are exacerbated by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In recent years, anti-Semitism has increased among Muslim populations around the world, including those in Western Europe (Antisemitism Research, 2002; Schoenfeld, 2004). For example, a study by the Anti-Defamation League (2014) found that 69% of Turks affirm anti-Semitic stereotypes.⁴ Interestingly, while Sunnis were more negative towards Christians, Jews, and non-believers than Alevis, we also found that Alevis disliked Sunnis more than that Sunnis disliked Alevis.

To understand these Muslim subgroup differences in out-group feelings, we first examined the role of host national identification. Alevis had higher host national identification than Sunnis, and host national identification was found to be positively associated with feelings towards all four religious out-groups. These findings are consistent with the Common In-group Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) that argues that a common national identity implies that subgroup distinctions are subsumed into a shared category that reduces negative out-group feelings. The fact that we found a positive association in relation to all four religious out-groups strongly supports this model. The implication is that the development of a sense of host national belonging is important for religious out-group feelings of Muslim minorities in West Europe. Society should not only recognize the demands of cultural and religious diversity, but also emphasize the importance of unity and shared belonging (Parekh, 2000; Verkuyten, 2014).

Next to host national identification, we examined the role of the three B's of religious commitment: belonging, behavior, and belief (Kellstedt et al., 1996). The findings show that subgroup differences in these three aspects explained (part of) the Sunni-Alevi differences in out-group feelings. This indicates the usefulness of the tripartite distinction in religious commitment, which is in line with other research (e.g., Ben-Nun Bloom & Arikan, 2012; Stouffer, 1955).

First, compared to Sunni participants, self-identified religious Alevis were less involved in religious practices (*religious behavior*), and involvement in religious practices was the single aspect of religious commitment that turned out to be relevant for all out-group feelings: higher behavioral involvement was associated with more negative feelings towards all four out-groups. Religious practices are behavioral markers that make the boundary between the in-group identity and out-groups visible and clear. Strong religious group boundaries emphasize group differences that lead to less positive feelings towards religious out-groups (Ellemers et al., 1999). Interestingly, involvement in practices was for the two Muslim groups not only related to negative feelings towards non-Muslim out-groups (i.e. Christians, Jews and non-believers), but also towards each other. Sunnis and Alevis have a different interpretation of Islam and both groups claim to represent and practice 'true' Islam (Verkuyten, 2014). They tend to consider their own religious practices as more Islamic, and this process of claiming to practice 'true' Islam more (in-group projection), leads to negative attitudes towards other Muslim sub-group (Lie & Verkuyten, 2012; Wenzel et al., 2007).

⁴ See <http://global100.adl.org/>.

Second, Sunni participants had stronger religious group identification (*religious belonging*) than Alevis, and identification was found to be associated with more negative feelings towards non-believers, but also with more positive feelings towards Christians, and it did not predict feelings towards Jews and Muslim out-group. These findings suggest that non-believers constitute a negative other for many (Sunni) Muslims, and for high religious group identifiers in particular. The findings also indicate that for West European Muslims stronger attachment to the Muslim community does not have to go together with more negative attitudes towards non-Muslim religious groups: religious belonging in our study even went hand in hand with acceptance of Christians. Christianity has many connections and belief similarities with Islam (Armstrong, 1994). Yet, specific historical, political and social circumstances in different contexts can trigger clear negative feelings towards Christians among Muslims (e.g., Kanas, Scheepers, & Sterkens, 2015).

Third, Alevis endorsed abortion, gay marriage and euthanasia more strongly than Sunnis. These liberal values (as an aspect of *religious belief*) were in turn associated with more positive feelings towards non-believers (but not toward Christians and Jews), and the difference in the endorsement of liberal values between Sunnis and Alevis was one of the reasons why Alevis were more positive towards non-believers. This is in line with our expectations and in agreement with Sunni and Alevis' different interpretations of Islam. Alevi Muslims tend to have a more spiritual and mystical interpretation of Islam and the Qur'an, and they claim to share a humanitarian, egalitarian and democratic outlook with Western Europeans. Therefore, liberal values do not necessarily strongly contradict the Alevi way of life but they do stand in sharp contrast with the religious beliefs of many Sunnis.

Our study shows that Muslims are not a monolithic group, and that subgroups of Muslims, namely Sunnis and Alevis, differ in their attitudes towards religious out-groups. Yet, these subgroups should not be seen as monolithic either. While Sunnis in our sample on average tended to have more negative attitudes towards Christians, Jews and non-believers than Alevis did, it should be noted that the variation in the scores on these attitudinal questions was noticeable within both groups, and even more so within the group of Sunnis, as indicated by comparatively larger standard deviations reported in Table 1. In fact, between 30 and 40% of Sunni Muslims in our study held favorable attitudes towards religious out-groups. Furthermore, within the group of Sunnis and Alevis there are differences in the level of education, and education was independently related to higher host national identification and a stronger endorsement of liberal values, both of which translate into greater acceptance of religious out-groups. Another finding that challenges a monolithic view about subgroup differences is that the national context matters. Religious out-groups were in general more positively viewed in Germany than in the Netherlands, and this country difference was found over and above the difference in religious denomination. This suggests that in order to understand attitudes towards religious others we must take into account not only the values and identifications of the groups considered, but also the contexts within which they live.

4.1. Limitations

There are some limitations of our study that should be considered and that give suggestions for future research. With our theoretical model we have managed to fully explain differences between Sunnis and Alevis in their feelings towards Christians and Jews. However, the differences in feelings towards non-believers were only partially explained by the mediating variables. This indicates that other processes are also involved, and these should be examined in future studies. Regarding feelings toward each other, we found that Alevis like Sunnis more to the extent that Alevis engage less in religious practices and identify more with the common host national category. However, these are positive indirect effects, and they do not help us understand why Alevis are on average more negative about Sunnis than that Sunnis are about Alevis. The negative direct effect became even more pronounced when accounting for the positive indirect paths, and this is possibly related to the history of oppression of Alevis by Sunnis in Turkey (Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2012). In addition, even though our measure of religious commitment (the three B's) was rather extensive, future research could consider other conceptualizations, like fundamentalist beliefs and involvement in the religious community. This might give a further understanding of why Sunnis and Alevis differ in religious out-group feelings, including feelings towards each other.

Another limitation is the non-representative sample and the cross-sectional design, which prevent us from generalizing the findings to the whole population or drawing causal conclusions about the hypothesized paths. However, as we targeted Sunnis and Alevis, whose denomination is not registered in the official records, we had to collect data through snowball methods. Yet, as can be seen from the demographic composition of the sample, we managed to gather data from a relatively large and diverse group of participants. Any selectivity might have implications for the average scores on religious group feelings and the mediators but need not necessarily distort the associations between these constructs. Regarding causality, it is possible that the relations between the mediators and outgroup feelings are bi-directional: for instance, disliking a religious out-group could also be a motivation for stronger adherence to one's own religious group and its values and practices. Similarly, having positive attitudes towards religious out-groups might facilitate identification with the host nation. Future studies could try to improve the sample and replicate the findings on a larger and more representative group of Sunnis and Alevis, collecting longitudinal data to test the over-time influences.

5. Conclusions

One of the main conclusions is that it is important to distinguish between different religious out-groups, as out-group feelings, as well as the processes that generate these feelings, depend on the type of religious out-group. A related conclusion

is that it is important not to treat all Muslim minorities in Western countries as a uniform group when examining intergroup relations. Muslim minorities are diverse and differ in their identity defining beliefs, values, and practices. Furthermore, Muslim identity, and what represents the core of their religion, is disputed and constructed in different ways and in the context of negotiating intergroup relations (e.g., Peek, 2005; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Our findings show fairly strong negative feelings towards Jews and non-believers, especially among Sunni Muslims who, compared to Alevis, identified relatively strongly with their Muslim group, were more involved in religious practices, and less strongly endorsed liberal moral values. For developing harmonious intergroup relations in Western European societies, these are worrying findings. However, our findings also show that a stronger sense of host national belonging has positive consequences for the feelings that both Sunnis and Alevis have towards other religions as well as towards the secular population. Future studies could investigate religious group feelings, host national identification, and the three aspects of religious commitment among other Islamic groups, such as the Shiites, in different countries, and in comparison to different religious and non-religious groups. These studies could also include comparison groups of religious and non-religious majority members (Koopmans, 2015) in order to examine the impact of the three B's of religious commitment and of host national identification on majority members' religious out-group feelings. Such studies would further our understanding of the conditions and processes involved in the development of religious out-group feelings among both Muslim minorities and Christian or secular majorities.

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