

Please join us for our LSE Sociology Research Seminar on Wednesday 21 March, 12-2pm, with Dr Bart Bonikowski.

Is Civic Nationalism Necessarily Inclusive? Conceptions of Nationhood and Anti-Muslim Attitudes in Europe

Abstract

Despite the centrality of national identity in the exclusionary political discourse of the European radical right, scholars have not investigated how popular conceptions of nationhood are connected to dispositions toward Muslims. Using latent class analysis and multilevel models of survey data from 41 European countries, we demonstrate that respondents' definitions of legitimate criteria of national belonging (a) are heterogeneous within countries, (b) predictive of anti-Muslim attitudes, and (c) varied in their effects between countries. Specifically, and contrary to existing theories, we find that civic nationalism is associated with greater antipathy toward Muslims, but only in Northwestern Europe. We argue that this is a legacy of historically contentious church-state relations and the dominance of Lutheranism in the region, which have served to relegate religion to the private sphere. As a consequence, elective criteria of belonging have become fused with exclusionary notions of national culture that portray Muslims as incompatible with European liberal values, effectively legitimating anti-Muslim sentiments not only on the radical right, but also in mainstream political culture.

Bio

Bart Bonikowski is Associate Professor of Sociology at Harvard University, Resident Faculty at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, and a Faculty Affiliate of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, where he co-directs the Research Cluster on Global Populism. Relying on survey methods, computational text analysis, and experimental research, his work applies insights from cultural sociology to the study of politics in the United States and Europe, with a particular focus on nationalism and populism. His research has demonstrated that meanings attached to the nation constitute politically salient cultural cleavages that drive support for radical politics, that the nation and the state evoke distinct affectively-loaded cognitive constructs, and that national identification fluctuates in patterned ways within national communities. In studying populism, Bonikowski has reframed the phenomenon as a dynamic feature of speech acts rather than a stable ideological property of political actors, revealing that variation in populist claims-making, on both the left and the right, is a function of political actors' shifting positions within and across political fields. More recently, he has theorized the relationship between nationalism, populism, and authoritarianism, and proposed a structural resonance account for the rise of radical politics. His research has appeared in the *American Sociological Review*, the *Annual Review of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, the *British Journal of Sociology*, the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, the *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, and a number of other journals and edited volumes.