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**The effect of Social Dominance on prejudice towards North-African minorities: Evidence for  
the role of Social Representation of Secularism as a Legitimizing Myth.**

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**The effect of Social Dominance on prejudice towards North-African minorities:  
Evidence for the role of Social Representation of Secularism as a Legitimizing Myth.**

ABSTRACT

Secularism in France is both a state principle and a cultural construct, that enforces a State neutrality towards religion. Recent studies have demonstrated the emergence of a lay conception called 'New Secularism' (NS) that is used to legitimize expression of prejudice towards North African minorities. However, none have been able to yet demonstrate links between NS and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which would further corroborate those beliefs' role as prejudice justification. Using Social Representations Theory, we created a Secularism questionnaire and used it in a cross sectional survey ( $N = 261$ ) that also included SDO and Generalized Prejudice measures. In order to test social representation of Secularism's legitimizing function, we derived the hypothesis that NS will mediate the link between SDO and expressed Prejudice from a Social Dominance perspective. Results support our predictions and are discussed in light of intergroup status quo legitimization processes and their links with social representations.

*Keywords:* Prejudice, Social Dominance, Social Representations, Legitimizing Myth, Secularism.

## Introduction

Secularism in France (known as '*laïcité*') refers to a state principle first established with a 1905 law 'On the separation between State and Cults'. According to secularism, the French State and its servants must remain neutral towards religion (i.e., not to display visible religious signs) in order to allow for individual freedom of religion. This principle may be thought as a form of State 'secularity' (for a more accurate depiction, see Akan, 2009).

However, it must be noted that this definition is a legal one, but how can we then explain rising ethnic tensions and prejudice toward north African minorities that seem to be more and more justified by appealing to secularism? How is secularism reconstructed by the French and to what purpose? Could it deserve ideological goals, such as *status quo* maintenance? These are some of the issues this paper will try to answer.

### Emergence of 'New Secularism'

Indeed, as noted by historians throughout the past decades (e.g., Baubérot, 2010, 2014), this traditional understanding of secularism has been gradually replaced in everyday life. Thus, this 'New Secularism' (NS, also referred to as 'counterfeited secularism') has emerged among the public, media and political discourse: now, individuals ought to be *laic* and religious signs shall not be seen in the public sphere. These two conceptions of secularism have been recently confirmed by Roebroek and Guimond (2017). Departing from a 'positive' logic of liberty (Berlin, 1958), NS's fundamental logic has become one of restriction and social control (Vauchez & Valentin, 2014) according to which one's religion should remain private. Thus, the principle of neutrality legally attributed to the French State has been imputed to religions. This new conception of secularism was the basis for the 2004 act forbidding visible religious signs among pupils in French public schools. Though every religion falls under the scope of this law, it was implemented after more than a decade of heated debates surrounding the

wearing of Muslim *hijab* by underage pupils. In fact, as Nugier, Roebroek et al. (2016) report, ‘one argument to justify this 2004 law was that it was needed to fight against Islamic fundamentalist movements’. This has led researchers (e.g., Kamiejski, Guimond, De Oliveira, Er-Rafiy, & Brauer, 2012) to consider the possible function of NS as a socially acceptable justification for expressing intergroup prejudice (Crandall & Eschleman, 2003; Crandall, Eschleman, & O’Brien, 2002), namely anti-Muslim prejudice.

### **New Secularism and expression of prejudice**

For their part, Kamiejski et al. (2012) created a scale designed to assess the adherence of French students to Republican Ideology. It refers to the ‘French Republican model of integration and organization of community life [...] model which aims at ensuring freedom, equality and brotherhood’ (Kamiejski et al., 2012). Among the scale’s two dimensions, a factor corresponding to NS (i.e., ‘religious practice should remain as private as possible’) was found. Subsequent correlational analyses revealed the NS factor to be positively linked with expression of prejudice towards people from North African descent. What is surprising here is that expressed prejudice has little to do with belonging to a religious group (Muslim) but to an ethnic one. Further studies confirmed positive correlations between NS and expressed prejudice towards North Africans (Guimond, de la Sablonnière, & Nugier, 2014), but also towards immigrants in general (Roebroek & Guimond, 2015) among both students and the general population. Experimental corroboration of this phenomenon through manipulation of adherence to NS was conducted by Nugier, Oppin et al. (2016), whose results indicate that transgression of NS principles, such as wearing a visible religious sign in public, was more sanctioned when transgressors were Muslim than when they were Christian. Furthermore, individuals in the Muslim-target condition scored significantly higher on the NS subscale of the Republican Ideology Scale, indicating the justification potential of this construct.

### **Limitations of the republican ideology approach**

Though very interesting in highlighting the effects of NS on expressed prejudice, we wanted to complement the above-mentioned approach on several important features. The first one has to do with methodological considerations regarding the Republican Ideology Scale (RIS). Indeed, three major concerns emerge regarding this scale's construction, validation and psychometric properties. When taking a closer look at how RIS was created, one cannot help noticing that items used to assess this construct were selected by researchers on the basis of a press review and legal definitions. This might explain the sometimes poor reliability of the NS subscale ( $\alpha = .25$ , Kamiejski et al., 2012, study 2), because those contents might not reflect the way Secularism is perceived by lay people. Also, RIS is a measure of Republican Ideology, which mixes a dimension regarding beliefs about French citizenship (called 'colorblind equality') with another one regarding secularism, but only in its 'new' version. Notwithstanding the different nature of these two components, individuals may also hold different beliefs regarding each of these components and may not fall in a simple dichotomy between 'citizenship equalitarians' and 'new laics'.

These methodological concerns point at more theoretical issues that need to be addressed. We agree with Nugier, Oppin et al. (2016), from a justification-suppression of prejudice perspective (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Crandall et al., 2002) and with their observation that NS helps to justify expression of prejudice. Furthermore, Imhoff and Recker (2012, study 2) observed that Secular Critique of Islam was correlated to prejudice toward Islam only for participants high in Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). If so, then a moderate to strong relation between NS and SDO is to be expected. This is because a higher endorsement of general *status quo* legitimizing myths should also be linked with endorsement of more culturally situated explanations for justifying derogation of outgroups (as would be the case for NS). In fact, from a Social Dominance perspective, beliefs

of the NS kind can be considered as legitimizing myths that mediate the relationship between SDO (which is a general tendency to support the current status quo by adhering to legitimizing myths) and expressed prejudice (or support to anti-egalitarian policies; see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Hodson, Rush, & MacInnis, 2010).

However, from Kamiejski et al.'s (2012) study and on, no one has yet been able to consistently demonstrate such correlations by using NS subscale of the RIS. We argue that these negative results might be attributed to measurement problems. In light of these limitations, we offer to further assess these authors' hypothesis regarding the status of NS as a collective belief which has legitimizing properties, by drawing upon their work using more ecological material for measuring NS. This is why we turned to Social Representations Theory and methods.

### **Social representations approach**

The concept of social representation (SR) was initially proposed by Moscovici (1961, 2008). SRs can be defined as structured systems of ideas, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs shared by a social group about a same social object (Keczer, File, Orosz, & Zimbardo, 2016; Rateau, Moliner, Guimelli, & Abric, 2011; Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell, & Valsiner, 2015). SRs constitute 'what people think of knowing and are persuaded to know about objects, about situations, about given groups' (Abric, 1996, p. 11). Especially, it focuses on the construction of a common vision of an object or a social issue through interpersonal interactions within a social group (Moscovici, 1988, Breakwell, 1993; Brunel, et al., 2017; Moloney, Hayman, Gamble, Smith, & Hall, 2017; Moloney & Walker, 2002; Wagner, 1995, 1998).

The contributions in the field of SRs were developed through three main lines of research, each one aiming to develop different ways for studying SRs (Rateau et al., 2011). Originally, the sociogenetic approach (e.g., Moscovici, 2008) studies the impact of social relationships on the elaboration of SRs using monographic and qualitative methods (e.g.,

Kronberger and Wagner, 2000; Markova, 1997; Wagner, 1994; Wagner et al., 1999). Then, the structural approach (Abric, 2001; Lo Monaco, Piermattéo, Rateau, & Tavani, 2016; Moliner & Abric, 2015) analyzes the representational dynamics and the structural characteristics of the field of cognitions defining social representations, more specifically linked to social conduct through among other things experimental methodologies (see Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016; see Lo Monaco, Girandola, & Guimelli, 2016). Finally, the sociodynamic approach (Clémence, 2001; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Clémence, 2001; 2010; Spini, 2002) investigates the shared principles which organize the interindividual differences. Moreover, this approach explores the regulatory role of SRs in connection with symbolic relationships (e.g., socioeconomic and/or cultural levels).

Moreover, the represented object is, inter alia, the object of frequent conversations and debates among social groups in which it carries different meanings and bear important identity stakes (see Breakwell, 1993; Moliner, 1993; Moscovici, 2008). This is the case for secularism in France. The interesting fact about SRs is that they provide us with a robust theoretical and methodological framework (Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016) within which one can study content, structure (e.g., Keczer et al., 2016) and functional relationships of what could otherwise be loosely characterized as ‘lay beliefs’ or ‘worldviews’.

In the case of secularism, we thought that investigating shared beliefs about secularism among the French with the help of mainly used methods from the field of SRs (Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016) might provide us with interesting insights. In fact, though secularism is currently the focus of social psychological investigation in France (e.g., Roebroek & Guimond, 2016), very little is known about the meaning individuals spontaneously attach to it. As a reminder, Jost and Ignatow (2001) pointed out the system justification function of SRs. This reinforces the plausibility of a link between SDO, Prejudice and *post hoc* justification by individuals’ adherence to NS (i.e., theoretical insight). A second advantage of this inductive



approach is to obtain more ecological material, drawing upon subjects' own cognitive categories (Bruner, 1990), which constitutes a methodological gain.

A cross sectional study was designed, which included a Secularism questionnaire created with the help of SR methodology and two other constructs of interest: Social Dominance Orientation and Generalized Prejudice. This was done to carry on the work initiated by Kamiejski et al. (2012). We aimed at putting their hypothesis regarding NS as a prejudice-justification to further tests. Though this study's design is cross-sectional and does not allow for making statements about causality, we wanted to put a mediation model to the test, according to theoretical considerations. Recent research on SDO as a cause of prejudice, using longitudinal protocols (Kteily, Sidanius, & Levin, 2011), constrained us in considering this factor as our independent variable. Indeed, it seems that SDO, though context sensitive (Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003), is a rather stable construct (i.e., due to the stability of social structure) that demonstrates sufficient consistence across situations (Levin, 1996; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Then, still in line with the Social Dominance approach, NS had to constitute a mediating variable of the link between SDO and Generalized Prejudice. Thus, we expected that:

H1: Our Secularism questionnaire will? tap into at least two different dimensions, namely NS and a traditional conception of Secularism.

H2: The dimension corresponding to NS will? positively correlate with SDO.

H3: The dimension corresponding to NS will? positively correlate with Generalized Prejudice.

H4: As predicted by Social Dominance theory, a positive correlation between SDO and Generalized Prejudice will? be found.

H5: The link between SDO and Generalized Prejudice will? be mediated by NS.

## Method

### Pre-test

This pre-test was conducted to gather lexical content about secularism among a small sample of the French population. Then, gathered material was used to create a questionnaire for studying the dimensions of the SR of secularism.

### *Participants*

Our pre-test sample consisted of 70 French people (38.5% male;  $M_{age} = 31.8$ ,  $SD = 12.5$ ); 38.6% were students (college or high school), 48.6% were working and 11.4% had different background (unemployed, housewife...). Only one (1.4%) was retired.

### *Material and procedure*

To construct the secularism questionnaire, an online questionnaire was distributed among social networks groups. In order for the targeted groups to be as neutral as possible, we avoided contacting stereotypical gendered activity groups (e.g., soccer fan groups) and used exchange/sales/classified advertisements groups. Due to the qualitative nature of our data, which takes time to analyze, we had to restrict the number of participants. This survey was anonymous, confidential and all participants gave their written informed consent.

We used a verbal association task (e.g., Bonnac, Roussiau, & Vergès, 2002; Jung & Pawlowski, 2014, 2015; Pozzi, Fattori, Bocchiario, & Alfieri, 2014). Rooted in the structural approach of SRs, it is a widely used method allowing to gather the contents associated with a given object of SR (Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016). Operationally, verbal associations consist in asking participants to associate a variable number of words or phrases (generally three to five; see Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016; Piermattéo, Lo Monaco, & Girandola, 2016) with the object of representation under study. Here, we asked participants to associate the five words or phrases that came to their mind when we say the word 'secularism' (i.e., 'laïcité' in French). Participants also had to rank the words or expressions they wrote from 1 =

‘most important’ to 5 = ‘least important’ (Bonnec et al. 2002; Dany, Urdapilleta, & Lo Monaco, 2015; Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016). Participants had then to rate the valence of the words (see Piermattéo et al., 2014) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from -3 (‘*very negative*’) to +3 (‘*very positive*’). If these last two measures are often part of the verbal evocation task (see Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016), the information they provide was useless to the aims of our main study, and will therefore not be presented here. Additionally, they had to write, for each word, a sentence expressing the meaning that they wished to assign to these words or sentences in relation to secularism. Thanks to this method called “semantic contextualization” (Piermattéo, Tavani, & Lo Monaco, 2018; see Lo Monaco, Piermattéo et al., 2016; Piermattéo, Lo Monaco, Moreau, Girandola, & Tavani, 2014), we were able to perform a thematic content analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), that is, a categorization of words and sentences to constitute a limited number of categories. Indeed, semantic contextualization allows for improving not only the level of agreement between researchers performing the categorization and the confidence in these categories, but also their homogeneity (Piermattéo et al., 2018).

### *Results*

Sixteen investigators performed thematic content analysis on words from the present survey during two workshops. This analysis aimed at grouping the collected words, thanks to the semantic contextualization technique, into a small number of categories or themes. It allowed to identify seven categories summarizing all content from the verbal association task. However, being general and abstract, we could not construct items directly from these categories. Rather, we formulated them with the help of contextualisation sentences from each category in order to respect the meaning given by the participants to their own associations. Note that, when several meanings were attributed to a same category, several items corresponding to each meaning were constructed. Table 1 presents these categories, their frequency of evocation (i.e., the total number of words and expressions belonging to the

category relative to the total number of words and expressions produced by our 70 participants through the verbal association task) and the 11 items constructed.

Table 1.

*Thematic Content Analysis performed on items from the evocations task and the corresponding items constructed (N= 70).*

Category	Frequency of evocation (%)	Corresponding item
Respect	37.7	Secularism means respect for other people's faith
State	18.6	Secularism protects the French Republic Secularism protects public places from religion
Individual freedom	12.3	Secularism enforces respect for everybody
Religion	10	Secularism guarantees equality between religions
Tension	9.7	Some religions go against secularism Secularism worsens religious conflicts
School	6.6	School is the place where secularism is taught and where religious signs shall not be seen
Religious diversity	5.1	Cultural differences are deleterious to secularism

## **Main study**

### *Participants*

Our sample consists of 261 French people (21.1% male;  $M_{age} = 32.11$ ,  $SD = 11.45$ ); 28% were students (i.e., college or high school), 53.6% were working, 1.9% of them were retired and 16.5% had other background. Within this sample, 48.7% declared being religious. This sample size was over  $N = 250$  allowing us to provide stable estimates of the links between the constructs under investigation (see Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013).

In order to determine the power achieved by this study, we computed *post hoc* power analyses with the help of GPower®. The parameters were set as follows: correlation size  $r = .30$  for  $H_1$  (our conservative threshold); correlation size  $r = .10$  for  $H_0$  (corresponds to a small correlation, thus ambient noise); two-tailed test;  $\alpha = .05$ ; for a total  $N = 261$ . It yielded an achieved power of  $\beta = .92$ .

### *Procedure*

An online survey was then created and distributed among social networks groups using the same procedure than for constructing the secularism questionnaire. The survey included first the secularism questionnaire (11 items, 7-point Likert scale), then a French version of the SDO scale (10 items, 7-point Likert scale; Pratto, Sidanus, Stallworth, & Bertram, 1994; see Duarte, Dambrun, & Guimond, 2004 for the French validation), and of the Generalized Prejudice Scale (GP, 15 items, 7-point Likert scale, Dambrun & Guimond, 2001). Finally, participants had to fill in demographics (i.e., age, gender, occupation, religion, education). This survey was anonymous, confidential and all participants gave their written informed consent.

### *Results*

Due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, some precautions were implemented. In order to render correlations more interpretable and maximize the likelihood of detecting ‘theoretically’ significant effects, we decided to set a minimum (conservative) correlation threshold of  $r = .30$ , thus maximizing the odds of excluding correlational ambient noise (Lykken, 1968; Meehl, 1990) and spurious correlations due to Common Methods Variance (Reio, 2010). All correlation analyses were bivariate Pearson correlations.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using Maximum Likelihood factor analysis with a Promax rotation on its 11 items (see Costello & Osborn, 2005). Two items (i.e., ‘*The Republic must enforce freedom of religion through secularism*’ and ‘*The State must follow a neutrality principle*’) saturated both on a first factor and a third one which eigenvalue was too

weak to be retained ( $< 1$ ). Thus, the most parsimonious model that was yielded was a 2-dimensional, 9-items solution which was therefore chosen. It explained 47.2% of total variance (KMO = .82; Bartlett's test of sphericity:  $\chi^2(36) = 819.3$ ;  $p < .001$ ; see Table 2). As expected and in line with the results found by Roebroek and Guimond (2017) on the basis of the structure of attitudes, two dimensions were found.

Based on item content and correlation patterns with other constructs (see table 3), we interpreted Factor 1 as closer to Traditional Secularism (6 items; e.g. '*Secularism guarantees equality between religions*', '*Secularism means respect for other people's faith*', negatively correlated with SDO), Factor 2 (3 items, e.g., '*Cultural differences are deleterious to secularism*', positively correlated with SDO and GP) as closer to New Secularism so these were labelled accordingly. Given these results, *H1* cannot be rejected.

We thus proceeded to factor score computation. Also, correlation analyses between SR of Secularism's two dimensions and demographics (i.e., age, gender, education and religiousness) were performed. This was done to check for potential demographic confounds. None of the obtained significant correlations were higher than  $r = .20$  and were thus treated as 'ambient noise'. Before carrying out data analysis, we computed Cronbach's alphas for SDO ( $\alpha = .88$ ), GP ( $\alpha = .93$ ), TS ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and NS ( $\alpha = .59$ ). NS' reliability seemed low, but this might be due to the number of items (only 3). Thus, we computed NS' mean inter-item reliability, which is not sensitive to the number of items, providing a more accurate estimate of this dimension's reliability. It was of  $r = .32$ , which was deemed acceptable (optimal inter-item correlation should be comprised between .20 to .40, see Briggs & Cheek, 1986).

Table 2.

*Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for social representations of secularism measures using Maximum Likelihood (Promax rotation; N = 261).*

Items	Factor 1: Traditional Secularism	Factor 2: New Secularism
Secularism enforces respect for everybody	.800	-.162
Secularism guarantees equality between religions	.759	-.114
Secularism protects public places from religion	.706	.133
Secularism protects the French Republic	.672	.005
School is the place where secularism is taught and where religious signs shall not be seen	.620	.267
Secularism means respect for other people's faith.	.531	-.170
Cultural differences are deleterious to secularism	.075	.749
Some religions go against secularism	.261	.595
Secularism worsens religious conflicts	-.299	.425
Eigenvalues	3.00	1.25
% of variance	33.28	13.92

Correlation analyses can be seen in Table 3. As expected, associations between NS and SDO were found. Indeed, we can see that NS positively correlates with SDO ( $r = .35; p < .001$ ) yielding a Cohen's  $d = .75$ . Thus,  $H2$  cannot be rejected. NS also positively correlates with GP ( $r = .55; p < .001; d = 1.32$ ),  $H3$  cannot be rejected. Finally, the well documented correlation between SDO and GP was found ( $r = .35; p < .001; d = .75$ ) which lead us not to reject  $H4$ .

Also, an unexpected, negative correlation was found between TS and SDO ( $r = -.29; p < .001; d = -.61$ ).

Table 3.  
*Bivariate correlations between Social Representations of Secularism, Social Dominance Orientation and Generalized Prejudice (N = 261).*

	1	2	3	4
NS	-			
TS	.15*	-		
SDO	.35***	-.29***	-	
GP	.55***	-.05	.35***	-

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

NS= New Secularism; TS = Traditional Secularism; SDO = Social Dominance Orientation; GP = Generalized Prejudice.

Since all correlations were obtained between our three variables of interest, we proceeded to the test of our mediation hypothesis (H5). A mediation analysis was thus carried out using bootstrap methods with the help of PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). Number of bootstrap samples was set at 5000 and all variables were standardized to get coefficients strictly equivalent to betas. NS was used as our mediating variable. As shown in Figure 1, there is indeed a partial mediation of SDO's effect on GP by NS. In other words, higher SDO levels predicts higher adherence to NS which in turn legitimize higher expression of prejudice. The predictors explained 31% of GP' variance,  $F(2,258) = 57.67, p < .001$ . SDO's indirect effect through NS upon GP was  $\beta = .17; p < .001, Z = 4.92; p < .001$ . NS' mediation effect size was  $R^2 = .09, 95\%CI [.04; .16]$ .



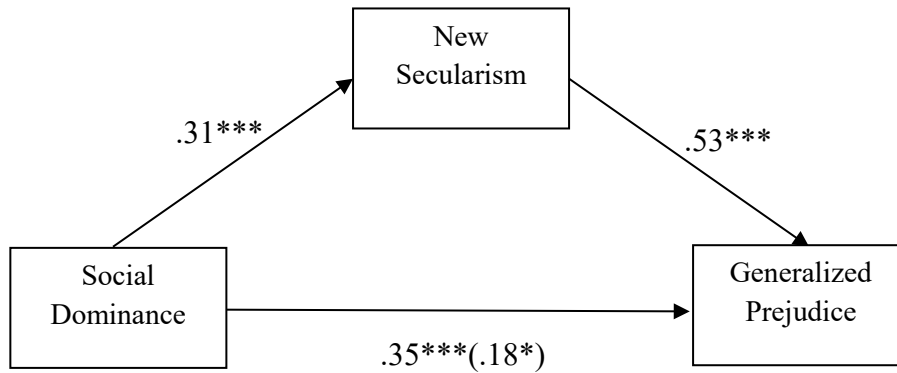


Figure 1. Partial mediation model of Social Dominance Orientation's effects on Generalized Prejudice by New Secularism. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , numbers represent *beta* coefficients for each path.

## Discussion

The Secularism scale demonstrated adequate psychometric properties, with regards to factor structure, total explained variance and theoretical relevance. We were able to observe significant, positive correlations between Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), Generalized Prejudice (GP) and a specific dimension pertaining to SR of secularism, namely New Secularism (NS). Finally, a mediation analysis lent support to the hypothesis of NS's function for prejudice expression justification. Since these results are in line with expectations drawn from previous studies, theoretical and methodological consequences will now be reviewed.

This study allowed us to explore the SR of Secularism among the French and further corroborate its prejudice legitimizing function. We have seen that this SR included two dimensions. A first dimension, Traditional Secularism, does not seem to be meaningfully correlated with GP, indicating that it might only reflect descriptive aspects of Secularism that do not tap into any normative processes linked to prejudice-justification outcomes, though it is negatively correlated with SDO. This is a curious finding given that most previous studies have found Traditional Secularism to be negatively associated with GP measures (see Roebroek, &

Guimond, 2016). This might be explained by differences in our samples (i.e., general population) or our measure of TS. This contradictory result calls for subsequent research in that direction.

The second dimension, NS, bears resemblance to the '*Laïcité*' factor as measured by the Republican Ideology Scale (Nugier, Oppin et al., 2016) and replicates findings from Roebroek & Guimond (2016) whom recently obtained positive correlations between SDO and NS. In fact, because those correlations were not observed in samples from Kamiejski et al. (2012), we can hypothesize that time could be at play in the formation of NS as a legitimizing myth. Indeed, our study was conducted in 2016, in a post terror attack context and those of Roebroek and Guimond (2016) were carried out in a post-2008 crisis situation. If Secularism can be used as malleable ideology for coping with both symbolic and realistic threats as recent studies suggest (Roebroek & Guimond, 2017, in press), then time (through prevalence of societal threat) might explain these differentiated results regarding SDO's link with NS.

Our inductive approach based on participant's situated knowledge, SR of Secularism allowed us here to uncover a relevant dimension, NS, which appears to act as a socially acceptable way to justify prejudice (especially directed at North African minorities). This is because it allows one to invoke cultural differences and general religious tensions in order to make an implicit statement about one particular religion (Islam) linked to perceptions of a specific minority (North African minorities) in a subtle way. This legitimizing dimension is in line with research on modern racism (McConahay, 1986) that emphasizes a clear-cut distinction between so called 'blatant' and 'subtle' prejudice. Mediation analysis did lend support to this hypothesis. These results not only corroborate Nugier, Guimond and Kamiejski's hypothesis regarding the justification function of Secularism, they also give a finer depiction of socially shared beliefs of it and show us that an important dimension bears normative and ideological implications. Normative because NS allows socially acceptable

prejudice justification, ideological because those expressed prejudice and their justification seem to be rooted in social dominance, thus motivated by a need to preserve and maintain existing societal structures and group asymmetries (Sibley & Duckitt, 2010). More generally speaking, our results suggest a functional correspondence between internalized structural factors (social hierarchy) that trigger adherence to culturally acceptable narratives (legitimizing myths) that serve to justify intergroup prejudice on an interpersonal level (Doise, 1980, 1986). Thus, the study of SR (such as Secularism in France) brings an extended socio-cognitive frame allowing for the exploration of socially regulated cognitive processes at stake in the study of intergroup relations. Furthermore, the relatively small size of NS's correlations with demographics point at the relevance of approaching these issues with a strong emphasis upon psychosocial factors, in line with social psychology's historical interest in distinguishing between 'objective' group memberships and individuals' reference groups (Merton & Kitt, 1950).

Though theoretical considerations were a prime motive for conducting this study, another objective was also attained. We demonstrated the feasibility and relevance of using a more ecological approach for studying both content and functional relationships between universal and situated socio-cognitive constructs. This framework allowed us not only to unveil hidden content that was not *a priori* deducible by researchers and to operationalize its quantitative measurement, but also to assess 'hot' cognition in action (Abelson, 1963) and the way it is mobilized in order to deserve inter-group and ideological motives. This method can thus be used across contexts and populations, with other 'local' legitimizing myths. Taking this kind of cognitive content into account matters, because it can then be used in other protocols assessing general social-cognitive processes of interest to researchers. It is part of a need to combine both constructionist and experimental paradigms in social psychology (Jost &

Ignatow, 2001; Jost & Kruglanski, 2002) in order to gain a better understanding of phenomena under investigation, and thus, increase our theories' explanatory power.

This study being exploratory, some inherent limitations and biases need to be pointed out. One is, of course, the cross-sectional nature of the design. The mediation mechanisms uncovered through bootstrap analyses need further validation and experimental corroboration. Also, concerns can be raised regarding the hypothesized conceptual relations between our questionnaire and the Republican Ideology Scale. Indeed, to address such concerns, further research is needed in order to a) assess the links between NS's subscale and Kamiejski et al.'s RIS for theoretical matters, b) further explore and validate our Secularism questionnaire's structure on a larger sample of the French Population. In fact, alternative theoretical considerations could account for our data. First, our NS measure might tap into a form of implicit negative orientation towards Islam which, when accounted for, could make our patterns of correlations vanish. Moreover, it is possible that NS reflects a specific instantiation of cultural prejudice in itself, which would explain its strong links with GP. Experimental protocols should thus be carried out in order to (dis)confirm NS role as prejudice justification, and as discriminatory behavior justification, not only prejudice expression. Finally, our sample was 80% female, as it is often the case when carrying out online surveys. Though no relevant influence of gender was observed on NS, our design is not sufficiently equipped to firmly rule it out. Of course, further research need to include measures such as social identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) or group fusion (Atran, Sheikh, & Gomez, 2014) to empirically link our findings with social identity stakes and to obtain a better picture of the group identities at play within this framework and representations of Secularism's social nature. We argue that, given the weak direct effect of SDO on NS, we may well be facing a total mediation. One reason for the statistical significance of this effect should be the use of bootstrap methods, which are

considerably more powerful (Shrout & Bolger, 2002) and thus more able to detect small (and sometimes trivial) effects.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed at understanding the function of culturally situated beliefs (i.e., Secularism) and their links with psychosocial processes at work on both ideological and intergroup levels in France. Understanding these phenomena bear important stakes in the present political and societal situation (i.e., controversies surrounding the '*burkini*' and the following discriminatory practices of civil servants toward minorities). Furthermore, we argue that even if secularism is specific to a French context, its role and function can be found across countries and cultures. Even if the SR used to legitimize prejudice can vary significantly between populations and social groups, the justification process is expected to be relatively stable. Thus, our method could serve the purpose of identifying specific socio-cognitive categories mobilized in prejudice justification in order to assess the extent to which content impacts processes (and the other way round). Studying 'hot' political cognitive processes (Jost, Hennes, & Lavine 2013) involved in intergroup conflicts and prejudice justification with a mixed theoretical framework may be fruitful. Indeed, it could help us shed light on the way ideological and social factors shape the construction of other beliefs, and 'color' people's worldviews with regards to group identity motives. This framework could allow us to dive deeper in the understanding of emergent political behaviors, in a context of perceived threat favoring the revival of extreme votes, defiance against 'traditional' political parties and rising ethnic tensions across Western democracies.

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### **Appendix 1.**

Social Dominance Orientation Scale (Pratto, Sidanus, Stallworth, & Bertram, 1994)

1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
2. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.
3. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
4. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
5. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
6. It would be good if groups could be equal.
7. Group equality should be our ideal.
8. Increased social equality.
9. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.
10. No one group should dominate in society.

Generalized Prejudice Scale (Dambrun & Guimond, 2001)

1. French people should be prioritized when it comes to employment.
2. French people should be prioritized when it comes to welfare increases.
3. French people should be prioritized when it comes to housing.
4. If there is a lot of unemployment in France, it is because foreigners are taking the jobs of French people.
5. The diversity brought by foreigners enriches the country.
6. We should not be granting French citizenship so easily.
7. Foreigners living in France should be granted the right to vote.
8. It is absurd to blame Algerians and Moroccans for France's economic problems.
9. I consider society to be unfair to Arabs.
10. The wearing of the hijab should be allowed at school.
11. We should be more restrictive towards the coming of foreign families in France.
12. Immigrants should be given more rights.
13. It is legitimate that legal immigrants should be sent back to their country of origin.
14. One can easily understand the anger of French Maghrebi.
15. I would not be worried if most of my college friends were from Arab descent.