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“Attitudes of Muslims toward America: Two Typologies”

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The current eagerness to understand the attitudes of Muslims toward the United States has been largely translated into an empirical rush that over-relies on polls and ostensibly lacks theoretical anchors. Specifically, the perception toward integration in an interdependent world has been neglected, leaving us with averages that confuse as much as they illuminate. This paper argues that the realities of globalization make using a “perceptual connectedness” scheme critical for the understanding of Muslims’ worldwide alignments. On the one hand, the attitudes of Muslims outside the United States can be understood from a class-culture prism, which intersects the dynamics of class opportunities with the perceptual framework of relating to others. Specifically, two factors condition the attitudes of non-American Muslims: their knowledge base and relative familiarity with the United State’s culture, and their avenues of making a living. Within this organizing scheme, we can further differentiate between those who are Islamically oriented and those who are not. On the other hand, the attitudes of Muslims of the United States can be understood along their general conception of desired integration, which are conditioned by their perception of the openness of the American society and its opportunity system, and their style of communal activism. The paper argues that the trajectories of American-Muslims and Muslims aboard are growing further apart, creating points of friction if not conflict. Nevertheless, there are indications that a strategic global Muslim elite groups, in the US and abroad, are developing in multiple areas, including economics, politics, and even academics. These elites will try to impose themselves as the legitimate speakers of Islam.