

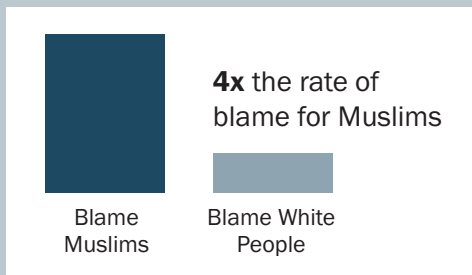
A Simple Intervention Reduces Anti-Muslim Sentiment

Research finds that demonstrating the hypocrisy of collective blame significantly lessens hostile sentiments.

1. The Problem

According to research conducted over five years in the U.S. and Europe, non-Muslim respondents blame Muslims for attacks by individual extremists acting in the name of Islam at nearly **four times** the rate that they blame white people for attacks by extremists acting in the name of white supremacy.

Non-Muslims may sometimes be unaware that they are committing this double standard, which points to a pathway for intervention. This intervention can help mitigate anti-Muslim bias that collectively blames an entire group for individual acts.



3. The Result

The study found those who are able to first reflect on their lack of collective blame of white people are then **more likely to avoid collectively blaming Muslims** for attacks by Muslim extremists.

That reduction, in turn, erodes their support for anti-Muslim policies like denying entry to Muslim refugees and surveilling mosques. These effects persist even one year after engaging in this simple, two-minute exercise.

2. The Intervention

Researchers led respondents through a brief exercise designed to allow participants to avoid a double standard in how much they blame Muslims versus white people and Christians for attacks by extremists from these groups. Half of the respondents (Group 1) were first asked about blaming white Americans, Christians, and themselves. The other half (Group 2) only responded to questions about Muslim individuals and groups.

GROUP 1



HYPOCRISY EXERCISE

How much do you blame... for the acts of...

How much do you blame...	for the acts of...
▶ Yourself, white Americans, Christians	Dylann Roof, Andre Brevik, Wade Page, white supremacists, Ku Klux Klan



GROUP 2



▶ Muniba, Ahmed, Tareq	Paris attacks
Belgian Muslims, Muslims in general	Three Muslim extremists who attacked a Brussels airport

NOT AT ALL

VERY



Methodology

Studies 2a and 2b provided evidence that a 2-min video interview with a Muslim American woman was sufficient to change how much people collectively blamed Muslims in general for individual acts of violence. A portion of the interview included a comment by the Muslim American guest that many people blame all Muslims for actions committed by individual Muslims, but do not blame all Christians for the actions of Christian extremist groups (i.e., the “Westboro Baptist Church” and the Ku Klux Klan [KKK], which are characterized as Hate Groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center; “Extremist Files: Westboro Baptist Church,” 2016). We hypothesized that this video effectively reduced collective blame because it helped to reveal to viewers the (potentially unconscious) hypocrisy of holding some groups (i.e., Muslims) more responsible for the actions of individual group members than other groups (i.e., White Americans, Christians). As holding inconsistent views is generally aversive (Festinger, 1962), we reasoned that the specter of hypocrisy was enough to cause people to reduce their attributions of collective blame so that they could avoid the inconsistency. However, video stimuli are inherently complex, and it is possible that other aspects of the video were in fact responsible for the observed effects. If revealing the hypocritical nature of collective blame was in fact driving our effects as we assumed, then revealing it in other ways (i.e., beyond the specific video used in Studies 2a and 2b) should yield similar effects.

In Study 3a, we therefore sought to specifically test the effects of revealing the intergroup bias in collective blame using a different and more controlled method. Rather than exposing participants to the hypocrisy of collective blame through a didactic argument, we illuminated the hypocrisy to participants through a targeted interactive activity that employed a Socratic approach. In the activity, participants first reported how much they blamed themselves and White Americans for acts of mass violence committed by highly self-identified White men. Next, using the same slider scale, participants reported how much they blamed individual Muslims for a terror attack. Finally, they reported how much they blamed Muslims in general for an act of mass violence committed by Muslims (i.e., collective blame). We reasoned that people would be very unlikely to blame themselves or White Americans for acts of mass violence by ingroup members, and that they would subsequently hold Muslims minimally responsible for acts of terrorism to avoid cognitive dissonance. In line with the results from Studies 2a and 2b, we further predicted that the hypothesized reductions in collective blame would mediate reductions in anti-Muslim policy support and anti-Muslim behavior, both directly and by reducing anti-Muslim attitudes and beliefs (i.e., prejudice and dehumanization).

Method

Participants and design. We recruited 605 participants from Mechanical Turk for a five-condition study. Sample sizes were slightly smaller than obtained in Studies 2a and 2b, but still large enough to provide 80% power to detect a small to medium effect size ($d = .35$). Twelve people failed the attention check question, leaving 593 participants (314 female, $M_{age} = 35.56$, $SD = 11.78$). The final sample was 79.6% White, 5.7% Asian, 4.6% Hispanic, 7.4% Black, 1.0% Native American, 0.5% Middle Eastern, 1.0% biracial, and 0.2% “Other.” Due to a coding error, religious affiliation was not collected.

Participants were randomly placed into one of five conditions: A Collective Blame Hypocrisy activity, a no-activity control condition, or one of three alternative activities (described below) that were inspired by psychological theory and represented in arguments that were widely circulated through social media (in an attempt to reduce anti-Muslim sentiments) in the wake of terror attacks by Muslim extremists.

Procedure and stimuli. The Collective Blame Hypocrisy activity was composed of two parts. First, participants reported how responsible they held White Americans and themselves for three different individual acts of violence committed by White people: Dylann Roof (who killed nine Black parishioners at a church in 2015), Anders Breivik (who killed 77 Norwegians, mostly children, in 2011), and Wage Page (who killed six Sikhs at a temple, believing they were Muslims, in 2012). To foreshadow a comparison with violence committed by “Muslim extremists,” we noted that each perpetrator was motivated by his White identity. For example, “On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof entered the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, and during a prayer service killed nine African American parishioners. Roof cited his White identity as a motivation for the attacks.” Participants then responded to the following: “How responsible do you think you are for the acts of Dylann Roof?” and “How responsible do you think White Americans are for the acts of Dylann Roof?” Responses to each question were made using unmarked sliders anchored at 0 (not at all responsible) and 100 (completely responsible). We then asked how responsible participants felt White Americans were for hate crimes by White supremacists in the United States, and White supremacists in Europe. We predicted that participants would attribute very little responsibility to themselves and White Americans for the specific actions of mass violence, and for hate crimes committed by White supremacist groups.

Next, we asked participants to report, using the same scales, how responsible they felt individual Muslims were for an act of violence committed by Muslim extremists (e.g., “Ahmad works as a bank teller in Jordan. How responsible do you think Ahmad is for the Brussels Airport attacks?”). Finally, we asked how responsible they thought Muslims were, in general, for the Paris terror attacks. Overall, we hypothesized that reporting low levels of collective blame for oneself and White Americans would precipitate lower levels of collective blame of Muslims, in general, for terror attacks, which would have downstream effects on anti-Muslim attitudes and policy support.

Similar to Study 2a, we examined the impact of the Hypocrisy activity relative to other popular approaches that mapped broadly onto psychological theories suggesting their plausibility in reducing collective blame. The first (“Ingroup Guilt”) exposed participants to historical opinion polling prior to and during World War II showing that Americans were opposed to accepting Jewish refugees. We hypothesized that this could elicit collective ingroup guilt for American rejection of Jews during the Holocaust—a moral emotion that has been shown to facilitate support for reparations (Brown, González, Zagefka, Manzi, & Čehajić, 2008; Čehajić-Clancy, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011; Lickel, Schmader, & Barquissau, 2004). We reasoned that individuals who were exposed to this information might soften their attitudes toward Muslims and Muslim refugees to assuage their guilt. This strategy was used widely in social media to evoke sympathy for Muslim refugees, and was reported on by major news outlets (e.g., The Washington Post; Tharoor, 2015). A second version of the intervention additionally presented photos directly drawing the link between interned Jewish children and interned Muslim refugee children, and provided a statement by the Holocaust Memorial admonishing governments for their refusal to accept Muslim refugees. Because this version had an additional component that, at least in theory, strengthened the basis for feeling guilt, we labeled this intervention “Ingroup Guilt+.” Although we thought it plausible that these two interventions (Ingroup Guilt and Ingroup Guilt+) could also reduce collective blame of Muslims, we thought it most likely that this intervention would change policy support and behaviors toward Muslims via reducing prejudice.

The final intervention was designed to challenge stereotypes about Muslim aggression by highlighting participants’ incorrect assumptions. As with the stereotype reduction videos, we predicted that challenging the stereotype of Muslims as violent may reduce the tendency to blame all Muslims for the violent actions of individual group members. In the activity (“Counterstereotyping”), participants were first asked to guess statistics related to aggression by Muslims and refugees (e.g., the percent of European terror attacks in the past 10 years that had been perpetrated by Muslims). After guessing, participants were shown the true answer, which was consistently less in line with prevailing stereotypes than their estimates. Specifically, the mean estimate for the percent of European terror attacks committed by Muslims over a 5-year period was 38.75% ($SD = 31.92$), and the correct response, subsequently revealed, is less than 2% (more than 97% of the sample overestimated the statistic). Similarly, of the 190,000 murders committed in the United States since 9/11, participants guessed that on average 5,042 ($SD = 18,742$) were committed by Muslim extremists, whereas the correct answer is 37 (more than 65% of participants overestimated); and of the 194,000 refugees granted shelter in the United States since 9/11, participants guessed on average that 899 ($SD = 5,580$) had committed murder, whereas the correct answer is 0 (more than 70% of participants overestimated). As part of collectively blaming Muslims for violence likely involves the stereotype that Muslims as a group are violent, we predicted that challenging this perception could potentially reduce collective blame and anti-Muslim sentiments.

After completing one of the activities (or no activity in the control condition), participants completed a survey that included the key measure of collective blame, as well as blatant dehumanization, prejudice, and two downstream outcome measures: support for anti-Muslim policies and signing anti-Muslim petitions.

Collective Blame was assessed as in Studies 1 and 2b (i.e., toward the Paris terror attacks).

Dehumanization was assessed as in Study 2b, by standardizing and then combining the trait measure ($\alpha = .91$) and the Ascent dehumanization measure ($r = .55$, $p < .001$).

Prejudice was assessed with feeling thermometers, and expressed as the difference between warmth toward Americans versus Muslims.

Anti-Muslim Policy Support ($\alpha = .94$) was assessed as in Studies 1, 2a, and 2b; Signing Anti-Muslim Petitions ($\alpha = .87$) was assessed as in Study 1.

Partial methodology excerpted from full study.