



The Hijab Ban in France from an Islamic Perspective: Secularism, Religious Freedom, and Muslim Identity

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Abstract

This article discusses an interesting discourse that has recently become a controversial issue in France, attracting global attention and discussion. This article analyzes the debate regarding Islamophobia and the ban on the hijab in France, which is considered a historical and ongoing class struggle conflict. Several countries in Europe, including France, have a ban on wearing the hijab in public places. This happened because of disputes between the majority religions in the country, starting from the 15th century until 1950. So the French government established the concept of *Laïcité*, or in English, “secular”. *Laïcité* is the separation between the state and religious systems, which aims to ensure that the state is not influenced by certain religious organizations, and at the same time the state guarantees and protects religious organizations since 2004. One of the impacts of this regulation is the prohibition on wearing clothing that is too indicative of a particular group or religion. In terms of the Islamic religion, a rule was introduced that prohibits women from wearing the hijab. This research uses the library research method (library study) and collects data using a qualitative approach. The conclusion of this article is that it cannot be denied that the secular system that has been established in France gives rise to religious problems related to religious adherents and state politics. Apart from that, this phenomenon can be detrimental to certain institutions or groups and can cause divisions between one another so that peace and everyone's religious rights will be disturbed, and based on the problems that occur above, the French secular system can trigger prejudice and biases towards the Islamic religion.

Keywords: Islam, Religious Practice, France, Islamophobia, Hijab.

Introduction

French society has maintained historical contact with Islam for many centuries, with the earliest encounters dating back to the eighth century, when Islam reached southern France during the period of political transition from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty. Muslim political influence in the region continued for approximately four decades before gradually declining. In the tenth century, further efforts were made to extend Islamic territorial influence into parts of France, although these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful. The subsequent development of Christian political power and the conflicts associated with the medieval Crusades contributed to the decline of Muslim territorial presence in France. Nevertheless, France's historical relationship with the Islamic world did not end with the withdrawal of Muslim political authority. During the colonial era, France developed extensive political, economic, and cultural connections with numerous Muslim-majority territories, including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Mali, Lebanon, and Egypt. These colonial relationships created long-lasting patterns of interaction and migration between France and Muslim societies. Furthermore, like other industrialized European countries, France later opened its

labor market to *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, particularly from Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, and other countries. Many of these workers subsequently settled in France, contributing to the growth of Muslim communities and making Islam an increasingly visible component of French society and its multicultural demographic landscape (Faridah et al., 2021).

The development of Islam in France continues to evolve dynamically from year to year. In 2000, there were approximately 150,000 Muslims out of a population of around 1.8 million in the city of Lyon, while in Paris, the Muslim population reached 1.7 million out of roughly 12 million residents. The port cities of Marseille and Lille also had significant Muslim populations, each numbering 200,000. Given Marseille's total population of 800,000, this implies that 25% of the city's residents have embraced Islam; furthermore, it is projected that by 2040, Islam will become the second-largest religion in France, following Catholicism, as noted by Faridah (2021). Given the continuous growth of the Muslim community, driven primarily by da'wah (religious outreach) and marriage, it is projected that the Muslim population in France will see significant expansion in the coming years. This rapid growth has fostered a pluralistic society, yet interactions with the external (non-Muslim) population have become a source of societal conflict and a key challenge facing French Muslims today.

In recent times, the growing global debate surrounding Islamic symbols and practices highlights the increasing importance of Islamic discourse within the political imagination. In the modern era, fears regarding terrorism, specifically terrorism linked to “Muslim” groups, have fostered a climate of global suspicion toward Islam. Various interests are intertwined in this context, including the implications of transnational trends. Thus, it is entirely appropriate to consider, as one of the peripheral issues in the study of religion, the existence, transformation, and correlation of religion with local socio-cultural contexts, including the perspective of nationalism through the lenses of religion and culture (Hashas et al., 2025). Such issues surfaced in France when three female students wearing hijabs were expelled from school in 1989, followed by a recurring confrontational incident in September 2003 (Limage, 2010; Zimmerman, 2015). In February 2004, legislation reinforcing an administrative directive that effectively banned the wearing of hijabs in public schools was passed by parliament with near-universal support (494 in favor, 31 abstentions, 36 opposed). Furthermore, according to Syahban (2026), the policy prohibiting French athletes from wearing the hijab during the Paris 2024 Olympics remains a contentious issue. For instance, news media indirectly frame the matter in ways that align with their respective agendas.

Long before the emergence of issues surrounding Islamophobia and hijab bans, it is known that during World War II, anti-Semitic movements drew France into a form of segregation that was primarily ethnic in nature. France's complicity in the Holocaust illustrates that the ideals of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* were not upheld when it came to “the Other”, even when that individual was a French citizen. Ethnic or religious segregation has persisted throughout history. In the 20th century, the independence of Francophone nations brought about shifts in social relations within the French context. The influx of people from the Maghreb (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco) and Africa settling in France gave rise to stark ethnic segregation. In her book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex), Simone de Beauvoir (1976) implicitly explains that segregation imposed by the dominant masculine order placed women on the same level as Black people and Jews. De Beauvoir's indignation stemmed, on one hand,

from a desire for women to be treated as equals to men. Yet, on the other hand, she personally acknowledged that within French society, it was not only women who constituted “the second sex,” but also Black people and Jews (Udasmoro, 2010). Based on de Beauvoir’s perspective, the position of Islam in France today mirrors the plight of Jews, who have long been a marginalized group in the country.

The implementation of secularism in France has generated ongoing tensions between the exercise of individual religious practices and the political interests and policies of the state. At its core, secularism is intended to establish a clear institutional separation between religion and government, ensuring that religious institutions do not exercise undue influence over state affairs. France represents one of the most prominent examples of this approach, particularly through the principle of *laïcité*, which has become a central foundation of the French secular system. In principle, *laïcité* is intended to protect individual freedom of conscience and allow citizens to practice their religion without direct interference from the state. However, its practical implementation in France has produced significant controversy, particularly among Muslim communities. Rather than being perceived solely as a mechanism for protecting religious freedom, the application of secular principles has, in certain contexts, imposed restrictions on visible Islamic practices and expressions. Consequently, the French experience demonstrates a tension between the theoretical objectives of secularism and its practical effects, especially when state policies concerning public religious expression are perceived as limiting the ability of Muslims to freely observe aspects of their faith (Wulandari et al., 2024). This phenomenon can clearly disadvantage specific institutions or groups, fostering division and undermining peace as well as the right to religious freedom; furthermore, the issues described can fuel prejudice and bias against Islam.

Therefore, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and conditions of the Muslim minority in France following the establishment and implementation of the secular system, this discussion will focus on two closely related issues, namely Islamophobia and restrictions on the wearing of the hijab. The analysis will examine how these phenomena have emerged and developed within French society, including the various forms through which discrimination, social exclusion, and restrictions on religious expression are manifested. In addition, attention will be given to the underlying factors that contribute to the persistence of Islamophobia and the regulation of hijab use in France, particularly those associated with secularism, political discourse, social attitudes, and perceptions of Muslim identity.

Literature review

Several previous studies have addressed the discourse surrounding the dynamics of Islam in France, ranging from the rise of Islamophobia to the ban on the hijab for Muslim women. For instance, research by Udasmoro (2010) examined how political elites, the general public, and women who wear the hijab perceive these symbols as integral to their subject positions—emphasizing concepts of the “self” and the “other.” Subsequently, a 2021 study by Faridah (2021) analyzed the evolution of Islam in France, covering aspects such as the process of Islamization, developmental trends and challenges, and the contemporary status of the Muslim community. The findings revealed that while Islam in France is evolving dynamically, the lives

of Muslims there are marked by complex issues, such as the ban on Muslim women wearing the hijab. Furthermore, research by Ismoyo (2016) focused on discrimination against Maghrebi Muslim women, exploring the interplay between identity, the Islamic context, and discrimination, while also analyzing the causes and impacts of such discrimination on the identities of these women. These studies have broadly addressed the phenomenon of Islam in France, covering both its developmental dynamics and current realities. In contrast, this research article focuses specifically on the manifestation of Islamophobia in France and the discrimination faced by Muslim women due to bans on wearing the hijab in certain locations and activities.

Research method

This article employs a descriptive-analytical method based on data gathered through a literature review of various written sources (Hashas & Mawaddah, 2025). The study examines a broad range of academic and documentary materials, including scholarly articles, publications, and other relevant writings that discuss Islamic politics, political activities, and the development of Muslim communities in Europe, with particular attention to the French context. The sources encompass both historical and contemporary perspectives on Islamic political developments in France and are selected in accordance with the chronological scope and focus of the present study. Because the materials have been published through publicly accessible channels, the relevant information can be obtained from a variety of sources, including libraries, academic publications, and online platforms. The collected literature is subsequently described, compared, and analyzed in relation to the central issues addressed in this article. Rather than merely presenting existing arguments, the study seeks to synthesize the available literature in order to identify patterns, perspectives, and insights that remain relevant to the contemporary situation. This synthesis also aims to evaluate how the findings and arguments contained in previous studies may contribute to understanding possible responses or courses of action in the present context. The research process begins by identifying and formulating the principal research problem, which is then followed by a systematic analysis of the relevant literature. The findings of this analytical process are presented in the results and discussion section, while the overall interpretation of the evidence and analysis is ultimately brought together in the conclusion.

Result

Throughout human history, religion and the state have stood as two vital institutions, with the nature of the relationship between them remaining a constant subject of debate and discussion. Religion serves as a source of ethics and morality, playing a crucial role in shaping an individual's attitudes and conduct within social life. In this context, religion acts as a normative foundation, providing a reference point, a benchmark, and a source of solutions, for addressing the various challenges of individual life, whether concerning interpersonal relationships or the connection to the religious teachings themselves. Meanwhile, the state functions as a fundamental pillar that regulates aspects of social ethics and the exercise of authority within society. Formulating a paradigmatic framework that reconciles religious ideals with political realities has consistently been a central issue in Islamic political thought. This

focus stems from the historical reality that the relationship between religion and politics has frequently been characterized by tension and disparity (Hashas & Mawaddah, 2025).

Islam, both as a religious tradition and as a political and cultural force, entered the European continent as early as the seventh century CE, giving it a remarkably long historical presence within what would later become a predominantly Christian European context. Throughout its history, Muslim political powers established and maintained rule over parts of Europe for extended periods, particularly in the Iberian Peninsula, where Islamic dynasties governed for centuries and produced a significant intellectual and cultural legacy. This period was marked not only by political achievements but also by important developments in science, philosophy, medicine, architecture, and systems of social organization. However, the historical position of Islam in Europe underwent substantial transformation following the Crusades, particularly from the medieval period onward, and later through the expansion of European colonial powers into Asia and Africa from the seventeenth century. As European political and cultural dominance expanded, the Muslim presence that had once exercised significant influence in parts of Europe gradually declined. Nevertheless, the legacy of Islamic civilization did not completely disappear. It continues to be reflected in scholarly works on philosophy, science, and medicine, as well as in numerous historical monuments and architectural remains that serve as tangible evidence of Islam's enduring contribution to European history and civilization.

Today, Muslims in Europe find themselves in a situation vastly different from that of centuries or even a millennium ago. The end of World War II—which brought independence to nations across Asia and Africa—shifted the global political climate and trajectory. Newly independent former colonies often found themselves economically and politically marginalized. For Muslim-majority nations in particular, these conditions drove citizens to migrate to Europe and the Americas in search of better livelihoods. The UK and France emerged as top destinations for immigrants from Asia and the Middle East, the majority of whom were Muslim. Unfortunately, their aspirations for a better life in their new homes did not materialize without significant hurdles. They faced challenges regarding their legal status as recognized citizens, as their racial and religious identities were often unfamiliar to the local populations. Consequently, political struggle became the only path to securing official recognition and state-sanctioned guarantees of their citizenship rights—a necessity that has been particularly crucial for Muslim immigrant communities in the 21st century (Kaunain, 2020).

Based on the background described above, multiculturalism emerged in France. France faced a significant labor shortage, prompting many immigrants—particularly from Africa—to arrive in the country in search of work. Many of these immigrants brought their families and settled in France; the majority were of Negroid descent and Muslim. The diversity resulting from this immigration process transformed France into a multicultural nation. To better understand the definition of multiculturalism, one can look to Bhikhu Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, which describes it as diversity or difference that is culturally embedded. This process of integration requires tolerance—specifically, the willingness to accept other groups as part of a unified whole by breaking down the barriers of difference (Parekh, 2008).

Over time, the immigrant population has grown, making this a significant issue in France as their presence impacts crucial aspects of the nation—social, political, and cultural. Cultural clashes, such as acts of racism by the native population against immigrants, have persisted since their arrival. Social disparities between locals and immigrants have generated friction leading to conflict, manifested in incidents such as attacks on immigrant neighborhoods (banlieues) and other racist acts. This issue extends to the political sphere, where nationalist, far-right parties often display xenophobic attitudes, rejecting immigrants on the grounds that they disrupt the stability of French society. Xenophobia is not a new phenomenon in France; the fear of newcomers has long been a source of anxiety for segments of the French public. Former President Nicolas Sarkozy serves as a prominent example of anti-immigrant sentiment. This xenophobia has evolved into Islamophobia—a specific form of racism directed at a minority group in France. Islamophobia intensified following the events of January and November 2015, as well as the tragedies in Nice and Rouen in 2016. Data from the CCIF supports this, indicating that in 2015, Islamophobic acts were perpetrated by institutions (64%), legal entities (34%), and individuals (2%) (Anisa, 2020). Discrimination manifests across three aspects of identity, as these individuals occupy the most marginalized positions within the French social hierarchy. From the French perspective, Maghrebi immigrants are viewed as inferior. Similarly, regarding gender, women are considered inferior to men. Furthermore, Muslims are also perceived as inferior, a sentiment exacerbated by rising Islamophobia in France. Consequently, Muslim women of Maghrebi origin face layered discrimination (Ismoyo, 2016).

In April 2021, the French Senate voted to introduce sweeping additional legislation regarding the visibility of religious attire in public spaces, in support of the country's commitment to secularism. While the presence of religious symbols in public spaces remains a contentious issue, the French legislature has—over the past two decades—introduced a series of laws that disproportionately affect Muslim women and girls. Specifically, a proposed bill seeking to ban the wearing of the hijab in public by girls under the age of 18 has drawn both domestic and international criticism from feminists, who view it as a malicious attempt to police women's bodies (Jeannot, 2021).

Yet, previous instances have revealed less favorable outcomes; for example, the 1905 Law on *laïcité*—initially implemented to prevent societal divisions and provide a shared foundation for living amidst diversity—has, in the context of contemporary France, sparked conflicts that threaten to fracture the nation. The *laïcité* policy mandated by the 1905 Law has actually resulted in negative consequences, including discrimination, physical and verbal abuse, and intolerance toward Muslims within French educational institutions. Consequently, it can be argued that the implementation of *laïcité* under the 1905 Law—as pursued by Macron—has failed to achieve its intended objectives. The adverse effects of this policy further demonstrate a failure to realize the core purpose of the *laïcité* principle regarding Muslims in public educational institutions. This situation can be attributed to the fact that the values of *laïcité* and the 1905 Law are no longer compatible with the contemporary Muslim population in France, which continues to grow (Esmano & Miranda, 2022).

Discussion

Islamophobia

Nowadays, a term exists for the condition in which an individual harbors an extreme or disproportionate fear of something—such as the intense anxiety experienced when encountering a specific religious community, namely Islam. According to Ayesha (2023), this fear of Islam is known as Islamophobia; the British Runnymede Trust defines Islamophobia as “dread or hatred of Islam and, consequently, to the fear and dislike of all Muslims.” This phenomenon leads to discrimination against adherents of Islam, such as their marginalization from a country's social, economic, and political life.

According to the article *The History and Impact of Islamophobia* published by the United Way of Southeastern Michigan, the historical development of Islamophobia in Europe, as discussed in the relevant context, can be traced through developments in the Metro Detroit area of the United States. This region has long been characterized by considerable cultural and religious diversity, including substantial communities of Arab Americans and American Muslims originating from various immigrant backgrounds. Many of these communities came from regions outside Western Europe and initially contributed significantly to the multicultural character of the area. However, their demographic presence experienced a substantial decline following the implementation of the 1924 immigration legislation, which introduced and expanded immigration quotas based on the principle of “national origins” for several decades thereafter. In addition to restrictive immigration policies, the emergence of state-sponsored surveillance further intensified the marginalization of these communities. In 1972, the launch of “Operation Boulder,” a government surveillance initiative under U.S. President Richard Nixon, contributed to the construction of Arab Americans and American Muslims as potential security threats. Through this policy framework, members of these communities were increasingly associated with terrorism and suspicion, reinforcing discriminatory perceptions based on their ethnic and religious identities.

The September 11, 2001, World Trade Center (WTC) attacks involved an American Airlines Boeing 767—carrying 20,000 gallons of jet fuel—crashing into the North Tower in New York City, resulting in 3,000 fatalities. The attack was orchestrated by the Islamic extremist group Al-Qaeda, founded by Osama bin Laden, whose plan involved hijacking four commercial passenger aircraft to carry out suicide attacks against targets in the United States. These terrorist attacks were motivated by retaliation against the United States for its support of Israel, its role in the Persian Gulf War, and its continued military presence in the Middle East (History Editors, 2023).

Based on the explanation above, it is evident that the primary factors underlying the emergence of Islamophobia in Europe fall into two categories: Western Orientalism and the 9/11 World Trade Center tragedy in the United States. First is the concept of Western Orientalism—emerging in the 18th and 19th centuries—which fostered a perspective that subordinated non-Western entities. Second is the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center tragedy, which triggered an exaggerated fear of terrorism linked to stereotypes about Muslims (Ismoyo, 2016). Elaborating on the first point requires looking at the historical context of 18th- and 19th-century Europe, an era when European nations competed to acquire colonies. This

eastward expansion led to significant implications for and a transformation of the Western perspective regarding the East (the non-West)—including Islam, which was perceived as originating from the East. European assertions of superiority indirectly characterized Eastern identities (including Muslims) as primitive, uncivilized, barbaric, and irrational, while assigning them values deemed inferior to those of European nations. This Western ideology of subordination clearly contributed to racist attitudes among European societies toward anything outside the West.

Currently, this is manifested in the contestation surrounding the emergence of social actors; Macron's speech explicitly identifies several actors involved at an institutional level. Islam, as a religious institution, is represented through specific actors: Wahhabi and Salafi groups are portrayed as the primary agents behind terror and radical movements, while children, the French public, Charlie Hebdo, Jean-Baptiste Salvin, and Jessica Schneider are depicted as victims of Islamic radicalism. Macron's speech avoids casting a negative stigma upon the entire Muslim population. Instead, the representation of radical Islam is specifically linked to Wahhabism and Salafism—movements historically implicated in various acts of terrorism. Radical Islam is closely associated with humanitarian crises and terror threats worldwide. Conversely, Islam—when viewed in the context of civilizational development free from radicalism—is still regarded as a force for change and progress. This stance aligns with the French government's principles (*liberté, égalité, fraternité*), which firmly oppose any form of radicalism that threatens society. Furthermore, the principle of *laïcité* serves as the foundation for the French government in formulating religious policies and practices that must align with the circumstances and needs of French society. Consequently, the formulation of policies to counter separatism has become a necessity for France (Wijaya & Baskoro, 2022).

An event that shocked the entire world—particularly Europe—sparked trauma and fear regarding Islam. Following the WTC attacks, many Muslims faced discrimination due to their Muslim identity. According to a Harvard Gazette article by Mineo (2021) titled “Born to take on Islamophobia,” Anan Hafez—a Palestinian-American Muslim—grew up in an anti-Muslim community. He encountered various obstacles as early as kindergarten, facing mockery and ostracism from his peers simply because he was Muslim. It is evident that the impact of the WTC attacks was not limited to that moment in time; the repercussions persist to this day, affecting new generations. Mussab Ali expressed this sentiment: “A lot of Muslim Americans are much more open about countering Islamophobia, which is our legacy. Our generation, that of young Muslim Americans raised in the shadow of 9/11, was born to take on these issues.”

A perceived sense of European superiority contributed to the development of attitudes that were resistant to cultural and social differences, encouraging tendencies toward racism and reluctance to integrate with people from non-Western backgrounds. This perception of superiority also helps explain the widespread emergence of xenophobic attitudes among segments of the European population, particularly toward individuals regarded as outsiders. Fear and suspicion of foreigners can be understood as products of Western exclusivist attitudes that construct non-Western communities as culturally distant and socially threatening. As a consequence, various misconceptions, prejudices, and negative stereotypes developed alongside discriminatory and racist attitudes. These tendencies became particularly visible during the nineteenth century, when Europe experienced a significant increase in migration from foreign populations. The growing presence of people from different racial and cultural

backgrounds brought questions of race, identity, and social hierarchy into sharper focus. Discrimination based on skin color subsequently became an important social issue, with Black people frequently represented through deeply dehumanizing stereotypes and positioned as inferior to white Europeans. In this context, they were often associated with the institution of slavery and portrayed as lacking education, civilization, and social status, reflecting the racial hierarchies that characterized European society at the time.

The year 2015 represented a significant challenge to the development of multiculturalism in France, particularly in relation to social cohesion and relations between religious communities. Over a period of only ten months, France experienced two major terrorist attacks that collectively resulted in 146 deaths, creating profound social and political repercussions. Both tragedies occurred within a broader context marked by increasing Islamophobia and heightened public suspicion toward Muslim communities. Data documented by the *Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France* (CCIF) indicated that, during the three weeks following the Charlie Hebdo attack in January, as many as 120 Islamophobic criminal acts were recorded. A similar pattern emerged after the November 13 attacks, which generated negative reactions and intensified public hostility toward Muslims living in France. The CCIF's annual report further illustrates the escalation of this phenomenon, recording an 18.5% increase in reported Islamophobic incidents, from 764 cases in 2014 to 905 cases in 2015. These developments demonstrate how terrorist violence can contribute to heightened social tensions and reinforce negative perceptions of Muslim communities, thereby presenting a serious challenge to France's commitment to multiculturalism, religious tolerance, and social inclusion.

Ban on Wearing the Hijab

Wearing the hijab is a tangible and enduring manifestation of Muslim faith, yet it is also conflated with visual representations of oppression and gender inequality (Zempi, 2016). Consequently, the visual alteration of the body caused by the hijab relates to the female gender through the dichotomy of “open” versus “closed” sexuality proposed by Khosrokhavar (Scott, 2007). This presents a crucial binary that must be addressed regarding the treatment of women and their bodies in Western nations, as the visual accessibility of the female body implies a certain level of sexual availability to the opposite sex (Scott, 2007).

Although, according to Windle (2004), the French Republic attempts to mask relationships of subordination by applying formal, non-discriminatory conditions to all citizens—even when the distinct nature of the subjects involved allows the underlying ideology to be traced—the phenomenon of the niqab and hijab in France is viewed as more than mere religious attire; it is also represented as a socio-political symbol perceived to conflict with the concept of secular citizenship. The French government tends to frame the niqab within the contexts of *laïcité* (secularism), public safety, gender equality, and social integration. The media also plays a role in shaping the image of the niqab as a controversial issue linked to conflict, bans, and Muslim minority identity. From a Western feminist perspective, the niqab is often interpreted as a symbol of the oppression of women—a view that warrants critical examination, however, as it overlooks the agency, experiences, and religious consciousness of Muslim women themselves. Bans on the niqab, hijab, and abaya have the potential to curtail religious freedom and foster social exclusion for Muslim women. Thus, in modern life, the

niqab is relevant not only as a religious issue but also as a matter concerning democracy, human rights, gender, and multiculturalism (Iswandi et al., 2025).

The French government's ban on the hijab is certainly ill-suited to the lives of Muslims living and working in the country; the practice—an obligation for Muslims yet viewed unfavorably by French society—has given rise to a sense of unease. Oktavian (2024) states in his research that the discrimination arising from the regulation violates Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as Islamic principles and Maqasid Sharia. Nevertheless, the Muslim population in France continues to grow. Out of a total population of 63.8 million, 83 to 88 percent are Roman Catholic, 2 percent are Protestant, 1 percent are Jewish, and 5 to 10 percent are Muslim, while the religious affiliation of the remaining 4 percent is unspecified ('Rulings Regarding Wearing Hijab and Niqab', n.d.).

According to Farauqi (2025), the French principle of *laïcité* is viewed as inconsistent within the context of the Paris 2024 Olympics. This inconsistency is evident in several aspects: claims of neutrality that often mask historically rooted exercises of symbolic power; disparate treatment between French and foreign athletes, reflecting a protectionist logic of national identity that marginalizes vulnerable citizen groups; arguments regarding policy urgency that rely on weak evidence and prioritize security discourses laden with colonial influence; and the policy's impact in perpetuating complex structural inequalities based on gender, racialization, and colonial legacies. Within the framework of Social Identity Theory (which, in this case, serves as a reinforcing theory), Muslim women who wear the hijab are symbolically positioned as an “out-group”—a group perceived as falling outside the norms of a secular and uniform national identity. Conversely, the policy of *laïcité* can be understood as a performative instrument employed by the state to position itself as part of a global “in-group”: the Western world.

However, as Western concerns regarding organized and political Islam intensify, the hijab has evolved from a mere matter of religious expression into an issue of public order and national security. Despite the understanding that the face veil or hijab is not the sole indicator of Islamic faith for women (Zimmerman, 2015), France continues to uphold laws that specifically target Muslim women, framing their attire as a serious threat to French secular values—as evidenced by the characterization of the hijab in France as a “primary symbol of patriarchy and resistance to modernity” (Zimmerman, 2015). Data from 2015 indicates that approximately 74% of Islamophobic discrimination incidents targeted women, particularly those wearing headscarves. Furthermore, 79% of French citizens viewed women wearing headscarves as an obstacle to social cohesion in France. Ironically, this widespread opposition is evident in the public sphere, with 93% of respondents stating that women wearing the hijab have no place in France (Marchand, 2006).

In November 2021, a group of women living in France calling themselves 'les Hijabeuses' filed a legal challenge against the ban on wearing the hijab, arguing that the rule was discriminatory and violated Muslim women's right to practice their religion. French law guarantees freedom of religion or belief for all and does not prohibit the display of religious symbols in public—with the exception of full-face coverings, which have been banned since 2010 (Tim detikcom, 2022).

The involvement of journalists, media institutions, and political actors has further intensified the complexity of identity experienced by Maghrebi Muslim women in French society. Various forms of violence, particularly those expressed through sexist and racist attitudes, place women's bodies under continuous public observation, scrutiny, and judgment. Such treatment appears to contradict the fundamental spirit of *laïcité*, which is intended to safeguard individual freedom and establish a distinction between religious affiliation and the public sphere. Within this context, the issue of Muslim women's head coverings continues to occupy a significant place in French political and social debates, while a definitive and universally accepted resolution remains difficult to achieve. The freedom of Muslim women to wear a head covering as part of their religious obligation appears to be constrained by competing interpretations of civic responsibility and secular public life. Consequently, Maghrebi Muslim women may experience limited social acceptance and tolerance, particularly when their religious identity becomes highly visible in public spaces. Media representations can further aggravate this condition by reproducing and amplifying the dual stigma associated with both their gender and Muslim identity. Through repeated negative or stereotypical portrayals, these representations contribute to the marginalization and dehumanization of Maghrebi Muslim women within French society.

Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité: Principles of Universal Social Solidarity

Religious identities, including Islam and Catholicism, gender identities involving women and men, and national identities that distinguish immigrants from native-born citizens—whether of Maghrebi origin or belonging to other racial and ethnic backgrounds—can provide a framework for understanding the operation of power relations within French society. Such identity distinctions may produce hierarchical relationships in which certain groups are positioned as dominant while others are placed in subordinate or marginalized positions. However, this dynamic can be transformed when identity is understood not as a basis for separation, but as a form of social solidarity within the framework of the nation-state. From this perspective, social hierarchies based on religious, gender, racial, or national differences can be challenged and diminished. Identity is instead conceptualized as a collective and unifying whole that connects members of society through shared processes of interpellation and identification. In the French context, national identity is fundamentally associated with the ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, which emphasize liberty, equality, and fraternity as foundational principles of national life. By placing these principles at the center of citizenship and social relations, French national identity has the potential to create a more inclusive social framework in which differences can be acknowledged, respected, and accommodated, thereby encouraging greater tolerance and social cohesion.

The proposed solutions may be articulated through a set of recommendations directed toward the French government, public institutions, media organizations, and the wider French society. Government authorities and public institutions in France are encouraged to establish and strengthen more open, inclusive, and sustained dialogue with civil society, particularly concerning the experiences and challenges faced by Maghrebi Muslim women. Such dialogue is considered essential for promoting mutual understanding, reducing social prejudice, and fostering greater tolerance toward religious and cultural diversity within French society. At the

same time, it is important to develop a broader public understanding that Islamophobia should not be regarded merely as an individual opinion or personal expression, but rather as an ideology that can be rooted in racism and the marginalization of minority groups through physical, verbal, and symbolic forms of violence. In addition, the French government is expected to encourage all relevant ministries and public institutions to ensure that the rights of Maghrebi Muslim women are effectively protected and guaranteed, particularly their equal access to essential sectors such as healthcare, education, and employment. These measures are important to ensure that principles of equality and non-discrimination are implemented not only at the level of formal policy but also in the everyday lives of Muslim women in France.

France and Indonesia can both be regarded as examples of multicultural nations whose national identities are shaped by the principles of diversity, equality, and social cohesion. As previously discussed, French multicultural identity is reflected in the national ideals embodied in the principles of equality, liberty, and solidarity, which emphasize the equal position of citizens within society. A comparable dynamic can also be observed in Indonesia, where national identity is fundamentally rooted in Pancasila and the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). The recognition and acceptance of differences constitute an important element in strengthening Indonesia as a unified state while simultaneously reflecting its multicultural cultural identity. Although Indonesia upholds relatively strong principles of tolerance in relation to religion, social status, gender, race, and ethnicity, the process of integrating diverse groups into a common national identity remains subject to various forms of discrimination and social differentiation. Nevertheless, such differences are an inherent and unavoidable dimension of Indonesia's pluralistic character and, when managed inclusively, can contribute to enriching the diversity and strengthening the unity of the Indonesian nation.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, Islamophobia and restrictions on the use of the hijab in France cannot be understood solely as a religious issue; they are also linked to dynamics involving history, identity, politics, and the application of the principle of secularism (*laïcité*). The growth of the Muslim community, largely composed of individuals with Maghrebi and African immigrant backgrounds, has made Islam increasingly visible within the French social landscape. In this context, the presence of Muslims as a minority group intersects with constructions of national identity, perceptions of non-Western groups, and rising concerns regarding radicalism and terrorism. The history of Western Orientalism and various terrorist events, particularly the September 11, 2001 attacks and the series of terror attacks in France between 2015 and 2016, have reinforced stereotypes and prejudices against Muslims, thereby fueling the rise of Islamophobia.

Bans and restrictions on the hijab demonstrate that the issue extends beyond mere clothing choices; it has become a contested arena involving religious freedom, the identity of Muslim women, gender equality, social integration, public security, and France's secular identity. While the principle of *laïcité* is normatively intended to guarantee freedom of conscience and maintain state neutrality, its application regarding religious symbols creates tension when confronted with visible expressions of Islam in the public sphere. Muslim women—particularly those who wear the hijab and hail from Maghrebi communities—find themselves vulnerable to intersecting forms of discrimination based on their religious identity,

gender, and ethnic background. Consequently, restrictions on the hijab can be understood as an issue situated at the intersection of secularist policies and the right of Muslims to express their identity and practice their faith.

This study also highlights the tension between the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and the lived experiences of Muslim communities within French society. When the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity are applied without regard for the diverse identities and experiences of minority groups, policies that are formally universal can yield unequal outcomes. Therefore, addressing the issues of Islamophobia and hijab restrictions requires an approach that does not merely emphasize a uniform national identity but also acknowledges religious freedom, equality, human dignity, and diversity within a multicultural society. Strengthening dialogue among the government, public institutions, the media, Muslim communities, and civil society is crucial to reducing prejudice and ensuring that the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* are realized inclusively in public life. Future studies could further analyze the effectiveness of alternative policies and the firsthand experiences of Muslim women in navigating regulations and discriminatory practices in France.

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