

BALLARD BRIEF

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Religious Discrimination against Muslims in France

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Summary

Due in large part to its colonial past,¹ France is home to one of Europe's largest Muslim populations—comprising nearly 9% of the country's population.² Relations have not always been easy between France's Muslim and non-Muslim populations, and 42% of French Muslims reported feeling discriminated against in a 2019 study.³ The discrimination felt by French Muslims stems in large part from France's unique approach to secularism, called *Laïcité*, blowback from recent terrorist attacks, and the stereotyping of Muslims in public discourse. Due to this discrimination, France's Muslim population faces increased economic disadvantages and a lack of representation across multiple levels of French society. Various efforts concerning public awareness have been initiated in different areas around the globe in an attempt to reduce discrimination against Muslims.

Key Terms

Burka—A loose garment covering the body and face worn by some Muslim women.⁴

Discrimination—The intended or accomplished differential treatment of persons or social groups for reasons of certain generalized traits.⁵

Hijab—A garment worn by some Muslim women to cover their hair.⁶

Islam—A monotheistic religion promulgated by the prophet Muhammad in the 7th century CE.⁷

Laïcité—A French concept of secularism that separates religious life and civic life.^{8,9}

Muslim—An adherent of Islam.¹⁰

Nationalism—An ideology based on the premise that the individual's loyalty and devotion to the nation-state surpass other individual or group interests.¹¹

Secularism—The principle of separation of the state from religious institutions.¹²

Stereotypes—An oversimplified, fixed, and often biased belief about a group of people that typically consist of rationally unsupported generalizations.¹³

Terrorism—The calculated use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby bring about a particular political objective.¹⁴

Context

Q: Who are Muslims, and what do they believe?

A: The word “Muslim” is used to denote someone who is a follower of Islam. Muslims believe in one God and that Muhammed was his last prophet.¹⁵ Muslims also believe the Quran to be an unadulterated record of God’s revelations to Muhammed.¹⁶ For the purposes of this paper, it is important to mention that there are multiple tenets concerning individual behavior within Islam that may seem conspicuous to a non-Muslim population—in the same way wearing

a cross necklace would be noteworthy in Saudi Arabia. Because Islam contains no current central authority, there is occasional disagreement as to whether certain practices are obligatory or voluntary.¹⁷ For example, it is widely agreed that praying 5 times daily facing Mecca is an obligatory part of the faith, but there is some disagreement as to whether women wearing the hijab is a voluntary or obligatory aspect of the faith.¹⁸ There are specific rules for personal etiquette called adab.¹⁹ These include saying Bismillah before meals, eating with your right hand (even for left-handed people), and following halal dietary practices.²⁰ Halal means permissible in Arabic, and a halal diet includes abstention from pork, alcohol, and any other meat not prepared in the halal method.²¹

Q: How many Muslims live in France?

A: Approximately 24% of the world's population (18 billion) is Muslim,²² with most Muslims living in North Africa, the Middle East, and South or Southeast Asia.²³ However, there are

Muslims in every region of the world, including a growing number in Europe.²⁴ Of all the European countries, France has one of the highest numbers of Muslim inhabitants.²⁵ It is important to note that France has largely banned the collection of data on an individual's race or religion, making it nearly impossible to get an exact statistic on how many Muslims live in the country.²⁶ This paper will use the estimate provided by Pew Research due to its international credibility and because Pew's estimate is close to the middle of most publicly available estimates. A 2017 Pew Research study placed the Muslim population in France at approximately 8.8% of the total population or around 6 million people.²⁷ Of the French Muslim community, 26% are foreigners and 9 out of 10 have a father who was born abroad.²⁸ Many of these Muslim immigrants are from North Africa, specifically former French colonies such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.²⁹

Q: How does Muslim identity affect this issue?

A: Anyone from any ethnicity or background can be a Muslim, as the word means someone who submits to God.³⁰ However, multiple studies have shown that discrimination against Muslims frequently can be traced back to whether or not they have a name associated with the Muslim community.^{31, 32} Therefore, anyone born into a Muslim community might be subject to prejudices against the Muslim community, regardless of their personal beliefs at the time.

It is also important to note that discrimination is a complex issue that is intersectional by nature. The experience of the French Muslim community—and their perception by the rest of the country—is heavily affected by factors relating to ethnicity and urban poverty.³³ This paper will focus specifically on the factors that can be most explicitly tied to religion and religious discrimination.

In this paper, the term religious discrimination will be used to describe

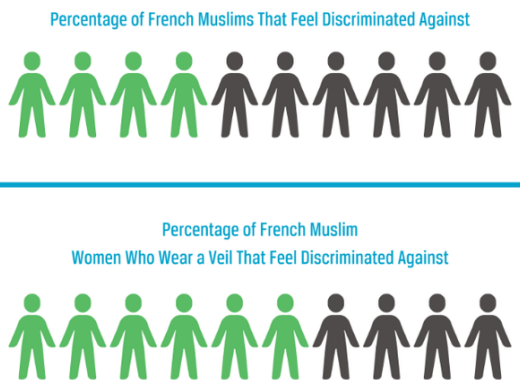
all types of discrimination aimed at people associated with a certain religion, even if some of these behaviors affect people who do not actively participate in that religious community. The discrimination faced by French Muslims because of their religion does not just affect their religious practices but other areas of their lives, such as the ability to get a job or participate in athletic activities.³⁴

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Q: What does religious discrimination against Muslims in France look like? Why is this brief focusing on France?

A: Although Muslims are a large minority of the French population and Islam is the second largest religion in France, there are tensions around the integration of Islam with ‘traditional’ French cultures. Forty-two percent of Muslims in France reported feeling discriminated against, and that number jumps to 60% for women who wear a veil.³⁶ More than a third said

these instances occurred in the past 5 years—showing that this problem has not yet been resolved.^{37, 38} Another statistic that shows the deteriorating situation in France is that in the year 2020, there were 235 attacks on Muslims in France, marking a 53% increase from the year before.³⁹ Muslims only account for .08% of the Senate and National Assembly despite accounting for 6% to 10% of the country’s population. Muslims make up about 40–50% of the French prison population, while in England, a country that is around 5% Muslim, they only make up around 15% of the prison population.^{40, 41, 42} This disparity shows that although the issue of Islamophobia is not uniquely French, the discrimination in France is worse than in the average western country. Accordingly, this paper will focus on the issue of religious discrimination in France specifically.



Q: What are the roots of religious discrimination in France? Why are there so many Muslims in France, and has their situation changed over time?

A: One reason for the recent increase in the salience of the issue of Muslim compatibility with French law is the growing population of Muslims in France. When the most recent French Constitution was passed in 1958, there were around 900,000 Muslims in France. That number had increased to just under 4 million in 1989, around the time of the first legal case regarding

the Muslim veil in public spaces and was up to an estimated 6.5 million in 2020.⁴³ As was mentioned previously, many of these Muslims are first or second-generation immigrants from North Africa. Large-scale immigration to France from North Africa is largely a legacy of France’s colonial past. French troops followed the retreat of the Ottoman Empire into modern-day Algeria in the mid-19th century and continued expanding their North African colonies up until the early 20th century—at which point they controlled the entirety of northwestern Africa.⁴⁴ Many North Africans immigrated for the economic promise of the numerous blue-collar jobs available in France during its reconstruction after World War II.⁴⁵ Although independence was granted for the last French North African colony, Algeria, in 1962, the independence process involved bloodshed on both sides of the Mediterranean.^{46, 47}

Q: Is there a geographic element to this issue within France?

A: Although the concepts discussed in this paper examine France as a whole, it is worth mentioning that an estimated 40% of French Muslims live in and around Paris.⁴⁸ There is a dearth of research regarding the experience of French Muslims in rural areas, and most research focuses on the situation faced by Muslims in urban areas that are referred to as “banlieue.” The French word banlieue roughly translates to suburb, but the French term carries a much more negative connotation. This connotation is because, in France, the term typically refers to public housing blocks hastily constructed on the periphery of cities to house workers for industrial factories. These housing blocks were already isolated in many ways from the rest of the city, and as the factory jobs went overseas, they lost their main employers as well. Because many Muslims from French colonies migrated to France for these industrial

jobs, they have been stuck in these poorly serviced and socially isolated banlieues for generations.⁴⁹

The schools in the banlieue are typically overcrowded and understaffed.⁵⁰ Policing in the banlieue is also understaffed, leading officers to often resort to defensive policing characterized by pre-emptive acts of violence.⁵¹ Because the banlieue is outside the regular network of the city, people seeking better jobs and schools are typically forced to spend multiple hours a day commuting.⁵² Due to the high Muslim population in many of the banlieues, the unrest and crime that are commonly found in disadvantaged urban areas around the world are sometimes linked to Islam in news coverage of these events in France.⁵³ Although the history of these banlieues is not linked to religious discrimination, it is context worth considering as we examine the experience of the French Muslims and how they are viewed by the rest of the country.



Contributing Factors

Laïcité

The French legal principle of *laïcité* has increased discrimination against Muslims in France by prohibiting many forms of Muslim religious expression. *Laïcité*—the complete separation of religious life and civic life—can trace its legal roots back to the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” a document produced in 1789 during the French Revolution. This declaration established that no one could be disturbed by their religious opinions insofar as they did not disrupt the public.⁴³ However, the complete separation of church and state

occurred in 1905 under a law that established that the state could not recognize or fund any religion. The current constitution, passed in 1958, prioritizes the concept by establishing in its first article that France is a secular republic.⁵⁵

Although Muslims have lived in France for centuries, the application of *laïcité* specifically to Islam was not a subject of national debate or attention until 1989.⁵⁶ That year in a northern French town named Creil, the schoolmaster suspended three Muslim girls for refusing to take off their hijabs on the grounds that the hijab was a religious symbol that was incompatible with a secular public school.⁵⁷ This situation sparked a national debate, with multiple other schools following suit. A national court heard the case, and it was determined that schools could determine for themselves whether or not they would expel students who wear a hijab.⁵⁸ This legal precedent was expanded upon by a 2004 law that determined that all public schools should forbid their

students from wearing religious symbols, including the hijab.⁵⁹

Since the 1989 headscarf ruling, there has been increased scrutiny regarding how the legal concept of *laïcité* applies to the Muslim faith. Indeed, a 2012 study found that 80% of the French population now believes Islam to be incompatible with the principle of *laïcité*.⁶⁰ Because multiple requirements of the Muslim faith involve outward expression, it is unclear how many of these expressions will be allowed in the public sphere going forward.

The debate that started in 1989 was the first time Islam became explicitly subject to *laïcité*.⁶¹ As a consequence of the court's ruling in that case that schools had the authority to ban students from wearing a hijab, around 100 Muslim students were expelled between 1994–2003 for wearing an Islamic veil.⁶² In 2004, the national legislature ruled that in all public schools, the wearing of large religious symbols would be banned. Although this law was neutral on its face, it

became known as the headscarf ban because its biggest effect was the banning of the hijab in schools.⁶³



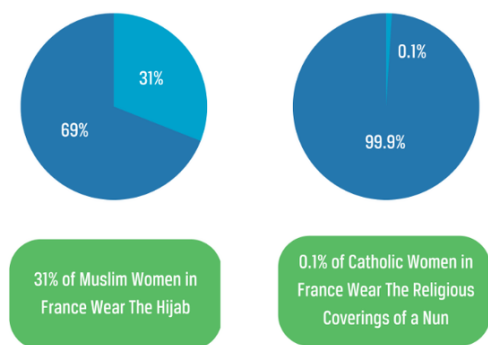
In 2010, the national legislature went beyond public schools and banned the wearing of the Muslim niqab in public spaces. Violators of the law are punished with a \$150 EUR (\$159 USD) fine and a potential citizenship course.⁶⁴ Those who wear a niqab are required to take a citizenship test, which suggests that those who wear the niqab do not understand French values. In 2018, an independent UN committee of human rights experts ruled that this law violated the religious freedom of French Muslim women.⁶⁵ Rules against Muslim head covering continued in 2012 when the French Football Federation forbade female athletes from wearing

the hijab in organized competitions.⁶⁶ Since 2016, over 30 French municipalities have banned the use of the burkini, female swimwear designed to meet Muslim modesty requirements, at public beaches on the grounds that they are “inappropriate.”⁶⁷

In May 2022, the town of Grenoble passed an ordinance explicitly allowing the use of burkinis in public pools, but a month later, a national court overturned the ordinance on the grounds that it violated *laïcité*. The Interior Minister of France described the city’s ordinance as an unacceptable provocation that was contrary to French values.⁶⁸

It is important to note that, at face level, *laïcité* is a neutral law. A nun was recently turned away from a state-run retirement home for insisting on wearing her headscarf.⁶⁹ However, a law that bans public expressions of faith has a disproportionate effect on a religion that requires many public expressions of faith. In 2019, it was reported that 31% of Muslim women in France wear the hijab compared to less

than 0.1% of Catholic women in France who wear the religious coverings of a nun.^{70, 71} The 2004 headscarf law banned large religious symbols but allowed small ones such as the cross necklace, star of David, or hand of Fatima.⁷² While the inclusion of the hand of Fatima on that list ostensibly carves a space for Muslim expression in schools, the cross is a much more important symbol to Christians than the hand of Fatima is for Muslims; and the hand of Fatima does nothing to satisfy the requirements of *fard* that the hijab does.⁷³



In order to fulfill the requirements of their religious lives, Muslims must do

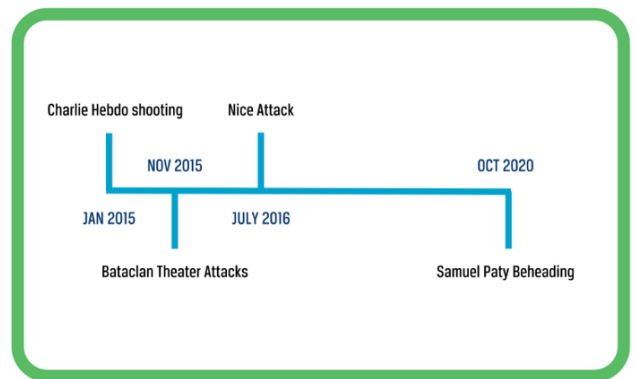
things such as avoid consuming pork in all situations, even in the public sphere. While some schools in France have allowed substitutions of meats other than pork to accommodate their Muslim students, other schools have stopped offering these substitutions because they feel they violate the principle of laïcité.⁷⁴ Thus, when Muslims enter the public sphere, they must constantly decide whether to follow the laws of their faith or the laws of their country in ways that other French religious groups do not. If they choose to live the dictates of their faith, they may be fined, forced to take citizenship courses, have their head coverings forcibly removed,⁷⁵ and in some cases, may even be fired from their jobs.⁷⁶

Recent Terrorist Attacks

Recent terrorist attacks have contributed to religious discrimination against Muslims in France because they have fostered and emboldened anti-Muslim backlash. The following account of recent terrorist attacks in France is by no means comprehensive

but summarizes some of the events that were most impactful on the national psyche. One of the first major terrorist attacks in France was the Charlie Hebdo shooting. On January 7, 2015, two men entered the offices of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and killed 12 people while injuring 11. The attack was carried out because the magazine had posted satirical cartoons of the prophet Muhammed.⁷⁷ The attackers were Frenchmen of Algerian descent, and Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the attack.⁷⁸

RECENT TERRORIST ATTACKS



On November 13 of that same year, multiple attacks were carried out, including suicide bombings at the

national soccer stadium and shootings at several popular nightlife destinations. The biggest of these attacks occurred at a concert at the Bataclan theater. All in all, 130 people were killed in these attacks, while 350 were injured. These attacks were claimed by the terrorist organization ISIL.⁷⁹ On July 14, 2016, a cargo truck ran through Bastille Day celebrations in Nice, killing 86 and injuring 303. This attack was carried out by a Tunisian man living in France, and ISIS also claimed responsibility for these attacks.⁸⁰ On October 16, 2020, a secondary teacher named Samuel Paty was beheaded by an 18-year-old Russian Muslim refugee. Paty had become the target of a social media campaign after allegedly showing cartoons of the prophet Muhammed during a unit on freedom of expression.⁸¹

As with all national tragedies, these horrific events had a deep impact on France. The Samuel Paty beheading and Charlie Hebdo shootings were especially jarring to the French because they were seen as attacks on the

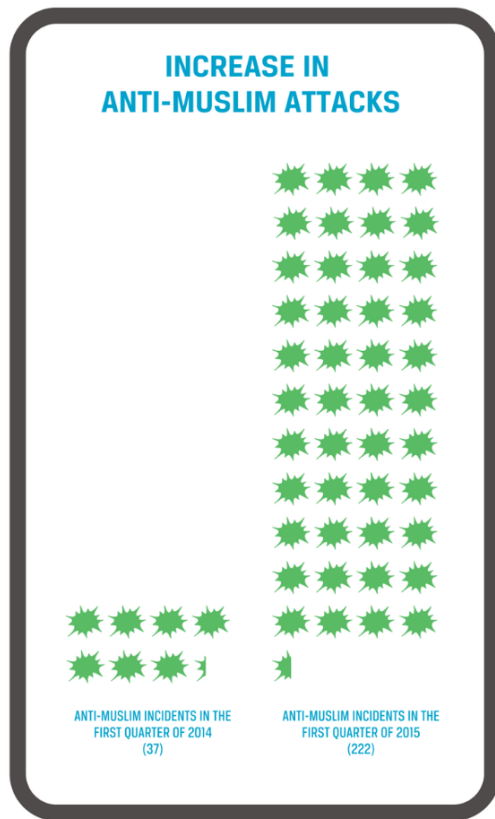
foundational values of their republic.⁸² The 1958 French Constitution declared the slogan from the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” to be the official motto of France, and the motto is prominently inscribed across the country.⁸³ The French view the freedom of expression as the foundation of many of the other liberties they cherish in their republic, and the French Constitution refers to the freedom of expression as the basis of multiple constitutional provisions.⁸⁴ Because freedom of expression is so central to French values, when multiple people were killed for something they said or drew, it was seen by some as a direct attack on French values.⁸⁵

After Samuel Paty’s beheading, the French President declared in an official letter that it was targeted in terrorist attacks because of France’s belief in freedom of expression.⁸⁶ Around the same time, he also vowed to introduce legislation combating “Islamic separatism” through the creation of a “French Islam” that would ensure the teaching of an Islam that is compatible

with French values.^{87, 88} The notion that France's terrorism problem stems not from a few violent individuals but rather from an issue of incompatibility between Islam and French values is not limited to members of the country's leadership.⁸⁹ In 2017, the international research firm Ipsos found that the percentage of the French population that felt that Islam was compatible with French society had decreased 8 points since the terrorist attacks of 2015, from 47% to 39%.⁹⁰

Even though many Muslim officials condemned these attacks,⁹¹ there was still a sharp increase in attacks on Muslims and mosques after these terrorist attacks. According to the National Observatory against Islamophobia, the first quarter of 2015 saw a sixfold increase in anti-Muslim acts after the terrorist attacks in January of that year.⁹² There were 222 Islamophobic attacks in that quarter, compared to 37 in the first quarter of 2014.⁹³ These attacks included grenades lobbed at mosques and shots fired near prayer rooms.⁹⁴

The backlash from the terrorist attacks also led to serious surveillance of Islam by the French government. After the Samuel Paty beheading, France's president introduced a law that would increase government surveillance of and authority over Muslim schools and Mosques, as well as their financing. Despite the importance of religious neutrality in the public sphere in France, lawmakers have explicitly labeled this bill as an attempt to combat Islamic separatism.⁹⁵ Under this law, 75 mosques now have increased surveillance, and some French Muslims have expressed that they feel stigmatized by this law.⁹⁶ This bill has raised the concern of Amnesty International, an international human rights organization, due to its potential to be used to discriminate against Muslims.⁹⁷



 = 5 ANTI-MUSLIM ATTACKS

It is important to note that data paints a complicated picture of the effects of terrorist attacks on French attitudes toward Muslims. Pew Research found that even as anti-Muslim attacks increased in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shooting, so too did favorable views of Muslims within France—favorability rose from 72% to 76%.⁹⁸ While the increase in generally favorable views should be celebrated, it

does not erase the tangible negative effects of hate crimes from an emboldened minority, nor the impact of the surveillance laws passed by the government in the wake of these attacks.

Stereotyping of Muslims in Public Discourse

Discussion of Muslims by the media and prominent political figures has furthered stigma through the frequent use of stereotypes and fear-mongering. It is worth first noting that many French political leaders have made at least nominal clarifications that the problem is not Islam but extremism and remind their citizens that there are many Muslim victims of terrorist attacks as well, including Marine Le Pen and the French presidents during the terrorist attacks that occurred from the 2015 to 2020 period.^{99, 100} The issue with these statements is that they are normally vague and are then followed by sweeping statements that often tie extremist attacks to mainstream elements of the Islamic faith.¹⁰¹ Although there are no statistics that

measure the exact effect of every statement, we can examine how public opinion on the issue has changed during the timeframe of these remarks.

In response to the Samuel Paty beheading, the French President remarked that “Islam is a religion that is in crisis all over the world today.”

This remark upset many French Muslims because it laid the blame for a recent event on Islam itself rather than the actions of a few non-representative extremists.¹⁰² These remarks were viewed as inflammatory enough to anger not just French Muslims but the wider Muslim world. Multiple national leaders, such as the President of Turkey, openly criticized France’s president over the remarks, and in some areas, there was a movement to boycott French goods.¹⁰³ Although no studies have examined the effect this statement had on discrimination against Muslims, French Muslims have claimed the statement has made them feel alienated and targeted in their own country.¹⁰⁴

French political leaders do not just criticize Islam in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. In 2010, the leader of the political party the National Front, Marine Le Pen, compared Muslims praying in the streets to the Nazi occupation during World War II.¹⁰⁵ After the Charlie Hebdo attacks, a senior member of the same political party said that France was “at war with some Muslims.”¹⁰⁶ This leader also compared Muslims to Nazis by saying, “We’re told a majority of Muslims are peaceful. But a majority of Germans were also (peaceful) before 1933 and national socialism.”¹⁰⁷ Marine Le Pen made the criticism of “Islamism” a central part of her 2017 presidential campaign, which saw her get 33.9% of the vote.¹⁰⁸ She then went on to win 41.5% of the vote in 2022, suggesting that this style of politics is not a dealbreaker for French voters.

Statements like these are not just made by figures in extreme political parties. In 2019, the Minister of the Interior gave a speech about the importance of reporting exhibited signs of radicalism.¹⁰⁹ The speech raised

concern because the signs of radicalization he listed were mundane practices of mainstream Islam, such as growing a beard and doing daily prayers.¹¹⁰ The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has denounced the discourse of French political leaders and has stated that the discourse harms French-Islamic relations.¹¹¹

Stereotyping and scapegoating of Muslims is not something that happens just by political leaders. A 2019 analysis of France's two main newspapers found that coverage frequently homogenized Muslims and questioned their compatibility with French values.¹¹²

The frequent portrayal of Muslims in this light has had a tangible effect on French people's perception of and treatment of Muslims. A study completed in 2019 found that 49% of French respondents held an unfavorable view of Muslims, and 72% were concerned about the possibility of extremism in Islam.¹¹³ This finding marks a significant increase from a 2016 study that found that 29% of

French people had an unfavorable view of Muslims.¹¹⁴ Another recent study found that French nationals were less likely to be altruistic to Muslims than to Christians.^{115, 116} A 2015 study in America found a significant correlation between negative media depictions of Muslims and public support for the imposing of civil restrictions on Muslims in their country.¹¹⁷ These data points paint a direct line between negative public discourse about Muslims leading to disfavor and discrimination.

Consequences

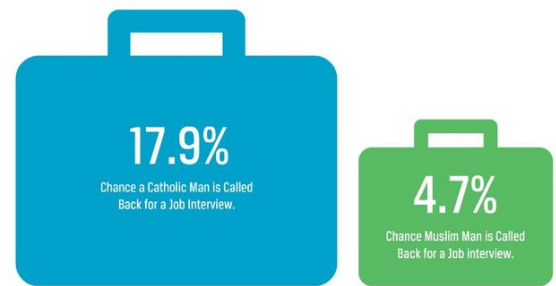
Economic Disadvantages

Because Muslims face discrimination in France, they face serious economic disadvantages. In 2013, a French nonpartisan think tank named the Institut Montaigne ran a study to determine the potential effect religious discrimination might have on employment. The study was conducted by submitting job applications to 6,231 job openings throughout France.¹¹⁸ The

applications were completely identical in every way except religion. Religion was signified in the study through their given name (Dov, Michel, and Mohammed for the men), the religious identity of the junior high school they claimed to have attended, and self-reported outside interests.¹¹⁹ The researchers then measured the rate of callbacks for interviews between the otherwise identical applicants.¹²⁰

The study found that only 10% of Muslims were contacted for an interview compared to 16% of Jews and 21% of Catholics.¹²¹ The rate was even worse for Muslim men specifically, which were 4 times less likely to be called back for an interview than Catholic men. The study controlled for potential bias based on exotic-sounding names and found that a Muslim man named Adam fared better than Mohammed but still significantly worse than a Catholic man named Adam.¹²² Another interesting finding was that Muslim applicants who denoted themselves as secular had better callback rates than those who showed activity in their faith.

Additionally, secular Catholics actually had a lower callback rate than practicing Catholics, demonstrating that employers were not seeking to avoid religious employees in general but specifically avoiding Muslim (and, to a lesser extent, Jewish) employees.¹²³



Another study examining the impact of the 2004 law, sometimes referred to as the “headscarf ban,” found that the restriction on the headscarf in public spaces reduces the secondary education attainment of Muslim girls and limits their career trajectory.¹²⁴ In the study, the authors identify the need to travel further to a religious school

that will accommodate their headscarves as a likely reason why Muslim women are more likely to take more time to graduate or drop out altogether.¹²⁵ This is backed up by anecdotal evidence such as the experience of Asma Bougnaoui, who in 2009 was fired from her IT job for refusing to remove her headscarf while meeting with clients.¹²⁶

These situations combine to have a devastating effect on the economic position of the French Muslim community. Because France does not collect data about religion,¹²⁷ the best image of the employment situation for France's Muslim community comes from private studies of neighborhoods with a high concentration of North Africans. For example, a 2015 study showed that one such neighborhood in Paris faced an unemployment rate of over 50%.¹²⁸ Another study done in 2006 found that French citizens of North African descent had an unemployment rate of 30%, compared to a 10% unemployment rate for the population at large.¹²⁹

Another disadvantage facing the Muslim community's economic prospects is that Muslims have disproportionate rates of incarceration. Although exact statistics on religious affiliation are unavailable in France, it is estimated that around 40–50% of France's inmates are Muslims, compared to the estimated 8–10% of Muslims composing the general French population.¹³⁰ In comparison, English Muslims comprise roughly 5% of the total population and 15% of the prison population.¹³¹ Although French studies on the economic impact of incarceration are not readily available, a recent American study found that incarceration leads to an annual income reduction of around 52%, and it can be assumed that the effect in France is similar.¹³²

Lack of Representation

Another consequence of French Muslims not being accepted by mainstream French society is a lack of representation of Muslim voices in positions of authority and influence in France. Despite comprising almost half

of the prison population, Muslims are under-represented in the chaplain ministry. Chaplains are spiritual leaders, often specific to one religion, that are appointed by the state to minister to soldiers or prisoners. In 2017 the number of chaplains assigned to the French penitentiary system was as follows: 695 Catholic, 347 Protestant, 224 Muslim, 170 Jehovah's Witness, 76 Jewish, 54 Orthodox Christian, and 19 Buddhist—meaning roughly just 14% of chaplains were Muslims.¹³³ In the absence of professional, moderate clergy, some Muslim inmates look for spiritual guidance from jailed jihadists—adding to the cyclical nature of the predicament of the French Muslims.¹³⁴

Muslims also face lower representation in political spheres. Despite making up between 8–10% of the people in France,¹³⁵ Muslims only account for 0.08% of the Senate and National Assembly combined.¹³⁶ Their lack of representation in government means there is little to no Muslim input on issues that involve

them, such as the legal applications of *laïcité*.



A 2012 study comparing Muslim and Christian Senegalese immigrants in France found that because the Muslims experienced more discrimination, they anticipated it more. The anticipated discrimination led them to withdraw into their communities and assimilate less.¹³⁷ The study authors noted that this lack of assimilation contributed to

the cyclical nature of discrimination against Muslims in France.¹³⁸

Practices

One of the most visible organizations fighting Islamophobia is a British organization called Tell MAMA. MAMA is an acronym for ‘Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks,’ and the organization is primarily centered around compiling and reporting data about anti-Muslim incidents. Although Tell MAMA is based in the United Kingdom, the lessons they have learned about data collection and collaboration with the media could easily be applied to France.

The organization was founded on February 21, 2012, and for its first year, it was funded by the UK government through the Department for Communities and Local Government.¹³⁹ The program was launched with help from the Community Security Trust (CST), an organization that has been recording antisemitic incidents since 1984.¹⁴⁰

Tell MAMA records anti-Muslim behaviors that can be anything from

arson at a mosque, job discrimination, or a prejudiced comment on social media. Tell MAMA has multiple hotlines and online services for reporting anti-Muslim incidents and supporting those who have experienced them. In its first year, it reported 632 anti-Muslim incidents.¹⁴¹ It also uses the data it collected to generate academic reports about the state of Islamophobia in England and examine patterns or trends. Tell MAMA’s work has been cited in scholarly research, government reports, and articles across different media networks.¹⁴² It has greatly facilitated awareness of anti-Muslim attacks and, since their founding, have been cited in approximately 275 news articles.¹⁴³

Unfortunately, there is no data readily available on how media depiction of British Muslims has or has not changed on aggregate since the founding of Tell MAMA. An American study published in 2015 found that news reports portraying Muslims as terrorists led to an increase in support of civil restrictions on Muslims, while positive media coverage of Muslims decreased

support for policies that harmed Muslims.¹⁴⁴ If there is any correlation between this American study and the reaction of British and French citizens, Tell MAMA's work would have a great potential for a positive impact. Tell MAMA itself does not provide data on what the impact of news coverage about anti-Muslim incidents may have on perceptions of Muslims in Britain.

Tell MAMA has also been criticized by some Muslims over its affiliation with certain figures tied to Jewish and LGBTQ advocacy.¹⁴⁵ It is unknown to what extent, if at all, these claims may affect the likeliness that all members of the Muslim community turn to Tell MAMA for support if they have experienced an anti-muslim incident.

Endnotes

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