

EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT 2023

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ (Eds)



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2023

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE IN 2023 Enes Bayraklı • Farid Hafez	7
ALBANIA Kristina Millona	71
AUSTRIA Farid Hafez	89
BELGIUM Amina Smits	123
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA Hikmet Karčić	149
BULGARIA Aziz Nazmi Şakir	171
CROATIA Nejra Kadić Meškić	193
DENMARK Lamies Nassri & Amani Hassani	213
ESTONIA Liina Laanpere	245
FINLAND Enrique Tessieri	259
FRANCE Kawtar Najib	285
GERMANY Fabian Goldmann	317
GREECE Ali Huseyinoglu, Alexandros Sakellariou	353
HUNGARY Dániel Vékony	377
IRELAND Louise Ryan, James Carr	397
ITALY Ugo Gaudino	419
KOSOVO Shan Karemani and Jeta Luboteni	439
NORTH MACEDONIA Mersiha Smailović	465
NORWAY Cora Alexa Døving	483
POLAND Ewa Górska	499
PORTUGAL Raimundo Gregoire	519
ROMANIA Adriana Cupcea	553
RUSSIA Alexandra Sopa	571
SERBIA Aida Salihović-Gušić	595
SLOVAKIA Jozef Lenč	631
SPAIN Sergio Gracia and Inés Bolaños Somoano	655
SWEDEN M. Çağrı Bilir	679
SWITZERLAND Nadia Lahdili	707
UNITED KINGDOM Aristotle Kallis	749

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www.islamophobiareport.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *European Islamophobia Report 2023 (EIR 2023)* highlights the pervasive denial and under-recognition of Islamophobia across Europe, despite its formal acknowledgment in the EU's anti-racism action plan 2020-2025. The report underscores how anti-Muslim racism manifests through systemic discrimination, political rhetoric, media narratives, and societal attitudes, exacerbated by geopolitical events such as the Gaza conflict.

Some of the **key findings** of the *EIR 2023* are the **denial and minimal recognition of Islamophobia**: Islamophobia remains unacknowledged by all European governments and the overwhelming majority of political parties, as the silence on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia (IDCI), established by the UN in 2022, reveals. At the same time, the war on Gaza has functioned as a **geopolitical catalyst of anti-Muslim racism** in Europe. European governments' reactions have intensified Islamophobic rhetoric and actions, framing pro-Palestinian solidarity as terrorism and challenging the agency of Muslims standing up for a ceasefire. Countries like Germany, France, and Denmark enforced restrictive measures, such as banning demonstrations and imposing fines on pro-Palestinian symbols. When far-right parties across Europe exploit Islamophobia for political gains, **political and institutional responses** by various European governments remain largely absent the condemnation of rising anti-Muslim hatred by international institutions like the UN and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has had little effect on member states' commitments. **Legal systems** in countries like France and Finland enforced controversial policies targeting Muslim practices, such as bans on religious attire. Court rulings varied, with some upholding discriminatory practices while others protected religious freedoms.

As for the **media's role in Islamophobia**, we have continued observing mainstream and far-right media perpetuating Islamophobic stereotypes, often dehumanizing Muslims and aligning with racist narratives. Social media saw a surge in anti-Muslim

lim content post-October 2023, amplifying disinformation and hate speech. One of the most important revelations in 2023 was the coverage by investigative reporters of the “**Abu Dhabi Secrets**,” an investigation that exposed how private intelligence firms facilitated smear campaigns against thousands of Muslims and people in favor of open societies, influencing public discourse and policy across Europe. The revelations showed how far-reaching and well-funded this global **Islamophobia network** is.

Anti-Muslim hate crimes spiked, especially following the Gaza war. Reports from countries like Norway, Spain, and Greece highlighted increased physical and verbal assaults on Muslims. **Discrimination against Muslims**, particularly **women** wearing religious attire, persisted in employment, education, and housing.

The **educational** sector remains crucial. Schools and academic institutions often perpetuated Islamophobia through discriminatory policies and revisionist histories, as seen in Kosovo and Serbia. National reports highlight how anti-Muslim narratives are embedded in national identity formation and policy frameworks.

In conclusion, the *EIR 2023* paints a grim picture of Islamophobia in Europe, highlighting systemic failures to address anti-Muslim racism effectively. Therefore, we, the editors, of the *European Islamophobia Report* call for robust political, legal, and societal interventions to combat this pervasive racist phenomenon.

Enes Bayraklı, Farid Hafez
Editors of *European Islamophobia Report*

THE STATE OF ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE IN 2023

ENES BAYRAKLI • FARID HAFEZ

Introduction: The Ongoing Misrecognition and Denial of Islamophobia in Europe

Alongside other supranational European institutions, the European Commission explicitly recognized anti-Muslim hatred as a form of racism in its “Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025”; yet, the fact remains that anti-Muslim hatred is not on the agenda of almost any of the EU member states.¹ Practically, Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism remains unrecognized, with its existence often denied by many European governments, political parties, institutions, journalists, and intellectuals. There are different strategies to deny the existence of Islamophobia: some outright deny its very existence, while others attempt to downplay its severity.

Leading Islamophobic figures and circles often apply conspiracy theories and claim that Islamophobia is a fabricated tool used by so-called Islamists to stifle legitimate criticism of Muslims and Islam. Others apply a strategy of terminology avoidance in order not to recognize or legitimize a discussion of Islamophobia. Instead of using terms like “Islamophobia” or “anti-Muslim racism,” milder phrases such as “anti-Muslim sentiment” or “prejudice” are often employed to obscure the inherent racism within Islamophobia which has systemic and institutional dimensions beyond the interpersonal level.

To address rising anti-Muslim racism globally and create awareness, the United Nations General Assembly in 2022 declared March 15 as the “International Day to Combat Islamophobia” (IDCI). This specific day was chosen to commemorate the

1. European Commission (2020), “A Union of Equality: EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025”, Brussels, 18.9.2020 COM(2020) 565 final https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/beb25da4-e6b9-459e-89f7-bcddb3a8f0c8_en?filename=a_union_of_equality_eu_action_plan_against_racism_2020_-2025_en.pdf. (Access date: November 14, 2024).

Christchurch attack which took place on March 15, 2019. As the editors of the *European Islamophobia Report* (EIR), we welcomed this decision as an important milestone in the combat against Islamophobia and hoped that it would be an important step in the legal and political recognition of this phenomenon. We also reminded readers of last year's report that the only dissenting voices in the UN General Assembly discussion on the IDCE were the speaker of the European Union alongside the representatives of France and India. This already foreshadowed the difficulty that a meaningful implementation of the IDCI would have in Europe.

One year following the initiation of the IDCI, we see that EU member states are largely reluctant to give it any meaning. In 2023, among the 28 countries covered in this report only one European state, i.e. Spain referred to the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The rest did not observe IDCI in any way, not even in a press release, let alone an event that commemorated the day or discussed how best to confront Islamophobia in the future.

This shows that we are clearly at the beginning of a long struggle in the recognition of Islamophobia. One of the ways in which we can measure the political recognition of Islamophobia is to track and list the countries, political parties, and NGOs that observe the IDCI on March 15 each year.

In 2023, only the Spanish Government observed the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. As a positive outlier, the city of Turin, which is led by a center-left administration, signed an agreement on the IDCI with the representatives of 21 local Muslim associations valid from 2023 to 2026 that included the inclusion of local Muslim groups in the fabric of the city by strengthening mutual knowledge alongside creating more awareness about anti-Muslim racism.

If we turn our attention to political parties, we can see that only in a few countries referred to the IDCI. In the cases of Austria and Germany, two female Muslim MPs from the Green Party commemorated the IDCI alongside policy claims to address Islamophobia in their respective countries. Interestingly, both Green parties were part of a coalition government at that time. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Naša Stranka (Our Party) published a statement on the IDCI. In France, the leftist La France Insoumise published a tweet. In the United Kingdom, an event was organized in the parliament, co-hosted by the Muslim Labour MP Afzal Khan, and joined by politicians from across the political spectrum. In other countries, the IDCI was ridiculed and criticized: in France, the IDCI was criticized by the media; in Belgium, the far-right political party Vlaams Belang criticized the IDCI; and in Denmark, a former MP negatively commented on the observance day. In the below chart, the value -1 refers a political party (or potentially a city council) openly questioning the IDCI and the positive value 1 refers to political parties and city councils drawing on the IDCI to push against Islamophobia.

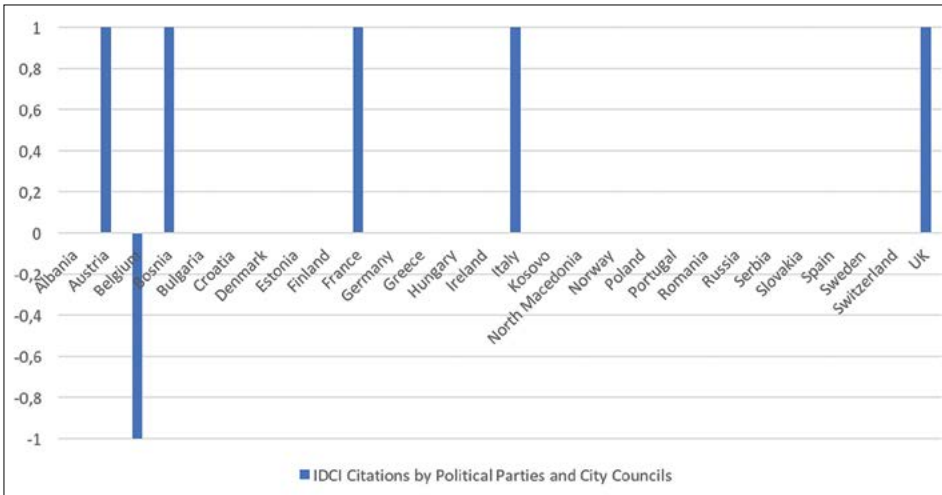


Figure 1: IDCI Citations by Political Parties and City Councils in Europe

Apart from governments and political parties, a handful of NGOs across Europe actively participated in the observance of the IDCI. In particular, these were the Center for Danish Muslim Relations (CEDA), the UN Association, and Minhaj-ul-Quran in Denmark; various NGOs including news coverage in Norway; the Muslim Association of Greece; the Malmö Mosque event in Sweden; Salam Lab in Poland; and the Muslim Council of Britain and the Aziz Foundation in the UK.

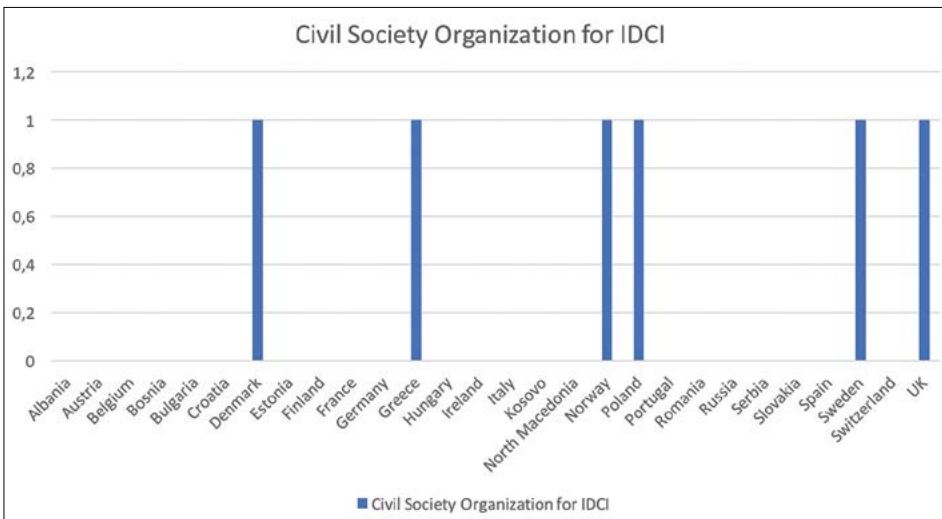


Figure 2: Civil Society Organization for IDCI

On the other hand, the IDCI was observed in varying degrees by international institutions such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the UN. The Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Antisemitism, anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes Alexandre Gues-

sel, published an article on March 15, 2023 on the website of Council of Europe, where he stressed that one needs to acknowledge the problem of Islamophobia. He wrote, “Addressing any problem should start by acknowledging its existence and by analyzing ourselves first of all.” He stated that the declaration of March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia is an important development and “a resolute step of the international community to fighting anti-Muslim racism and hatred as well as all forms of discrimination against Muslims.”²

The UN observed the IDCI with a special event at the General Assembly Hall in New York City, where speakers upheld the need for concrete action in the face of rising hatred, discrimination, and violence against Muslims. UN Secretary-General António Guterres spoke and drew attention to discrimination towards Muslims.³

During a special event organized by Pakistan and the UN General Assembly to mark the IDCI, the Turkish ambassador to the UN, Sedat Onal, emphasized the growing danger posed by Islamophobia. Onal stated that it has become a “major threat to democracy” and noted an increase in the desecration of the Qur’an and attacks on mosques. He described Islamophobia as a “real and rising threat,” pointing out that Muslims are facing systemic restrictions on religious freedom, hate crimes, and other manifestations of discrimination. He further remarked that this trend aligns with the surge of populism and polarization influencing political narratives in many countries, fueling racist and xenophobic tendencies.⁴

Courtney Austrian, Chargé d’Affaires of the US Mission to the OSCE, delivered a statement to the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna on behalf of Iceland, the United Kingdom, and the United States underscoring the importance of religious freedom and advocating for individuals’ right to live according to their beliefs. She stated, “On this day, we call attention to people around the world who are harassed, detained, imprisoned, or even killed for identifying as Muslim, or being perceived as Muslim, practicing Islam, or converting to Islam.” Austrian also referred to the speech of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Beliefs at the UN Human Rights Council in 2021, in which the Rapporteur Ahmad Shaheed cautioned that the “institutional suspicion of Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim has escalated to epidemic proportions.” Austrian highlighted the fact that the hate crime report by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) clearly demonstrates that “anti-Muslim threats and violence, including attacks against people and on property, continue to be a problem across the OSCE region.”

2. Council of Europe (2023), “A Europe of fraternité”, Strasbourg, 15.03.2023, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/antisemitic-anti-muslim-hatred-hate-crimes/-/a-europe-of-fraternité> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

3. United Nations (2023), “UN observes first International Day against Islamophobia”, 10.03.2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134462> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

4. Rabia İclal Turan, “Islamophobia ‘major threat to democracy’, Turkish envoy to UN”, Anadolu Agency, Washington, 11.03.2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/islamophobia-major-threat-to-democracy-turkish-envoy-to-un/2842661> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

2023: A Fateful Year for Muslims and the Palestine Issue

No other political development has shaped the life of Muslims in 2023 as much as the war in Palestine. While Palestine and Israel are primarily not a religious issue, part of the discourse has been to paint it as such and make the attack on Israel and the genocide of Palestinians into a war between two religious groups. In this manner, the support or silence towards the Israeli aggression on Palestinian land and people becomes highly intertwined with Islamophobia, given the legitimization of the anti-Palestinian discourse is heavily based on the equation of Palestine and Islam that eradicates the diversity of the Palestinian experience including its Christian and Jewish heritage as well as its diverse political and social structures.

With the rising voices against the genocide in Gaza also coming from Muslims in European countries, the political response by various governments has put Muslims into an even more securitized position. The European Commission's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) report "Muslims – Selected findings" revealed an ever-high spread of anti-Muslim racism, and declared that "[t]he situation has deteriorated after October 7, 2023 with an increase of threats and hatred against Muslim communities in the European Union."⁵

Hence, it is with little surprise to see an unfolding of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim positions throughout Europe. Germany's unconditional support of Israel manifested in the concept of "Staatsräson" has probably received the most coverage by Western media for its cancellation of various authors and crackdown on Jewish and Palestinian diaspora in Berlin and beyond for calling for a ceasefire. As Fabian Goldmann's report on Germany in this volume highlights, those publicly criticizing Israel's war in Gaza faced unprecedented media and political backlash, often using Islamophobic, racist, anti-Palestinian, and occasionally anti-Semitic rhetoric. Cultural figures, including many Jewish artists, were particularly targeted, resulting in significant repercussions such as loss of contracts, funding, reputation, and employment. Additionally, raids and bans on Muslim organizations have sparked criticism. The largest operation took place on November 16, when more than 800 officers raided 54 locations belonging to Muslim individuals and organizations across seven states. While even before October 7, human rights organizations such as Amnesty International had criticized Germany for violating the right to assembly, citing the prohibition of Palestinian demonstrations,⁶ on November 9, several members of the UN

5. European Commission (2023), "Combating anti-Muslim hatred", https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-anti-muslim-hatred_en (Access date: November 14, 2024).

6. Protect The Protest, Amnesty International, 2023, <https://viewer.mapme.com/ca3f817e-c8cb-4fd2-83f2-910f0c7fd3c1> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

Human Rights Council criticized the country for its restrictions on pro-Palestinian demonstrations.⁷ On December 6, human rights organization Civicus downgraded Germany's freedom rights rating from "open" to "narrowed" for the first time, citing repressions against climate and Palestinian activists.⁸

Similarly, in France, as Kawtar Najib outlines in her report in this volume, the French state views pro-Palestinian solidarity as endorsing terrorism and anti-Semitism. As a result, it banned initial demonstrations via ministerial directive and imposed fines of €135 for displaying items such as keffiyehs, certain attire, flags, or slogans associated with Palestinian solidarity.⁹

In her report on Denmark in this volume, Lamies Nassri discusses how the prime minister announced an investigation into whether pro-Palestinian protests promote terrorism and whether police and prosecutors should take action. Subsequently, a letter was sent to Justice Minister Peter Hummelgaard highlighting "disturbing behavior in Denmark fueled by the conflict" and expressing concern that certain individuals have not adopted Danish values, conflating issues of the so-called Muslim Question with Palestine.¹⁰ In December, police conducted a significant anti-terrorism operation at multiple locations in Denmark, involving a prominent Danish-Palestinian charity worker.¹¹ While the operation was carried out afar from the public, Israel's Mossad claimed involvement.¹² In January 2024, the police indicated that the case has connections to Hamas, although the precise nature of these links remains unclear. In total, 32 cases have been registered in the police districts as of December 15 2023 for public approval of terrorist acts.¹³

As highlighted in Aziz Nazmi Şakir's report on Bulgaria in this volume, the Sofia Municipality prohibited a procession organized by the "Palestinian Committee for the Defense of Jerusalem in Bulgaria." Despite this ban, a protest took place near the National Palace of Culture in central Sofia. The ban, imposed by mayor Yordanka Fandakova, was based on information from the State Agency for National Security

7. Sarah Marsh, "Germany accused of silencing pro-Palestinian voices at U.N. rights forum", Reuters, November 9, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/germany-accused-silencing-pro-palestinian-voices-un-rights-forum-2023-11-09/> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

8. "Civicus monitor: Germany's Human Rights Record Slips After Targeting Of Climate Activists", CIVICUS; December 6, 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/presscentre/germany/> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

9. Mawad D. and Brennan E., "France bans all pro-Palestinian protests", *CNN*, October 12, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/12/europe/france-ban-pro-palestinian-intl/index.html> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

10. Mette Frederiksen, København, den 9. November 2023, <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20231/almdel/REU/bilag/43/2777893.pdf> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

11. DR (2024), "Analytiker: Hamas-kobling i mørklagt terrrorsag rejser flere centrale spørgsmål", Danmark, 09.01.2024, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/analytiker-hamas-kobling-i-moerklagt-terrorsag-rejser-flere-centrale-spoergsmaal> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

12. X,PrimeMinisterofIsrael (@IsraeliPM), 14.12.2023, 18:03, <https://x.com/IsraeliPM/status/1735314600877334936> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

13. Af Anette Pedersen, "Mand tiltalt for billigelse af terror", Anklage Myndigheden, København, 18.12.2023, <https://anklagemyndigheden.dk/da/mand-tiltalt-billigelse-af-terror> (Access date: November 14, 2024).

and the Ministry of the Interior. The Prosecutor's Office pledged to take a firm stance to maintain public order, citing increased instances of hate speech and "calls for radical actions based on religious and ethnic grounds, including radical Islam."¹⁴ Despite evidence of the severe humanitarian impact of Israel's practices, including carpet bombing, starvation, denial of water, and ethnic cleansing, on Palestinians, no political party in Bulgaria has condemned the civilian casualties in Gaza, which just shows the level of dehumanization of Palestinians that has been cultivated by invented lies such as the forty beheaded babies.¹⁵ A primary example of this dehumanization is the media coverage by the Springer-owned *Die Welt*, which ran the headlines "There Are No Innocent Civilians in Gaza."¹⁶ As Fabian Goldmann remarks in his report on Germany in this volume, only two weeks earlier the newspaper had also published an interview with the headline "Free Palestine Is the New Heil Hitler," making people who stand up for peace and freedom the new fascists.¹⁷

In his report on Hungary in this volume, Dániel Vékony shows that while Islamophobia as a political tool of mobilization for electoral reasons and campaigning was not central in 2023, the war in Gaza exposed the intersection of anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim processes. The government effectively banned protests that called for an end to the war on Gaza. This intersection manifests even in the cultural realm as the example of the soccer player Mohamed Remili who was called a "Hamas bomber" by fans during a game demonstrates.¹⁸ In Albania, Kristina Millona reveals in her report that when the Muslim community tried to organize peaceful public assemblies against the Israeli war crimes in Gaza, their request was rejected by the authorities several times.

As the British Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) has revealed in a study about media coverage following October 7, in the period between October and November 2023, news outlets were three times less likely to present Palestinian perspectives on the conflict compared to Israeli ones. Coverage of atrocities displayed significant anti-Muslim bias, with emotive terms like "slaughter" or "massacre" being

14. "Столична община забрани шествие в подкрепа на Палестина" ("Sofia Municipality Bans March in Support of Palestine"), 13 October 2023, in: <https://www.mediapool.bg/stolichna-obshtina-zabrani-shestvie-v-podkrepa-na-palestina-news352260.html> (Access date: 1 April 2024).

15. Assma Maad, William Audureau and Samuel Forey, "40 beheaded babies: Deconstructing the rumor at the heart of the information battle between Israel and Hamas," *Le Monde*, 3 April 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2024/04/03/40-beheaded-babies-the-itinerary-of-a-rumor-at-the-heart-of-the-information-battle-between-israel-and-hamas_6667274_8.html (Access date: November 14, 2024).

16. "Ich habe die Hölle erlebt. Es gibt keine unschuldigen Zivilisten in Gaza", *Die Welt*, December 30, 2023, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article249288408/Befreite-Hamas-Geisel-Ich-habe-die-Hoelle-erlebt-Es-gibt-keine-unschuldigen-Zivilisten-in-Gaza.html> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

17. "Free Palestine ist das neue Heil Hitler", *Die Welt*, December 12, 2023, <https://www.welt.de/podcasts/welt-talks/article248996436/Mathias-Doepfner-im-Gespraech-mit-Rapper-Ben-Salomo-ueber-den-wachsenden-Antisemitismus.html> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

18. "Börszine miatt 'robbantós hamászoszták' a magyar Remilit Csornán", *Magyar Hang*, 31 October 2023, <https://hang.hu/sport/robbantos-hamaszos-migrans-kiabaltak-a-magyar-remilinek-158939>, (Access date: 2 November 2023).

used eleven times more frequently to describe Israeli victims than Palestinian ones.¹⁹ In the age of peak social media and rapid online sharing, stories such as the alleged beheading of forty babies by Hamas spread quickly, being promoted by news outlets and circulated by individuals, groups, and bots across all social media platforms.²⁰ This story made its way into major newspapers and was even cited by U.S. President Joe Biden. The narrative was also picked up by European social media users and media outlets,²¹ reinforcing existing Islamophobic stereotypes about alleged left-wing pro-Palestinian activists who purportedly support the violence of Hamas and advocate for the elimination of Israel.²²

The European Civic Forum (ECF), a pan-European network of more than 100 associations and NGOs across 30 European countries, published a report on this worrying development in Europe. The ECF criticized the anti-Palestinian measures of many European countries. The report highlighted several observations including “undue restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression on those standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people, in violation of international human rights standards, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and rule of law principles,” the “increase in hate speech and hate crimes targeting both Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe,” and the misuse of the justification of these measures “in the name of fighting anti-Semitism,” while “Jewish organizations and activists critical of Israeli policies have been silenced and marginalised, and at times been accused of not being representative of Jewish people in Europe.”²³ The three key trends highlighted by the ECF were the following:

- Disproportionate measures enforced on protests, including pre-emptive banning based on risk to “public order” and “security”
- Protesters subject to intimidation, harassment, and arbitrary detentions
- Legitimate criticism of Israeli authorities conflated with anti-Semitism and “apology for terrorism,” and used to silence Palestinian and Jewish activists and organizations.²⁴

19. “CfMM Report Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24”, Centre For Media Monitoring, 06.03.2024, <https://cfmm.org.uk/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/> (Access date: 15 November 2023).

20. “Hamas Slaughtered Babies and Children in Kfar Aza Kibbutz Massacre”, *The Telegraph*, 10.10.2023 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/10/10/babies-killed-hamas-attacks-kibbutz-israel/> (Access date: 15 November 2023).

21. “Fake UK News Reports about Gaza to Be Reported to Press Regulator”, Islam Channel, 3.4.2023, <https://islamchannel.tv/fake-uk-news-reports-about-gaza-to-be-reported-to-press-regulator/> (Access date: 15 November 2023).

22. “Appeasing Hamas: Why We Need Muscular Liberalism”, *The Article*, 16.10.2023, <https://www.thearticle.com/appeasing-hamas-why-we-need-muscular-liberalism> (Access date: 15 November 2023).

23. European Civic Forum and Civic Space Watch (2024), “Civic Space Report 2024: Escalating Restrictions on Organizations and Individuals Expressing Solidarity With The Palestinian People”, <https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CIVIC-SPACE-REPORT-2024-RESTRICTIONS-ON-PALESTINE-SOLIDARITY.pdf> (Access date: 15 November 2023).

24. European Civic Forum and Civic Space Watch (2024), “Civic Space Report 2024: Escalating Restrictions on Organizations and Individuals Expressing Solidarity With The Palestinian People”, <https://civic-forum.eu/>

While several supranational institutions already in October 2023 issued statements warning of an increase of anti-Muslim racism, recalling that Muslim persons and representatives have become targets of physical and verbal attacks, feeling more unsafe and threatened, both online and offline, no protection of civil liberties was observed. On November 29, 2023, “Coordinators, Special Representatives, Envoy and Ambassadors on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred and Discrimination” published a joint statement, declaring,

In the current geopolitical context, hate crimes, hate speech, and threats to civil liberties and freedom of peaceful assembly have multiplied worldwide. Muslim and Jewish communities have become targets of physical and verbal attacks. ... International organizations have recognized that discrimination and hatred of Muslims following terrorist attacks can rise to epidemic proportions. We are deeply concerned with such developments and express solidarity with our fellow Muslim citizens.²⁵

Anti-Muslim Hate Crime

The war on Gaza has left its mark on anti-Muslim hate crime in Europe. In her report on Norway in this volume, Cora Alexa Døving writes that Muslim organizations have seen “an increase in hate speech relating to the Hamas attack of October 7 2023 [...] coming especially from pro-Israel organizations.” In Spain, anti-Muslim

wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CIVIC-SPACE-REPORT-2024-RESTRICTIONS-ON-PALESTINE-SOLIDARITY.pdf (Access date: 15 November 2023).

25. The statement was signed by Reem ALABALI-RADOVAN, Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor, Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism, Germany; Luise AMSTBERG, Federal Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance, Germany; Rabin BALDEWSINGH, National Coordinator against Discrimination and Racism in the Netherlands; Andrea BENZO, Counsellor, Special Envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the protection of religious freedom and for interfaith dialogue, Italy; Delphine BORIONE, Ambassador for Human Rights, France; Beatriz Micaela CARRILLO DE LOS REYES, Director General for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination and Against Racism at the Ministry of Equality, Spain; Amira ELGHAWABY, Canada’s Special Representative on combatting Islamophobia; Márk Aurél ÉRSZEGI, Special Advisor for Religion and Diplomacy Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary; Simon GEISSBÜHLER, Ambassador, Head of Peace and Human Rights Division, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland; Karen GRØNLUND ROGNE, Acting Special Representative for Freedom of Religion and Belief, Denmark; Alexandre GUESSEL, Special Representative of the Secretary General on antisemitic, anti-Muslim and other forms of religious intolerance and hate crimes, Council of Europe; Rashad HUSSAIN, U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom; Véronique JOOSTEN, Human Rights Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgium; Marion LALISSE, European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred; Øystein LYNGROTH, Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, and head of the IHRA delegation, Norway; Luka MESEC, Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia; Michaela MOUA, European Commission Coordinator on combating racism; Regina POLAK, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination; David Fernandez PUYANA, Ambassador, Permanent Observer of the UN University for Peace to the UN Office and International Organisations in Geneva and Permanent Delegate of UPeace to UNESCO; Ulrika SUNDBERG, Ambassador, Sweden’s Special Envoy to the OIC, Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue; Agnese VILDE, Director of the International Organisations and Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/t%C3%BCrkiye/joint-statement-coordinators-special-representatives-envoy-and-ambassadors-combating-anti-muslim_en?s=230

hate speech made up 35% of all hate speech statistics and was primarily monitored in November and December 2023, probably in the context of the war on Palestine. In Greece, the Racist Violence Recording Network documented 89 attacks on immigrants, refugees, or asylum-seekers based on ethnic origin, religion, and/or skin color in 2023.²⁶ Ali Huseyinoglu and Alexandros Sakellariou reveal in their report on Greece that many Muslim spaces were also targeted in 2023. One of the many examples outlined in their report took place in September, when following the wildfires in Thrace, a conspiracy theory circulated claiming that immigrants were responsible for it, resulting in the Muslim cemetery of Polyanthos in Rodopi being vandalized.

In some countries, there seems to be an increased awareness among victims of hate crime, so that the numbers are increasing in comparison to prior years, as Nadia Lahdili reports for Switzerland, where the state authorities registered 1,058 cases of racial discrimination including 62 incidents of anti-Muslim hate crime.

An example of a specific anti-Muslim hate crime comes from Kosovo where a person posted a TikTok video threatening to bomb the Great Mosque of Mitrovica.²⁷ In the video, the perpetrator, who belongs to the Christian minority, referred to Muslim Albanians in a derogatory manner. He was arrested and pled guilty to the crime of publicly spreading hatred against a religious group.²⁸

In her report on France in this volume, Kawtar Najib has highlighted the killing of Nahel Merzouk, a young man, in the context of a simple traffic stop that could have had a completely different outcome, stating that there was no violence on the part of Nahel or his two friends aged 17 and 14 years old who were passengers. She understands his murder at the hands of French police as the murder of “a racialized Muslim body, ... a killable body that a police agent representing the French state could target.” Najib shows that the police union Alliance came to the defense of the murderers, stating they were at war with “nuisibles et hordes sauvages” (pests and wild hordes), a dehumanizing reference to racialized Black, Arab, and Muslim bodies in the French *banlieues*. Revolts and protests followed the killing for several days in June and July 2023. During these protests, other racialized men were also killed by the police²⁹ and others suffered physical deformations following shots.³⁰ Some lost an eye and a man

26. Racist Violence Recording Network (2023), “Annual Report 2023”, https://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2023-RVRN-Annual-Report_eng-v_fn.pdf (Access date: 15 November 2024).

27. “Photo + video - Muslims are threatened with mass murder/ The young man from Kosovo hangs out with Nikola Xhufka”, CNA, 09.09.2023, <https://www.cna.al/english/aktualitet/foto-video-kercenon-me--masive-myslimanet-i-riu-nga-kosova-shoq-i375703> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

28. “Mitrovicasi që kërcënoi për sulm terrorist në një Xhami në Mitrovicë, denohet nga gjykata”, Vezhguesi, 28.10.2023, <https://vezhguesi.com/mitrovicasi-qe-kercenoi-per-sulm-terrorist-ne-nje-xhami-ne-mitrovice-denohet-nga-gjykata/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

29. Kazib A., “Marche silencieuse en hommage à Nahel ce samedi à Nanterre”, *X*, June 27, 2024. <https://x.com/AnasseKazib/status/1806334173168259582>

30. Mediapart, “Violences policières: trois mois après Nahel, des victimes témoignent”, *YouTube*, September 26, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQHcBQXnlSQ>

lost a part of his skull which had to be removed for his survival. This episode, which became the cover page of this year's report, is characteristic of the extent of dehumanization and criminalization of postcolonial populations in a metropole of a major European country. The episode was sparked by state violence and led to the arrest of 3,200 individuals (including children), 1,056 of whom were sentenced to prison.³¹

The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies has measured attitudes towards Muslims in three different years: 2017, 2022, and 2024. One-third of the population sample (33%) supports the statements "Muslims pose a threat to Norwegian culture" and "Muslims do not fit into modern Western society" (39%) and 26% support the statement "Muslims are more violent than others." The survey also shows that 10% of the population sample supports the statement "Considering recent terrorist attacks, harassment and violence against Muslims are justifiable." However, a solid majority (62%) of the population sample supports the statement "Muslims are good Norwegian citizens." Of relevance for the end of the year 2023 is the following statement from the latest survey: 34.7% fully or partially agree with the statement "Hamas' terrorist attack on 7 October has made me more negative towards Muslims in general."³²

In the days immediately following the October 7 attack, anti-Muslim statements made online increased forty times in the UK.³³ Examples of anti-Muslim acts intersecting with the post-October 7 era include a man repeatedly shouting "Hamas terrorist" at a Muslim woman on the street or Muslims being told to "f*** off back to Palestine" or called "bombers" for expressing support for Palestine.³⁴ In his report on the UK, Aristotle Kallis gives the example of a cyclist who threw a petrol can with "IDF" (Israel Defense Forces) scrawled on it into the car park of the Oxford Mosque and Islamic Cultural Society on October 28, 2023. Kallis has shown in his report that compared to the years before, various police forces in the UK documented a rise incidents and offences. The Metropolitan Police in London, for instance, showed 58 anti-Muslim incidents and 54 anti-Muslim offences in London between September 29

31. Desmonceaux J., "Death of Nahel: 40,000 police officers and gendarmes mobilized this Thursday evening, including 5,000 in Paris", *BFMTV*, June 29, 2023. Death of Nahel: 40,000 police officers and gendarmes mobilized this Thursday evening, including 5,000 in Paris (www.bfmtv-com.translate.google); Le Figaro and AFP, "Riots: more than 1,000 convictions, 600 people imprisoned, according to Dupond-Moretti", *Le Figaro*, July 17, 2023. Riots: more than 1000 convictions, 600 people imprisoned, according to Dupond-Moretti (www-le-figaro-fr.translate.google). Seventy percent of those sentenced to prison are serving their sentence, while the remainder were granted conditional discharge.

32. HL-senterets holdningsundersøkelse 2022 - HL-senteret (hlsenteret.no)

33. Hannah Rose and Zahed Amanullah, "43-Fold Increase in Anti-Muslim YouTube Comments Following Hamas' October 7 Attack", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 19.12.2023, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/43-fold-increase-in-anti-muslim-youtube-comments-following-hamas-october-7-attack/ (Access date: 15 November 2024).

34. "Mosque Calls for New Security Measures after Spate of Reported Attacks", Bournemouth Echo, 21.9.2023, <https://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/news/23803126.bournemouth-mosque-calls-new-security-attacks> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

and October 12 of 2023, an 87% rise in incidents and a 58.8% rise in offences compared to the same period the previous year. Non-governmental watch bodies also recorded an increase. Tell Mama speaks of 291 cases of anti-Muslim hate between October 7 and 19, a sixfold increase from the same period in 2022.³⁵ This trend continued in the remaining months of 2023, reaching 1,432 by mid-December, a figure that was seven times higher than in the same period in 2022 and the largest rise ever recorded by their service.³⁶ Tell Mama especially noted a tenfold increase in cases at schools and universities.³⁷

Knowledge and Education

Educational institutions are conventionally seen as places promoting the intellectual empowerment of children and youth. Beyond the many problematic aspects of the regulation of Muslim clothing in several European countries, schools themselves are oftentimes not experienced as a liberating space. In 2023, the Flemish Student Umbrella (Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel), which represents student councils and officially voices secondary school students in Flanders, published a report titled “De stem van 20.000 scholieren” (The Voice of 20,000 Secondary School Students). This report offers a detailed account of students’ experiences and perceptions regarding various aspects of their school life in Belgium. The findings revealed that nearly half of the students (47%) had witnessed acts of racism in their secondary schools, while 18% reported experiencing racism themselves. Among students with non-European parents, the rate was notably higher, with nearly half (49%) indicating personal experiences of racism during their secondary education.³⁸

Several authors in this volume problematize how Islamophobia is deeply entrenched in the nation-building process of several countries that build on the idea of representing a European wall against Muslims entering the continent. As Shan Karemani and Jeta Luboteni reveal in their report on Kosovo, academics use “a historical revisionism which places Serbia on the same side as a racialized ‘Islam,’ in order to place themselves [Albanian Islamophobes] on the same side as Europeanness/Whiteness—at all costs.” Thus, anti-Muslim narratives and myths are perpetuated. The authors give examples in their report of how the Kosovar-Albanian historian Frashër Demaj

35. “British Muslims ‘too Scared to Leave Home’ as Islamophobic Incidents Skyrocket 365%”, *Independent*, 4.3.2024, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/islamophobia-britain-report-israel-palestine-b2499913.html> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

36. “A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate”, TELL MAMA, 21.7.2023, <https://tellmamauk.org/a-decade-of-anti-muslim-hate/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

37. “Punched and Told to Leave Britain’: Islamophobia Reaches Record High”, ITV News, 20.7.2023, https://www.itv.com/news/2023-07-20/punched-and-told-to-leave-britain-islamophobia-reaches-record-high?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1689879393 (Access date: 15 November 2024).

38. Kelly Van Droogenbroeck, “Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel rapporteert alarmerende cijfers over racisme: ‘Ik moest een bord met droge spaghettislierten eten’”, *De Morgen*, 13.11.2023, <https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/vlaamse-scholierenkoepel-rapporteert-alarmerende-cijfers-over-racisme-ik-moest-een-bord-met-droge-spaghettislierten-eten-be23bbca/> (Access date: 28 June 2024).

presented an Islamophobic narrative suggesting that Serbs, the historical oppressors of Albanians, benefit from a secret plan to make Albanians more Muslim. Similarly, the historian Belisar Jezerci made claims that “800 mosques in Kosovo are financed by Serbia,”³⁹ thus suggesting that Islam is continuously an outside force endangering Kosovo’s national unity. As Aida Salihović-Gušić shows in her report on Serbia in this volume, one-sided and false historical narratives from the wars of the 1990s are used to fuel Islamophobic sentiments and the glorifying of war criminals goes hand in hand with a revision of history that feeds and perpetuates anti-Muslim narratives, which are instrumental for far-right nationalists in Serbia. An example of how Islamophobia is cultivated comes from the following story: when two Serbian students from the University of Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina were suspended for glorifying the convicted war criminal General Ratko Mladić, they were awarded scholarships to continue their studies in the capital city of Serbia, Belgrade.⁴⁰ This decision was not only politically supported by the ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Serbia (an ethnic Serb), but also embraced by the director of the Serbian Security Information Agency.⁴¹

In Bulgaria, Aziz Nazmi Şakir highlights that the “Georgi Stoykov Rakovski” Military Academy in Sofia accepted a PhD thesis titled “Social Aspects and Prevention of Radicalization among Roma in Pazardzhik and Plovdiv Regions” foreseeing a major conflict between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority in the country without objections. The author problematizes especially the Muslim Roma community in Bulgaria and what she calls their “radicalization.”

Maybe one of the most powerful examples of how academic institutions with a proximity to the state are used to legitimize a state crackdown on free speech is the Russian example of the Laboratory of Destructology at Moscow State Linguistic University. “Destructology” is conceptualized as a form of applied science that aims to investigate “dangerous destructive entities: extremist and terrorist organizations, psychocults and non-religious sects; totalitarian sects and the sphere of magical services; suicidal games and hobbies, deadly youth subcultures and medical dissidence.”⁴² The laboratory has frequently analyzed materials related to Islam. Members of the Laboratory of Destructology including when it published an expert analysis for the detain-

39. “800 xhami në Kosovë financohen nga Serbia”, flet historiani që u kthye në Katolik – Shqipëria Live - Top Channel (top-channel.tv), 10.05.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHzcQVAKbEQ> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

40. See: Sramotan Postupak, “Srbija studentice koje su veličale Mladića nagradila stipendijom i nastavkom studija u Beogradu”, Klix Vijesti, 15.07.2023, <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/srbija-studentice-koje-su-velicale-mladica-nagradila-stipendijom-i-nastavkom-studija-u-beogradu/230715039> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

41. See: “AMBASADOR BiH U SRBIJI PODRŽAO VULINA: Vranješ: Republika Srpska i srpski narod dobro znaju šta je nepravda!”, Kurir.rs, 27.07.2023, <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4206324/ambasador-bih-u-srbiji-se-podrzao-i-zahvalio-se-vulinu-vranjes-rs-i-srpski-narod-dobro-znaju-sta-je-nepravda> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

42. Moscow State Linguistic University, “Laboratory of Destructology”, <https://linguanet.ru/proektnaya-deyatelnost/laboratoriya-destrukologii/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

ment of playwrights Svetlana Petriichuk and Yevgeniya Berkovich, as our anonymous author in her report on Russia details in this volume.

Politics

In Italy, where a far-right coalition is now governing again, this time under the leadership of the post-fascist Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia), Islamophobia gets displayed on both local and national levels. Following a local event that problematized the sharing of halal menus for Muslim students in schools in Lodi near Milan, the local branch of Forza Nuova displayed a banner with the slogan "Italy is Christian, never Muslim" (*Italia Cristiana, Mai Musulmana*).⁴³ Criminal justice scholar and author of the Italy report Ugo Gaudino mentions a series of policies that are attempted to be implemented by the far-right government: a new law regulating the management of mosques, infamously dubbed the "Anti-Mosques" Draft Law, which was suggested by the Brothers of Italy, and the burkini ban set by the North League mayor of the Northeastern town of Monfalcone near Trieste.

In their report on Spain, Sergio Gracia and Inés Bolaños Somoano outline that competing extreme right-wing parties engage in a race to weaponize Islamophobia. The far-right camp uses its Islamophobic ideology in every way possible and entangles it with its culture war crusade against anything questioning its ideology. When protesting the government's decisions regarding the Catalan amnesty in front of the Socialist Party's headquarters, sympathizers of the radical right party Vox and its youth Revuelta chanted slogans such as "Christian Spain, not Muslim!",⁴⁴ thereby marking the left and Islam as its natural political enemy. This is supported by a media discourse that invents "The danger of Islam and 'wokism.'"⁴⁵ The authors also hint to developments where leftist social movements such as Front Obrero embrace an Islamophobic agenda, blaming Islam for social maladies and attempting to decrease Muslim visibility in the public space.

While in Greece, the radical right-wing Elliniki Lissi (Hellenic Solution) was the main driver of Islamophobia, in contrast to previous years, the authors of the report on Greece have registered no attacks coming from the Greek Orthodox Metropolis. In contrast, the latter spoke out against an incident where a French citizen entered a mosque and tore apart a copy of the Qur'an.⁴⁶ At the same time, formations of new

43. "LODI Il caso della carne halal, blitz di Forza Nuova nella notte", *il Cittadino*, 28.01.2023, https://www.ilcittadino.it/stories/lodi/lodi-il-caso-della-carne-halal-blitz-forza-nuova-nella-notte-o_84544_96/ (Access date: 15 November 2024).

44. Alberto Ortiz, "Cánticos racistas en la manifestación contra la amnistía de Ferraz: 'España cristiana, nunca musulmana'", *ElDiario.es*, 08.11.2023, https://www.eldiario.es/politica/ultima-hora-negociaciones-investidura-pedro-sanchez-directo_6_10666473_1104172.html (Access date: 15 November 2024).

45. Irene González, "El peligro del Islam y lo woke", *Vozpópuli*, 01.02.2023, <https://www.vozpopuli.com/opinion/peligro-islam-woke.html> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

46. "Xanthi: A 64 year old French citizen who ripped apart the Quran is transferred to the district attorney", *flash.gr*, 16 June 2023, <https://www.flash.gr/greece/2121251/ksanthi-ston-eisaggelea-odigeitai-64xronos-gallos-pou->

political parties and youth movements emerged that connect a religious agenda with Islamophobia, including Elliniki Orthodoxi Neolaia (Greek Orthodox Youth) or the religious fundamentalist party Niki (Victory). Elliniki Lissi posed a parliamentary question to the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, and to the Minister of Citizen Protection concerning “the operation of illegal mosques in Athens,” labeling a specific mosque as “a national threat.”⁴⁷ Besides Elliniki Lissi, other radical right-wing political parties espousing anti-Muslim views have emerged including Niki (Victory) and Spartiates (The Spartans), which got several seats in the National Parliament in 2023.

Sociologist of law Ewa Górka reminds us in her report on Poland that it is not only the right-leading Law and Justice (PiS) party, which governed Poland from 2014 until December 2023, that toyed with Islamophobia. During the election campaign in late 2023, PiS’s contender and leader of the Civic Coalition, who finally won the elections, used anti-Muslim mobilization to put pressure on the PiS-led government leading to the withdrawal of a new visa regulation which would have simplified the procedure for obtaining work visas for citizens of 21 countries, including several Muslim-majority ones.⁴⁸

When in power, far-right political parties implement authoritarian policies. In Finland, as Enrique Tessieri shows in his report, the far-right PS Justice Minister Leena Meri dismantled two ministerial committees that were supposed to reform the penal code and strengthen the independence of the judiciary.⁴⁹

As the legal expert and author of the Estonia report Liina Laanpere shows, centrist-right parties such as the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) disseminate their anti-Muslim views beyond their election campaigns, exemplifying the deep-seated nature of anti-Muslim ideologies.

For Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the reason why Muslims cannot be integrated is because they are spiritually superior.⁵⁰ Promoting the Great Replacement theory in Hungarian media, his Fidesz party members speak of a “shameful ide-

eskise-to-korani-se-tzami-ton-thermon (Access date: 28 March 2024). The General Secretary’s official announcement can be found here: <https://www.minedu.gov.gr/gepo-menu-m/2015-09-16-09-19-00/55735-15-06-23-dilos-i-genikoy-grammatea-giorgou-kalantzi-gia-to-symvan-se-tzami-tis-ksanthis-2> (Access date: 28 March 2024).

47. “Press announcement about the vandalism of graves in the Muslim cemetery in Rodopi”, elliniki-lisi.gr, 4 September 2023, <https://elliniki-lisi.gr/anakoinosi-typou-gia-ton-vandalismo-tafon-sto-mousoulmaniko-nekrota-feio-sti-rodopi> (Access date: 1 April 2024).

48. Jan Cienski, Wojciech Kość, “Polish politicians attack migrants for electoral gain”, Politico, 07.07.2023, retrieved May 6, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-politicians-donald-tusk-attack-migrants-for-electoral-gain/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

49. Yle News, “Justice Minister Meri Accused of Meddling in Panels on Judicial Independence and Racism”, 23.04.2024, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20085250> (Access date: 30 May 2024).

50. Original quote: “(L)elki szempontból jelen pillanatban a muszlim világ erősebb, mint a keresztény, ezért mi csak abban sem reménykedhetünk, hogy a keresztény vallás és világlátás erejével elő tudjuk segíteni az integrációt.” Source: <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-magyar-allando-ertekezlet-xxi-ulesen/> (Access date: 26 June 2024).

ological jihad against conservative governments” waged by the head of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen.⁵¹

Aziz Nazmi Şakir has shown in his report on Bulgaria that the extreme radical right parties with an Islamophobic agenda that formed the United Patriots alliance and joined a coalition from 2017 to 2021, did not receive any parliamentary seats after the 2023 elections. Still, a new far-right formation that has thus far not been involved in Islamophobic more than doubled its votes from 13 to 27.

Media

Media outlets aligned with far-right parties such as Spain’s *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera* which is aligned with the radical right-wing party *Vox* disseminate Islamophobic talking points. However, not only media outlets connected to the far-right are disseminating Islamophobia knowledge. Several mainstream newspapers give space to known Islamophobes who can spread their anti-Muslim views without any repercussions. The Greek *I Kathimerini* (The Daily), for instance, regularly features authors such as Takis Theodoropoulos, who write statements such as “Europe is undergoing a cultural collapse in the face of an aggressive Islam that exploits its freedom to impose its own authoritarianism.”⁵² Meanwhile, Muslims are regularly portrayed as a fifth column. Portrayals such as Muslims being a “visible-invisible army that operates behind the scenes of Western countries.... exploit[ing] the right to freedom of speech while simultaneously denying, persecuting, and suppressing it in their funding countries”⁵³ suggest that Muslims should be deprived of their basic rights, legitimizing authoritarian intrusion of their privacy or creating a two-class citizen system. While many of these statements pass unchallenged, an important decision by the Court of Appeals in Greece upheld an initial conviction for “complicity in inciting hatred” from December 2021 against the newspaper *Makeleio*.⁵⁴ As Ali Husayinoglu and Alexandros Sakellariou argue in their report on Greece, while these commentaries have become more and more normalised, a rise was observed following the attack on Gaza on October 7, 2023. In the case of Kosovo, Shan Karemani and Jeta Luboteni show that media coverage reproduces the antagonism between Kosovar identity and Islam as a religious identity. In social media, the popular Facebook page “Allahu” posts content mocking and dehumanizing Muslims and the Islamic faith on a daily basis.

51. European Parliament, “Multimedia Center: State of the European Union 2023: MEPsdebate (part1)”, 13.09.2023, https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/sk/video/_I244633 (Access date: 14 September 2023).

52. T. Theodoropoulos, “From Foundas to Ahmed”, *I Kathimerini*, 24 December 2023, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/562799077/ap-ton-foynta-ston-achmet/> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

53. D. Triantafyllidis, “An enemy in our backyard”, *Liberal.gr*, 26.10.2023, <https://www.liberal.gr/d-triantafyllidis/ehthros-sta-metopisthen> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

54. For the background of this case and more details see: “Racist Crimes Watch”, [racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com](https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2023/01/20/1-1419/), 20.01.2023, <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2023/01/20/1-1419/> (Access date: 28 March 2024).

Much of this is true not only for conventional media but for the internet as well. As Sergio Gracia and Inés Bolaños Somoano argue in their report on Spain, “social media actors like YouTubers and Instagrammers have helped extreme right actors in Spain to disseminate this type of content.” The political scientist Aristotle Kallis shows in his report on the UK, just one month after the October attack, anti-Muslim content surged more than fourfold online. In mid-October, the hashtag DayofJihad was exploited by far-right Islamophobic trolls to fuel a new wave of global disinformation aimed at Muslims and Islam.⁵⁵

Justice System

The justice system continues to remain a contested field, where, on the one hand, Muslims are able to defend their civil liberties, while, on the other, decisions are made that curtail their freedoms, especially religious freedom.

In legal terms, France surpassed itself with yet another highly problematic regulation of clothing identified as “Muslim.” As Kawtar Najib has highlighted in her report in this volume, «a concrete decree has been implemented on September 7, 2023 that extends the 2004 law banning religious symbols in public schools in order to include the abaya and qamis (or thobe) as religious dresses,” which reveals the extent of paranoia and sexism in the French government’s governing of female bodies, in general, and Muslim female bodies, in particular. Shan Karemani and Jeta Luboteni show in their report on Kosovo that several Muslim girls were expelled from school due to wearing the hijab, although Kosovo has a Muslim majority of 95%. In North Macedonia, debates about reducing the volume of the call to prayer emerged in the capital city of Skopje and several other municipalities. Citizens submitted petitions and demanded the abolition of the call to prayer or the reduction of its volume,⁵⁶ attempting to reduce the visibility of Islam in the public space.

In Spain, several decisions were made by courts sentencing perpetrators of anti-Muslim acts severely, one including the harshest prison sentence imposed in Spain so far for a hate crime. Another sentence included three years and three months in prison for Islamophobic groups and social media accounts that fueled “xenophobic hatred” by distributing racist content posters and forming “night watch groups” that took on “pseudo-police” roles, interrogating and threatening Muslim Moroccan citizens in the area.⁵⁷ Another case revealing the gendered dimension of Islamophobia

55. David Gilbert, “Rumors of a ‘Global Day of Jihad’ Have Unleashed a Dangerous Wave of Disinformation”, *Wired*, 13.10.2023, <https://www.wired.com/story/day-of-jihad-disinformation-israel-palestine/> (Access date: 28 March 2024).

56. “Да се демонтираат звучниците од џамијата во Долно Нерези, гласните звуци од минаретото ги вадат од памет”, *Вечер Пресс* (online version), 06.06.2023, <https://www.vecер.press/> (Access date, 30 March 2024).

57. “Condenado el líder de un grupo islamófobo de Antas (Almería) por promover el odio hacia ciudadanos marroquíes”, *Europa Press*, 31.07.2023, <https://www.europapress.es/andalucia/almeria-00350/noticia-conde->

is mentioned in this year's report on Greece: a man was sentenced to three years imprisonment without suspension for attacking his 25-year-old daughter, a student in the UK, who appeared wearing the hijab after converting to Islam.⁵⁸

In his report on Finland, Enrique Tessieri shows how Muslims who are asylum-seekers are being treated differently in the eyes of the law. He discusses how two women asylum-seekers were forced to take off their hijabs for a passport photograph.⁵⁹ After filling a case in a court, the women won on the district court level, but lost at the Court of Appeals. The entire process took seven years and exposed the fact that Finish law does not allow Muslim asylum-seekers to be photographed for a passport wearing a hijab.

In her report on Albania, Kristina Millona discusses the increasing unjustified targeting of imams and Muslim men by the anti-terrorist secret service units. The General Secretary of the Muslim Community in Albania Roal Hysa criticizes the over-policing and heightened surveillance of Muslim communities, which traumatizes Muslim families and is hardly documented or highlighted.

As Amina Smits shows in her report on Belgium in this volume, Belgium's Constitutional Court ruled that the ban on foreign funding for religious communities and service providers was unconstitutional. This ban originated from long-standing concerns about foreign influence on local religious institutions, especially mosques, in Flanders. The court's decision emphasized that a blanket prohibition on foreign funding violates religious freedom and fails to consider the diverse needs and circumstances of various religious communities.⁶⁰

In 2022, Belgian Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne revoked the recognition of the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium (EMB) due to allegations of mismanagement, lack of transparency, and foreign interference from Morocco and Türkiye. The EMB was accused of being unrepresentative and unprofessional, resulting in the loss of its annual grant of approximately €600,000. In June 2023, the Muslim Council of Belgium was established to replace the EMB. This new body, quickly set up by Minister Van Quickenborne, is intended to serve as the official representative of Belgium's Muslim community. The council is composed of Michaël Privot, Mimou Aquichouh, Esma Uçan, and Taha Zaki, all of whom are involved in the pri-

nan-lider-grupo-islamofobo-antas-almeria-promover-odio-ciudadanos-marroquies-20230731140706.html (Access date: 15 November 2024).

58. "Velestino Volou: He seriously bit her daughter for converting to Islamism (sic)", *flash.gr*, 25.04.2023, https://www.flash.gr/greece/2096228/velestino-volou-ksylokopise-agria-tin-24xroni-kori-tou-epaidi-aspastike-ton-islamismo?fbclid=IwAR3yQZ1K6t4dEzfb2KmJrUkWGQD9WRjerSaTU88ofm7Xb_IQfSuncwXhff0 (Access date: 28 March 2024).

59. Enrique Tessieri, "The Police Can Remove a Hijab by Force if You are an Asylum Seeker", *Migrant Tales*, 17.04.2024, <https://migranttales.net/the-finnish-police-can-remove-a-hijab-by-force-if-you-are-an-asylum-seeker/> (Access date: 20 April 2024).

60. Victor Van Driessche, "Vlaanderen mag buitenlandse financiering van erkende moskeëen niet verbieden", *VRT NWS*, 20.07.2023, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2023/07/20/verbod-op-buitenlandse-financiering-geloofs-gemeenschappen-ongron/> (Access date: July 13 2024).

vate sector and the Muslim community. However, the council's creation has faced criticism for lacking prior consultation with the Muslim community and being perceived as a government-imposed entity. The EMB and other Muslim organizations have condemned the establishment of the Muslim Council, labeling it as “an unacceptable interference with freedom of worship.”

In his report on the UK, Aristotle Kallis discusses an important report that is of symbolic relevance given the UK's spearheading role in the implementation of the highly problematic policies of deradicalization and prevention of extremism. Instead of coming to terms with its problematic legacy, the chance was wasted. Thus, the release of the highly anticipated review of PREVENT, the government's controversial anti-radicalization program, failed to address the long-standing concerns of Muslim communities. PREVENT has faced criticism for various forms of anti-Muslim bias, including its referral system disproportionately affecting young Muslims, its excessive focus on “Islamist terrorism,” and its role in normalizing anti-Muslim discrimination within essential public services such as education and healthcare. When the government announced the review in 2021, it appointed William Shawcross—former director of the Henry Jackson Society, known for his negative remarks about Islam—to lead the review, undermining any hope that the process would yield positive outcomes for Muslim communities in the UK. As a result, human rights organizations chose to boycott the review. Upon its publication in February 2023, the review confirmed many critics' worst fears: The Shawcross review echoed the government's recent narrative of an existential security threat, asserting that the UK had “failed to tackle the ideological beliefs behind Islamist extremism” and recommending a shift in PREVENT's focus from far-right extremism to “Islamist extremism,” despite evidence showing a higher number of referrals linked to far-right ideologies. The review also claimed that PREVENT was particularly effective in schools, citing successful integration of radicalization awareness into safeguarding efforts and strong support from the Home Office and Department for Education leaders. This assertion contradicted evidence of PREVENT's harmful effects in educational and public health settings, as documented in previous reports. Amnesty International condemned the review for failing to address PREVENT's history of “targeting Muslim communities and activists” and for its “disastrous consequences,” including erosion of freedom of expression, suppression of activism, creation of a compliant generation, and impact on individual rights. Furthermore, the Shawcross review perpetuated biased narratives that have long underpinned the government's discourse on Islamophobia.

Employment

A study published on November 14, 2023, by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) suggests little has changed in the discrimination of Muslim women in the labor market. More than half of headscarf-wearing Muslims reported

experiencing discrimination in school, at work, or when looking for housing.⁶¹ This is not only the case for Muslims in Western European countries. As Mersiha Smailovikj shows in her report on North Macedonia, women wearing a hijab are totally absent in certain professions such as the legal sphere, where legal regulations and dominant practice discourages hijab-wearing women from even applying. Statements registered in Spain by social media users such as “I’m not racist, but I wouldn’t hire a girl wearing a veil” show the extent of how the racist exclusion of Muslims from the workspace is not regarded as a form of racism.

Islamophobic Networks

Anti-Muslim networks that push the criminalization of Islam and non-state organized Muslims in the public sphere are working on national and transnational levels. Probably one of the most important revelations that got relatively little attention given the enormous amounts of money invested and its huge impact was the revelation of the Abu Dhabi Secrets. The coverage started with an investigative report by David Kirkpatrick in *The New Yorker*. According to this report, Alp Services,⁶² a Swiss intelligence and consulting firm, has been involved in orchestrating smear campaigns to benefit clients, notably governments and influential entities seeking to discredit individuals, organizations, or rival states, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as part of an information warfare strategy. Alp Services would gather, fabricate, or amplify damaging information against thousands of people in Europe accusing them to be linked to or even operate covertly as part of the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement declared by the UAE as a terrorist organization. The aim was to tarnish reputations or create a negative public image for targeted individuals or entities ranging as wide as businesses to politicians, academics and Muslim civil society actors. This “intelligence” would then be circulated to shape narratives favorable to the UAE’s geopolitical interests in designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization in Western nation states including the United States, the UK, and Austria. The investigative piece showed that Alp Services was able to influence Wikipedia entries, media coverage, and finally convince politicians to go against certain individuals and entities.⁶³

Based on these revelations, the EIC (European Investigative Collaborations) network, comprised of 13 media outlets throughout Europe, started investigations in

61. Anja Sticks and Katrin Pfündel, “Diskriminierungserfahrungen von Menschen aus muslimisch geprägten Herkunftsländern”, Berlin Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge & Forschung Zentrum BAMF, 2023, https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/fb48-muslimisches-leben2020-diskriminierung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=10 (Access date: July 1 2024).

62. Bridge Initiative Team, “Factsheet: Alp Services”, The Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University, 05.01.2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-alp-services/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

63. David D. Kirkpatrick, “The Dirty Secrets of a Smear Campaign,” *The New Yorker*, 27.03.2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/04/03/the-dirty-secrets-of-a-smear-campaign> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

their respective European societies. The EIC reported that “Abu Dhabi Secrets reveals how the Swiss private intelligence company Alp Services has been contracted by the UAE government to spy on citizens of 18 countries in Europe and beyond. Alp Services has sent to the UAE intelligence services the names of more than 1000 individuals and 400 organizations in 18 European countries, labelling them as part of the Muslim Brotherhood network in Europe.”⁶⁴ They investigated how Alp Services operated in various countries, such as France,⁶⁵ Denmark,⁶⁶ Italy,⁶⁷ and Germany,⁶⁸ to mention but a few. Also, other media outlets outside of this collaboration such as the Austrian weekly *Profil* followed and showed how Alp Services was involved in one of Austria’s largest police raids, Operation Luxor, that alleged to target the Muslim Brotherhood⁶⁹ and which turned out to be a huge scam and judged to have been unlawful.⁷⁰

A central figure aside from Alp Services was the well-known scholar Lorenzo Vidino.⁷¹ *Der Spiegel* writes, “The Swiss company Alp Services also relied on experts like Lorenzo Vidino for its mudslinging campaigns on behalf of the United Arab Emirates.”⁷² As Kirkpatrick details in his report in *The New Yorker*, “Vidino signed an initial contract paying him three thousand euros for ‘interesting leads/rumours’ about the Muslim Brotherhood, along with a ‘list of alleged members of the first tier organisations in European countries.’”⁷³ Alp Services also cooperated behind the curtain with politicians such as the German member of parliament Christoph de Vries from the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).⁷⁴

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64. European Investigative Collaborations (EIC), “Abu Dhabi Secrets”, <https://eic.network/projects/abu-dhabi-secrets.html> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
65. Clément Fayol, Yann Philippin and Antton Rouget et Antoine Harari, “ONU, Qatar, Macron : les opérations secrètes du Sheikh Matar, agent des Émirats”, *Le Mediapart*, 13.07.2023, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/130723/onu-qatar-macron-les-operations-secretes-du-sheikh-matar-agent-des-emirats> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
66. Morten Skjoldager, “Det er utroligt og virkelig ubehageligt at høre, at mit navn optræder. Men det overrasker mig ikke”, *Politiken* Torsdag, 07.07.2023, <https://politiken.dk/danmark/art9420703/%C2%BBDet-er-utroligt-og-virkelig-ubehageligt-at-h%C3%B8re-at-mit-navn-optr%C3%A6der.-Men-det-overrasker-mig-ikke%C2%AB> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
67. Giovanni Tizian and Stefano Vergine, “Abu Dhabi Secrets, dopo gli scoop indagano i magistrati di Francia e Svizzera”, *Domani*, 15.04.2024, <https://www.editorialedomani.it/fatti/abu-dhabi-secrets-indagini-francia-svizzera-caso-alp-services-teeq9I12> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
68. Muriel Kalisch, Monika Bolliger, Rafael Buschmann, Nicola Naber and Sven Becker, “How United Arab Emirates Seeks to Leverage Its Influence in Europe”, *Der Spiegel*, 11.07.2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/abu-dhabi-secrets-how-qatar-seeks-to-leverage-its-influence-in-europe-a-d0058776-2806-464d-9e0b-1fd3b6a07282> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
69. Von Stefan Melichar and Anna Thalhammer, “Inside the United Arab Emirate’s spy campaign in Europe”, *Profil*, 19.09.2023, <https://www.profil.at/investigativ/inside-the-united-arab-emirates-spy-campaign-in-europe/402598541> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
70. Bridge Initiative Team, “Factsheet: Operation Luxor”, The Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University, 08.01.2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-operation-luxor/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
71. Bridge Initiative Team, “Factsheet: Lorenzo Vidino”, The Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University, 22.04.2020, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-lorenzo-vidino/> (Access date: 15 November 2024).
72. Kalisch et al., “How United Arab Emirates Seeks to Leverage.”
73. Kirkpatrick, “The Dirty Secrets of a Smear Campaign.”
74. Kalisch et al., “How United Arab Emirates Seeks to Leverage.”

In retrospect, many of the attacks on Muslim civil society seem to have been part of a larger systematic attempt to destroy the lives of not only outspoken Muslims but also politicians and journalists who stand for pluralism, respect, and the inclusion of Muslims in their respective European societies.

The Role of International Institutions in Combatting Islamophobia

As already mentioned, the European Union’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has released the report “Being Muslim in the EU - Experiences of Muslims” covering the period of October 2021 to October 2022 indicating a troubling rise in racial discrimination against Muslims. The survey reveals that “individuals—women, men, and children—experience harassment and violence due to their religion, skin color, or ethnic background. Such racial discrimination and harassment occur in public spaces, schools, and workplaces, with the frequency of these incidents becoming alarmingly normalized.” In the report, FRA Director Sirpa Rautio highlighted the worrying developments. She stated, “We are witnessing a worrying surge in racism and discrimination against Muslims in Europe. This is fuelled by conflicts in the Middle East and made worse by the dehumanising anti-Muslim rhetoric we see across the continent. Instead of sowing division in our societies, we need to ensure that everyone in the EU feels safe, included and respected, regardless of their skin colour, background or religion.” According to the report, “Young Muslims are particularly affected, often leaving school prematurely, which adversely impacts their future employment prospects. Many find themselves in temporary, low-security jobs that offer little stability. Furthermore, educated Muslims face challenges in securing suitable employment, with many being overqualified for the positions available to them.” The report highlights that “one-third of Muslims seeking housing encounter difficulties in finding adequate homes for their families due to racial discrimination, a significant increase since 2016. Landlords with biases against Muslims frequently reject rental applications or prioritize other applicants, leading to poor living conditions for those who do manage to find accommodation.”⁷⁵ The report’s key findings are the following:

- Racism – Nearly 1 in 2 Muslims (47%) experience racial discrimination, up from 39% in 2016. The highest rates in the 13 survey countries are in Austria (71%), Germany (68%) and Finland (63%).

75. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), “Muslims in Europe face ever more racism and discrimination”, Press Release, 24.10.2024, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2024/muslims-europe-face-ever-more-racism-and-discrimination> (Access date: 15 November 2024). The “Being Muslim in the EU” report is based on the experiences of 9,604 Muslim respondents in 13 EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, and Sweden. The data was collected from October 2021 to October 2022, before the October 7 Hamas attacks against Israel and the war that ensued in Gaza.

- **Work** – Muslims most often face discrimination when looking for work (39%) or in the workplace (35%), up from 31% and 23% in 2016. This has a knock-on effect on other areas of life, such as housing, education or healthcare. In addition, two in five (41%) are overqualified for their job compared to 22% of people generally.
- **Housing** - A third (35%) of respondents could not buy or rent a house because of discrimination, up from 22% in 2016. Muslim respondents with disabilities face even more barriers; 46% experience discrimination in the housing market.
- **Religious clothing** - Women wearing religious clothing face more racial discrimination than those who do not, especially when looking for work (45% compared to 31%). This goes up to 58% for young women (16-24 years) wearing religious clothing.
- **Racist harassment** – Almost 1 in 3 (27%) Muslim respondents were racially harassed in the five years before the survey; most of them more than once.
- **Discriminatory profiling** – Almost half (49%) of those stopped by the police in the year before the survey thought their last stop was due to racial profiling.
- **Education** – Muslim respondents are three times more likely to leave school early, compared to the general EU population (30% compared to 9.6%).
- **Poverty** – A third (31%) of Muslim respondents' households struggle to make ends meet compared to 19% households generally. They are twice as likely to live in overcrowded housing (40% vs. 17%).⁷⁶

In order to combat racism and discrimination effectively, FRA calls on the EU and its member states to “focus on anti-Muslim racism,” and specifically to “renew the EU anti-racism action plan beyond 2025 and include actions to specifically counter anti-Muslim racism.” The report highlights the need

to collect data on all grounds of discrimination to support better policymaking and develop benchmarks, targets and indicators for monitoring, **enforce laws** – properly enforce anti-discrimination laws as well as tougher sanctions for discrimination and hate crimes, **resource equality bodies** - implement the directives on binding standards for equality bodies. Ensure that equality bodies have the necessary mandates and sufficient resources to tackle discrimination effectively and independently, **combat discriminatory profiling** – eradicate discriminatory institutional practices and cultures that lead to unlawful police profiling, and **tackle racism in all areas of life** – this includes targeted efforts to combat racism in education, employment, housing and healthcare.⁷⁷

On February 1, 2023, the European Commission finally appointed a person as its new Coordinator on combatting anti-Muslim hatred. Marion Lalis, a European

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

civil servant for sixteen years with a strong focus on the Arab world,⁷⁸ who still had to accumulate expertise regarding anti-Muslim racism, was given this position.⁷⁹ While we certainly second the appointment at such, the filling of the position does not suffice. Only 15 days after her appointment, she accepted an invitation⁸⁰ by President Emmanuel Macron and Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, representatives of one of the most anti-Muslim governments in Europe, for the state-led French Islam Forum (Forum de l’Islam de France, FORIF) event. FORIF was established by the Ministry of Interior a year earlier to “renew the methods of dialogue” between the government and “actors and associations representing the Muslim faith,” and can be seen as a soft power tool to discipline Muslim subjects⁸¹ along the harsh policies of the French government cracking down on independent Muslim agency.⁸² Lalissee called the meeting a deliberation on “constructive initiatives.”⁸³ At the same time, she argued during an event organized by the U.S. Mission Geneva that “tackling anti-Muslim hatred and racism require as a first step to acknowledge that it exists and it can be ingrained in our own institutions, our own families, our own daily lives.”⁸⁴ While these are bold and important words, we couldn’t agree less when Lalissee argues that “the European Union and its member states are fully committed to leading by example in combatting anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination today and tomorrow.” As the findings of our report show, there is a lot still to be done.

On November 4, 2023, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk condemned the global surge in hate, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, which intensified after October 7. He also voiced concerns about excessive limitations on protests related to the Israel-Gaza conflict and restrictions on freedom of expression.⁸⁵

Representatives from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) issued multiple statements condemning the public desecration of the Qur’an. On September 20,

78. Par Lous Fritel, “Qui est Marion Lalissee, coordinatrice européenne ‘chargée de la lutte contre la haine anti-musulman?’”, *Marianne*, 02.08.2023, <https://www.marianne.net/politique/union-europeenne/qui-est-marion-lalissee-coordinatrice-europeenne-chargee-de-la-lutte-contre-la-haine-anti-musulman> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

79. X, Marion Lalissee *ماريون لاليس* (@EUAgainstAMH), 16:41, 14.03.2023, <https://twitter.com/EUAgainstAMH/status/1635637385907060736> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

80. Élysée, “La réunion du Forum de l’Islam de France à l’Élysée”, YouTube, 16.02.2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEasur4VtPc> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

81. Bayraklı, Enes, Farid Hafez, and Leonard Faytre. “Engineering a European Islam: an analysis of attempts to domesticate European Muslims in Austria, France, and Germany”, *Insight Turkey*, 20.3 (2018): 131-156.

82. Hafez, Farid, “Criminalizing Muslim agency in Europe: The case of ‘political Islam’ in Austria, Germany, and France”, *French Cultural Studies*, 34.3 (2023): 313-328.

83. Marion Lalissee, “Marion Lalissee’s Post”, LinkedIn, https://jo.linkedin.com/posts/marion-lalissee-b3709a3_forif-activity-7032058130238734336-0Gd4 (Access date: 15 November 2024).

84. U. S. Mission Geneva, “Combating Intolerance, Hate Crimes, and Islamophobia”, YouTube, 02.10.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqU1lvSVfFE> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

85. United Nations, “UN Human Rights Chief condemns rise in hatred”, 04.11.2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/11/un-human-rights-chief-condemns-rise-hatred> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

2023, OIC Secretary-General Hissein Brahim Taha expressed serious concern about the intensifying anti-Muslim rhetoric and growing hostility towards Muslims. He denounced incidents involving the desecration and burning of the Qur'an in several European countries, reinforcing the OIC's strong opposition to such acts.⁸⁶

On July 31, 2023, the Chair of the 14th Islamic Summit, together with representatives from Iraq and Iran, convened a virtual special session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers. The session focused on repeated instances of Qur'an desecration, including the latest incident in Sweden on July 20, 2023. These acts were condemned as dangerous displays of hatred, racism, and Islamophobia. The council called for immediate action to halt and criminalize such provocations, stressing the need to respect religious texts and symbols while promoting a culture of peace and mutual acceptance. The OIC particularly condemned the Qur'an burning in Sweden, urging collective efforts to prevent future incidents.⁸⁷

Additionally, on January 31, 2023, Türkiye invited the OIC Executive Committee to an emergency meeting at its Jeddah headquarters. The agenda addressed recent cases of Qur'an desecration in Sweden, the Netherlands, and Denmark. The committee denounced these offensive acts and urged the respective governments to implement effective preventive measures.⁸⁸

On December 28, 2023, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion expressed concern over the increasing levels of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia globally. They called on all relevant stakeholders—including states, media outlets, social media, technology companies, and academic institutions—to take immediate action in response to persistent and widespread reports of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents. The statement emphasized that these responses should align with international human rights standards to address and mitigate hatred and discrimination effectively.⁸⁹

86. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation – The Collective Voice of The Muslim World, “OIC: We are Concerned about the Escalation of Anti-Muslim Rhetoric and the Recurrence of Incidents of Desecration and Burning of Copies of the Holy Qur’an”, 20.09.2023, https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=39593&t_ref=26641&clan=en (Access date: 15 November 2024).

87. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation – The Collective Voice of The Muslim World, “Resolution on the Repeated Crimes of Desecration and Burning of Copies of al-Mus’haf ash-Sharif in the Kingdom of Sweden and the Kingdom of Denmark Approved by the 18th Extraordinary Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation”, 31.07.2023, https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=39325&t_ref=26550&clan=en (Access date: 15 November 2024).

88. Mahmut Geldi, “OIC calls for collective measures to prevent disrespect towards Quran”, Anadolu Agency, 03.07.2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/oic-calls-for-collective-measures-to-prevent-disrespect-towards-quran/2935393> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

89. United Nations, “UN Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion decry rising Antisemitism and Islamophobia around the world”, 22.12.2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2023/12/un-special-adviser-prevention-genocide-high-representative-united-nations> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

General Recommendations for Combatting Islamophobia in Europe

Apart from the many recommendations suggested by the authors of the reports regarding the nation-states they live in and the recommendations we have given on the European level in the past years, we see the fundamental need to re-emphasize a simple, but basic necessity: the need to recognize Islamophobia. As the poor outcome of European governments, political parties, and NGOs on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 shows, political leaders in Europe are far from recognizing the problem and giving it its due attention. Only very few National Action Plans against Racism in European countries explicitly include the fight against anti-Muslim racism.

As the European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred Marion Lalisie stated during an event, “Tackling anti-Muslim hatred and racism require as a first step to acknowledge that it exists and it can be ingrained in our own institutions, our own families, our own daily lives.”⁹⁰ Europe’s nation-states are still far behind in this regard.

Also, regarding many European countries’ responses to pro-Palestinian speech and organizing, the year 2023 has shown us that basic civil liberties from freedom of assembly to freedom of speech are under heavy pressure. The further expansion of anti-terrorism legislation and measures that are threatening political dissent and sending a wave of intimidation through European societies, including its Muslim population, must be counteracted. These authoritarian measures have only been exacerbated following the war in Gaza and must, therefore, be countered on the educational level, to create consciousness; on the legal level, to defend against such and similar violations; and on a policy level, to abolish the counterterror state in the long term.

90. U. S. Mission Geneva, “Combatting Intolerance, Hate Crimes, and Islamophobia”, YouTube, 02.10.2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqU1lvSVfFE> (Access date: 15 November 2024).

THE OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE IN 2023

To address rising anti-Muslim racism globally and create awareness, in 2022, the United Nations General Assembly declared March 15 as the “International Day to Combat Islamophobia” (IDCI). This specific day was chosen to commemorate the Christchurch attack which took place on March 15. One year following the inauguration of the IDCI, EU member states are largely reluctant to give it any meaning. In 2023, among the 28 countries covered in this report only one European state, specifically Spain, referred to the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The remaining 27 states did not observe it in any way, not even in a press release, let alone an event that commemorated the day or discussed how best to confront Islamophobia in the future. This shows that we are clearly at the beginning of a long struggle in the implementation of IDCI. One of the ways in which we can measure the political recognition of Islamophobia is to track and list the countries, political parties, and NGOs that observe the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 each year.

ALBANIA

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia was not commemorated in 2023 by any of the political groups or civil society actors advocating against forms of discrimination and racism, with the state authorities reluctant to address Islamophobia formally.

AUSTRIA

The year 2023 was revealing regarding Islamophobia. While the UN’s International Day to Combat Islamophobia, which was supported by all member states including Austria, was only commemorated by the Greens, all other political parties and the government were silent.

BELGIUM

On the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Filip Dewinter, a leading member of the far-right political party Vlaams Belang, tweeted, "To hell with the #InternationalDayAgainstIslamophobia because #Islam harms our #freedom! I'm afraid of Islam because the Koran is a license to kill. Islamophobia is a term invented by Islamic terror states like #Pakistan who want to carry out their agenda of Islamization."

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

On March 15, International Day to Combat Islamophobia, no official government commemoration was held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the political party Naša Stranka (Our Party) issued a statement advocating for a more open society through the fight against Islamophobia. Media coverage was present, with outlets like Al Jazeera Balkans and web portal Preporod highlighting increasing levels of Islamophobia, emphasizing the continued attacks and hate speech against Muslims. Academics such as Prof. Dr. Amir Karić and Emir Kovačević pointed out the persistent and intensifying dehumanization of Bosniaks in public discourse.

BULGARIA

On March 15, 2023, neither a government representative, nor any political party, nor civil society organization commemorated the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Accordingly, no media outlet mentioned this date on any occasion.

DENMARK

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was not observed by the government. Instead, a former MP wrote about the day criticizing that her party leader had been used as an example of Islamophobia in a UN report on Islamophobia, stating: "I can feel that trust in the UN as a system suffers daily when such nonsense is allowed to be elevated to truth." The day was, however, commemorated by civil society, which posted about it on social media. Amongst those were Minhaj ul Quran International Denmark, the Centre for Muslims' Rights in Denmark (CEDA), and the UN association in Denmark, an NGO united under the World Federation of United Nations Associations.

ESTONIA

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia was not publicly commemorated by the Estonian government, political parties, or civil society in 2023.

FINLAND

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia was not commemorated officially by the government and, by and large, went unnoticed. Taking into account the anti-Muslim policies of the present government and the general atmosphere, it is doubtful that the date will be commemorated in 2024.

FRANCE

The French government did not commemorate the UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15. A few press articles talked about it in negative terms, denigrating the country that initiated this day, namely Pakistan, as well as the chosen vocabulary (“Islamophobia”) which allegedly prevents criticism and mockery of Islam. Only the X account of La France Insoumise published a tweet celebrating this fight.

GERMANY

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia received little to no attention in German politics and public discourse. One of the few politicians to acknowledge the day was Green Party member of the Bundestag Lamya Kaddor, who called for the appointment of a federal commissioner for Muslim life in Germany.

GREECE

In March, the Muslim Association of Greece (MAG) together with EuLeMa (European Muslim Leaders' Majlis) organized a roundtable in Athens on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia with the participation of different experts: university professors in social sciences, theology, history, anthropology, and law interacted with diplomats, politicians, civil society representatives, educators, diplomats, and community leaders.

HUNGARY

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia was not commemorated in Hungary. March 15 is one of Hungary's most important national holidays, celebrating Hungary's uprising against the Habsburg Empire in 1848 and the IDCI would have to compete with the latter. In the current political climate, no political leaders or press organization based in Hungary reported on this matter. The only Hungarian language press outlet that reported on the IDCI was the Turkish TRT.net. However, even this news site chose to publish an article on March 16, one day after IDCI and the Hungarian national holiday.

IRELAND

March 15, 2023 marked the inaugural UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia. In acknowledgement, the Irish Muslim Council released a statement that noted the growing anti-immigration and far-right presence and rhetoric spreading through the country. Likewise, the statement noted positive steps towards integration and understanding towards the Irish Muslim community. For instance, the celebration of Eid al-Adha in Croke Park is seen as a positive and notable step towards combatting Islamophobia in the state.

ITALY

The city of Turin, led by a center-left administration, signed an agreement (*Patto di Condivisione*, A sharing agreement) with the representatives of 21 local Muslim associations valid from 2023 to 2026. Symbolically, the agreement was sealed on March 15, 2023, the first UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The pact aims to contribute to the better inclusion of local Islamic groups in the fabric of the city by strengthening mutual knowledge, organizing joint events, and raising awareness about anti-Muslim racism. Islamophobia is still widespread in Turin, a city counting about 40,000 Muslim residents.

KOSOVO

In terms of recognizing Islamophobia in Kosovo on the national or international stage, neither the government, nor any political party, nor civil society actor in Kosovo commemorated the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15. There were no posts, press releases, or news coverage marking the occasion.

NORTH MACEDONIA

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia was not marked by any political or governmental entity, nor by human rights organizations. Only the web portal TRT published a text from a global framework that referred to this observance day.

NORWAY

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was commemorated by different religious, human rights, and anti-racist organizations. The day was also reported in different newspapers, but neither the government nor political parties participated in any official marking of the day.

POLAND

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was not publicly commemorated by the government, public institutions, politicians, or the media. Only Salam Lab, a pro-diversity NGO, acknowledged the day with a blog post on its website and social media.

PORTUGAL

On March 15, 2023, the International Day to Combat Islamophobia was celebrated for the first time. In the case of Portugal, there were no official statements registered in the media or on the Portuguese government website. The same is true for the Portuguese political parties and NGOs.

ROMANIA

There were no citations or commemorations of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia by the Romanian government, political parties, or civil society in Romania.

RUSSIA

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was not commemorated by the Russian government, political parties, or civil society.

SERBIA

According to available information, the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, observed on March 15, was not officially commemorated by the Serbian government in 2023, nor were there notable initiatives from political parties and civil society organizations in relation to this date. A review of media reports, official statements, and social media presence for 2023 reveals a lack of significant activities marking the day.

SLOVAKIA

The fact that March 15 is the International Day to Combat Islamophobia is virtually unknown in Slovakia. The day is not acknowledged in any way; specifically, no state institutions, NGOs, or the Slovak Muslim community observed the occasion.

SPAIN

The Spanish government observed the International Day to Combat Islamophobia ahead of schedule: on July 4, 2023, the Ministry for Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, in cooperation with OBERAXE (Observatory for Racist and Xenophobic Discrimination), addressed the challenge of mounting Islamophobia and racism in Spanish society with a new “Strategic Framework for Citizenship and Inclusion against Racism and Xenophobia (2023-2027).” Spanish civil society organizations, faith groups, and state-affiliated think tanks directly observed the IDCI on March 15 with special roundtables, publications, press statements, and various forms of online engagement through their websites and social media accounts. Among these, especially noteworthy are the Morocco Association for the Integration of Immigrants (Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes), Málaga; the Three Cultures Foundation (Fundación Tres Culturas), Sevilla; the Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies (Fundación Euroárabe de Altos Estudios), Granada; the European Institute of the Mediterranean (Insituto Europeo del Mediterráneo), Barcelona; and Casa Árabe, Madrid-Córdoba.

SWEDEN

In February 2023, the Swedish government introduced an “Action Programme to Combat Islamophobia,” but on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia (March 15), aside from Lars Arrhenius, the head of the Discrimination Ombudsman established by the Swedish government, visiting

Malmö Mosque, where he emphasized the widespread discrimination faced by Muslims, there was no specific statement from the government or political parties.

UNITED KINGDOM

On March 15, the UN-designated International Day to Combat Islamophobia was marked by a variety of organizations and political figures across the UK. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) led calls to the government to recognize formally the annual occasion: at an event organized at the UK Parliament and co-hosted by the Labour MP Afzal Khan, political figures from across the political spectrum (including the “Father of the House” Conservative MP Sir Peter Bottomley) declared their determination to make “a bold statement of unity and recognized that we must all work together to tackle Islamophobia at its root.” The Aziz Foundation joined the calls for officially enshrining the day in UK law and followed it, in April, with the launch of a campaign to end Islamophobia. It came as no surprise that the UK government, so persistently opposed to the adoption of an official definition of Islamophobia, chose not to mark the event.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN NUMBERS

- “The overwhelming majority of European states do not record Islamophobic incidents as a separate category of hate crime. The recording of anti-Muslim/Islamophobic crimes by the police as a separate category of hate crime is essential to uncover the real extent of this problem and to develop counter-strategies to combat it.
- In the EU, only 12% of Muslims who have been discriminated against report their cases to the authorities. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, FRA) The non-exhaustive list that follows hints at the extent of underreporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes in Europe by states and NGOs, which has serious implications regarding the awareness of Muslims and the bureaucracy to tackle these issues.” (EIR 2017)
- The diverging numbers across the countries allude to different degrees of awareness and organisation.

BELGIUM

- A report was published by the Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel (Flemish Student Umbrella) on secondary school students in Flanders which found that nearly half of the students (47%) had witnessed acts of racism in their secondary school, while 18% reported experiencing racism themselves. This figure was significantly higher among students with non-European parents, with nearly half (49%) of these students reporting personal experiences of racism during their time in secondary education.

AUSTRIA

- The Islamophobia watchdog NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus documented 1,522 cases of anti-Muslim incidents, which is an increase from 1,324. Of the reported cases, 1,015 happened online and 507 cases in total were reported by directly affected people, which is a 100% increase.

FINLAND

- According to the latest data, suspected hate crimes continued to rise in 2022 (+21%) to 1,245 cases compared with 1,026 in 2021. (Police University College of Finland)
- As in previous years, the lion's share of cases by religious group were Muslims, but by national origin were Russians. 74.7% of all hate crime cases were due to national-ethnic origin and 9.7% due to religion.
- The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported 1,094 hate crimes in 2022, down 21.3% from 1,390 cases in the previous year; a total of 121 cases (44 in 2021) faced prosecution and 27 (30 in 2021) received sentences, according to the latest OSCE ODIHR data. Contrary to the Police University College, the OSCE ODIHR figures use a broader methodology where offences suspected of being hate crimes are also tabulated.

NORWAY

- 81 incidents categorised as motivated by hatred towards Islam/Muslims were reported to the police in 2023. The number of offenses with the hate motive of religion rose by 28.8% from 2022 to 2023.
- 30.7% of the population displays marked prejudice against Muslims.

DENMARK

- According to the Danish National Police's newly published report on hate crimes for 2022 - the report for 2023 is not yet published - a total of 101 cases were registered by the police as religiously motivated hate crimes out of which 50 cases were targeted against Muslims. The 50 cases with an Islamophobic motive correspond to 10% of all hate crime cases in 2022. With 439 cases out of a total of 893 in the period 2017-2022, Muslims are the religious group that accounts for the largest share of religiously motivated hate crime cases. (Hadforbrydelser 2022. Rigspolitiets årsrapport vedr. Hadforbrydelser)

UNITED KINGDOM

- The number of recorded anti-Muslim attacks in Scotland increased exponentially in the last three months of the year, showing a 230% increase between November and December.
- 68% of Muslims in England and Wales live in areas with the highest unemployment rates.
- 44% of religiously aggravated hate crimes (3,400 offences) affected people perceived as Muslims.

GERMANY

- Official police statistics reported 1,464 Islamophobic crimes, a 140% increase from the previous year, also marking the highest level since official recording of Islamophobic crimes began in 2017.
- Total numbers of politically motivated crimes, encompassing assaults on Jews and other marginalised groups, also hit a record high in 2023. With 60,028 incidents, politically motivated crimes reached their highest level since records began in 2001. (Bundeskriminalamt)

FRANCE

- The 2023 data from the Central Territorial Intelligence Service (Service Central du Renseignement Territorial, SCTR) recorded a total of 242 anti-Muslim acts in 2023 (compared to 188 in 2022, i.e., a 28.7% increase between 2022 and 2023).
- The Collective Against Islamophobia in Europe (Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Europe, CCIE) published a total of 828 Islamophobic reports in 2023 (against 527 in 2022) for the French case alone. The CCIE report highlights a worrying increase of 57.1% over the period 2022-2023. (SCTR and CCIE)

SWEDEN

- In the report compiling Islamophobia-motivated hate crimes by the Swedish police force for the period until the autumn of 2023 and in 2022, 52% of hate crime cases recorded in 2022 were motivated by Islamophobia.
- While there were 234 cases in total, the fact that victims generally do not resort to reporting to official authorities after such attacks suggests that these figures reflect the minimum.
- By 2023, significant changes were detected in the way hate crimes are committed. For example, in cases of public provocation, the rate increased from 19% in 2022 to 34% in 2023.
- Regarding harassment and vandalism, hate crimes decreased from 25% to 19%. Additionally, a significant increase has been detected in the use of digital platforms for these crimes, with a 47% increase in non-physical acts of violence observed.

PORTUGAL

- According to data by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the government of Portugal, hate crimes have risen by 451% since 2018.
- Data from the Public Ministry shows that between 2020 and 2023, 792 hate crime investigations were opened but only 14 of them continued as indictment orders.
- The Instituto Nacional de Estatística (National Institute of Statistics) announced that 1.2 million people (16.1% of the country's population) have already suffered discrimination.

SPAIN

- The hate crime report from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior in 2022 detected 755 cases due to racism or xenophobia, compared to 639 cases in 2021, representing an increase of 18.15% in total racist hate crimes.
- The data from the OBERAXE (Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia) points that online Islamophobia in 2023 ranged from 17% in the months of May and June to 35% in the months of November and December.

SWITZERLAND

- In 2023, the advisory network for victims of racism documented 1,058 incidents, including 876 cases of racial discrimination. Out of these 876 cases, 512 were reported directly by the victims. Notably, women were more likely to seek assistance from the centres.
- The majority of cases involved communication issues (938 cases), with the most common categories being “other denigrating expression/illustration” (362 cases), “insults” (227 cases), and “slander/false accusations” (104 cases). Exclusion was also prevalent, with 887 cases primarily involving unequal treatment (348 cases) and denigrating treatment (288 cases). Ninety-nine acts of violence were recorded, predominantly physical attacks (79 cases). There were 23 instances of far-right propaganda, mostly involving the distribution of written and audio materials. (Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024)
- Xenophobia was the most common ground for discrimination, with 387 cases reported. Most cases took place in the form of unequal treatment (182 cases) and “other denigrating expressions/illustrations” (154 cases). Discrimination based on anti-Arab racism accounted for 69 cases, while anti-Muslim racism comprised 62 cases. These incidents frequently occurred in education (31 cases), workplaces, and public spaces (16 cases each). The data highlights the overlapping nature of discriminatory thought patterns and targeted groups, influenced by various ideologies, racist opinions, and prejudices. (Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024)

KOSOVO

- In 2023, statistics from the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council suggest there were thirty cases of hate and/or national or religious intolerance in the country. However, as with previous years, the data does not specify the religion of either the perpetrators or the victims, nor does it clarify the type of intolerance involved. (Kosovo Prosecutorial Council)

ROMANIA

- 68% of Romanians have a lack of trust in relation to Muslims, while the scale of social distance indicates a high intolerance towards people of Muslim faith (39% do not accept to be their relatives, 28% do not accept to be their friends, and 19% do not accept them as co-workers). (National Council for Combatting Discrimination, NCCD)

SLOVAKIA

- The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia conducted a survey among Slovak Muslims in 2021 according to which Muslims in Slovakia are the most frequent victims of verbal attacks (73%) while only 7% of Muslims admitted that they have been a victim of a physical attack.
- The majority of attacks took place in public spaces (53%), followed by attacks in online spaces (38%), attacks at school or in the workplace (25%), and a relatively high proportion of attacks also took place in families (17%).

ITALY

- The Italian police recorded 1,393 hate crimes in 2022, as reported to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE, while no data is available yet on 2023. The Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OSCAD) had registered 353 cases of hate crime in 2022.

VIOLENT ACTS

Violent acts are an outcome of the violent ideology of racist dehumanisation. Across Europe, Muslims are increasingly becoming victims solely because of their faith.

BELGIUM

- An unknown woman attempted to set fire to the Ennassr Mosque in Borgerhout, Antwerp. This was the third attack on the mosque in a couple of months.

FRANCE

- In a video shared on social media, police officers executed Nahel Merzouk, a 17-year-old French-North African Muslim teenager, on 27 June, the day of Eid al-Adha. Merzouk was driving a car without a driver's license, but displayed no violent behaviour during the car check. Conversely, the police officer told him that he was going to shoot him in the head. (YouTube and BLAST, Le souffle de l'info)

GERMANY

- On 6 May 2023, in Dessau-Roßlau, two men violently assaulted and verbally abused two Syrian girls, aged 14 and 15, tearing off their headscarves, beating, and kicking them.

GREECE

- In April, a 25-year-old woman was violently attacked by her father at the local bus station in Volos, Central Greece. The attack ensued upon her arrival from the UK, during which she appeared wearing a hijab. The young woman, studying bio-medicine in the UK, had already expressed her intention to convert to Islam to her parents. According to her account, her father "would shout at home that Muslims are sick and left no room for me to explain to him that it is my right to seek, research religions, and make my own decisions." The father was sentenced to three years imprisonment without suspension.

HUNGARY

- In September, the *Guardian* reported that the Hungarian authorities regularly push back immigrants from Hungarian territory into Serbia. In

one case, police pushed back an individual, who was hospitalised and not able to move properly. It is assumed that a number of these people have a Muslim background. The harsh treatment of irregular immigrants is still an ongoing issue on the borders of the country.

ITALY

- According to the “Map on Intolerance” published by the Italian Observatory of Rights – VOX, an NGO, in 2023, 65% of Muslims in Italy declared that they have endured violence, discrimination, and prejudice.

KOSOVO

- In May, six people disturbed a Friday prayer service in a village in Podujeva.
- In September, Patrik Kurti, a Christian Albanian from Kosovo, posted a TikTok video threatening to bomb the Great Mosque of Mitrovica and using derogatory language towards Muslim Albanians. He was arrested and pled guilty to spreading religious hatred.

NORWAY

- In connection with a pro-Palestinian demonstration in November, a man was hit twice in the face with a clenched fist.
- A mosque in Oslo was threatened on TikTok with a gun-emoji.
- In May/June, the police’s security service notified one of Oslo’s largest mosques of a terrorist threat against it. According to the police, there has been an increase in terrorist threats online by young boys.

PORTUGAL

- Mehdi Taremi, an Iranian football player of Porto FC, received xenophobic and Islamophobic remarks during the broadcast of a match between his team and Sporting CP, a Lisbon team. The commentator, Carlos Xavier, received a fine.

ROMANIA

- Empirical observation shows that the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023 led, in the following months, to an increase in the level of hate and Islamophobia, reflected especially in the urban streets’ messages. An example is a series of posters that appeared at the end 2023 in the public space of the capital, and which conveyed xenophobic and anti-Muslim messages, such as “Islam=terrorism”, “Foreigners out!”, “Immigrants out!”, “Quran = Filth”.

RUSSIA

- One of the most high-profile incidents took place in Kotelniki (Moscow Region), a suburb of Moscow that is home to a large number of Central Asian migrants. In May, residents of Kotelniki recorded a video message to President Putin asking him to deal with the problems that had appeared in their town allegedly due to the influx of migrants, namely public order violations and harassment. After the collective complaint, the authorities launched a two-week raid. As a result, 951 protocols were drawn up against the newcomers, and a total of 1,455 people were taken to the police station.

SERBIA

- On 21 May, Ervin Ćelahmetović, a Bosniak from Priboj, was beaten to death by Igor Avramović, a member of the special police unit in Belgrade. The incident occurred in a local establishment where a confrontation escalated into a fatal assault. Security footage captured the event and Avramović was identified as the assailant. The incident highlights tensions and potential abuse of power by law enforcement members, sparking concerns about violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities.
- In Belgrade, Mišel Krstović, entered the courtyard of the Bajrakli Mosque during evening prayers, shouting that all Muslims should be killed and cursing them. He threatened the mosque's secretary with a scalpel. The police arrested him on charges of inciting racial, national, and religious hatred and intolerance.

SPAIN

- In Cartaya (Huelva, Andalucia), two young neighbours, following the spread of a false rumour on various social media platforms the previous day, assaulted a young person of Maghrebi origin.
- A judge investigated local police officers in Cornellà for a racist attack. When a young man asked for the reason he had been stopped for an identity check, one of the officers responded in these terms, partly recorded: "Shitty Moor, aren't you from around here? Go to hell, I am going to smash your head in."

SWEDEN

- According to a report on Sveriges Radio on 18 August, the imam of the Islamic Center in Malmö stated in an interview that a threatening letter had arrived at the mosque in the recent past. The letter stated that the fire that had occurred in Eskilstuna in southeastern Sweden on 25 September 2023, was the result of arson. According to police records, the mosque had been subjected to threats and physical attacks in the past as well.

- Islamophobic attacks with hate messages took place in November 2023 against a mosque in Stockholm, which is affiliated with the United Islamic Associations in Sweden. According to the statement made by the association, mosques in Umea, Gothenburg, and Linköping were frequently subjected to similar attacks.
- When a Muslim woman took her two children to kindergarten, an elderly woman verbally harassed them, saying, "Go home, terrorist, I'm tired of people like you."
- A man disturbed students by constantly shouting around a school frequented by Muslim students, stating that there could be no caliphate in Sweden.
- A man, after a conflict with his client, verbally attacked him, calling him a "Taliban Bastard" and saying he should "return to his home in the desert in a coffin."

SWITZERLAND

- In 2023, 99 acts of violence were recorded. The majority of these incidents, totaling 79 cases, involved physical attacks.
- Two cases of physical assault highlight the discrimination and violence targeting Muslims. Both incidents involved verbal abuse and physical assault based on the victims' religious identity, reflecting a troubling pattern of Islamophobia. One incident involved a mother and her two children, including her veil-wearing daughter, in a disturbing incident at a gas station, while the other incident involved two Muslim women attacked on the street.

UNITED KINGDOM

- A number of attacks on Islamic places of worship occurred across West London, including Hammersmith, Fulham, and Ealing on 11 occasions between 16 October and 18 November, linked to a single attacker who was subsequently arrested. These instances included Acton Central Mosque in West London that was splashed with red paint on five separate occasions in a two-week span, and the Palestinian Mission to the UK that was attacked and vandalised on 13 November.

ISLAMOPHOBIC STATEMENTS BY POLITICIANS

Islamophobic language by high-ranking politicians, mostly from the far right, normalises a dehumanising and racist language when it comes to the portrayal of Muslims. This reduces the threshold of what is considered utterable and overall acceptable in public discourse, and legitimises discrimination of Muslims as citizens and human beings.

ALBANIA

- On 10 July 2023, Mustafa Nano, a public figure renowned for his public Islamophobic attitudes, was named Albania's upcoming ambassador to Switzerland by Albanian President Bajram Begaj. The Muslim community in Albania reacted and contested the decision. A source near the National Observatory against Islamophobia claimed, "Journalist Mustafa Nano has continuously promoted prejudices against Islam and Muslims, even deeming Islam the biggest enemy in Albanian history."

AUSTRIA

- On 18 October, far-right FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, Freedom Party of Austria) member Maximilian Krauss demanded the resignation of the Muslim SPÖ (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, Social Democratic Party of Austria) Member of Parliament Omar Al-Rawi criticising his "lack of position on Hamas terror", calling it "Palestinian propaganda to assert that Israel would attack hospitals and civilians".
- On 20 October, Vice Chancellor and chairman of the Greens, Werner Kogler, said that one has to look at "what is being preached on Fridays", clearly amalgamating Islam and the attacks of 7 October.

BELGIUM

- On March 15, International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Filip Dewinter, a leading member of the far-right political party Vlaams Belang, tweeted, "To hell with the #InternationalDayAgainstIslamophobia because #Islam harms our #freedom! I'm afraid of Islam because the Koran is a license to kill. Islamophobia is a term invented by Islamic terror states like #Pakistan who want to carry out their agenda of Islamisation."

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- Controversy arose when President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik nominated a genocide denier to replace Parliament members Helez, Tegeltija, and Miletić. The decision sparked criticism for undermining reconciliation and justice efforts.
- Candidate for (Vice) President of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina Stojan Stojanović accused the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) of prioritising mosques over the state, sparking outrage and highlighting the complex interplay of religion and politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Željka Cvijanović made a controversial remark, stating that there are more Asians than Serbs in Sarajevo. Her statement was widely criticised as racist and inflammatory.
- Bosnian Serb politician serving as mayor of Banja Luka since 2020, Draško Stanivuković criticised the sale of public property to Muslim investors, triggering backlash and reflecting underlying ethnic tensions.
- State minister Nenad Nešić published a map showing an expanded Republika Srpska, a move criticised for undermining regional stability and reconciliation efforts.

DENMARK

- Minister for Immigration and Integration Kaare Dybvad Bek stated, “I have been surprised by how unequivocally people from Muslim countries have protested against Israel and the West. I myself have been to the West Bank and I can understand that Palestinians living here have very strong feelings towards this conflict. What I don’t understand is that people from countries far away from Israel clearly ally themselves against the West. Sikandar Siddique [leader of the political party Independent Greens] has a background in Pakistan, which is about as far away from Gaza as Denmark, but he is one of the most vocal critics of Israel and the West. I also don’t understand why people want to join protests shouting ‘solve it with jihad’”

ESTONIA

- On 3 August 2023, the leader of the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) Martin Helme stated in an interview that only very limited and controlled immigration into Estonia should be allowed, claiming that “anyone with a cultural background that is incompatible with our way of life” is not welcome to Estonia, including “radical Muslims”, which he followed up with, “Well actually, can you find me a non-radical Muslim?”

- On 15 October 2023, in an episode of EKRE's podcast "Räägime asjast", Martin Helme claimed that "Europe is groaning under the invasion of Islam" and that "it's a culture of death, it's a culture of destruction and killing, when they finish with the Jews, they will continue with us."

FINLAND

- In a talk show in November, Interior Minister Mari Rantanen claimed that if Vladimir Putin asked for asylum in Finland, he could not be returned to Russia and not be arrested and sent to the International Court of Justice at The Hague: "It means that if we continue on this path [of granting asylum], it means that anyone from anywhere, and it means if Vladimir Putin crosses the [Finnish] border and says 'asylum,' he can stay indefinitely - it also means that. You can't send him back to Russia because it isn't a safe country."

FRANCE

- During an interview on the abaya and the protection of *laïcité* on 4 September to French YouTuber Hugo Travers, President Macron mentioned the murder of Samuel Paty by stating: "We also live in our society with a minority of people who, by hijacking a religion, challenge the Republic and *laïcité*. And sorry, but sometimes this has led to the worst. We cannot act as if there have not been terrorist attacks and the assassination of Samuel Paty in our country." When the journalist denounced the parallel, the president replied, "No, I am not making a parallel; I am just telling you that the question of *laïcité* in our schools is a profound question." Macron's statement portrays visible Muslims as the enemy within the French Republic.

GERMANY

- On 21 October 2023, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Friedrich Merz stated, "Germany cannot take in any more refugees. We already have enough anti-Semitic young men in the country."

GREECE

- Niki is a religious fundamentalist party rooted in Greek Orthodox religious values and teachings that espouse Islamophobic views. The party advocates for the promotion of Greek Orthodox identity and perceives Islam and Muslims as a threat, expressing opposition to immigrants and refugees. When in December the government decided to grant permits for immigrants from Pakistan and other countries to work legally in Greece in response to the significant labour shortage, Niki reacted both in the parliament and through public announcements. The party's president, in a public statement, argued, "Our country is rapidly becoming

the most attractive destination for illegal immigrants. This decision effectively nullifies the '21 Revolution [1821 Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire]. The prospect of the first European emirate [i.e., Greece] is looming dangerously close."

HUNGARY

- In a speech Prime Minister Viktor Orbán spoke about the inability of a secularised liberal Europe to integrate Muslims. He voiced his scepticism about integrating Muslims in Europe, in general, stating that "from a spiritual point of view, at the moment, the Muslim world is stronger than the Christian one, so we cannot hope that we can promote integration even with the power of the Christian religion and worldview."
- In a speech during the yearly Hungarian gathering in the Transylvanian Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp, PM Viktor Orbán seemed to embrace the Great Replacement theory, when he stated: "The European Union rejects Christian heritage, conducts population exchange through migration, and conducts an LGBTQ campaign against family-friendly European nations."

ITALY

- The leader of the far-right party North League praised the decision to cancel a hijab-friendly pool party as a "a victory of common sense" in the "civilisational clash with Islam".

NORWAY

- With direct reference to the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023, the head of the justice committee in parliament and a member of the Progress Party wrote on his Facebook page: "With Norway and Israel against Arabs who kill people, as they are in the habit of doing [...]". The leader of the Progress Party demanded his resignation which was later handed in (March 2024).

POLAND

- On 11 October, Mateusz Morawiecki, then prime minister and Law and Justice (PiS) party candidate for parliament in the 2023 elections, during an electoral meeting, stated, "The Israeli Palestinian conflict will result in tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Muslim immigrants marching towards Europe, as they did a few years ago. You will see these marches of Islamic young men who have women's rights for nothing. [...] Among these illegal immigrants there will be [...] people like Islamic militants, those came there this time, Islamic terrorists. [...] Great waves of illegal immigration entering Sweden, France, Germany, destroy the peace of those cities. Let's not allow this to happen!"

PORTUGAL

- André Ventura, president of far-right Chega, the third force in the National Assembly, stated, “We need a new immigration policy, with more control of the frontiers and being careful with Europe’s Islamisation.”

SERBIA

- A protest was organised in Mladenovac against the construction of a mosque three days before Orthodox Christmas. Protest organisers claimed that building a mosque in Mladenovac, where no mosques existed during Ottoman rule, is a political act meant to provoke the local Serbian Orthodox population. The local mayor, Vladan Glišić, denied any plans or requests for constructing a mosque, dismissing the claims as baseless.
- In Belgrade, a panel entitled “Was Sarajevo a Besieged and Blocked City?” was organised by the Representation of the Republika Srpska in Serbia, where claims were made that the siege was only a defense of the Serbs of Sarajevo against the Muslims.
- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said, “Thank you, President Vučić [Aleksandar Vučić, president of Serbia since 2017]! Without Serbia and Hungary, Europe would have hundreds of thousands more migrants!”
- During a session of the Serbian National Assembly on 11 July 2023, Jelena Jerinić, a representative of the opposition party Moramo, was booed by members of the ruling coalition when she spoke about the genocide in Srebrenica. Jerinić highlighted the International Court of Justice’s 2007 ruling that recognised the events in Srebrenica as genocide and criticised the ongoing denial of these facts. Her remarks were met with significant opposition from the ruling party representatives, reflecting the contentious nature of acknowledging the genocide within Serbian political discourse.

SLOVAKIA

- Milan Mazurek, a politician of the far-right party Republika stated, “Slovakia today faces a massive invasion of illegal migration. (...) We know very well that if a criminal crosses these borders, every illegal immigrant is by definition a criminal (...) And we are fighting here for the safety of all the inhabitants of the Slovak Republic. We want them not to be afraid, we want them to be able to live a normal, safe life, to feel that the state is there for them.” He added that his movement’s position is that “the only tolerable way of illegal immigration is zero illegal migrants. No illegal immigrant has anything to do here.”

SPAIN

- Santiago Abascal, leader of the extreme far-right political party VOX, stated, "Today we will see how those who usually silence this threat will be shocked, and in a few weeks they will attack us for denouncing a fact that is a reality throughout Europe. Some open their doors to them, others finance them, and the people suffer. We cannot tolerate Islamism advancing on our land."
- Silvia Orriols, president of the far-right ultranationalist political party Catalan Alliance (Aliança Catalana) stated, "Allowing a massive influx of Muslim immigrants is a mistake that we could pay dearly for because essentially Muslims do not recognise European democracies or our civil laws."
- Santiago Abascal (VOX) stated, "We have to take them down, yes, all the heartless ones who bring hatred, pain and death. And preferably we need to take them down before they kill a single innocent person. In Barcelona, in Brussels or in Israel. But first, we must prevent them from entering and hold those who have opened the doors accountable."

SWEDEN

- Jimmie Åkesson, leader of the Sweden Democrats since 2005, made statements suggesting that the issue of Quran burnings should be addressed with freedom of expression and that restricting such actions is dangerous for Swedish democracy. However, more radical statements came from Richard Jomshof, a member of the Sweden Democrats and Chairman of the Justice Committee, who commented, "I don't like burning the Quran, but this is legal, and let's burn 100 more Qurans for those who are disturbed by this." He also called Islam an "anti-democratic, violent, and misogynistic religion/ideology" in a social media post in July.

SWITZERLAND

- There has been a significant increase in Islamophobic discourse among political figures, especially those from far-right parties. Statements have frequently targeted Muslim communities, contributing to a climate of fear and discrimination.
- The series by Swiss People's Party (SVP) titled "Neue Normalität?" exhibits racist and xenophobic messages. Some headlines read: "Thousands of young men from Africa, Afghanistan, Türkiye, etc. come to Switzerland - and stay here! This policy costs taxpayers CHF 4 billion annually - and those are just the costs of the federal government. In addition, there are thefts, harassments, violence"; "North African criminals are causing insecurity in Switzerland"; "Switzerland is less and less safe, due to the importation of crime"; "An Arab robs a woman"; "The center-left's asylum chaos allows Islamist terrorists to come to Switzerland and stay there".

UNITED KINGDOM

- Home Secretary Suella Braverman in a speech at the Conservative Party Congress on 3 October, stated, "It's why we're making sure that police are not inadvertently helping mobs to enforce non-existent blasphemy laws. It's why we've prioritised tracking down grooming gang perpetrators and getting justice for their victims after authorities turned a blind eye. And it's why we've made sure that Prevent [the government programme that stops people from sliding towards terrorism] is focused on the main security threat to the British public, Islamist extremism."

LEGALISING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Governments and political parties implement or demand legislation that directly targets Muslims as religious subjects, treating them differently than members of other religious communities.

BELGIUM

- Flemish Minister of Internal Affairs Bart Somers started the procedure for the withdrawal of the recognition of three mosques connected to the Diyanet, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, and is planning to do the same for the remaining nine. The Diyanet took matters to the Constitutional Court in Belgium, which declared the ban on foreign funding for religious communities and religious service providers unconstitutional.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- The Ministry of Interior of Republika Srpska (MUP RS) launched an investigation against imam Muharem ef. Štulanović for calling Republika Srpska a “genocidal creation” during a sermon in Bihać. This investigation, invoking Article 280a of the RS Criminal Code, addresses offenses against the entity’s reputation. The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina condemned the move, viewing it as an attempt to silence discussions on historical truths, especially the genocide recognised by international courts.
- Municipal authorities in Neum sealed a mosque a day after a minaret was added, citing building permit irregularities. The Islamic Community and local Bosniak residents argued this action was discriminatory and aimed at limiting religious freedoms, reflecting broader struggles of religious minorities in certain regions.
- In Mostar, a dispute arose over the construction of the Croatian National Theatre on the site of the former Lakišića harem, a historic Muslim burial ground. The Islamic Community’s requests to build an Islamic Cultural Centre on the same site have been ignored or delayed. The move is seen as an attempt to erase Bosniak cultural heritage from the city’s central zone.

BULGARIA

- After a 9-year-long juridical battle, the historical Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo and its vicinity were granted to the municipality, which only three weeks later, on 16 January 2023, organised a ceremonial turning of the first sod of a project that would turn the iconic mosque building into a gallery. During the event attended by a number of MPs from the 48th Parliament and uniformed generals from the Bulgarian army, the mayor of Karlovo, Emil Kabaivanov, stated, “We have been working on the project

for several years, but the approval procedures were difficult. It took a whole year for the National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage to agree on the design." It, thus, becomes clear that the municipality leadership knew in advance that it would win the case and took the necessary administrative steps to activate the project long before the court ruling. It is not clear how an official institution such as the National Institute of Immovable Cultural Heritage can start a procedure for approving a project foreseeing a radical transformation of a historical site whose legal status is unspecified. On the same date, Chairman of the Supreme Muslim Council Vedat Ahmed wrote on Facebook, "The mosques have *been built only for the sake of mentioning Allah's name...* And what the Municipality of Karlovo is doing under the plausible pretext of 'respect' and 'preservation' is an act of complete dishonour, demolition, theft, Islamophobia and an attempt to stop the mentioning of Allah. This is happening in democratic Bulgaria, which is a member of the European Union. This is a mosque built more than 530 years ago by Karlizade Ali Bey, who was the founder of the city that bears his name."

Vedat Ahmed
16 Ocak 2023 · 🌐

Saygıdan bahsedilerek yapılan düpedüz bir hırsızlık, ama bundan ötesi de var İslâm düşmanlığı... 530 yıllık Karlizade Ali Bey (Kurşun) Camisini demokratik bir ülkede aslından kopararak müzeye dönüştürmek başka bir şeyle izah edilemez. Bilim insanlarının bu işe alet olmasına da anlam veremiyorum... Her şeye rağmen Allah'ın adaletine inancımız tam... Daha önce camileri kapatan, yıkan ve gaspedenlerin başına gelenler bunların da muhakkak başına gelecek...

Джамиите са изградени за споменаване на името на Аллах... А това, което община Карлово прави под благовидния претекст "уважение" и "съхраняване" е пълно неуважение, рушене, кражба, ислямофобия и опит за спиране на споменаването на Аллах. Това се случва в демократична България, която е членка на Европейския съюз. 530 и кусур годишната джамия, изградена от Карлъзаде Али Бей, който е основател на града, носещ неговото име. Къде останаха заветите на Левски?! Гьонсуратлък...

Въпреки всичко вярвам в справедливостта на Аллах и той ще отсъди справедливо с тези, които рушат домовете Му, така както се е случвало с други преди това...



PBNOVINI.COM
Емблематичната Куршум джамия в Карлово става галерия за ценни археологически открития/ВИДЕО...

DENMARK

- On 9 November 2023, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen wrote a public letter to the Minister of Justice Peter Hummelgaard stating that she wanted him to investigate whether pro-Palestinian protests promote terrorism and whether police and prosecutors can intervene. In the letter, she noted that she had observed “disturbing behaviour in Denmark fuelled by the conflict” and emphasised that “it clearly shows that there are people in Denmark who have not embraced our Danish values”, insinuating that it is not ethnic Danes she is addressing, but immigrants, often assumed to be Muslims.

FRANCE

- On 7 September, the former minister of national education and youth, Gabriel Attal, issued a new decree extending the 2004 law banning religious symbols in public schools to include the abaya and qamis (thobe), a long garment that covers the entire body, as ostensible manifestations of religious affiliation. This new clothing restriction mainly targets female high school students who wear the hijab outside school premises. The Council of State validated this new ban, deeming that it posed no illegal restrictions on fundamental freedoms. However, the application of the ban has generated numerous instances of abuse, including sexual harassment.

ITALY

- The Draft Law 1018/2023, presented by Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia), makes it more difficult for Muslims to build mosques and to use existent facilities (such as garages) as prayer rooms.

KOSOVO

- The removal of Muslim girls from schools in Kosovo for wearing hijabs reflects a form of institutionalised Islamophobia, enforced through school policies rather than specific laws. While not legally codified, these policies disproportionately target Muslim students and restrict their access to education, effectively legitimising Islamophobia under the guise of maintaining secularism. It should be noted, however, that showing some progress, almost all girls were allowed to return to school.

NORTH MACEDONIA

- On social networks and in the media, NGOs, citizens, and politicians started collecting signatures for reducing the sound of the call to prayer.

PORTUGAL

- Deputies or members of the nationalist, right-wing political party Chega declared that Portugal needs to review its immigration policy, especially in regard to the arrival of immigrants.

SERBIA

- The Serbian Court of Appeals rehabilitated Nikola Kalabić, a former commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (Chetniks), deciding he did not collaborate with the German occupying forces during World War II. The court ruled that there is no written evidence of his collaboration with the Germans and that accusations against him were politically and ideologically motivated. The decision sparked controversy, especially given the Chetniks' role in wartime atrocities against civilians.
- Aida Ćorović, an activist, was fined 100,000 RSD (approx. 850 EUR) by the Serbian court for throwing eggs at a mural of Ratko Mladić, a convicted war criminal responsible for the Srebrenica genocide. Ćorović criticised the Serbian government, alleging it protects criminals and suppresses dissent. The mural, located in Vračar, Belgrade, has been a point of contention, highlighting the societal divide over Mladić's legacy and the ongoing tension surrounding war crimes acknowledgment in Serbia.

SPAIN

- Extreme right-wing party Vox proposed discriminating against immigrants from countries with a Muslim culture. The party also wants to prohibit the entry of immigrants from "Islamic culture countries" into Spain "if their correct and peaceful integration cannot be guaranteed".

SWITZERLAND

- Legal measures, such as restrictions on certain Islamic practices, have become more widely discussed and enacted. These include restrictions on hijabs and the ongoing discussion over outlawing the full-face veil.
- Discussions continued on a national level regarding enforcing the 2021 full-face veil ban, with some cantons implementing stricter measures.
- In September 2023, the Swiss parliament passed legislation making it illegal to cover one's face, including wearing a burka with a fine of CHF 1,000, in public and private places accessible to the general public. The "burka ban" was approved by the upper chamber of parliament, known locally as Nationalrat, by a vote of 151 to 29. Exceptions to the ban include religious services, indigenous customs, theatrical performances, and veiling for health or climatic reasons.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE MEDIA

The media a crucial role in the reproduction and normalisation of anti-Muslim racism plays.

ALBANIA

- After the end of the Eid al-Adha prayer in Tirana's main square, the national public broadcasting channel of Albania, Radio Televizioni Shqiptar (Albanian Radio and Television, RTSH), reported on the event by underlining that "the Skënderbej [Skanderbeg] Square will return to regular activity to be used by the citizens." The social media post was met with public outcry, with many commentators asking RTSH to apologise publicly and distance itself from the discriminatory and exclusionary anti-Muslim language.

 **RTSH Radio Televizioni Shqiptar** Follow ...

Yesterday at 9:05 pm · 

Pas përfundimit të faljes së Kurban Bajramit, sheshi "Skënderbej" do i rikthehet aktivitetit normal për t'u shfrytëzuar nga qytetarët.



lajme.rtsh.al
Nesër Kurban Bajrami, myslimanët do të falin namazin në sheshin "Skënde...

 1.5k 118 comments · 2 shares

AUSTRIA

- In an op-ed in *Exxpress*, columnist Daniela Holzinger opined in a piece titled “Islam Again and Again”: “A killing spree in Vienna, knife terror in a small town, plans to attack schools, rapes and debates about virtue. Again and again, immigrant Islam is making headlines that would have been considered impossible just a few years ago. If we don’t start to tighten the reins massively now, we will soon no longer recognise our country.”
- The tabloid press *Exxpress* criticised Muslims organising a panel on Islamophobia in the European Parliament, writing that “Islamists are in Brussels”, problematising statements made by EU expert Shada Islam and Eve Geddie from Amnesty International.
- In an opinion piece by Rosemarie Schwaiger in *Die Presse* titled “No, A Female Soccer Player with a Headscarf Is No Reason to Cheer”, she argues: “For the first time, a young woman wearing a hijab is playing in the World Cup. How unworldly do you have to be to think this is ‘equality.’”

BELGIUM

- Tom Van Grieken, president of right-wing nationalist party Vlaams Belang, shared a video of Muslims praying on the streets for the Eid prayer, stating, “What does Islamisation actually mean? These are images from #Brussels from two days ago. Public roads are being seized for Islam. Is this really the society we want?”

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- Branimir Kojić criticised the acquittal of former Bosnian army members for alleged crimes against Serbs. He framed the acquittal as part of a broader effort to falsify history, accusing the judiciary of biased actions that distort the suffering of Serbs. He suggested that Bosniaks are actively working to rewrite history, minimising or erasing their alleged wrongdoings. This aligns with broader stereotypes of Muslims being deceitful or unwilling to take responsibility for their actions, reinforcing the victimhood of Serbs, and portraying Muslims as aggressors, further deepening ethnic and religious divides.
- The public broadcaster Radio Television of Republika Srpska (RTRS) published an article discussing historian Aleksandar Raković’s comments urging sanctions against alleged “Muslim extremists” for threatening Serbs celebrating Petrovdans in Srebrenica. Raković criticised the perceived hostility from the local imam and called for legal action, framing the incident as part of a broader problem that affects inter-ethnic relations. The article’s offensive nature is exacerbated by the context of the Srebrenica Genocide commemoration. Describing Bosniak reactions as “extremist” while framing the Serbian celebration as peaceful dismisses the deep trauma and grief associated with the genocide. Srebrenica,

where more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys were massacred in 1995, remains a symbol of suffering for survivors and families.

- RTRS/SRNA published an article presenting anti-Semitism in Bosnia and Herzegovina as being rooted in the political and religious landscape established by Alija Izetbegović's leadership, suggesting that Islamic political movements fostered extremism. It highlighted controversial religious speeches and publications, portraying them as examples of extremist rhetoric and indirectly framed Bosniaks as inherently prone to radicalism.
- RTRS published an article by Dževad Galijašević associating Islamic prayers for Palestine with extremism and violence. It framed Muslims as inherently violent, equating Islamic beliefs with terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The narrative implied that Muslim leaders and communities, including those in Bosnia and Herzegovina, have never fully renounced violence, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Muslims being inclined towards extremism.

BULGARIA

- On 4 November 2023, Prof. Vladimir Chukov, a Middle East expert, during his participation in what is perhaps the most watched podcast in Bulgaria "2&200" (with almost 155,000 views and 300 comments on YouTube for this episode alone) called the prophet Muhammad "the first anti-Semite".



- On 12 December 2023, the analyst David Levi during his participation in one of the most popular podcasts hosted by the well-known journalist Martin Karbowski (with 205,000 subscribers), on the subject of what is happening in the Gaza Strip, indulged in unacceptable anti-Muslim hate speech: "The Ministry of Education of Palestine has been teaching children in Gaza since 2007 that all non-Muslims are animals and pigs and they must be slaughtered... The Israeli army is the most humane army in

the world... We fight the war with tweezers... 15,000 are the victims, but according to Ahmed with the kufiyah, who called himself the minister of health... If the Arabs win the war, there will be no Israel. If Israel wins, it will be peace... Eliminating Israel is one of the intermediate goals. The goal is then to remove this arrowhead of Western civilisation from the Middle East so that there is no obstacle to enter Europe. Their goal is Bulgaria, their goal is Spain, their goal is England, France and Germany, their goal is to subjugate the whole world..."



Целта на ХАМАС е унищожение на Израел - Давид Леви в студиото на @Martin_Karbowski

DENMARK

- A Danish-Palestinian imam was accused of being a Hamas leader in TV2, one of Denmark's largest news channels, based on a claim by Israeli Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli. The article faced heavy criticism for revealing the imam's identity without evidence.

ESTONIA

- In April 2023, the Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO) published an annual review that received significant media coverage. KAPO stated that the number of foreigners from "high-risk Islamic countries" who have settled in Estonia is growing steadily and the growing Muslim community is "inevitably linked" to several other risk factors such as increased contact with high-risk countries, the transfer of the origin countries' problems to Estonia, and increased likelihood of radicalisation.

FINLAND

- A story titled "The Government Plans to Tighten Integration Rules" was published by MTV, a private television company, but was taken down almost immediately. The reporter who interviewed Interior Minister Mari Rantanen was Ivan Puopolo, well-known for his anti-immigration views.

Hallitus kiristää kotoutumisen ehtoja



FRANCE

- On 31 October, the lawyer and state councillor Arno Klarsfeld stated on CNews, the most Islamophobic TV channel in France, that “Muslims, many work on construction sites, have access to explosives, can have access to firearms, if there was an order to kill Jews, there could be an attack every day.” This essentialising statement is a criminal offence, but Klarsfeld was in a friendly space, allowing him to make such Islamophobic remarks.

GREECE

- In June, a young Polish woman working on the island of Kos was murdered by a Bangladeshi individual. This event provided an opportunity for media outlets to launch attacks against Islam and Muslims, emphasising the “monstrous character of Muslims” and the purported incompatibility of Islam with Western values. Extreme-right newspaper *Eleftheri Ora* (Free Hour) embraced a statement by a public figure on its front page arguing, “She was murdered by inhumane people of other religions [i.e. Islam] hungry for sex”.



HUNGARY

- In an interview with well-known pro-government figurehead Zoltán Lominci Jr., the online outlet Origo presented demonstrations against the war in Gaza as “demonstrations supporting and propagating Islamist terror”.

európai útló

Tombolnak a muszlim terrort támogató migránsok Nyugat-Európában

2023. október 21. 09:32

People gather with placards and Palestinian flags to take part in a "March For Palestine", part of a pro-Palestinian national demonstration, in London on October 14, 2023, organized by Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Friends of Al-Aqsa, Stop the War Coalition, Muslim Association of Britain, Palestinian Forum in Britain and CND. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak called on Israel Friday to take "every possible precaution to protect civilians" in its response to last weekend's deadly attack by Hamas. (Photo by Adrian DENNIS / AFP)

Míg Nyugat-Európában az iszlamista terrort támogató és propagáló tüntetések zajlanak, addig Magyarországon erre sem igény, sem jogi lehetőség nincs – mondta az Origónak ifj. Lominci Zoltán

EZEK IS ÉRDEKELHETNEK

- In an op-ed for *Magyar Nemzet*, the most important KESMA-related political daily paper, the author openly embraced the idea of the Great Replacement theory. The title of the article read “This Is No Longer Migration: Population Replacement” and the article claimed that one may lose their job if they mention the Great Replacement theory in Western Europe. In this light, the article presented Central Europe as a domain of common sense and free speech.

Magyar Nemzet

SZOBOSZLAI DOMINIK HÁBORÚ UKRAJNÁBAN MAGYAR PÉTER PRESSMAN

Portugália 0 ÉLŐ 0 Szlovénia

Vélemény

Ez már régen nem migráció: népességsere

Az európai és az amerikai elitnek kicsúszott a kezéből az a kulturális kísérlet, amit ostobaságból, arroganciából és narcizusból indítottak el.

Deme Dániel



ITALY

- On 18 October, after two Swedes were shot in Brussels by a man of Tunisian origins in an attack described as terrorist, *Liberò's* front page used the sensationalist title "Il terrorista sul barcone" (The terrorist on the boat) to argue implicitly that all immigrants travelling across the Mediterranean might turn into radical jihadists.

KOSOVO

- Kohavision, one of Kosovo's largest media platforms, posted an interview on YouTube with the title "There Was Never a Mosque in Llapushnik, and Now the Church Accepts Us with our White Plis' Says a Resident."

NORWAY

- Nettavisen*, a Norwegian online newspaper (without an open agenda) ran what could be described as a campaign against a central mosque in Norway. The Rabita Mosque was accused, through several articles and without proper documentation, of posing a security threat to Norway and operating a form of hidden economy.



POLAND

- On 24 June 2023, right-wing wPolityce.pl published the article "Murder of Polish Woman on Kos: Muslims Coming to Europe 'for Their Own,' Including White Women."

ROMANIA

- In March-April 2023, the construction of a mosque in Timișoara by an Egyptian businessman, established in Romania since 1991, drew media attention. The Mufti of Romania reacted by stating in a press release that, as stated in the Muftiate's statute, its role is to guide and coordinate all religious activities within Muslim communities, but it had not received any request from the community in Timiș County to take steps to build an official place of worship, authorised by the Romanian state. The Mufti raised the issue of the functioning of Muslim places of worship in big cities which do not have the legal status of authorised mosques. He also pointed out the problem, debated since the 2000s, that some of the imams who provide religious services in these places have not studied Islamic theology at educational institutions recognised by the Romanian authorities and, therefore, cannot be considered part of the Muslim clergy in Romania. The press release described the approach taken in Timișoara as a deviation, calling on the state authorities to support the Muftiate and take the necessary measures so that the law is respected. The episode drew attention to institutional power centres targeting the presence of newly arrived Muslims within the security concept framework.

SERBIA

- Bogdan Ilić, a popular Serbian YouTuber known as Baka Prase, faced backlash for his comments about the earthquake in Türkiye. During a livestream, he stated he would not donate to earthquake relief efforts in the country, citing historical grievances against the Turks. His comments were seen as insensitive and sparked significant criticism from his followers and the public.
- The Film Center of Serbia allocated more than 200,000 EUR for the production of the film "Linija" directed by Dragoljub Elčić. The film glorifies the Siege of Sarajevo, focusing on Dr. Miodrag Lazić, who voluntarily went to Sarajevo to establish a war hospital on the front lines. The project has been criticised for presenting a one-sided historical perspective, portraying Serbs as heroes and victims, which is seen as an attempt to rewrite the narrative of the Bosnian War.

SLOVAKIA

- The website paradigm.sk publishes the most comprehensive Islamophobic content among Slovak websites. Between January and December 2023, a total of 80 articles were published, spreading various conspiracies and hateful content about Islam and Muslims in Europe. The website also published a number of articles about the demographic crisis or the "crisis of Christianity" with references to threats related to

Islam, Muslims, and immigration in Europe and Slovakia. The website self-describes itself as “[a] site created out of love for the Church and the world that does not skim the surface” and is reportedly run by Mikuláš Hučko, who works as a translator and interpreter and is involved in the Slovak Greek Catholic Church. He is also a contributor to another anti-Islamic portal, christianitas.sk.



Cirkev Sociálna náuka Cirkvi Politika Spoločnosť História Demografia LGBT Multi-kulti

Search Result for 'islam'



Open Doors: Islam je hlavnou príčinou utrpenia kresťanov

© 20. JANUÁRA 2024

<https://vimeo.com/903250217> Nová správa združenia Open Doors: 365 miliónov kresťanov žije v krajinách bez náboženskej slobody. Hlavnou príčinou prenasledovania je islam, a to v 34 z 50 krajín. Nasleduje komunizmus so Severnou Kóreou ...

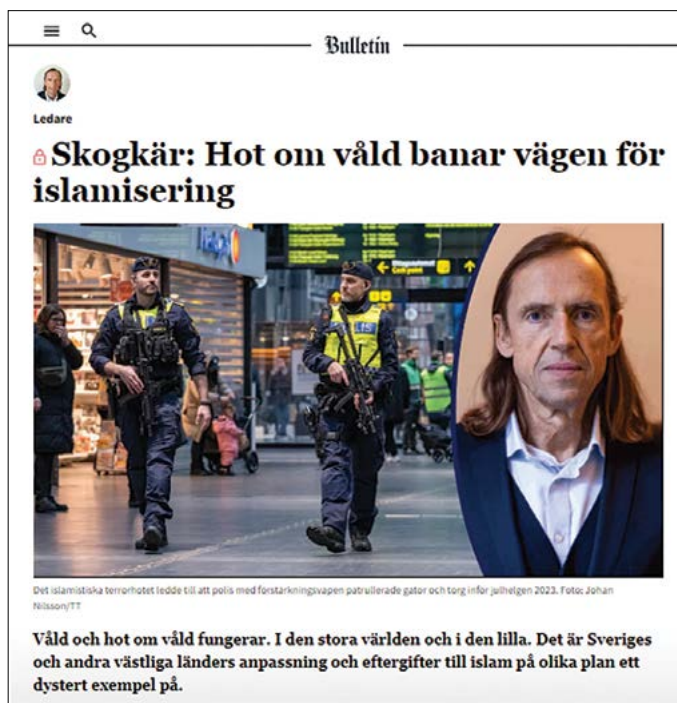
READ MORE

SPAIN

- Journalist Juan Abreu, writing for *VozPopuli*, presented a column in April 2023 titled “Islamophobia, A Moral Duty” where he stated, “A few days ago, a large group of young Muslims could be seen (I don’t know if because of Ramadan) in front of the Barcelona Arc de Triumph. They were hitting their chests. While they beat themselves, as if possessed by a frenzied deity, they emitted a kind of chilling chant. There is little discussion (or none) about the wisdom or prudence of allowing groups of immigrants, instead of accepting and adapting to the rules of Western civilisation (the only civilisation that exists), to import their macabre religious rituals and, in passing, their sexist, misogynistic and obscurantist norms to Europe.” He added, “The reality [is] that Europe is being invaded” and that “Islam is a religion that kills.”

SWEDEN

- The online newspaper *Bulletin* under the photo seen below stated, “The threat of Islamist terrorism has led the police to patrol the streets and squares with reinforced weapons before the 2023 Christmas holiday.” The definition of the “Islamist terrorism” exemplifies how the newspaper establishes a relationship between terrorism and ways of interpreting Islam. By associating the religion of Islam with crimes, *Bulletin* adopts a language that puts Muslims under suspicion and, worse yet, makes the entire Muslim community a target.



SWITZERLAND

- Swiss media outlets have been criticised for their biased coverage, which frequently depicts Muslims as “a security threat”.
- According to a study conducted by Carmen Koch and Angelica Hüsler (2023) from the University of Zurich, 35% of media coverage of Muslims was unfavourable, with Islam frequently being associated with terrorism or extremism. An example of this was a major newspaper writing an op-ed against the construction of a new mosque, claiming it may become a breeding ground for radicalism.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ALBANIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

KRISTINA MILLONA

The Author

Kristina Millona is an independent scholar and investigative journalist based in Tirana, Albania. She holds a master's degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in transnational queer feminist politics. Her research interests include security studies, racism, and the gendered effects of Islamophobia. Millona has published articles in Albanian on the relationship between women's rights, the war on terror, and contemporary imperialism in Afghanistan. Her latest research carried out with the End Female Genital Mutilation European Network in Belgium, focused on analyzing the impact of religious discrimination on the work to end FGM and support affected communities and survivors in Europe while providing policy recommendations for international and European stakeholders in tackling Islamophobia.

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Executive Summary

This report includes the main Islamophobic incidents recorded throughout 2023 in Albania. As illustrated by the interviews included in this report, Muslims continue to face discrimination in the workplace. In particular, hijabi women encounter forms of employment discrimination due to their religious attire, sometimes pushing them to take the headscarf off. In education and research, the misinformation, unfounded claims, and distortion in school textbooks about Muslims and the history of Islam remain an ongoing issue, necessitating immediate efforts from state institutions to provide media literacy.

The appointment of Mustafa Nano, a public figure renowned for his Islamophobic tone, as the new ambassador of Albania to Switzerland was met with backlash and strong reactions from members and religious leaders of the Muslim community. Various activists criticized the government for Nano's appointment, describing it as an endorsement of Islamophobia and calling for the reappointment of another ambassador. Similar to previous years, the media remains saturated with Islamophobic rhetoric, with media outlets using sensationalist language in the coverage of public Islamic celebrations, and persistent othering of the Muslim community. Given the ongoing genocide in Gaza, this report sheds light on the far-reaching implications of the Middle East political developments in the segregation and discrimination of the Muslim community in Albania. As illustrated by this report, Islamophobic and anti-Muslim sentiments are on the rise in public discourse in the wake of the Israel-Gaza war, leading to double standards on the coverage of Palestinian stories. For instance, Muslim activists have denounced the repressive policies followed by the Albanian authorities to silence and ban peaceful assemblies against the Israeli's unlawful attacks on Palestinians in Gaza.

Përmbledhje e Shkurtër

Ky raport përfshin incidentet kryesore islamofobike të regjistruara përgjatë vitit 2023 në media, punësim, internet, arsim, politikë dhe sistemin e drejtësisë në Shqipëri. Siç ilustron nga intervistat e përfshira në këtë raport, muslimanët/et vazhdojnë të përballen me diskriminim në punësim dhe në vendin e punës. Në veçanti, gratë me shami ndeshen me forma të diskriminimit në punë për shkak të veshjes së tyre fetare, ndonjëherë të detyruara për të hequr shaminë për shkak të presionit shoqëror. Në sistemin arsimor, dezinformimi dhe shtrembërimi i fakteve rreth muslimanëve dhe historisë së Islamit në tekstet shkollore mbeten një çështje e vazhdueshme, duke kërkuar adresim të menjëhershme nga institucionet shtetërore për korrigjimin e kurrikulës.

Emërimi i Mustafa Nanos, një personazh publik i njohur për tonet e tij islamofobike, si ambasador i ri i Shqipërisë në Zvicër u prit me reagime dhe kundërshti të forta nga pjesëtarët dhe liderët fetarë të komunitetit mysliman. Aktivistë të ndryshëm kritikuan qeverinë për emërimin e Nanos, duke e përshkruar këtë akt si një mbështetje të islamofobisë dhe duke kërkuar riemërimin e një ambasadori tjetër. Ngjashëm me vitet e mëparshme, retorika islamofobike mbetet prezente në media, me tabloide mediatike që përdorin gjuhë sensacionaliste në mbulimin mediatik të festimeve publike të komunitetit mysliman. Duke pasur parasysh gjenocidin e vazhdueshëm në Gaza, ky raport hedh dritë mbi implikimet e gjera të zhvillimeve politike në Lindjen e Mesme në segregimin dhe diskriminimin e komunitetit mysliman në Shqipëri. Siç ilustron nga ky raport, narrativat islamofobike dhe anti-muslimane janë në rritje në diskursin publik në vazhden e luftës Izrael-Gaza, duke çuar në standarde të dyfishta në mbulimin e historive palestineze. Për shembull, aktivistë të komunitetit mysliman kanë denoncuar përpjekjet e autoriteteve shqiptare për të heshtur dhe ndaluar tubimet paqësore kundër sulmeve të paligjshme të Izraelit kundër palestinezëve në Gaza.

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Albania

Type of Regime: Parliamentary democracy

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë, PS)

Opposition Parties: Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë, PD); Freedom Party (Partia e Lirisë, PL); Movement Together (Lëvizja Bashkë)

Last Elections: 2021 Parliamentary Elections: Socialist Party 48.67%; Democratic Party 39.43%; Freedom Party 6.81%

Total Population: 2,402,113 (Population and Housing Census 2023 The Institute of Statistics)¹

Major Language: Albanian

Official Religion: No official religion

Statistics on Islamophobia: No statistics available

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) in Albania recorded 41 cases of racism and discrimination.

Major Religions (% of Population): Islam (56.7%), Catholicism (10%), Orthodoxy (6.75%), Bektashism (2.1%), Non-affiliated (5.49%), Undeclared (13.8%), Atheists (2.5%), Other Christians (0.14%) (INSTAT/Census 2011)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 1.587 million (56.7%) (INSTAT/Census 2011)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Muslim Community of Albania (Komuniteti Musliman i Shqipërisë, KMSH), League of Imams in Albania (Lidhja e Hoxhallarëve të Shqipërisë, LHSH), Muslim Forum of Albania (Forumi Musliman i Shqipërisë)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Muslim Forum of Albania (Forumi Musliman i Shqipërisë)

Far-Right Parties: Albanian National Front Party (Partia Balli Kombëtar Shqiptar, PBK); National Unity Party (Partia e Unitetit Kombëtar, PUK); Red and Black Alliance (Aleanca Kuq e Zi, AK)

Far-Right Movements: N/A

Far-Right Violent Organizations: N/A

1. Worldometer. n.d. "Albania Population (2021) - Worldometer." [www.worldometers.info. https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/albania-population/](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/albania-population/).

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** No

Introduction

Islamophobia manifested in various fields during 2023 in Albania. While the government promotes religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence between religions in Albania, the state authorities have shown little effort in accommodating the needs of the Muslim community regarding their religious identity in the workplace. Members of the Muslim community continue to face obstacles in performing Friday prayers, and employers fail to offer practices with flexible hours for prayer breaks to help Muslim employees manage their Friday prayers and work commitments. School textbooks continue to be fraught with misleading information on Islam with distorted and inaccurate content on Islamic history and culture, leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes and reinforcement of institutional biases. Mainstream media continues to portray Islamic celebration in a negative light, often through securitizing language and by ignoring the normalcy of Islamic rites. The promotion of Islamophobic public figures in the political landscape remains a concerning phenomenon. The appointment of journalist Mustafa Nano, a promoter of Islamophobia, as the future Albanian ambassador to Switzerland sparked a reaction on social media among the Muslim community. Enes Neza, the founder of the National Observatory against Islamophobia, considered the appointment a decision that poses challenges to democracy and social harmony in Albania.



Figure 1: The reaction of Neza on social media calling for the reappointment of an ambassador who respects the core values of religious freedom and diversity.

Source: Facebook (14th of June 2023).

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Last September, the Tirana Municipality issued a promotional poster of the city that omitted the Ethem Beu Mosque (Albanian *Xhamia e Haxhi Et'hem Beut*), which is located in the city center next to the Clock Tower of Tirana.² The exclusion of the Ethem Beu Mosque from the poster sparked a strong reaction within the Muslim community, which saw it as an act of erasure and Islamophobia. (Fig. 2) Various members and leaders of the Muslim community have deemed the exclusion of the mosque from the poster as a clear example of the hostility and systematic discrimination against the Muslim community in Albania that the media have long fueled. According to analysts at the National Observatory Against Islamophobia,³ the act sends the wrong message that some communities of our society are less valued and that they should be less visible and involved in society because of their religious beliefs and identity. Despite these incidents, there are currently no anti-Muslim hate crime reports carried out in Albania, which reflects the legislative and policy gaps in addressing Islamophobia.



Figure 2: The promotional poster published by the Tirana Municipality which omitted the Ethem Beu Mosque from the city's map. **Source:** Observer.al (20th September 2023),

2. Observer.al. 2023. "Ethem Beu' Si Përpkje E Fshirjes Së 'Tjetrit' Nga Identiteti Kolektiv." Observer.al. September 20, 2023. https://observer.al/ethem-beu-si-perpkje-e-fshirjes-se-tjetrit-nga-identiteti-kolektiv/?fbclid=IwAR0VQhwqQ4JBW198tivWImCEVueqVaFLxbJggsY4AbuSeikMOg2H3eM5Qw_aem_ATUYSymfaO_N9SXixlq7_UCsJ0Xtlt_o3u54razx4RgXOFRWCpBXgbV-W5Zkqolbmh4a4eCm9dUbn2HIVCdj579c.
3. Ibid.

Employment

Islamophobia in the workplace remains under-reported in Albania, impacting the employment opportunities and experiences of Muslim employees in the work environment. According to organizations and activists working closely with cases of Islamophobia, Muslim employees continue to experience harassment or microaggressions in the workplace. The Muslim Forum in Albania recorded the case of a Muslim female employee working in a public institution who was forced to take off her headscarf in the workplace due to ongoing discriminatory attitudes and the challenging experiences she faced.⁴

On September 11, Edlira Durmishaj, a psychologist and renowned Muslim feminist, was invited to a TV debate on Euronews Albania to express her views on public attitudes toward hijab-wearing in Albania.⁵ During the interview, she shared the story of her two friends, both of them Muslim believers, who stopped wearing the hijab due to pressure and social stigma. “One of them told me very directly that she could not wear the headscarf anymore, saying that all the doors kept getting closed for her as a Muslim woman,” said Durmishaj. Despite the anti-discrimination laws in the Albanian Constitution, hijabi women still face discriminatory experiences in the workplace due to their religious attire and feel reluctant to file complaints.⁶ Research and studies on Islamophobia and the human rights of Muslim women in Albania remain scant, and feminist organizations direct little attention to addressing forms of employment discrimination faced by hijabi women.

In an interview for the report, Fisnik Kruja, head of the Muslim Forum in Albania, raised the issue of public institutions’ unwillingness to accommodate religious practices, such as time for daily prayers for Muslim employees. “Last year, we contacted the directorate of the civil administration, demanding that the employees of the Muslim faith be allowed to pray on Friday. The state institutions continue to ignore this aspect and still have not responded to our requests,” said Kruja. In addition to providing flexible break times to perform prayers, Kruja argues that the public institutions should invest more in designating prayer rooms in the workplace to foster a more inclusive work environment. “Around five years ago, we requested the Chief of Defence of the Armed Forces to comply with NATO standards and provide rooms set aside for Muslim prayers,” added Kruja.

As published in the 2023 annual report issued by the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) in Albania, 144 complaints of employment discrim-

4. 2024. Interview with the head of Muslim Forum in Albania.

5. Euronews Albania. 2023. “Vajzën Myslimane Nuk E Regjistruan Në Shkollë Se Kishte Shami.’ Edlira Durmishaj Denoncon Një Rast.” YouTube. September 11, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvC0y0bs14k>.

6. EQUINET. 2021. “Albania: Update in the Law on Protection from Discrimination – Equinet.” [https://Equineteurope.org](https://equineteurope.org). April 16, 2021. <https://equineteurope.org/albania-update-in-the-law-on-protection-from-discrimination/>.

ination were recorded and handled by the institution.⁷ The reported grounds of employment discrimination span a broad spectrum, including political beliefs, health conditions, educational status, belonging to a particular group, disability, etc., with no recorded cases of employment discrimination based on religious beliefs and faith.

Robert Gajda, Commissioner for the Protection of Discrimination (CPD), provided some factors that may lead to the low number of recorded religious discrimination cases.⁸ “Indisputably, there is an under-reporting of religious-based discrimination cases, which can be related to many factors. First of all, citizens’ lack of trust in public institutions in general... from our conversations carried out with religious communities we noticed how some citizens address these issues through religious institutions to find and negotiate a solution as fast as possible.”

According to the commissioner, another reason citizens are reluctant to report is their hesitancy to address complaints institutionally, and instead resort to solving these cases informally. However, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of addressing these issues formally to ensure justice and equality. The commissioner underlined the importance and need to organize awareness-raising sessions with different communities to inform citizens of diverse backgrounds on the right to file a complaint. Collaborating with other religious communities to organize informative sessions with representatives who can then convey this information to other believers remains crucial as underscored by Gajda.

Education

As underlined in previous reports, the issue of misinformation and distortion of the history of Islam in educational textbooks persists. On its website, the Muslim Forum of Albania publicly criticized and denounced the presence of inaccurate information on Islam in textbooks.⁹ In their open letter to the Ministry of Education, they highlighted an excerpt from the history book taught in the tenth grade that was particularly misleading. (Fig. 3) “The new faith was offered to Muhammad (570-632)” says the quote underlined by the Muslim Forum. The screenshot from the school textbook published by the National Observatory of Islamophobia went viral on the internet. The quote, as illustrated by the Muslim Forum, challenges the Islamic belief that Muhammad was chosen by Allah to deliver a message that was divinely ordained and it’s important to remember that Islam was not ‘offered’ to Muhammad, but rather, it was a divine revelation from Allah. Hence, it sparked outrage among the Muslim community, with many of them asking the Ministry of Education, the

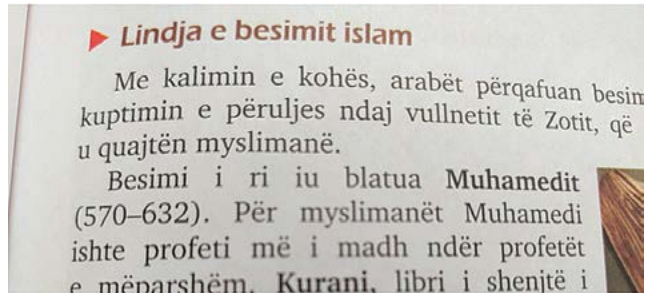
7. Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. 2023. “Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination.” <https://www.kmd.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Raporti-i-KMD-2023.pdf>.

8. Gajda, Robert. 2024. Interview with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination .

9. Kruja, Fisnik. 2023. “Letër Drejtuar Ministrisë Së Arsimit.” Fmsh-Al.org. September 12, 2023. <https://fmsh-al.org/leter-drejtuar-ministrise-se-arsimit/>.

authority responsible for educational curriculum development, to address and rectify this issue immediately.

Figure 3: “The new faith was offered to Muhammad (570–632)” says the quote in the history textbooks for elementary school. **Source:** Muslim Forum of Albania (12th of September 2023)



Politics

On 10 July 2023, Mustafa Nano, a public figure renowned for his public Islamophobic attitudes, was named Albania’s upcoming ambassador to Switzerland by Albanian President Bajram Begaj.¹⁰ The Muslim community in Albania reacted and contested this decision.¹¹ The decision to appoint the former politician and journalist has raised many questions and caused a public outcry among the Muslim community. “Journalist Mustafa Nano has continuously promoted prejudices against Islam and Muslims, even deeming Islam the biggest enemy in Albanian history,”¹² claimed one source near the National Observatory against Islamophobia. Various religious leaders of the Muslim community denounced the decision, arguing that his appointment might risk instigating further the hostility toward the Muslim community in Albania and pleaded for the reappointment of another ambassador who respects the core values of religious freedom, diversity, and coexistence. The National Day to Combat Islamophobia was not commemorated in 2023 by any of the political groups or civil society actors advocating against forms of discrimination and racism, with the state authorities reluctant to address Islamophobia formally.

The ongoing genocide in Gaza has had profound implications for the Muslim community across the globe. In Albania, various Islamic organizations, charities, and groups have engaged in public rallies and protests¹³ to demand an imme-

10. albinfo at. 2023. “Mustafa Nano Zyrtarisht Emërohet Ambasador Në Zvicër.” Albinfo. July 12, 2023. <https://www.albinfo.at/mustafa-nano-zyrtarisht-emerohet-ambasador-ne-zvicer/>.

11. Observer.al. 2023a. “Pse Kandidatura E Mustafa Nanos Për Ambasador Është Një Proçkë E Madhe.” Observer.al. June 14, 2023 https://observer.al/pse-kandidatura-e-mustafa-nanos-per-ambasador-eshte-nje-procke-e-madhe/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR1yb9Y0uGzW0UuhBmzybrVXmnA_OPSjlUwAJtxeAm6wlb341qCBv0iv5WQ_aem_Aa4z7jVWWSAzEuucSsEsNhCdPV2LZa25LxFRx7HbEddYhHqtouJHnOhrDs_IffEiaFridZ7tLgmRs.

12. BalkkanWeb. 2017. “‘Konvertimi Në Islam Proçka Më E Madhe E Shqiptarëve’, Ja Si E Shpjegon Mustafa Nano.” www.balkanweb.com. September 18, 2017. <https://www.balkanweb.com/konvertimi-ne-islam-procka-me-e-madhe-e-shqiptareve-ja-si-e-shpjegon-mustafa-nano/>.

13. Hysa, Roald. 2023. “Tubim Për Paqen Dhe Lirinë Në Palestinë.” Fmsh-AL.org. October 19, 2023. <https://fmsh-al.org/tubim-per-paqen-dhe-lirine-ne-palestine/>.

diate ceasefire and an end of Israel's unlawful attacks in the Gaza Strip.¹⁴ In October of last year, the Muslim Forum of Albania published a joint statement together with 240 professionals and personalities from various fields, with a public appeal to the government of Albania not to “remain silent in the face of war crimes and genocide in Gaza.”¹⁵

Just as in other countries, Islamophobic and anti-Muslim sentiments are surging up in public discourse in Albania in the wake of the Israel-Gaza war.¹⁶ Marlind Laçi, a political analyst on Middle East affairs, criticized the harmful narrative used for Palestinians by political pundits and called out the double standards shown by journalists and politicians in Albania on Palestinian suffering in the wake of Israel's attacks on Gaza.¹⁷ “Many public figures like journalist Grida Duma and pastor Akil Pano have expressed solidarity with Israeli victims of the 7 October attack, but they stay silent on the killings of Palestinians following the Israeli offensive on Gaza,” said Laçi. The political analyst criticized the evident double standards and the ways in which Palestinian lives in Gaza are dehumanized and treated as part of the “collateral damage,” calling this language a moral failure.

Media

Similar to previous years, the media remains saturated with Islamophobic rhetoric. It has become commonplace that whenever Islamic traditions are celebrated publicly, the coverage of these events in mainstream media outlets such as the Albanian Radio and Television (RTSH), the national public broadcasting, is sensationalist. The appointment of Nano as the future ambassador to Switzerland was reported in a positive light by certain news outlets such as Tema, Koha Jone, etc. deeming him an active voice for the Albanian community despite his public anti-Islam rhetoric.¹⁸

On the coverage of Israel's war on Gaza, some Albanian news outlets have retracted the unfounded claims by Israeli authorities that accuse Hamas of beheading forty babies in the Kfar Aza kibbutz during the October incursion into Israel. The television channel Vizion Plus disseminated the alleged claims on its webpage by

14. Gjevori, Elis. 2024. “Albanian Activists Say Israeli Participation in Cultural Week Is ‘Normalising Genocide.’” *Middle East Eye*. May 31, 2024. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/activists-urge-albania-cancel-israeli-cultural-week-normalising-genocide>.

15. 2023b. “Thirrje Ndaj Qeverisë Së Shqipërisë...” *Fmsh-Al.org*. October 29, 2023. <https://fmsh-al.org/thirrje-ndaj-qeverise-se-shqiperise/>.

16. Saber, Indlieb Farazi. 2023. “‘Seen as Less Human’: Why Has Islamophobia Surged amid Israel's Gaza War?” *Al Jazeera*. December 21, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/21/seen-as-less-human-why-has-islamophobia-surged-amid-israels-gaza-war>.

17. Laçi, Marlind. 2024. Interview with Marlind Laçi.

18. Redaksia.2023.Kandidat për ambasador në Zvicër, Mustafa Nano: Zë aktiv në mbrojtje të komunitetit shqiptar <https://kohajone.com/politike/kandidat-per-ambasador-ne-zvicer-mustafa-nano-ze-aktiv-ne-mbrojtje-te-komunitetit-shqiptar/>

citing the Israeli prime minister accusing Hamas of decapitating babies in its headline.¹⁹ Other local media such as Pamfleti, Java News, and Fax.AL published the alleged story of Hamas's decapitation of babies, hence amplifying the unfounded reports further. The mass media discourse is influential in building an "Islamophobic common sense," perpetuating harmful narratives and stereotypical misconceptions about members of the Muslim community in Albania. Such language is also present in media coverage when there are religious celebrations. After the end of the Eid al-Adha prayer in the main Tirana's square, RTSH reported on the event by underlining that "the 'Skenderbej' square will return to regular activity to be used by the citizens." The post on social media was met with public outcry, with many commentators asking RTSH to apologize publicly and distance itself from the discriminatory and exclusionary anti-Muslim language. (Fig. 4) After a while, the post was changed and the sentence above was deleted. This media bias and the fearmongering surrounding Muslim believers can reinforce societal prejudices, thus leading to discrimination in various areas.



Figure 4:

Source: The Facebook post published by The Albanian Radio and Television (RTSH) after the end of the Eid al-Adha prayer (29th of June 2023)

19. VizionPlus, '40 Fëmijët Izraelitë Me Kokën E Prerë/ Netanyahu: "Kjo Egërsi Nuk Është Parë Kurrë"' (11 October 2023) <40 fëmijët izraelitë me kokën e prerë/ Netanyahu: 'Kjo egërsi nuk është parë kurrë'> accessed 7 February 2024

Justice System

Marlind Laçi voiced the mounting obstacles faced by him and other Muslim community members in exercising the freedom of peaceful public assembly against the Israeli war crimes in the occupied Gaza Strip by stating, “Our requests for permission to hold rallies in solidarity with Palestine have been rejected five times by the local authorities. The permit was refused in one case under the pretense that the public square was planned for end-of-the-year celebrations and could not be provided for protests and rallies.” Laçi denounced the attempts by the authorities to impose blanket bans on assemblies by silencing those raising their voices against the Israelis’ unlawful attacks on Palestinians in Gaza, arguing that such incidents undermine the right to freedom of assembly.

Muslim members and activists slam the institutionalized Islamophobia present in the counter-radicalization measures undertaken by the authorities. Procedures implemented by the anti-terror units have led to increased surveillance and profiling of members of Muslim communities in Albania. According to Roal Hysa, General Secretary of the Muslim Community in Albania, there are unjustified intrusive procedures conducted on imams or Muslim men by the anti-terror units. “We have come across cases of unhinged checks carried out by the anti-terror units on members from the Muslim community. I know this case of a Muslim man who was approached and asked at his house to be checked under the pretense that he possessed arms. It seems that the authorities scapegoat Muslims whenever the anti-terror units need to accomplish a specific rate of operations,” said Hysa.

As Hysa argues, the entrenched Islamophobia in institutions has led to over-policing and heightened surveillance of Muslim communities, thus generating traumatizing experiences for Muslim families. There is a lack of studies and research on the implementation of state security policies, how religious communities experience them, and their impact on the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Muslim community.

Internet

Social media platforms have become a springboard for inciting anti-Muslim rhetoric. Users commenting on online pages affiliated with media outlets disseminate derogatory and racist comments that dehumanize and vilify Muslims. In the wake of the Gaza-Israel war, Islamophobic content has become rampant in the comments section, with harmful narratives associating Muslims and Arabs with terrorism. (Fig. 5) Social media platforms show little effort to combat online Islamophobia by disregarding content moderation in these platforms and by undertaking no measures to remove hate speech and discriminatory comments from the online platforms. The majority of these comments incite hatred towards Muslims and feed into the moral panic

around the “Islamization of Albania” directed against the pro-Palestinian voices. On 20 October, Dritan Hila, former Deputy Minister of Defense, compared the killing of Palestinian children in Gaza with murdered German children during World War II, claiming that Palestinian children murdered from Israeli airstrikes and bombardment were part of the “collateral damage.” Hila’s Facebook post drew criticism, with commentators calling out the dehumanizing and Islamophobic language used by him in minimizing Palestinian suffering.²⁰



Figure 5:

Source: Screenshot from the comment section of Tema, online daily newspaper (12th October 2023)

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As stated in the previous reports, there are several journalists, TV hosts, politicians, and other influential public figures promoting anti-Muslim sentiments in mainstream and populist media outlets.²¹ Some of the politicians using inflammatory language against Muslims and Islam are Agron Gjekmarkaj and Tritan Shehu, who have framed Islam as an inherently backward culture and incompatible with Europeanness with

20. Te Sheshi. 2023. “I Pabesueshëm Dhe I Frikshëm Ky Status...” Te Sheshi. October 20, 2023. https://tesheshi.com/i-pabesueshem-dhe-frikshem-ky-status/?fbclid=IwAR2snATCtrXnzSrQNUwmcYwx4KYiCL8Myga98rT1G29CPsWNJ2B8Tuvq-k_aem_ATX-FuqZqDFwrI525NYADvx5Jr2lU_f0-7e-_jEtHRVRH-kUFjGxp52MamEmlHCDQyR1YpLGOHWu3UpVXCtZ54OV.

21. Bayrakli, Enes, and Farid Haféz. 2019. “EUROPEAN ISLAMOPHOBIA REPORT.” https://www.islamophobiareport.com/EIR_2019.pdf.

the slogan “Run to Arabia, run to Turkey.” These political discourses are influential in building an “Islamophobic common sense,” which normalizes and legitimizes the anti-Muslim sentiments in public opinion.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

There are a few organizations, networks, and groups in Albania playing a crucial role in tackling Islamophobia through a variety of activities, services, and programs. Some of the most well-known organizations are the Muslim Forum of Albania (FMSH), a non-governmental organization that provides legal support to individuals affected by Islamophobia, and lobbies for policies that safeguard religious freedom and protection against religious discrimination. Additionally, FMSH organizes educational activities that inform the public about Islam and Muslim cultures. Mexhulis and the National Observatory Against Islamophobia are media platforms with a particular focus on countering negative stereotypes and misinformation, spreading awareness, and mobilizing against Islamophobia.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia remains pervasive in Albania in various fields ranging from employment, media, political discourse, education, etc. As illustrated by the report, persistent anti-Muslim racism can lead to a hostile environment with far-reaching effects on the marginalization and segregation of the Muslim community. To address forms of Islamophobia effectively, a multifaceted approach is necessitated to coordinate efforts among different state actors and stakeholders in combating Islamophobia and in fostering a more inclusive society. To conclude, a comprehensive set of policies to be followed is provided below.

- The Ministry of Education should introduce programs to improve media literacy; to assess inaccurate and misleading content on Islam in school textbooks critically; to support research to document and analyze the prevalence and impact of Islamophobia in various areas; and to provide evidence to support advocacy efforts.
- Employers in the private and public sectors should develop inclusive hiring and recruitment procedures to foster a diverse workforce by introducing practices sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of job applicants/employees.
- The government should develop a draft law introducing flexible hours and mandatory praying rooms in the workplace to enable employees with religious backgrounds to perform daily prayers and provide permission to take time off work to perform the Jummah (Friday) prayer.

- Civil society organizations should guarantee the provision of legal aid to individuals affected by Islamophobia, assisting them in filing complaints and seeking justice.
- The authorities in Albania should monitor law enforcement agencies closely and strengthen the implementation of monitoring mechanisms of religious discrimination and hate speech, and hold perpetrators accountable. They should monitor how law enforcement agencies comply with recording and reporting instances of Islamophobia and hate crimes.
- State authorities should evaluate anti-terrorism policies and monitor the misuse of counter-radicalization policies by anti-terror units who misappropriate them to over-police and criminalize Muslim communities unjustifiably.
- The government should provide mandatory training for public sector employees on anti-discrimination laws.
- The Audiovisual Media Authority should strengthen its regulation on hate speech monitoring on online media; and strengthen the accountability mechanism for media outlets disseminating misinformation, and negative and harmful stereotypes of the Muslim community and Islam.

Chronology

- **10 July 2023:** Mustafa Nano is appointed as upcoming ambassador of Albania to Switzerland, a decision which sparked a public outcry among the Muslim community.
- **20 October 2023:** Dritan Hila, former Deputy Minister of Defense, compared the killing of Palestinian children in Gaza with murdered German children during World War II, claiming that Palestinian children murdered from Israeli airstrikes and bombardment were part of the “collateral damage.”

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
AUSTRIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Executive Summary

The year 2023 was a revealing year regarding Islamophobia. While the UN's International Day to Combat Islamophobia, which was supported by all member states including Austria, was only commemorated by the Greens, all other political parties as well as the government were silent. When the investigation about the so-called Abu Dhabi Secrets revealed that Austria was included in the hidden smear campaign of the private investigative firm Alp Services that got paid millions of Euro by the United Arab Emirates and that they were also involved in Operation Luxor, revealing a massive scandal that was reported by the weekly *Profil*, no single daily newspaper and no single politician reported and acted on it, showing the broad consensus of state institutionalized Islamophobia that was put under the carpet. The violent attacks on October 7 and the subsequent war on Gaza had deep implications on Muslims. A securitization of the educational field was implemented by sending police to introduce de-radicalization workshops in schools. Protest against the war in Gaza and for a ceasefire was cracked down by the police forces and identified as a pro-Hamas stance. This was also reflected on an international stage, where Austria was amongst the ten countries that voted against a ceasefire at the UN General Assembly.

Zusammenfassung

2023 war ein aufschlussreiches Jahr in Bezug auf Islamophobie. Während der Internationale Tag der Vereinten Nationen zur Bekämpfung der Islamophobie, der von allen Mitgliedsstaaten einschließlich Österreichs unterstützt wurde, nur von den Grünen begangen wurde, schwiegen alle anderen politischen Parteien sowie die Regierung. Als die investigative Aufdeckung zu den so genannten Abu Dhabi Secrets medial berichtet wurde und bekannt wurde, dass Österreich in die verdeckte Hetzkampagne der von den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten mit Millionen Euro bezahlten Privatdetektei Alp Services einbezogen war und diese auch in die Operation Luxor involviert war, wurde ein massiver Skandal aufgedeckt. Jedoch griff lediglich die Wochenzeitung Profil die Geschichte auf. Keine einzige Tageszeitung und kein einziger Politiker berichteten oder zogen Konsequenzen, was den breiten Konsens der staatlich institutionalisierten Islamophobie aufzeigt, die unter den Teppich gekehrt wurde. Die gewalttätigen Angriffe vom 7. Oktober und der anschließende Krieg gegen den Gazastreifen hatten tiefgreifende Auswirkungen auf die Muslime. Durch die Entsendung der Polizei zur Einführung von Deradikalisierungs-Workshops in Schulen wurde eine Versicherheitlichung des Schulraums eingeführt. Proteste gegen den Krieg in Gaza und für einen Waffenstillstand wurden von den Polizeikräften zu Beginn verunmöglicht und medial als Pro-Hamas-Haltung ausgewiesen. Dies spiegelte sich auch auf internationaler Ebene wider, wo Österreich zu jenen wenigen Ländern gehörte, die fortlaufend gegen einen Waffenstillstand in der UN-Generalversammlung stimmten.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Austria

Type of Regime: Representative democracy

Form of Government: Semi-presidential representative democracy

Ruling Parties: Austrian People's Party (ÖVP, centrist-right) and the Greens (January 7, 2020 -2024)

Opposition Parties: Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), NEOS, FPÖ (right-wing)

Last Elections: Parliamentary Elections (October 2019): ÖVP 71 seats (37.5%); SPÖ 40 seats (21.2%); FPÖ 30 seats (16.2%); The Greens 26 seats (13.9%); NEOS 15 seats (8.1%)

Total Population: 9.042 million (Statista Austria)

Major Language: German

Official Religion: No official religion. The federal constitution recognizes 16 churches and religious communities. Islam has been legally recognized since 1912.

Statistics on Islamophobia: 1,522 cases documented by Islamophobia watchdog NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: ZARA documented 1,302 cases.

Major Religions (% of Population): Catholics 55%, Muslims 8.3%, Orthodox 4.9%, Protestants 3.8%

Muslim Population (% of Population): 645,600 according to Statistik Austria (2022)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Religious Authority in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich, IGGÖ); with the new Islam Act of 2015, most major Muslim organizations are part of the IGGÖ.

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: SOS Mitmensch, Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit und antimuslimischer Rassismus, ZARA, Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft, ACT-P (Assisting Children Traumatised by Police), Koalition gegen antimuslimischen Rassismus

Far-Right Parties: FPÖ

Far-Right Movements: DO5 (previously the Identitarian Movement), Info Direkt

Far-Right Violent Organizations: Miliz der Anständigen

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** Implemented in kindergartens in 2018, but not continued in 2022. Constitutional Court repealed the ban of the hijab in primary school in December 2020.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Partly banned
- **Minaret Ban:** In the counties of Carinthia and Vorarlberg
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** Since 2017

Introduction

The Varieties of Democracy survey of the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg that provides a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset on the democratic quality of countries around the globe that has downgraded Austria from a liberal democracy to an electoral democracy,¹ shows that the values of freedom and religion and religious organization repression have remained stable over the course of the last years. (Fig. 1)

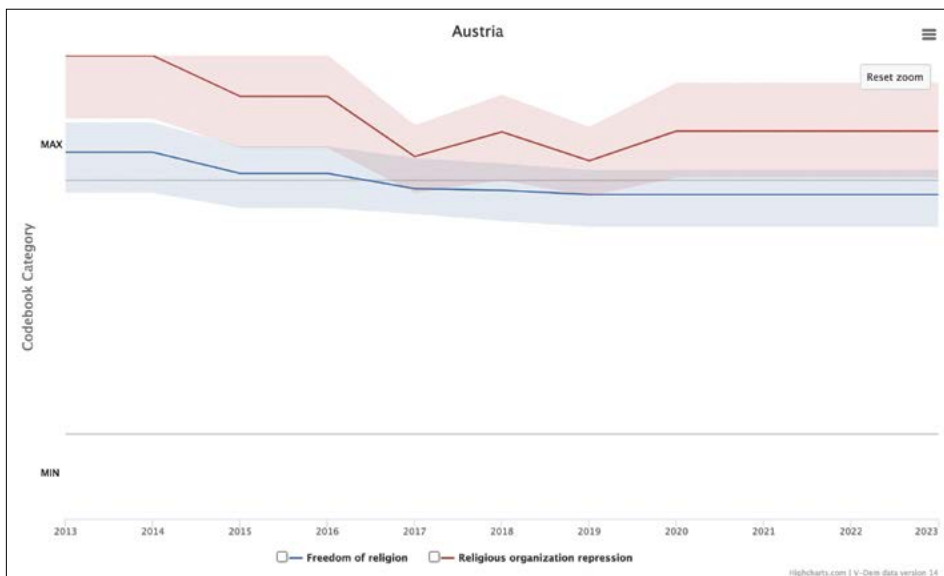


Figure 1: V-Dem Institute: Country Graph, https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/

Yet Austria continues to have a racism problem. Austria – next to Germany – ranks highest regarding racist events amongst EU member states according to the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency.² While in 2015, 51% of Blacks said they were discriminated against, this number increased to 72%. Black Muslim women are especially targeted.

While Christianity and more specifically Catholicism form a basis of the dominant white identity in Austria, Islam and non-Whiteness are largely portrayed as alien if not threatening. A good example is the ongoing securitization of Muslimness, while at the same time Catholic identity is included in the formal representation of Austrianness, as the Minister of Interior Gerhard Karner’s participation in the annual police’s Catholic pilgrimage to Mariazell,³ as just one symbolic example

1. V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report 2024 Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot, https://v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf, 42.
2. Red. (2023), “Rassismus in Österreich stark gestiegen”, ORF, 25.10.2023, retrieved November 20, 2023 from: <https://orf.at/stories/3337604/>
3. LPD ÖÖ (2023), “AVISO: Polizeiwallfahrt 2023 nach Mariazell”, OTS, 06.09.2023, retrieved October 18, 2023 from: https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20230906_OTS0099/aviso-polizeiwallfahrt-2023-nach-mariazell

amongst many, reveals. Simultaneously, the Austrian government expands the idea of a “fortress Austria.” Austria had already started deporting the first people to Iraq in April. Following the opening of an embassy in Bagdad, Iraq, the Foreign Ministry announced starting to deport larger groups of Iraqi citizens, around 40 people in October alone.⁴

One of the most impactful international events, the war on Gaza, has also shaped Austrian politics. At the UN General Assembly, Austria constantly voted with the few most hardline countries denying Palestinians a right to live in dignity by voting against a ceasefire.⁵ On a domestic level, there was a criminalization of pro-Palestinian positions rallying for a ceasefire that were conflated with Hamas’s position following the attack on October 7. On an international level, Chancellor Nehammer paid a solidarity visit to the “sole democracy in the region,” rejecting neutrality in what he called the “fight against terrorism.” Austria decided to halt 19 million Euro of development aid to Palestinians.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The Islamophobia watchdog NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus documented 1,522 cases of anti-Muslim incidents, which is an increase from 1,324. Of the reported cases, 1,015 happened online and 507 cases in total were reported by directly affected people, which is a 100% increase. (Fig. 2)

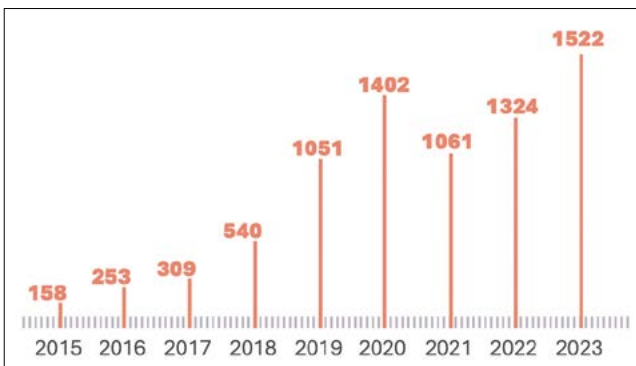


Figure 2: Anti-Muslim hate crimes documented by the NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus
Source: Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus, Antimuslimischer Rassismus, Report 2023, Vienna: 2024, 8.

4. Brickner, Irene; Lorenz, Laurin; Mory, Flora; Pucher, Johannes (2023), “Erste Charterabschiebung in den Irak nach Botschafteröffnung in Bagdad”, Der Standard, 02.10.2023, retrieved November 6, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000189370/erste-charterabschiebung-in-den-irak-nach-botschafteroefnung-in-bagdad>
5. UN General Assembly Adopts Resolution Demanding Immediate Humanitarian Ceasefire in Gaza, Parties’ Compliance with International Law, Release of All Hostages, Tenth Emergency Special Session, 45th Meeting (PM) GA/12572 12 DECEMBER 2023, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ga-adopts-resolution-demanding-immediate-humanitarian-ceasefire-in-gaza-dec12-2023/>

Incidents of anti-Muslim hate crime were also reported by the anti-racist watchdog NGO ZARA.⁶ In June, a man attempted to take down a full face-veil on the street shouting at the woman, “We are in Austria.” Policemen nearby intervened.⁷

In September, unknown persons deposited a severed pig’s head in front of the entrance to a mosque in Josefigasse in Graz, Styria. In 2020, three men were sentenced for the same act including smearing swine blood around the mosque.⁸

Secret Service and the Viennese State Prosecutor found firearms, cutting and stabbing weapons, alarm weapons, and objects relating to National Socialism at a private home of a person in Vienna, who is believed to be part of an international right-wing group called “Feuerkrieg Division” (Fire War Division). According to the Secret Service, the group had concrete plans for an attack.⁹



Figure 3: A graffiti in Austria saying “Love Dogs, Kill Moslems!,” where a third person erased “Kill” and made it read: “Love Dogs, Moslims Are Best!” **Source:** Photo taken by a passenger on the street and sent to the author of this report.

6. “Rassismus Report 2023. Analyse zu rassistischen Übergriffen und Strukturen”, March 2024, https://assets.zara.or.at/media/rassismusreport/ZARA_RassismusReport_2023_DE.pdf, 40.
7. Cajic, Robert; Pscheider, Stefan (2023), “Rassismus-Vorfall in Wien! Mann attackiert Burka-Frau”, Heute, 01.06.2023, retrieved November 20, 2023 from: <https://www.heute.at/s/rassismus-attacke-in-wien-mann-reisst-frau-burka-vom-kopf-100274258>
8. Red. (2023), “Schweinskopf bei Grazer Moschee abgelegt”, ORF, 04.09.2023, retrieved October 18, 2023 from: <https://steiermark.orf.at/stories/3222691/>
9. Red. (2023), “Rechtsterrorismus: Wiener unter Verdacht”, ORF, 27.05.2023, retrieved November 2, 2023 from: <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3209172/>

When author Amani Abuzahra attempted to take a bus in Lower Austria, she was confronted by a disrespectful bus driver telling her “You outside drink coffee. Coffee no bus,” implying she would not be able to fully converse in German. The acclaimed author, who wears a hijab and tours the country presenting her books, criticized the bus driver on social media, after which the Austrian Federal Railways apologized stating that the company stands for diversity and is against discrimination.¹⁰

Education

The Islamophobia watchdog NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus reported an increase of anti-Muslim incidents in the educational sphere, especially in schools. The rise of documented incidents of anti-Muslim hatred increased especially during the time when a report problematizing Muslims in educational institutions was published. The NGO writes, “In May, we documented a high number of active case reports and monitoring cases relating to schools and politically motivated and ethically questionable studies, whose media presence was directly reflected in racist comments in online forums and on social media.”¹¹ The NGO further holds.

From October 2023, schools were also one of the first areas in which case reports rose rapidly and took on worrying proportions. Overburdened teachers, overlapping forms of anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab racism and children left alone, unable to talk about their feelings and fears, were the first consequences. Calls for political statements, especially with regard to the acts of violence in Israel/Palestine by pupils and parents, as well as calls for the involvement of the security authorities in the school context were further consequences that were welcomed by political officials.¹²

At the private Danube University of Krems, a Master’s program in Counter-Terrorism has been established with 16 students starting in 2023. The program is headed by Nicolas Stockhammer, who has published together with Lorenzo Vidino and other Islamophobes such as Heiko Heinisch and Nina Scholz.¹³ The degree is funded by the Austrian state and supported by the Ministry of Interior. Omar Hajjawi-Pirchner, director of the domestic intelligence service DSN (Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst), hopes to recruit personnel from the program for the DSN.¹⁴ Stock-

10. Die Presse (2023), “Kaffee nix Bus’: Autorin berichtet über Diskriminierung im Bus”, Die Presse, 31.07.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://www.diepresse.com/13471297/kaffee-nix-bus-autorin-berichtet-ueber-diskriminierung-im-bus>

11. Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus, Antimuslimischer Rassismus Report 2023, Vienna: 2024, 9.

12. Ibid.

13. Routledge Handbook of Transnational Terrorism, <https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Handbook-of-Transnational-Terrorism/Stockhammer/p/book/9781032353197>

14. Puchinger, Thomas (2023), “Anti-Terror: Start für neuen Lehrgang in Krems”, ORF, 07.10.2023, retrieved November 6, 2023 from: <https://noe.orf.at/stories/3227280/>

hammer also published a book three years after the deadly attack in Vienna arguing that the authorities failed due to increasing demands.¹⁵

The Ministry of Interior and the Austrian Chancellery financed a report¹⁶ conducted by Peter R. Neumann, Nicolas Stockhammer, Heiko Heinisch,¹⁷ and Nina Scholz.¹⁸ The report detected “passive extremism”, primarily found in North-Caucasian and Turkish communities, “activist extremism”, primarily with Turkish and Arab communities, who are believed “to promote their own anti-pluralist and anti-democratic ideas through active participation in Austrian politics and society”, and “violent extremism” primarily in North-Caucasian and Balkan communities.¹⁹ Media respectively covered the findings: “New report sees ‘considerable potential for radicalization’ among migrants from Chechnya and the Arab region in Austria. Activist extremism is a problem in the Turkish community in particular.”²⁰

The state of Upper Austria initiated a research project analyzing lectures in mosques dubbed “Koran schools.” The idea was presented by conservative ÖVP politician Wolfgang Hattmannsdorfer. According to Islamic Studies scholar and known supporter of Islamophobic policies, Mouhanad Khorchide,²¹ the “schools” would spread “a religiously exclusivist attitude that places Islam above other religions.”²² Upon problematizing these mosques, the ÖVP argued in favor of expanding the project on a federal level with Professor of Islamic Studies Zekirija Sejdini agreeing to conduct the research under conditions.

Ednan Aslan published another research project based on assessing 139 Muslim pupils. According to the findings, 40 percent of them have a traditional and uncritical position vis-à-vis Islam. During the press conference presenting the findings, Aslan is quoted with the words: “A scholar in Egypt says something, and those people accept it unquestioningly.”²³ The press conference also featured State Secretary of Youth Claudia Plakolm (ÖVP). She focused her remarks on the prevention of ex-

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15. Red. (2023), “Anschlag: Buch zieht drei Jahre danach Bilanz”, ORF, 28.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3230188/>
 16. Peter R. Neumann, Nicolas Stockhammer, Heiko Heinisch, Nina Scholz (2023), *Lagebild Extremismus und Migration: Fallstudien aus vier österreichischen Migrations-Communitys*, Bundeskanzleramt und Bundesministerium für Inneres.
 17. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Heiko Heinisch, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 3 March 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-heiko-heinisch/>
 18. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Nina Scholz, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 2 Nov 2023, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-nina-scholz/>
 19. Ibid., 85-86.
 20. Daniel Bischof (2023), “Wo der Extremismus unter Migranten wächst”, Die Presse, 20 June 2023, <https://www.diepresse.com/13432504/wo-der-extremismus-unter-migranten-waechst>
 21. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Mouhanad Khorchide, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 15 March 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-mouhanad-khorchide/>
 22. Maurer, Manfred (2023), “Schach den Islamismus-Schulen”, Volksblatt, 20.09.2023, retrieved November 5, 2023 from: <https://volksblatt.at/politik/aussenpolitik/schach-den-islamismus-schulen-810857/>
 23. APA (2023), “Muslimische Schüler kritischer im Umgang mit ihrer Religion”, APA, 06.10.2023, retrieved November 6, 2023 from: <https://science.apa.at/power-search/12846679716772877145>

tremism, especially online. “Because Islamist hatred must not have a single millimeter of space in our country; we must protect our children and young people from this mental poison,” stated Plakolm.²⁴

Viennese teachers’ unionist Thomas Krebs and leader of the Christian Trade Unionists (FCG) that is ideologically linked to the ÖVP warned of increasing radicalization in Viennese schools. He argued that pupils are showing political and religious extremist attitudes in school and mock the authority of teachers, especially female ones. He spoke of warnings of escalating violence at compulsory schools and criticized the government that is headed by the social democrats and the liberals.²⁵ Following this, the minister of interior and the minister of education together with the Youth State Secretary and local politicians of Lower Austria (all ÖVP) introduced a new program in November to educate youth on the Symbol Act, democracy, human rights, and in the fight against anti-Semitism.²⁶ These workshops will be held in public schools by 60 “prevention officials” from the domestic intelligence service DSN. By the end of 2025, the number is intended to be increased to 200. According to the Minister of Education Martin Polaschek, more than 1,000 workshops were held since April 2022.²⁷ Thomas Krebs suggested having external security personnel at schools. Another member of the ÖVP and school principal in one of Vienna’s schools with Muslims representing two thirds of the student body, Christian Klar, supported the idea to have security personnel at schools, claiming that since the war in Gaza, “anti-Jewish and anti-Israel attitudes” have been observed at school.²⁸

In an interview, party leader of the liberal NEOS, Beate Meinel-Reisinger, argued that “anyone who wants to declare a caliphate has no place here.” She declared that her party ended cooperation with Fridays for Future due to Greta Thunberg’s behavior and the “very leftist anti-colonial attitude.”²⁹ To end anti-Semitism, children should be schooled as early as three or four years old, she claimed. Asked about a policy claim of the liberal German FDP to reduce the amount of immigrants to 25% in every city district, Meinel-Reisinger responded in support of this idea. “Yes, but the question is how to enforce it. Through forced relocation? There are no dis-

24. Ibid.

25. Red. (2023), “In Schulen: Warnung vor Radikalisierung”, ORF, 04.11.2023, retrieved December 2, 2023 from: <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3231084/>

26. Red. (2023), “Extremismus: Neue Workshops in Schulen”, ORF, 06.11.2023, retrieved December 2, 2023 from: <https://noe.orf.at/stories/3231301/>

27. Stepan, Max (2023), “Der Staatsschutz kommt jetzt in die Schule – um Extremismus vorzubeugen”, Der Standard, 06.11.2023, retrieved December 2, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000193894/der-staatsschutz-kommt-jetzt-in-die-schule-um-extremismus-vorzubeugen>

28. Red. (2023), “Schuldirektor in Wien sieht “klar judenfeindliche Haltung” an Schule”, Der Standard, 07.11.2023, retrieved December 19, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194069/schuldirektor-in-wien-sieht-klar-judenfeindliche-haltung-an-schule>

29. Mittelstaedt, Katharina (2023), “Meinel-Reisinger: “Wer das Kalifat ausrufen will, hat bei uns nichts verloren””, Der Standard, 15.11.2023, retrieved December 20, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000195379/meinel-reisinger-wer-das-kalifat-ausrufen-will-hat-bei-uns-nichts-verloren>

districts in Vienna where the state has lost its monopoly on violence, but the situation is problematic. In some districts, the proportion of foreigners is almost 50 percent. A model from Sweden would be conceivable: if too many children in a school have a non-German colloquial language, they are taken there by school bus to other districts. Whether that would be possible here would have to be seen.”³⁰

Politics

In the state of Salzburg, the far-right FPÖ joined a government with the conservative People’s Party. The coalition agreement said that immigration – which is a federal issue – should only be possible once all residing immigrants have successfully integrated. The government agreement also entertained the idea that asylum seekers should not receive social assistance in a monetary form, but in the form of allowances.³¹

The coalition agreement between the ÖVP and the FPÖ included the following: “In order to preserve our democratic values as well as our fundamental rights and freedoms, an action plan against radical Islam is being drafted, which includes the establishment of an advisory and monitoring centre against radicalization and political Islam.”³²

The Green Party was the only one in Austria that mentioned the International Day to Combat Islamophobia in a press release on March 15. Muslim MP Faika El Nagashi is quoted as follows:

Muslims have been experiencing a hostile political climate in Austria for years. They have been placed under general suspicion through questionable projects such as the Islam map and massive intimidation such as the Luxor police operation. This stirs up fears and opens up rifts. It is the task of politicians to break down enemy stereotypes and prejudices and to seek dialog with the Muslim communities. Operation Luxor in particular has left dramatic traces within the Muslim communities. Although most of the cases against the accused have since been dropped, the consequences are far-reaching: children and young people and their families were torn from their sleep early in the morning by heavily armed police squads in disproportionate raids and severely traumatized, the material and immaterial costs of the proceedings for those affected can hardly be quantified, and the defamation of Muslim associations and exposed individuals has left lasting damage. We have a long way to go in coming to terms with this politically.³³

30. Ibid.

31. Land Salzburg (2023), “Regierungsübereinkommen 2023 – 2028: Salzburg –Gemeinsam und sicher in eine stabile Zukunft”, Land Salzburg, 26.05.2023, retrieved November 20, 2023 from: https://www.salzburg.gv.at/politik_/Documents/regierungsuebereinkommen2023-2028.pdf

32. Volkspartei Niederösterreich und FPÖ Niederösterreich, Arbeitsübereinkommen Niederösterreich weiterbringen. 2023-2028, 16.

33. Grüner Klub im Parlament, “Grüne zum Tag gegen Islamfeindlichkeit: Feindbilder und Vorurteile abbauen und Dialog mit muslimischen Communities suchen”, 15 March 2023, www.ots.at/presseaussendung/

No other political party mentioned the International Day to Combat Islamophobia that was initiated a year earlier by all United Nations member states including Austria. The below graph also shows that since 2011, the term Islamophobia including its Germanized version “Islamfeindlichkeit” was not used frequently in the Austrian National Council (Nationalrat). While the term “racism” was used 76 times at its peak in 2020, “Islamophobia” was used 14 times at its peak in 2014, declining to zero in 2023. (Fig. 4)

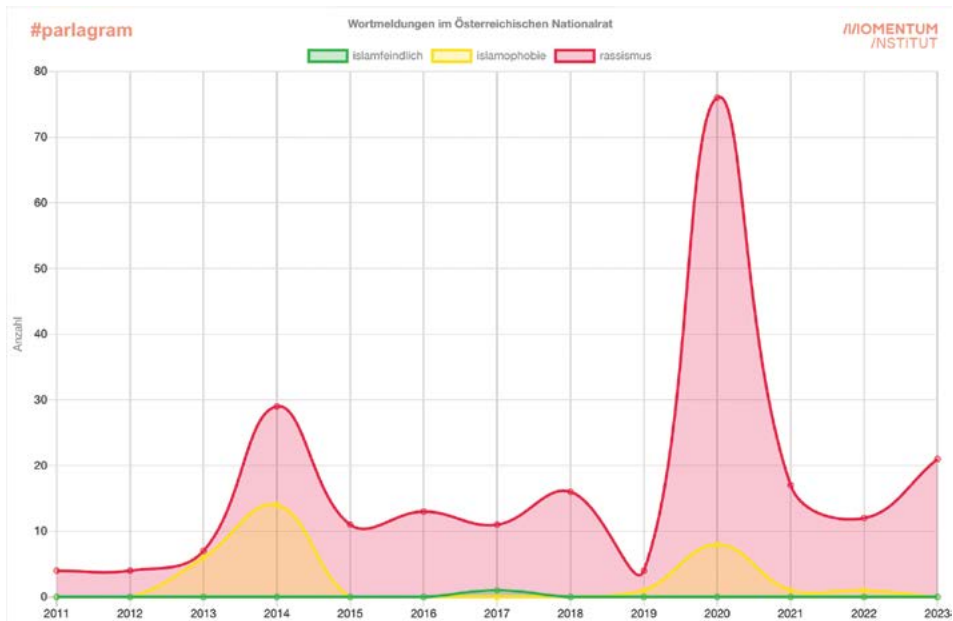


Figure 4: Mention of terms “Islamophobia,” “Islamfeindlichkeit” (Germanized version of Islamophobia), and “racism” in 2011-2023 in the National Council. **Source:** <https://www.momentum-institut.at/parlagram/>

On a federal level, the debate about Islam and Muslims has decreased dramatically, which correlates with Sebastian Kurz’s (ÖVP) resignation from government politics. It is striking that the politicization of Islam in Austrian parliamentary debates has decreased enormously with the pandemic and no similar upsurge with the Greens in coalition with the ÖVP has resurfaced after 2022.

Minister of Integration Susanne Raab meets with Minister of Integration and Migration Kaare Dybvad Bek on May 22 to discuss cutting social services for some immigrants. Raab argued she wanted to learn from the Danish model and offer full social services for immigrants only once they have lived in Austria for more than five years.³⁴ Susanne Raab started working on what she calls a “Ghetto-list” to tackle “par-

OTS_20230315_OT0067/gruene-zum-tag-gegen-islamfeindlichkeit-feindbilder-und-vorurteile-abbauen-und-dialog-mit-muslimischen-communities-suchen

34. APA, “Integrationsministerin Raab reiste nach Dänemark”, Vienna.at, 23 May 2023, <https://www.vienna.at/integrationsministerin-raab-reiste-nach-daenemark/8093134>

allel societies” in Austria, which will be based on a ‘Segregation report’. The reports, which use parameters such the proportion of foreigners, unemployment rates, women’s employment rates, and crime rates to identify problematic territories³⁵ might be the first step towards a Denmark-inspired ghetto politics. A report that had been conducted as a first step led to different reactions leading experts to refute the idea of parallel societies even existing in Austria.³⁶

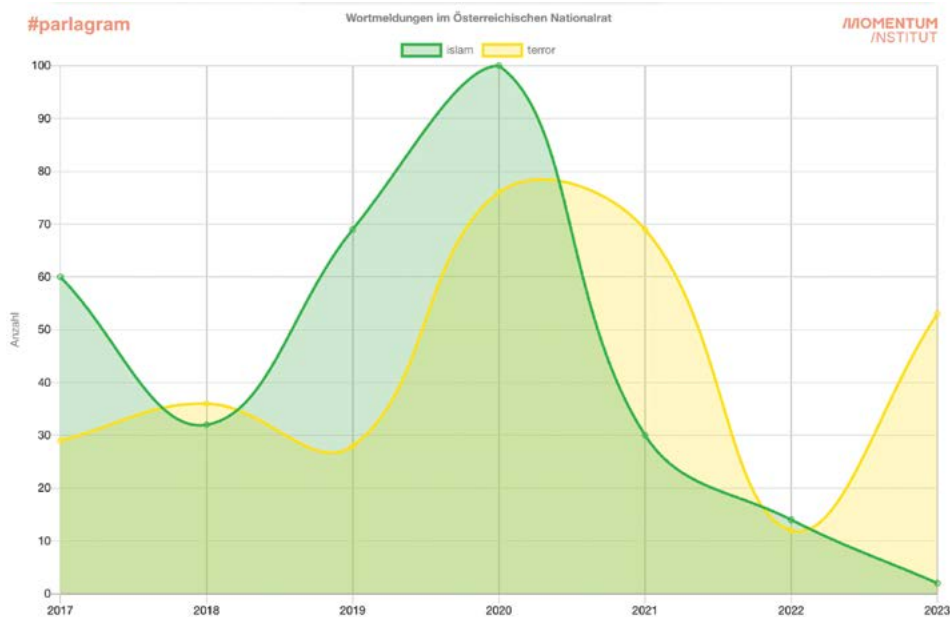


Figure 5: Mention of terms “Islam” and “terror” in 2017-2023 in the National Council (Nationalrat).

Source: <https://www.momentum-institut.at/parlagram/>

The Viennese ÖVP speaker on integration affairs, Caroline Hungerländer, criticized the Viennese government for allegedly denying the existence of “political Islam,” demanding that “an observatory be set up in Vienna, similar to the federal government (with the Documentation Center Political Islam³⁷), and that political Islam be included in the Vienna Integration and Diversity Monitor.”³⁸

The FPÖ criticized the fact that Turkish Muslim associations received funds from the COVID fund that was used to help small business and community associations.

35. Veronika Dolna (2023), “Auch Integrationsministerin Raab arbeitet an einer ‘Ghettoliste’, Kurier, 30 May 2023, https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/6291668/Nach-Besuch-in-Daenemark_Auch-Integrationsministerin-Raab-arbeitet

36. Michael Simoner (2023), “Studie zeigt größere Probleme bei Integration”, Der Standard, 27 Apr 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000145927944/studie-zeigt-groebere-probleme-bei-integration>

37. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Documentation Center Political Islam (Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam), The Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University, 12 December 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-documentation-center-political-islam-dokumentationsstelle-politischer-islam/>

38. ÖVP Wien (2023), “VP-Hungerländer ad politischer Islam: Wien muss endlich aufwachen!”, OTS, 26.07.2023, retrieved October 19, 2023 from: https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20230726_OTS0034/vp-hungerlaender-ad-politischer-islam-wien-muss-endlich-aufwachen

The FPÖ general secretary claimed that these funds would help ATIB (Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Co-operation in Austria) and by extension the Diyanet and the Turkish AKP government: “It is therefore simply inconceivable that a major arm of political Islam is being supported with Corona aid money at taxpayers’ expense.”³⁹ At the same time, various social and political organizations received millions of Euro during the pandemic.

Against the advice of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, leading members of the FPÖ made a trip to Afghanistan meeting the foreign minister there and legitimizing the Taliban government.⁴⁰ The goal was probably to free a radical right-wing activist from Austria, who has been kept captive in Afghanistan.⁴¹

The Austrian government has showed one-sided support for Israel and denied Palestinian people dignity. From the beginning, Austria consistently voted in the UN General Assembly against a ceasefire, siding with only nine other countries and many European countries (23 in total) abstaining from a vote.⁴² While raising the flag of Israel in solidarity with more than the 1,100 murdered and more than 200 kidnapped, no similar gesture was made on behalf of Palestinians.

The first rallies for Palestine started already on October 7 and October 8. Several politicians including vice-mayor Christoph Wiederkehr (NEOS), social democrat Muna Duzdar (SPÖ), and far-right Leo Kohlbauer framed the protests as being in support of the attacks perpetrated by Hamas. Caroline Hungerländer (ÖVP) criticized the social democratic government of Vienna for failing to integrate these people (Muslims, F.H.) and condemned the waving of Palestinian flags in the capital as well as “any kind of anti-Semitism.” The police reported high emotions, but peaceful protests. Israeli flags were put on the chancellor’s headquarters in solidarity with Israel. Jewish institutions were said to be put under further protection. The minister of interior (ÖVP) argued that “the Secret Service will act consequentially against all forms of Islamic extremism and terrorism.”⁴³

39. Red. (2023), “FPÖ kritisiert: Fünf Millionen Euro an Corona-Hilfsgeldern flossen an islamistische Vereine”, *Exxpress*, 05.04.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/fpoe-kritisiert-fuen-millionen-euro-corona-gelder-an-islamistische-vereine/>

40. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (2023), “Today, the leading members of the Freedom Party of Austria, called on the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi.”, *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*, 27.12.2023, retrieved December 28, 2023 from: https://mfa.gov.af/en/today-the-leading-members-of-the-freedom-party-of-austria-called-on-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-mawlawi-amir-khan-muttaqi/?fbclid=IwAR0RYkDeHVIX-KJIUMwT5J90YGaFLMTDYwqS2Rs1b1NfoHM1XZ84Z0goGzxE_aem_ASCxQw-Z47x-E6xRFJw8K-mD-jzD21YX4g_WRWoa5sYCMacRQbOhBltxszUEu6pxXT4

41. Red. (2023), “FPÖ-Mitglieder besuchten Taliban in Afghanistan”, *ORF*, 25.09.2023, retrieved November 5, 2023 from: <https://orf.at/stories/3332403/>

42. “UNGA demands ceasefire in Israel’s war on Gaza: How your country voted,” *Al Jazeera English*, 13 December 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/13/unga-decisively-backs-gaza-ceasefire-resolution-how-your-country-voted>

43. Red. (2023), “Aufregung über propalästinensische Demos”, *ORF*, 08.10.2023, retrieved November 15, 2023 from: <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3227412/>

Following a debate in the Viennese state parliament on October 18, far-right FPÖ member Maximilian Krauss demanded the resignation of the Muslim SPÖ local MP Omar Al-Rawi because of his “lack of position on Hamas terror,” calling it “Palestinian propaganda to assert that Israel would attack hospitals and civilians.” He further argued, “Mr. Al-Rawi has often been on the wrong side in the past, having his picture taken with Hamas activists or attending anti-Israel demonstrations. With his relativization today, he is finally ready to resign.”⁴⁴

Following a meeting of the crisis cabinet in the Defense Ministry, the Ministry of Interior used October 7 to increase support for further surveillance, pushing for more abilities of control. Minister of Interior Gerhard Karner (ÖVP) said that “data protection is important, but the protection of humans is more important.”⁴⁵ Vice Chancellor Werner Kogler (Greens) said that there must be a “massive increasing surveillance of Hamas” and “befriended organizations,” and that one has to look at “what is being preached on Fridays,” clearly amalgamating Islam and the attacks on October 7.⁴⁶ While the government announced a higher terror alert level, the chancellor proclaimed that there was indeed no specific threat.⁴⁷

While before October 7, the minister of interior put the responsibility of Operation Luxor on the Justice Ministry, the minister of justice referred to the independent state prosecutor. But when October 7 happened, a revisionism started to reframe Operation Luxor as a success. The new intelligence service’s director, Omar Haijawi-Pirchner, spoke of money being channeled to finance terror acts in Gaza.⁴⁸ As already mentioned before, scholars from the academia-intelligence-complex argued that the failure of Operation Luxor was the fault of the justice system rather than intelligence.⁴⁹

While the Austrian section of Amnesty International remained silent, Amnesty International in Germany criticized “the blanket bans on pro-Palestinian demonstrations ... from a human rights perspective.” “Freedom of assembly applies to everyone who wants to demonstrate now. It doesn’t matter what you think of the protest politically,” Amnesty Deutschland stated.⁵⁰ CAGE Austria said during an OSCE meet-

44. Oe24 (2023), “FPÖ-Krauss will Rücktritt von SPÖ-Gemeinderat Al-Rawi”, Oe24, 18.10.2023, retrieved November 15, 2023 from: <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/affaeren/fpoe-krauss-will-ruecktritt-von-spoe-gemeinderat-al-rawi/572709868>

45. Red. (2023), “Wegen Nahost: Regierungsaufwurf zu erhöhter Wachsamkeit”, ORF, 20.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: <https://orf.at/#/stories/3336763/>

46. Ibid.

47. Staudinger, Martin (2023), “Terrorwarnstufe ‘hoch’: Was steckt dahinter? - FALTER.morgen #682”, Falter, 20.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: <https://www.falter.at/morgen/20231020/terror-warnung-innenministerium-sebastian-kurz-prozess>

48. ORF, “Staatsschutzchef zur erhöhten Terrorwarnstufe”, ZIB 2, 17. November 2023.

49. Wolfgang Sablatnig, “Radikalisierung im Netz: Terrorspezialist Stockhammer arbeitete den Anschlag von Wien auf”, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.tt.com/artikel/30867885/radikalisierung-im-netz-terrorspezialist-stockhammer-arbeitete-den-anschlag-von-wien-auf>

50. Amnesty Deutschland (2023), “Die flächendeckenden Verbote von pro-palästinensischen Demonstrationen sind aus menschenrechtlicher Sicht bedenklich. Die Versammlungsfreiheit gilt für alle, die jetzt demonstrieren

ing held in Warsaw, Poland: “Austria has harshly suppressed pro-Palestinian demonstrations, banning 13 gatherings and issuing 400 administrative reports and 70 police citations in just one month of the genocide... the Austrian government seeks to ban Dar al-Janub, a Palestine solidarity organisation. This action is based on a report from the government-funded Documentation Center for Political Islam, which surveils Muslims in Austria and justifies repression against Muslim activists and opposition groups.”⁵¹

On October 19, a 14-year-old of Syrian origin called for the destruction of Austria’s second largest city Graz according to the Styrian intelligence service. While no specific plans could be revealed, the Styrian police issued the second highest terror alert and proclaimed to protect especially Jewish institutions.⁵² Both the Styrian Governor Christopher Drexler (ÖVP) and his deputy Anton Lang (SPÖ) are quoted as follows: “Current world events, including armed conflicts, terrorist attacks and Islamist propaganda, which is particularly prevalent on the internet, are causing increasing concern. It is therefore an important step to increase police presence as a preventative measure and to continue to act in a calm and level-headed manner.”⁵³

Chancellor Nehammer openly called on the public to inform the authorities “if they notice that individuals are beginning to radicalize” and argued that since even Israel was “massively surprised” by the latest Hamas attack despite its intelligence activities, this should be a “reminder” in this regard. Nehammer announced that he will meet the president of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (IGGÖ), Ümit Vural, to discuss what can be done “to prevent the poison of the terrorist organization Hamas from spreading in Austrian society.”⁵⁴ The new FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl reiterated his call for an “immediate stop to asylum” arguing that the “demonstrations of sympathy for Islamist terrorist attacks” in Austria were “the direct result of years of a ‘door-open policy’ for illegal mass immigration under the guise of asylum.”⁵⁵

The ÖVP-led government with its Minister of Interior Gerhard Karner called for new legislation to enable the monitoring of messenger services.⁵⁶ Karner also defended the banning of a pro-Palestinian rally in Vienna, saying that “we in Austria do

wollen. Dabei spielt keine Rolle, wie man den Protest politisch findet.”, Twitter Beitrag, 18.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: https://x.com/amnesty_de/status/1714612779515060270?s=20

51. CAGE International, “European Muslim NGOs Condemn State Repression of Palestine Activism at Global Conference,” Oct 8, 2024, <https://cage.ngo/articles/european-muslim-ngos-condemn-state-repression-of-palestine-activism-at-global-conference>
52. Red. (2023), “14-Jähriger wollte Graz ‘zerstören’”, ORF, 19.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: <https://steiermark.orf.at/stories/3229006/>
53. Ibid.
54. Die Presse (2023), “Krisenkabinett: ‘Werden uns anschauen, was in den Moscheen gepredigt wird’”, Die Presse, 20.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: <https://www.diepresse.com/17754503/krisenkabinett-werden-uns-anschauen-was-in-den-moscheen-gepredigt-wird>
55. Ibid.
56. Red. (2023), “Karner will mehr Befugnisse für Polizei”, ORF, 22.10.2023, retrieved November 21, 2023 from: <https://orf.at/stories/3337111/>

not want to have the terror of Hamas carried onto the streets and alleys of Austria.”⁵⁷ Vienna City Councilor Peter Hacker (SPÖ) argued, on the one hand, against the ÖVP that “anti-Semitism is not just a problem of immigrants,” while, on the other, blaming the ÖVP for alleged integration failures that are discussed as being related to anti-Semitism. Hacker stated, “Some of what is happening here at pro-Palestinian demonstrations and beyond is completely unacceptable. Of course there must be harsh reactions here; of course there are integration deficits. But I must also emphasize this: the ÖVP got us into this mess.”⁵⁸

In November, the government proposed an amendment of the Symbol Act to increase the penalties for showing symbols of Hamas and other organizations from 4,000 to 10,000 Euro. It also included that officials violating the law will be suspended from their jobs.⁵⁹ The Symbol Act was changed in January 2024.⁶⁰

Social democratic head of 9th district Saya Ahmed, who has a Kurdish Iraqi background, was picked and criticized by the district’s liberal party NEOS for allegedly not condemning the Hamas attacks. The racialization of her Muslimness made her a target. The Liberals called upon her to raise the flag of Israel at the headquarters of the district. Ahmed had, indeed, previously condemned Hamas as a terrorist organization.⁶¹

In November, Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner (ÖVP) called on Muslims to clearly distance themselves from terror and anti-Semitism and for “active persuasion in mosques and schools.”⁶² For her, the Hamas attack was an “attack on our Christian-Jewish values.”⁶³ She further said, “We clearly stand by Israel and by our Jewish fellow citizens in Austria. I have the clear expectation that Muslims in Austria will also reject this hatred and anti-Semitism.” The IGGÖ, as one of the main Muslim representative bodies, replied saying that the demand to distance oneself from terror and anti-Semitism “represents a blanket general suspicion of all Muslims living in Austria and insinuates that they support terror, hatred and anti-Semitism,” fur-

57. Ibid.

58. Stuibler, Petra (2023), “Hacker: “ÖVP-Kritik an Integration ist eine Chuzpe””, *Der Standard*, 08.11.2023, retrieved December 10, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194188/hacker-oevp-kritik-an-integration-ist-eine-chuzpe>

59. Stepan, Max (2023), “Regierung beschließt härtere Strafen für das Zeigen von Hamas-Symbolen”, *Der Standard*, 08.11.2023, retrieved December 10, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194283/regierung-beschliesst-haertere-strafen-fuer-das-zeigen-von-hamas-symbolen>

60. Bundesgesetz, mit dem die Verwendung von Symbolen der Gruppierung Islamischer Staat und anderer Gruppierungen verboten wird (Symbole-Gesetz) <https://ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009040&FassungVom=2024-09-20>

61. Red. (2023), “Neos drängen SPÖ-Bezirkschefin per Inserat zu Distanzierung von Hamas”, *Der Standard*, 08.11.2023, retrieved December 20, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194373/neos-draengen-spoe-bezirkschefin-per-inserat-zu-distanzierung-von-hamas?ref=rec>

62. Red. (2023), “Mikl-Leitner mit Forderungen an Muslime”, *ORF*, 15.11.2023, retrieved December 20, 2023 from: <https://noe.orf.at/stories/3232606/>

63. Ibid.

ther stating that the IGGÖ had “condemned the attack from the beginning.”⁶⁴ The NGO SOS Mitmensch called the governor’s words “a rhetoric of division.” Governor Mikl-Leitner had also called for stricter rules for obtaining citizenship including a mandatory recognition of the state of Israel for naturalization. The director of the SPÖ called her statements “untrustworthy and hypocritical”⁶⁵ given that she is in a coalition with the far-right FPÖ. In an op-ed, the same Michael Völker criticized Mikl-Leitner as follows:

Migrants are now being harassed under the guise of support for Israel. The supposed commitment against anti-Semitism reveals political bigotry. It is astonishing how much racism and xenophobia is now being presented as a seemingly noble cause: under the guise of the fight against anti-Semitism, which many, who until now were completely indifferent to it, are suddenly carrying before them as their historical responsibility and obligation, there is unabashed incitement against Muslims. Politicians who have not previously been suspected of being committed friends of Israel see it as their duty to put unruly Muslims in their place - because they are anti-Semites.⁶⁶

The increased pressure, criminalization, and interwovenness of Islam and the war on Gaza had a direct impact on the increase of anti-Muslim hate crimes: 35.7% out of the 1,522 cases of all anti-Muslim hate crime reported to the Islamophobia watchdog NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus were registered in October, 16.6% in November, and, finally, 13.9% in December, meaning that more than half of all cases collected in the year 2023 occurred after October 7.⁶⁷

Media

The media continued to cover a few ongoing processes of Operation Luxor that investigated alleged terrorism in their third year and the closing of many.⁶⁸ Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who was in charge of Operation Luxor as the minister of interior, was also questioned about the Operation Luxor,⁶⁹ but he evaded the critique and put responsibility on the state prosecutor.⁷⁰ The weekly *Profil* covered the story of the in-

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Völker, Michael (2023), “Integration mit böser Absicht”, Der Standard, 14.11.2023, retrieved December 20, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000195141/integration-mit-boeser-absicht>

67. Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus, Antimuslimischer Rassismus Report 2023, Vienna: 2024, 9.

68. ORF.at, “Verfahren gegen Politologen Hafez eingestellt”, 10 January 2023, <https://religion.orf.at/stories/3217053/>; Redaktion, “Muslimbrüder-Anführer? Ermittlungen eingestellt”, 6 January 2023, <https://www.diepresse.com/6235279/muslimbrueder-anfuhrer-ermittlungen-eingestellt>

69. Schmidt-Vierthaler, Rosa (2023), “Ein grantiger Kanzler und die “Interpretationen eines ORF-Moderators””, Die Presse, 12 January 2023, <https://www.diepresse.com/6237419/ein-grantiger-kanzler-und-die-interpretationen-eines-orf-moderators>

70. Brickner, Irene, Jan Michael Marchart, Luise Ungerboeck, “Karl Nehammers inhaltliche Widersprüche im “Zi B 2”-Interview”, Der Standard, 13 January 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000142537483/karl-nehammers-inhaltliche-widersprueche-im-zib2-interview>

dividual who rescued the lives of policemen on the night of the violent attack on November 2, who was denied citizenship because he was investigated in the Operation Luxor and still regarded by the secret service DSN as being close to terrorists circles.⁷¹ Partisan media such as the Upper Austrian ÖVP-owned *Volksblatt* continued with their alarmist discourse nevertheless.

Proceedings against 31 defendants, most recently the political scientist Farid Hafez, have already been dropped, house searches have been declared unlawful in some cases and no one has been charged. It is unlikely that another smoking gun will be found. So a blow to the water instead of one against Islamism? Only if we consider the problem for lack of convictions. Because the fight against Islamic extremism is more than just hunting down people wearing explosive belts. The Islamist threat often comes on velvet paws instead of bombs and grenades. There is also Islamism with a friendly face. The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution calls it “legalistic Islamism” because its protagonists try to undermine the liberal-secular order by legal means - often under the guise of religious freedom.⁷²

There was international coverage of my case.⁷³ I gave an interview after being finally exonerated in January 2023 from all suspicion.⁷⁴ I also participated in a podcast talk with legal scholar Ingeborg Zerbès, political scientist Thomas Schmidinger, sociologist Reinhard Kreissl, and integration expert Kenan Güngör.⁷⁵

In March 2023, *The New Yorker* published an investigative piece that had the potential to change the whole narrative about Operation Luxor. The piece shows how a Swiss company spied across Europe on behalf of the UAE state and reveals a hidden story of how the Swiss private intelligence company Alp Services⁷⁶ has been spying on citizens of 18 countries in Europe and beyond for the UAE government, sending names of more than 1,000 individuals and 400 organizations in 18 European countries to the UAE, smearing them, and labelling them as part of the Muslim Brotherhood network in Europe.⁷⁷ A dinosaur of private investigation, the Swiss Mario Brero of Alp Services, made Lorenzo Vidino a proposal: “Would he be available to work

71. Bauer, Gernot (2023), “Held der Terrornacht: Kein echter Österreicher?”, Profil, 27 January 2023, <https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/held-der-terrornacht-kein-echter-oesterreicher/402306404>

72. Manfred Maurer (2023), “Nette Islamisten”, OÖ Volksblatt, 13 January 2023, <https://volksblatt.at/meinungen/nette-islamisten-750362/>

73. Deutschlandfunk, “‘Operation Luxor’ Erfolgreiche Polizeirazzia gegen ‘politischen Islam’ in Österreich sorgt weiter für Debatten”, 14 January 2023, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/erfolgreiche-polizeirazzia-gegen-politischen-islam-in-oesterreich-sorgt-weiter-fuer-debatten-100.html>

74. Hafez zu “Luxor”: “Angriff auf kritische muslimische Zivilgesellschaft”, 11 January 2023, <https://www.puls24.at/news/politik/farid-hafez-zu-luxor-angriff-auf-kritische-muslimische-zivilgesellschaft/285846>

75. Falter Radio, “Der falsche Terrorvorwurf einer Razzia - #906”, 16 March 2023, <https://www.falter.at/falter-radio/6411db6823759c001198ad18/der-falsche-terrorvorwurf-einer-razzia-906>

76. Bridge Initiative Team, “Factsheet: Alp Services”, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 5 January 2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-alp-services/>

77. Kirkpatrick, David (2023), “The Dirty Secrets of a Smear Campaign”, *The New Yorker*, 3 April 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/04/03/the-dirty-secrets-of-a-smear-campaign>

as a consultant, perhaps a short unnamed memo on the MB in Europe? (confidential of course).” Two weeks after the dinner, Vidino signed an initial contract paying him 3,000 Euro for “interesting leads/rumors” about the Muslim Brotherhood, along with a “list of alleged members of the first tier organizations in European countries.”⁷⁸

Based on this story that highlighted how Alp Services destroyed the business of the American-Swiss citizen Hazim Nada, a major investigative initiative by the European Investigative Collaborations called “Abu Dhabi Secrets” was launched.⁷⁹ Germany’s *Der Spiegel* participated in this investigation.⁸⁰ Building on this, the Austrian weekly *Profil* published a story on the relationship of Alp Services with Austrian domestic politics. In “Inside the United Arab Emirate’s Spy Campaign in Europe,” Stefan Melchiar and Anna Thalhammer showed that “the Emirate’s networks reach well into Austria” including even as far as Operation Luxor.⁸¹ Operation Luxor, was “a large-scale police operation involving 940 officers targeting dozens of individuals and businesses that took place on November 9, 2020, in Austria.” The government claimed to “cut off the roots of political Islam.” In 2021, an Austrian court ruled that the raids were unlawful. In the three years since the raids, not a single person has been arrested or convicted. This “textbook example of governing with crime and fear” was conducted under Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, who was known for his anti-Muslim policies.⁸² The *Profil* article showed that Lorenzo Vidino’s “attributed people from the Muslim sphere to the Muslim Brotherhood ... Many of those names ended up with Alp – and many of them later became suspects in the so-called ‘Operation Luxor’”. For this criminal investigation, Vidino’s study was a main basis.⁸³ They also show that the private detective firm Alp Services was directly involved in Operation Luxor: The authors of the *Profil*-article say: “Alp was immediately informed of the house search by one of their sources at the time. Via Protonmail (i.e. anonymously and encrypted), a representative of Alp wrote to his contact in the UAE on November 9th: ‘As you may have seen and as we wrote on August 24th, the Austrian authorities are currently conducting a massive anti-terror counterterrorism against the MB, ‘operation ramses’. (...) The public prosecutor’s office in Graz declared: ‘The Muslim Brotherhood is not a religious community, but stands for religiously motivated po-

78. Ibid.

79. European Investigative Collaborations, “Abu Dhabi Secrets. How a Swiss company spied across Europe on behalf of the UAE state”, <https://eic.network/projects/abu-dhabi-secrets.html>

80. Kalisch, Muriel, Monika Bolliger, Rafael Buschmann, Nicola Naber und Sven Becker “How United Arab Emirates Seeks to Leverage Its Influence in Europe”, *Der Spiegel*, 11 July 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/abu-dhabi-secrets-how-qatar-seeks-to-leverage-its-influence-in-europe-a-d0058776-2806-464d-9e0b-1fd3b6a07282>

81. Melchiar, Stefan and Anna Thalhammer (2023), “Inside the United Arab Emirate’s spy campaign in Europe”, *Profil*, 19 March 2023, <https://www.profil.at/investigativ/inside-the-united-arab-emirates-spy-campaign-in-europe/402598541>

82. Bridge Initiative Team, “Factsheet: Operation Luxor”, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 8 January 2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-operation-luxor/>

83. Melchiar and Thalhammer, *Inside the United Arab Emirate’s spy campaign*.

litical extremism.”⁸⁴ However, the revelations by the weekly *Profil's* editor-in-chief Anna Thalhammer and Stefan Melchiar about the United Arab Emirate’s involvement received zero reaction in Austrian political circles. As Jakob Winter argued in regard to the involvement of Lorenzo Vidino as a member of the academic advisory board of Austria’s Documentation Center for Political Islam: “In a developed democracy, such revelations would tend to set political decision-makers thinking about the composition of the advisory board. Not so in Austria.”⁸⁵ Also, no single daily newspaper picked up the story. A major scandal involving a foreign government and a spy firm leading to no single reaction. Beyond that, one wonders, why these revelations were not used by a single political party to oppose the government, but rather all chose to remain silent on the issue.

The media coverage of Operation Luxor changed drastically following October 7. Suddenly, the infamous Operation Luxor was reframed as a success story of Austria’s intelligence service against Hamas. The tabloid press ran several articles depicting several mosques in Austria as belonging to Hamas.⁸⁶ In an interview, Minister of Interior Gerhard Karner (ÖVP) answering the question, “There are studies by the Documentation Center for Political Islam in which reference is made to preachers in Vienna who cite Hamas as a role model. How do you deal with this?” stated, “As the rule of law requires. That the police, that the Office for the Protection of the Constitution observes and intervenes when necessary. In connection with ‘Operation Luxor,’ there have been intensive investigations and arrests on the orders of the public prosecutor’s office. Numerous investigations in connection with the Muslim Brotherhood are still ongoing.” Further questioned about Operation Luxor being regarded as “an investigation flop because many cases have been dropped,” he said, “The fact is that there were investigations, which led to numerous house searches on the orders of the public prosecutor’s office. They were carried out. Some were discontinued. However, many investigations are still ongoing.”⁸⁷ Other media outlets ran headlines such as “There Are Hamas Structures in Austria”⁸⁸ quoting well-known Islamophobes such as Heiko Heinisch, who had also been involved in Operation Luxor, as experts.⁸⁹ Asked whether he believed Operation Luxor was a flop or not, Nicolas Stockhammer (see section on education and research), argued, “No, I don’t think so.” He further argued,

84. Ibid.

85. Winter, Jakob (2023), “Die resignierte Republik”, *Profil*, 22.09.2023, retrieved October 18, 2023 from: <https://www.profil.at/morgenpost/die-resignierte-republik/402603119>

86. Redaktion, “Wiener Moschee mit Hamas-Connection”, oe24, 10 October 2023, <https://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/wiener-moschee-mit-hamas-connection/571809334>

87. Gebhart, Martin (2023), “Zweithöchste Terrorwarnstufe in Österreich: Karner über Gefährdungslage”, 18 October 23, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/innenminister-karner-wer-tod-fuer-israel-schreit-wird-angezeigt/402637382>

88. Stoiber, Gerald (2023), “Es gibt in Österreich Strukturen der Hamas”, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 9 October 2023, <https://www.sn.at/politik/innenpolitik/es-oesterreich-strukturen-hamas-146646787>

89. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Heiko Heinisch, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 3 March 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-heiko-heinisch/>

“The connection between the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas shows that [Operation Luxor, FH] was justified. I would say that the judiciary should be held accountable. In my view, the authorities have good evidence.”⁹⁰

On the third anniversary of Operation Luxor, I published an op-ed in the daily *Der Standard* titled “Operation Luxor - A Scandal without Consequences.”⁹¹ Andrea Schurian replied in the daily *Die Presse*, arguing the fact that I had published a piece left her “speechless”⁹² and further reiterating the conspiracies that led to Operation Luxor in the first place.

Several newspapers not only from the far-right sensationalized that there are more Muslim than Catholic pupils in Vienna’s schools. The far-right *Exxpress*, a declining media outlet founded in 2021 whose CEO had worked for Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and who fired 24 employees in 2023,⁹³ sensationalized that Muslims formed the majority of all pupils in the city of Linz.⁹⁴ *Exxpress* has published several pieces on alleged Islamist⁹⁵ violence,⁹⁶ be it in Germany⁹⁷ or the alleged attack – that was never substantiated – against the Pride Parade.⁹⁸ Immigration is being conflated with Muslims posing a violent threat.⁹⁹ In an op-ed in *Exxpress*, columnist Daniela Holzinger opined in a piece titled “Islam Again and Again”:

A killing spree in Vienna, knife terror in a small town, plans to attack schools, rapes and debates about virtue. Again and again, immigrant Islam is making headlines that would have been considered impossible just a few years ago. If we don’t start

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90. Wolfgang Sablatnig, “Radikalisierung im Netz: Teroexperte Stockhammer arbeitete den Anschlag von Wien auf”, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.tt.com/artikel/30867885/radikalisierung-im-netz-terorexperte-stockhammer-arbeitete-den-anschlag-von-wien-auf>
91. Hafez, Farid (2023), “Die Operation Luxor – ein Skandal ohne Konsequenzen”, *Der Standard*, 9 November 2023, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194392/die-operation-luxor-ein-skandal-ohne-konsequenzen>
92. Schurian, Andrea (2023), “Der Islam wird europäisiert – oder Europa islamisiert”, *Die Presse*, 13 November 2023.
93. Neuhold, Clemens (2023), “Mehrere Kündigungen bei Online-Medium ‘Exxpress’”, *Profil*, 27.09.2023, retrieved November 5, 2023 from: <https://www.profil.at/oesterreich/mehrere-kuendigungen-bei-online-medium-exxpress/402608612>
94. Red. (2023), “Jetzt auch in Linz: Mehr muslimische als katholische Schüler”, *Exxpress*, 20.05.2023, retrieved November 2, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/jetzt-auch-in-linz-mehr-muslimische-als-katholische-schueler>
95. Koch, Michael (2023), “Islamisten planten Gift-Anschlag: Sondereinheit stoppte Terroristen”, *Exxpress*, 08.01.2023, retrieved October 10, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/islamisten-planten-gift-anschlag-sondereinheit-stoppte-terroristen/>
96. Rabeder, Rene (2023), “6701 Tote bei 3955 Anschlägen im Vorjahr: So gefährlich ist der Islamisten-Terror”, *Exxpress*, 15.03.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/6701-tote-bei-3955-anschlaegen-im-vorjahr-so-gefaehrlich-ist-der-islamisten-terror/>
97. Red. (2023), “Konkrete Anschlagpläne: Terror-Razzia gegen gefährliche Islamisten”, *Exxpress*, 06.07.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/konkrete-anschlagsplaene-terror-razzia-gegen-gefaehrliche-islamisten/>
98. Rabeder, Rene (2023), “Der Terror ist mitten unter uns: 16 Islamisten in Österreich festgenommen”, *Exxpress*, 21.06.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/so-akut-ist-die-terrorgefahr-16-islamisten-in-oesterreich-festgenommen/>
99. Rabeder, Rene (2023), “Österreichs oberster Polizist: Schlepper bringen uns Extremisten und Islamisten”, *Exxpress*, 13.04.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/oesterreichs-oberster-polizist-schlepper-bringen-uns-extremisten-und-islamisten/>

to tighten the reins massively now, we will soon no longer recognize our country. ... What a huge iceberg of Islamist hatred against our culture, our country and its people must be lurking beneath the surface if such a gruesome tip is peeking out at the top? ... And yet this development was anything but unforeseeable. Where Islam rules, oppression, discrimination, violence and dictatorship prevail. Afghanistan and the revival of the total disenfranchisement, indeed dehumanization of women and girls, currently seems to be the purest lesson in the political ideology that is preached in this country under the guise of religious freedom. ... For some years now, social democratic-led Denmark has been demonstrating how this works. Instead of a submissive welcoming culture, clear limits are set: immigration and family reunification are restricted. Ghettos for foreigners (more than 50% migrants) have been dissolved, people resettled and real integration demanded! In total, the reform package included more than 70 stricter laws - to the great delight of the native population.¹⁰⁰

In another opinion piece, Holzinger pushes back against the fact that Islamization has become a right-wing buzzword and argues why Islamization has become a reality in European societies.¹⁰¹ Stefan Beig, who played a central role¹⁰² in Operation Luxor¹⁰³ and is a journalist working for *Exxpress*, published an article, in which he criticized the FPÖ chairman of Upper Austria for meeting with a representative of a “Turkish-Islamist Movement.”¹⁰⁴ *Exxpress* also criticized Muslims organizing a panel on Islamophobia in the European Parliament, writing that “Islamists are in Brussels,” problematizing statements made by EU expert Shada Islam, and Eve Geddie from Amnesty International.¹⁰⁵

The far-right extremist newspaper *Zur Zeit* published a satire in which it joked about the fact that the new director of the domestic intelligence service DSN is named Omar Hajiwari, omitting his second surname “Pirchner” and alleging that Omar Hajiwari-Pirchner was a Muslim, although in fact he is a baptized Catholic from the inner circle of Sebastian Kurz, amongst whom some are known for their religious zeal.¹⁰⁶

100. Red. (2023), “Daniela Holzinger: Immer wieder Islam”, *Exxpress*, 04.08.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/daniela-holzinger-immer-wieder-islam/>

101. Red. (2023), “Daniela Holzinger: Islamisierung - ein rechter Kampfbegriff?”, *Exxpress*, 17.02.2023, retrieved October 10, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/daniela-holzinger-islamisierung-ein-rechter-kampfbegriff/>

102. Farid Hafez, *Wie ich zum Staatsfeind erklärt wurde. Die Operation Luxor und der Kreuzzug Gegen den ‘politischen Islam’*, Wien: Promedia Verlag, 125-130.

103. Bridge Initiative Team, *Factsheet: Operation Luxor*, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 8 January 2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-operation-luxor/>

104. Beig, Stefan (2023), “FPÖ-Haimbuchner trifft Funktionär von türkisch-islamistischer Bewegung”, *Exxpress*, 04.02.2023, retrieved October 10, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/fpoe-haimbuchner-trifft-funktion-aer-von-tuerkisch-islamistischer-bewegung/>

105. Red. (2023), “Islamisten in Brüssel? Anti-Islamophobie-Tagung attackiert Frankreichs Säkularität”, *Exxpress*, 25.09.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/islamisten-in-bruessel-anti-islamophobie-tagung-attackiert-frankreichs-saekularitaet/>

106. Thalhammer, Anna (2023), “Da kannst 1000 mal Satire drüberschreiben, ist das ein rassistischer Irrsinn. Wie kommt der DSN-Chef eigentlich zu sowas. Erschienen in *Zur Zeit*. Widerlichst.”, Twitter Beitrag, 09.08.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: https://twitter.com/anna_thalhammer/status/1689228947056144384?s=51&t=IqMyJxNOZr_BLR7RWY8sNA

Zur Zeit receives an annual budget of 44,600 Euro from state funds. This is a perfect example of the power of imagination in Islamophobic thought. Following this publication, the DSN investigated the article regarding racism.¹⁰⁷

In an opinion piece, veteran journalist Barbara Coudenhove-Kalergi argued that people have to accept that Austro-Turks (read: Muslims) won't rid themselves of their culture.¹⁰⁸

An opinion piece by *Der Standard*-journalist Michael Völker shows the amount of amalgamation of issues like integration, Islam, and anti-Semitism. He wrote,

We have a problem with our Muslim fellow citizens. With those who find it difficult to integrate into our society, who live in a parallel world. And are now increasingly living out their anti-Semitism, their hatred of Jews and ultimately their rejection of our social order. These are by no means all of them. But let's be honest: there are many. More than we want to cope with. This problem is particularly visible in schools. Muslim boys openly act out their aggression, their enemy stereotypes and values that are at odds with ours. They attack classmates who are not of their faith, want to tell girls from their own culture and religion what to do. They call Jews dogs and look down on Christians with contempt. These are not children who have just arrived in Austria and are still struggling to adapt. They are children who are the second or third generation to live here and yet have grown up in an environment where all efforts at integration have failed. Their parents come from countries where anti-Semitism is practically state doctrine. And so they have also been taught this view here. The fact that there are now supposed to be deradicalization workshops in schools is nice. But they are token measures, years too late and far too weak overall. A four-hour workshop at school will not turn around the world of young people whose views are manifested by all-pervasive propaganda on TikTok. We have failed at integration. We as a society, because we didn't care: it will work out, was the nice approach. It will never work out, said the FPÖ voters. It would have been up to politicians to tackle the problem. They didn't want to because they were afraid of the ideological charge of the issue. This government and the governments before it have let down the teachers at the hotspot schools and allowed them to fail in unmanageable situations. But it is also a failure of those affected themselves. A failure of people who do not want to integrate, who cannot reflect, who remain attached to the values of their home countries from which they have fled. Who themselves do not have the tolerance that they demand of others. School is the first place to start, where you can get to the young people. This requires suitable staff, role models and ultimately capacity. There are many approaches, all-day

107. Mark, Oliver (2023), "Mann namens Omar": Staatsschutz prüft rassistischen Artikel in "Zur Zeit", *Der Standard*, 11.08.2023, retrieved October 11, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000182509/mann-namens-omar-staatsschutz-prueft-rassistischen-artikel-in-zur-zeit>

108. Coudenhove-Kalergi, Barbara (2023), "Die "Austrotürken"", *Der Standard*, 20.07.2023, retrieved October 19, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000179666/austrot252rken>

school with a corresponding offer would be one. Society also needs to take a closer look: offer help and opportunities where appropriate, rethink tolerance where it is no longer required. We need to be aware of this problem before it overwhelms us. It is not a hopeless situation, but one that requires an effort and good will - on our part and on the part of others. Otherwise, nothing common will emerge from the us and them.¹⁰⁹

In an opinion piece by Rosemarie Schwaiger in *Die Presse*, titled “No, A Female Soccer Player with a Headscarf Is No Reason to Cheer,” she argues, “For the first time, a young woman wearing a hijab is playing in the World Cup. How unworldly do you have to be to think this is ‘equality.’”¹¹⁰ She criticized the fact that some media covered the news of the first woman wearing a hijab playing in the FIFA Women’s World Cup as an expression of progress.

Der Standard-columnist Hans Rauscher criticized the Viennese ÖVP leader and former deputy chief of police Karl Mahrer who suggested that “immigrant ghettos” should be demolished to “reorganize certain parts of the city” by relocating residents to create a “better mix” drawing on the example of Denmark’s infamous ghetto laws under the Social Democratic government. At the same time, he shared the assessment of a radicalization of Muslim youngsters that are in solidarity with Palestine.¹¹¹

Bernhard Heinzlmaier published an article with the title “The Open Society and Its Illiberal Muslim Enemies” in *Express*, responding to the investigative piece published by the weekly *Profil*. Therein, he argues,

The printed text was then, as expected, disappointing, the usual diffuse, conspiracy-theory ramblings of campaign journalism, which chronically lacks facts and therefore has to resort to the jargon of phantasmagorical conjecture in order to make credible connections and links that it cannot prove beyond doubt. An undercurrent of murmuring evil thus pervades the entire text and in the end the reader is left without any concrete clues as to who did what, why and what it was. As is so often the case in Austrian journalism, the entire text remains stuck at the stage of denunciatory suspicion. Reading it is a waste of time. ... The article pretends that the Muslim Brotherhood is a liberation organization. What is interesting about the article is what it leaves out. For example, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which is frequently mentioned in reports on the protection of the constitution, at least in Ger-

109. Völker, Michael (2023), “Wir haben bei der Integration versagt”, *Der Standard*, 08.11.2023, retrieved December 14, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000194332/wir-haben-bei-der-integration-versagt>

110. Schwaiger, Rosemarie (2023), “Nein, eine Fußballerin mit Kopftuch ist kein Grund zum Jubeln”, *Die Presse*, 01.08.2023, retrieved October 20, 2023 from: <https://www.diepresse.com/13578946/nein-eine-fussballerin-mit-kopftuch-ist-kein-grund-zum-jubeln>

111. Rauscher, Hans (2023), “‘Stadtteile neu ordnen’ gegen islamistische Radikalisierung?”, *Der Standard*, 23.10.2023, retrieved November 25, 2023 from: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000192340/stadtteile-neu-ordnen-gegen-islamistische-radikalisierung>

many, and the Islamo-fascist state of Qatar, which finances it, get off remarkably lightly in the article.¹¹²

In a critical piece in *Biber*, Aleksandra Tulej wrote about the disinformed media coverage of her case as a victim allegedly perpetrated by Chechens due to their religious policing. The yellow press *Kronen Zeitung* ran a headline with the title “No Headscarf: Moral Guard Attacks Woman!” The story was shared by other news media. *Kurier* wrote that “her friend, who wore a headscarf, was left alone.” Following this disinformation campaign, she took up the pen and published a piece, where she criticized that no media had ever talked to her and that the story about the hijab was simply invented by the media.¹¹³

Some media also reported on the increase of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the wake of the October 7 attacks following the Islamophobia watchdog Dokustelle’s public intervention.¹¹⁴

The editor-in-chief of the Jewish magazine *NU* published an op-ed in *Die Presse* with the title “Does Academic Freedom End with Islam?” There, she criticizes the minister of education’s backing down from a research project on Muslim religious education in public schools by Ednan Aslan’s PhD candidate that was criticized by the IGGÖ and the Muslim Youth of Austria (MJÖ). She concludes that there is an urgent need to debate “(politically abused) Islam without taboos” and suggests this be done “ideally by enlightened and open-minded Muslims,”¹¹⁵ mentioning Mouhanad Khorchide.¹¹⁶

Justice System

The daily *Kurier* reported that the duo Heiko Heinisch and Nina Scholz, after being recalled from their positions as experts for Operation Luxor, had to pay back the fees for the expert opinions they provided. Within 14 days, Heinisch and Scholz each had to transfer 4,641.50 Euro back to the federal accounting agency.¹¹⁷ As of the end of

112. Red. (2023), “Die offene Gesellschaft und ihre illiberalen muslimischen Feinde”, *Exxpress*, 27.09.2023, retrieved November 5, 2023 from: <https://exxpress.at/bernhard-heinzmaier-die-offene-gesellschaft-ihre-illiberalen-muslimischen-feinde/>

113. Tulej, Aleksandra (2023), “Die Möchtegern-”Sittenwächter” vom Handeskai: Wie die Schlagzeilen negativ auf das Opfer zurückgefallen sind”, *Das Biber*, 18.10.2023, retrieved November 25, 2023 from: <https://dasbiber.at/blog/die-moechtegern-sittenwaechter-vom-handelskai-wie-die-schlagzeilen-negativ-auf-das-opfer>

114. Strohmayer, Markus (2023), “Nahost-Konflikt führt zu Anstieg bei Übergriffen auf Muslime”, *Kurier*, 09.11.2023, retrieved December 19, 2023 from: <https://kurier.at/chronik/oesterreich/nahost-konflikt-uebergriffen-muslime-rassismus/402661982>

115. Schurian, Andrea (2023), “Islamstudie: Endet die Freiheit der Wissenschaft beim Islam?”, *Die Presse*, 23.05.2023, retrieved December 19, 2023 from: <https://www.diepresse.com/6291041/islamstudie-endet-die-freiheit-der-wissenschaft-beim-islam>

116. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Mouhanad Khorchide, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 15 March 2021, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-mouhanad-khorchide/>

117. Reibenwein, Michaela and Stephanie Anger, “Causa Muslimbrüder: Luxor-Gutachter müssen Honorar zurückzahlen”, *Kurier*, 9 October 2023, <https://kurier.at/chronik/oesterreich/causa-muslimbrueder-luxor-gutachter-muessen-honorar-zurueckzahlen/402625025>

2023, investigations against 30 people and institutions involved in the infamous racist Operation Luxor were still ongoing.

Rather than acknowledging the failure of Operation Luxor, the state prosecutor directing the operation mandated another raid against one person on November 3, which happened four days later.¹¹⁸

The Muslim theologian Amir Zaidan, who had also served as an anonymous tipster during Operation Luxor, was sued by the Muslim Youth of Austria (MJÖ) for having falsely alleged in public that leading members of their board were also members of an Islamist organization. Zaidan lost the case, was fined 5,850 Euro, and had to publish a revocation in the tabloid press *Express*, where he had originally stated these lies.¹¹⁹

According to the domestic intelligence service DSN, three people sympathizing with ISIL and the Islamic State in the Province of Khorasan were preparing an attack on the Pride Parade. The DSN communicated this as further proof of its important work in taking care of the security of the people in Austria. The three people aged 14, 17, and 20 years, were detained, but the Viennese Appeal Court ruled against their detention arguing “the suspicion that they have concretely planned an attack, is not accepted.”¹²⁰ While they had IS propaganda on their smartphones and instructions on how to build bombs, there were no specific plans.

In July, two pupils aged 15 and 16 were incarcerated for planning an attack on the middle school of the 15-year-old in Bruck an der Mur in the state of Styria. Media reported that they wanted to “kill Christians” and “reinstate the caliphate.”¹²¹ While the two youngsters were sentenced to two years in prison, the Styrian Governor Christopher Drexler (ÖVP) called on the minister of justice (Alma Zadic, Greens) “to impose harsher penalties in order to make it clear to such people how much our society and our constitutional state abhor this attitude and to take action against them.”¹²² For the far-right FPÖ, this case was proof “how omnipresent the danger posed by radical Islam is in Styria,”¹²³ criticizing the sentences as too lenient.

After being sued by Rami Ali for wrong information on the infamous Islam Map that is online again following major contestations,¹²⁴ Ednan Aslan had to publish the

118. Republik Österreich: Staatsanwaltschaft Graz, Anordnung der Durchsuchung, Anordnung der Sicherstellung, LVT-St 2409/19.

119. Republic of Austria, Commercial Court of Vienna, 20 Cg 48/21v - 26.

120. Red. (2023), “Pride-Anschlagsplan: OLG lehnt Beschwerde ab”, ORF, 28.07.2023, retrieved October 19, 2023 from: <https://wien.orf.at/stories/3217843/>

121. Red. (2023), “Burschen planten Anschlag auf Schule: Haft”, ORF, 29.07.2023, retrieved October 19, 2023 from: <https://steiermark.orf.at/stories/3217910/>

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid.

124. Farzan, Antonia Noori, “Muslim groups in Austria fear attacks after government publishes map of mosques”, *The Washington Post*, 29 May 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/29/austria-islam-map/>

following revocation: “I have made and spread the false allegation that Mr. Rami Ali, M.A. is a co-founder and board member of the association that operates the Al-Tay-sir Mosque. I refute this allegation as untrue. Prof. Dr. Ednan Aslan.”¹²⁵

Following Hamas’s attack on October 7 and the subsequent war on Gaza by the Israeli army, one of the immediate responses by the Austrian government was the crackdown on pro-Palestinian demonstrations. A rally on October 11 was cancelled by the Ministry of Interior a few hours before, which led to most participants pouring into the streets anyway unaware of the cancellation. As a result, 300 participants were surrounded by police forces and the identity of every single person was taken. Every person was told to be fined approximately 500 Euro for participating in the demonstration. Amongst the fined were also asylum seekers, who have been threatened with withdrawal of their right to remain in Austria. Several participants were also fined for using the slogan “From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free,” but judges decided that there was no reasonable suspicion to investigate terrorism activities.¹²⁶ As a response, the Ministry of Justice issued a decree forcing the chief prosecutor to consider the usage of the slogan as a reasonable suspicion to investigate terrorism activities. To legitimize such an interpretation, the Austrian Ministry of Justice primarily relied on an expertise from Germany’s RIAS (Recherche- und Informationsstelle Antisemitismus) and the German Ministry of Interior and Homeland.¹²⁷

Internet

The internet has been used primarily by politicians of the larger parties, especially the far-right FPÖ, to disseminate its conspiracies of a Muslim takeover. The latest report written by the anti-racist NGO SOS Mitmensch has chronicled a long list of anti-Muslim statements coming from leading politicians of the FPÖ in its annual report on anti-Muslim racism.¹²⁸

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Former chancellor and champion of Islamophobia, Sebastian Kurz, participated as a speaker at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) festival in Esztergom in the north of Hungary. The MCC is a think tank chaired by Balázs Orbán, Orbán’s polit-

125. Islamlandkarte, Widerruf, <https://www.islam-landkarte.at/detail/unterstuetzung-der-hinterbliebenen-ekrem-el-mawta-al-taysir-moschee>

126. Interview with a lawyer defending several suspects and wants to stay anonymous.

127. BMJ, Erlass des BMJ zur rechtlichen Würdigung der Parole “From the river to the sea (Palestine will be free)” iSd §282a Abs 2 StGB, GZ 2023-0.848.488, 30 Nov 2023

128. SOS Mitmensch, “Antimuslimischer Rassismus in der österreichischen Politik Antimuslimische Abwertungs-, Ausgrenzungs-, Feindbild-, Generalisierungs- und Hetzkampagnen im Jahr 2023,” March 2024, https://www.sosmitmensch.at/dl/kmuNJKJkNKmJqx4KJK/SOS_Mitmensch_Bericht2023_AntimuslimischerRassismus_pdf

ical director, and is considered a party cadre for the right-wing conservative Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, which aims to nurture a “patriotic elite.” In 2020, the Hungarian government provided the foundation with more than one billion Euro, more than all other universities in Hungary combined. Alongside Kurz, U.S. right-wing speaker Michael Knowles, who became infamous for calling Greta Thunberg “mentally ill,” also participated. Since May 2023, the MCC has also been the majority owner of the Vienna Modul University (MU Vienna) on the Kahlenberg mountain, one of Austria’s few private universities.¹²⁹

On October 24, the “Vienna Forum on Countering Segregation and Extremism in the Context of Integration” took place for the third time after its inception in 2021. Participants included high representatives of various European countries, amongst them Davor Božinović, Croatia’s minister of the interior; Kaare Dybvad Bek, Denmark’s minister of immigration and integration; and Ana Catarina Mendes, Portugal’s minister of parliamentary affairs. Opening the proceedings were Bart Somers, vice-minister-president of the Flemish Government in Belgium; Sofia Voultepsi, vice-minister for migration and asylum in Greece; Etienne Afaire, secretary general of France’s Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation (Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalization); and the Austrian host, Susanne Raab,¹³⁰ who is the minister for women, family, integration and the media. Raab was quoted in media saying the aim was to “recognize and effectively combat these forms of extremism.”¹³¹ According to Raab, the Vienna Forum makes a significant contribution to this networking at the European level. The conference “is sadly topical due to the terrorist attack by Hamas on Israel and deals with the associated effects on Islamist structures in Europe at expert level.”¹³² As CAGE said, “This secretive conference cloaks discussions on the ‘Muslim question’ under the guise of combating ‘extremism’ and ‘political Islam’. The Vienna Forum is Austria’s attempt to export its Islamophobic fight against so-called ‘political Islam’ to Europe. It serves as a platform for fostering Islamophobia, undermining self-organized Muslim communities, curbing Muslim visibility...”¹³³ It included several known names from the Islamophobic network including Heiko Heinisch and Nina Scholz.¹³⁴ The keynote was held by Ahmad Mansour.¹³⁵

129. Fuchs, Matthias (2023), “Ex-Kanzler Kurz tritt für Orbans Kadenschmiede auf”, Kronen Zeitung, 19.06.2023, retrieved November 20, 2023 from: <https://www.krone.at/3034577>

130. Bridge Initiative Team, “Factsheet: Susanne Raab”, The Bridge Initiative – Georgetown University, 11 October 2022, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-susanne-raab/>

131. Heute Redaktion, “Konferenz gegen Extremismus in Wien” 23 October 2023, <https://www.vienna.at/konferenz-gegen-extremismus-in-wien/8366974>

132. Ibid.

133. CAGE, Post on X, 25 October 2023, <https://x.com/CAGEintl/status/1717212477224624566>

134. Nina Scholz, Post on X, 25 October 2023, <https://x.com/NinaaScholz/status/1717166448211091683>

135. Tommaso Virgili, Post on X, 24 October 2023, https://x.com/TommasoVirgili_/status/1716739335624532308/photo/1

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

There are several associations who have continued their work against anti-Muslim racism including primarily reports. Broader alliances against Islamophobia are still missing. Here is a list of several reports and acts undertaken to counteract Islamophobia:

- The anti-racist organization SOS Mitmensch published its annual report on Islamophobia.¹³⁶
- The anti-racist organization ZARA published its annual report.¹³⁷
- The Islamophobia watchdog NGO Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus published its annual report on Islamophobia.¹³⁸
- I published an academic anthology on the third anniversary of Operation Luxor as an open access book.¹³⁹
- The Green MP Faika El-Nagashi criticized Islamophobia on the UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia.
- The weekly *Profil's* investigation based on David Kirkpatrick's article "The Dirty Secrets of a Smear Campaign" published in *The New Yorker* revealed the international dimension of Operation Luxor.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

While the Operation Luxor has suffered serious setbacks, the hardliners within the Austrian political leadership started revision the unsuccessful story of Operation Luxor. While the raids were declared unlawful in mid-2021 by the Appellate Court, still 20 people remain under investigation, some of them probably because they have no means to fight back legally. October 7th was used as an excuse to redefine Operation Luxor as a success, questioning the decisions of the courts and further criminalizing young Muslim subjects in school. Important investigative revealing by journalists made no difference for domestic politics and was silenced by media.

At this backdrop, I can only reiterate previous year's recommendations:

- The Documentation Center for Political Islam must be abolished.
- The Documentation Center Political Islam's project "Islam Map" must be abolished.
- The Islam Act must be legally contested.

136. Ibid.

137. "Rassismus Report 2023. Analyse zu rassistischen Übergriffen und Strukturen", March 2024, https://assets.zara.or.at/media/rassismusreport/ZARA_RassismusReport_2023_DE.pdf, 40.

138. Dokustelle Islamfeindlichkeit & antimuslimischer Rassismus, Antimuslimischer Rassismus Report 2023, Vienna: 2024.

139. Hafez, Farid (Ed.), *Operation Luxor Eine kritische Aufarbeitung der größten rassistischen Polizeioperation Österreichs* (Bielefeld: Transcript 2023), <https://www.transcript-verlag.de/media/pdf/6a/b4/80/oa9783839463826.pdf>

- The organized anti-Muslim network must be uncovered, especially those involved in the Documentation Center for Political Islam and the raid of November 9, 2020.
- The securitization of Muslim subjects in educational institutions must be contested and the police has to be pushed out of schools.
- Training on racism, especially Islamophobia, should be offered to journalists, lawyers, and police (security officials) by qualified personnel rather than by people related to institutions that harm Muslim life in Austria.
- Muslim civil society must be empowered with tools to combat Islamophobia, especially in the creation of a consciousness towards the illegality of hate crimes.
- Educational institutions and stakeholders must work towards creating an alternative narrative of Muslims in Austria which will work to dispel the widely accepted negative image of Islam.

Chronology

- **23 March:** The new coalition government in the state of Lower Austria (ÖVP and FPÖ) included “an action plan against radical Islam” and “the establishment of an advisory and monitoring centre against radicalization and political Islam.”
- **21-23 May:** Minister of Integration Susanne Raab meets with Minister of Integration and Migration Kaare Dybvad Bek to discuss cutting social services for some immigrants
- **11 October:** Cancellation of rally in downtown Vienna for a ceasefire in Gaza
- **24 October:** The “Vienna Forum on Countering Segregation and Extremism in the Context of Integration” took place.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
BELGIUM
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Samenvatting

Het Nationaal Rapport 2023 over islamofobie in België belicht de belangrijke maar ondergerapporteerde discriminatie waarmee moslims in het onderwijs en op het werk worden geconfronteerd. Het rapport documenteert tal van gevallen van vooroordelen en partijdigheid waarmee moslims dagelijks geconfronteerd worden. Echter krijgen deze kwesties minimale aandacht in de reguliere media, waardoor het bredere publiek zich grotendeels niet bewust is van de volledige omvang van het probleem. In het onderwijs worden moslimstudenten vaak geconfronteerd met racisme en uitsluiting. Het rapport belicht incidenten waarbij studentes geen hoofddoek mogen dragen, wat vooral moslimmeisjes treft en leidt tot gevoelens van vervreemding. Ook op de werkplek worden werkzoekende en werkende moslims geconfronteerd met aanzienlijke discriminatie. Moslimvrouwen die een hoofddoek dragen worden vaak geconfronteerd met bevooroordeelde aanwervingspraktijken, waarbij werkgevers expliciet de voorkeur geven aan niet-hijabi-kandidaten. Daarnaast worden moslims vaak geconfronteerd met vooroordelen of discriminatie op basis van hun religieuze opvattingen of etniciteit. Deze discriminerende praktijken worden gedocumenteerd door organisaties als UNIA en CIIB, maar blijven grotendeels onzichtbaar voor het publiek door onvoldoende aandacht in de media. Ook de berichtgeving in de mainstream media over mondelinge en fysieke aanvallen op moslims is minimaal. Incidenten zoals de poging tot brandstichting in de Ennassr moskee in Borgerhout, Antwerpen, en bedreigingen aan het adres van moskeeën in Brussel komen zelden in het nieuws, ondanks het feit dat ze een klimaat van angst en onveiligheid creëren binnen de moslimgemeenschap. Verbaal geweld en haatzaaien tegen moslims in de openbare ruimte komen vaak voor, maar worden zelden door de pers behandeld.

Het rapport bespreekt ook de politieke dimensie van islamofobie, in het bijzonder hoe de overheid de moslimgemeenschap en haar instellingen probeert te controleren. Er zijn pogingen geweest om moskeeën en moslimorganisaties te reguleren, zoals de Executieve van de Moslims van België (EMB), die werd vervangen door de nieuwe Muslimraad van België, die snel door de regering werd opgericht. Deze laatste werd bekritiseerd omdat er geen voorafgaand overleg was geweest met de moslimgemeenschap en werd beschouwd als opgelegd door de overheid. Daarnaast zijn er initiatieven geweest om de buitenlandse invloed op moskeeën te beperken, met strengere regels voor erkende religieuze gemeenschappen. Zo voerde de Vlaamse regering een decreet in om buitenlandse financiering van religieuze gemeenschappen te beperken, dat later ongrondwettelijk werd verklaard door het Grondwettelijk Hof. Dergelijke maatregelen hebben bezorgdheid gewekt over het feit dat de overheid buitensporige controle uitoefent over religieuze moslimpraktijken en -instellingen, wat mogelijk een inbreuk vormt op de godsdienstvrijheid.

Executive Summary

The “Islamophobia in Belgium: National Report 2023” highlights the significant yet underreported discrimination faced by Muslims in education and the workplace. The report documents numerous instances of bias and prejudice that Muslim individuals encounter daily, which receive minimal representation in mainstream media, leaving the broader public largely unaware of the full extent of the problem. In education, Muslim students frequently experience racism and exclusion. The report highlights incidents where students are banned from wearing headscarves, which disproportionately affects Muslim girls and leads to feelings of alienation. Similarly, in the workplace, Muslim job seekers and employees face significant discrimination. Muslim women who wear headscarves often encounter biased hiring practices, where employers explicitly prefer non-hijabi candidates. Additionally, Muslims often face bias or discrimination based on their religious views or ethnicity. These discriminatory practices are documented by organizations like Unia and CIIB, but remain largely invisible to the public due to insufficient media attention. Mainstream media coverage of verbal and physical attacks against Muslims is also minimal. Incidents like the attempted arson at the Ennassr Mosque in Borgerhout, Antwerp, and threats directed at mosques in Brussels are rarely covered in the news, despite creating a climate of fear and insecurity within the Muslim community. Verbal abuse and hate speech directed at Muslims in public spaces are common, but seldom covered by the press.

The report also discusses the political dimension of Islamophobia, particularly how the government is attempting to control the Muslim community and its institutions. There have been efforts to regulate mosques and Muslim organizations, such as the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium (EMB) which was replaced by a new Muslim Council of Belgium, fast-tracked by the government. The latter has faced criticism for lacking prior consultation with the Muslim community and perceived as government-imposed. Additionally, there have been initiatives to limit foreign influence on mosques, with stricter regulations on recognized religious communities. For instance, the Flemish government introduced a decree aimed at limiting foreign funding for religious communities, which was later deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. Such measures have raised concerns about the government exerting excessive control over Muslim religious practices and institutions, potentially infringing on religious freedom.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Kingdom of Belgium

Type of Regime: Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy

Form of Government: Representative democratic federal bicameral parliamentary system headed by the monarch

Ruling Parties: The De Croo government, formed in 2020 and led by Alexander De Croo (Open VLD), remains in power. The coalition includes Open VLD (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats), MR (Reformative Movement - Francophone), Vooruit (Forward - Flemish), PS (Socialist Party - Francophone), CD&V (Christian Democrat & Flemish), Ecolo (Green party - Francophone), and Groen (Ecolo's Flemish counterpart)

Opposition Parties: NV-A (New Flemish Alliance), Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest), CDH (Human Democratic Center), DéFI (Democratic Federalist and Independent - Francophone), and PVDA-PTB (Workers' Party of Belgium)

Last Elections: The last elections were held in May 2019. The highest-ranking parties were N-VA with 25 seats (losing 8 seats), PS with 20 seats, VB with 18 seats (gaining 15), MR with 14 seats, and Ecolo with 13 seats. The next federal elections are scheduled for June 9, 2024.

Total Population: 11,763,650 (as of January 1, 2024)

Major Languages: Flemish is predominant in Flanders (approximately 59% of the population), while Wallonia and Brussels are primarily Francophone. About 0.7% of the population speaks German, mainly in Liège (Wallonia).

Official Religion: Belgium is a secular state with no official religion. However, Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches), Islam, and Judaism are officially recognized religions.

Statistics on Islamophobia: The Counter Islamophobia Collective in Belgium (Collectif Contre l'islamophobie en Belgique - CCIB/Collectief Tegen Islamofobie in België, CTIB) documents statistics annually on Islamophobia, drawing on evidence from the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities (Unia) and direct reports.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Compiled by Unia, under 17 of the 19 legal bases of discrimination, including racial discrimination (based on presumed race, skin color, nationality, ancestry, and ethnic origin), disability-based discrimination, philosophical/religious discrimination, sexual orientation, age, wealth, civil status, political beliefs, trade union membership, health, physical/genetic characteristics, birth, and social background.

Major Religions (% of Population): Approximately 60% Christianity, 31% no religion, 6% Islam, 2% other

Muslim Population (% of Population): Approximately 870,000 (6% of the Belgian population)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Moslimraad van België vzw (MRB - Muslim Council of Belgium), Conseil Musulman de Belgique (CMB) in French, is a Belgian association of Muslims in Belgium. The MRB was founded on May 14, 2023, to replace the Muslim Executive; BOEH! (Baas Over Eigen Hoofd! - Boss Over Own Head!); Mahara.

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: CIIB (Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique, Collective for the Inclusion and against Islamophobia in Belgium), Unia, European Network against Racism (ENAR), Actiris

Far-Right Parties: Vlaams Belang (VB, Flemish Interest)

Far-Right Movements: Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond, Nationalistische Studentenvereniging, Schild en Vrienden, Voorpost

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: None identified

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No national ban, but a regional ban exists in the Wallonian town of Verviers and individual school bans include almost all Flemish schools.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Slaughter without sedation has been banned by law in Flanders since January 2019 and in Wallonia since September 2019.
- **Minaret Ban:** No official ban, but the construction of new mosques often faces delays, prohibitions, or cancellations.
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** In effect since June 1, 2011. Individuals found wearing a burka in public spaces face fines of 15 to 25 euros and risk imprisonment for up to seven days.
- **Prayer Ban:** No national ban, but local decisions apply since the European Court of Justice ruled in March 2017 that employers can ban staff from displaying religious symbols, including taking time off for prayers. This ban has been reconfirmed in 2023 when a woman again filed a case against her employer for not allowing her to work with a hijab. Here the European Court of Justice ruled that employees were indeed free to decide upon this matter and that there was no infringement on the freedom of religion.

Introduction

Islam's role in Belgian society, especially in the northern region of Flanders, has long been a topic of intense debate. The compatibility of Islam with Western, and specifically Flemish, culture is a central issue that continues to polarize the country. This division is growing, with the gap between differing viewpoints widening daily. In 2023, many of the previously discussed issues have resurfaced, yet there remains a lack of clear solutions or policies regarding the integration of Islam and Muslims into Belgian society. Although these debates are not explicitly aimed at removing Islam from Belgium, it is important to recognize the long-standing presence of Muslims in the country. The lives of Muslims in Belgium, shaped by ongoing discussions and legislation, reflect a community that has been established for over fifty years. Many younger Muslims, who are about to take active roles in society, were born and raised in Belgium, representing the third generation of their families in the country. The 2023 national report on Islamophobia in Belgium seeks to evaluate and analyze the most significant developments regarding Islam and Islamophobia over the past year. This report will delve into various forms of discrimination, verbal and physical attacks, and institutional biases faced by Muslims. It will also explore the political dimensions of Islamophobia, examining government actions and policies that impact the Muslim community and its institutions.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

On February 24, 2023, an unknown woman attempted to set fire to the Ennassr Mosque in Borgerhout, Antwerp. She placed a burning cigarette and dry twigs in the mosque's mailbox and threw a bag of construction waste against the front door, causing minor damage. The incident occurred around 5 a.m., and the mosque's management informed the police later that morning. This was not the first such incident: the mosque had previously experienced two similar arson attempts in late January 2024 and early October 2023. It remains unclear whether these incidents are connected. The mosque's management was unavailable for comment.¹

UNIA, an independent public institution fighting discrimination and promoting equal rights, reports a significant number of discrimination complaints related to ethnic and religious discrimination. In 2023, they received hundreds of reports, many of which involved discrimination against Muslims. There were several incidents that involved landlords not willing to rent their property to people of Moroc-

1. "Opnieuw poging om brand te stichten in Antwerpse moskee", *Bladna*, February 24, 2023, <https://www.bladna.nl/brandstichting-moskee-borgerhout,45634.html>, (Access date 15/07/2024).

can or Turkish background because of their ethnicity. The report furthermore indicated how the conflict between Israel and Hamas escalated on Belgian soil as well and has led to an increase in Islamophobic incidents, including verbal and physical attacks on Muslims and vandalism of Islamic institutions.² In October 2023, for example, several mosques in Brussels were threatened following the outbreak of the conflict. In December, a pork bone was placed at a bus stop in the Brussels district of Evere with a tag attached to it stating, “Authentic pork bone (gift for Muslims).”³ (Fig. 1) The mayor of Evere Ridouane Chahid has called for increased security measures near places of worship following this particular incident. Police are advising mosques to report threats. In response to the increased threat, Police Zone North has deployed additional police patrols. These patrols are part of a broader initiative to protect “soft targets,” such as places of worship, especially since the terror level in the area has been raised to Level 3.⁴



Figure 1: Pork bone placed at bus stop in Brussels district.⁵

2. “Jaarverslag 2023”, UNIA, June 25, 2024, https://www.unia.be/files/UNIA_jaarverslag_2023_NL.pdf, (Access date 28/06/2024).
3. “Angst onder moslims Brussel na vondst varkensbot met haatbericht”, Bladna, December 14, 2023, <https://www.bladna.nl/angst-moslims-brussel-varkensbot,49594.html>, (Access date 15/07/2024).
4. “Belgische politie moedigt moskeeën aan om aangifte te doen”, Bladna, December 14, 2023, <https://www.bladna.nl/belgische-politie-moskeeen-aangifte,49606.html>, (Access date 15/07/2024).
5. “Angst onder moslims Brussel na vondst varkensbot met haatbericht”, Bladna, December 14, 2023, <https://www.bladna.nl/angst-moslims-brussel-varkensbot,49594.html>, (Access date 15/07/2024).

In their “Yearly Report 2023,” UNIA shares a specific incident concerning a woman wearing a headscarf who applied for a job as a payroll expert. She was invited for an interview, however, during this interview, she was informed that she has the appropriate profile, but that she is expected not to wear a headscarf in the workplace. However, the job description did not state that the payroll expert has visual contact with clients (back office function). The employer disputed this and UNIA asked the labor inspection to investigate. The inspection report confirmed that the position didn’t require visual contact with customers. The report also revealed that the company had already refused other women wearing headscarves for positions without visual contact with the public (e.g., cleaning staff).⁶

In 2023, ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities against Racism), an UNESCO initiative, released a guide on Islamophobia. This guide was made through the co-operation of several European cities. In Belgium, Gent and Leuven, among others, contributed to the report. The report makes mention of the specific challenges of Islamophobia in Belgium, indicating that Muslim women in Belgium face intersectional discrimination due to their gender and visible religious symbols like the hijab. This often results in exclusion from the labor market and public spaces. The report also states that stereotypes about Muslim men have shifted post-9/11, portraying them as potential terrorists, which increases their vulnerability to discrimination and violence.⁷

The Collectif pour l’Inclusion et contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique (CIIB, Collective for the Inclusion and against Islamophobia in Belgium) is an organization conducting research on and combating Islamophobia. It released its seventh annual report on Islamophobia in 2024. The 2023 report by CIIB underscores the importance of systematic monitoring and data collection in understanding and addressing Islamophobia. The organization collaborates with institutions like Unia to ensure accurate reporting and analysis of incidents. However, data collection faces challenges, primarily due to underreporting. CIIB reveals that many victims of Islamophobia do not report incidents out of fear of reprisals or a lack of trust in authorities. Additionally, institutional discrimination within public bodies further discourages victims from coming forward. In 2023, CIIB received 70 requests for assistance, with 32 cases identified as instances of Islamophobia. These cases predominantly involved education and employment, followed by societal interactions and media portrayals. The gendered nature of Islamophobia was evident, with women comprising 70% of the victims, highlighting the intersectional dis-

6. “Jaarverslag 2023”, UNIA, June 25, 2024, https://www.unia.be/files/UNIA_jaarverslag_2023_NL.pdf, (Access date 28/06/2024).

7. “ECCAR Guidebook on Local Actions against Anti-Muslim racism”, ECCAR, September 14, 2023, https://www.eccar.info/sites/default/files/document/ENG_ECCAR%20Guidebook%20Local%20Actions%20against%20Anti-Muslim%20Racism.pdf, (Access date 28/06/2024).

crimination they face due to their visible religious symbols such as headscarves. The types of incidents reported to CIIB varied: discrimination constituted 50% of the cases, including school and workplace bans on headscarves. Hate crimes, involving physical and verbal assaults, accounted for 6% of the incidents, while harassment, particularly in educational settings, made up 19%. The majority of these incidents were perpetrated by public institutions, responsible for 56% of the reported cases, indicating systemic issues within these organizations. The visibility of Muslim identity played a significant role in the incidents of Islamophobia. Most victims were targeted because their religious identity was apparent through markers like headscarves or beards. Specific examples include discrimination in schools, where students were prohibited from wearing headscarves or long robes, and workplace harassment, where Muslim employees faced unfair treatment due to their religious practices.⁸

In 2023, a report was published on experiences when changing or moving away from a religion or a specific worldview. The report was commissioned by the Flemish government's Domestic Administration Agency, Equal Opportunities, Integration and Inclusion Division. The chapter on conversion to Islam highlights the significant challenges faced by individuals who embrace Islam. One of the biggest obstacles is Islamophobia, which manifests both within their immediate social circles and in the broader society. Converts often encounter fears from friends and family about potential radicalization. But respondents also noticed negative reactions in the broader community, for instance being questioned on their religion when looking for an apartment. Respondents perceive such questions as a subtle form of exclusion, especially in areas with low ethnic or religious diversity. Another convert respondent shared the story that her children are often excluded from social activities like birthday parties because of their mother's faith. The study reveals that female converts, in particular, face additional hurdles due to headscarf bans in Flanders. These bans significantly impact their ability to practice their religion fully and freely. This inconsistency highlights the struggle between societal norms and personal religious practices, making it difficult for converts to reconcile their faith with their public and professional lives.⁹

Employment

UNIA received reports of discrimination based on ethnicity and religion in the workplace. This included incidents where potential employees were refused em-

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8. "Rapport Chiffres CIIB 2023", CIIB, May 24, 2024, https://islamophobia.be/wp-content/uploads/CIIB_PUBLIC_PDF_RapportChiffresCIIB/RAPPORT_CHIFFRES_CIIB_2023.pdf, (Access date 03/07/2024).
 9. "Rapport Onderzoek naar ervaringen bij verandering of afstand van religie of levensbeschouwing", Vlaamse Overheid - Agentschap binnenlands bestuur, Afdeling Gelijke Kansen, Integratie en Inburgering, 2023, https://assets.vlaanderen.be/image/upload/v1675941009/Rapport_onderzoek-naar-ervaringen-bij-verandering-of-afstand-van-religie-of-levensbeschouwing_0_bmmxfd.pdf, (Access date 07/07/2024).

ployment because of their headscarves or because of their ethnicity. It shares the incident of a woman wearing a hijab being rejected for a job with a large company in Antwerp. The reason for the rejection was that the company did not allow religious symbols.¹⁰

Education

In 2023, a report was published by the Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel (Flemish Student Umbrella), the umbrella organization of student councils and the officially recognized voice of secondary school students in Flanders. “De stem van 20.000 scholieren” (The voice of 20,000 secondary school students) report provides a comprehensive overview of the experiences and perceptions of students in Belgium regarding various aspects of their school life. The report found that nearly half of the students (47%) had witnessed acts of racism in their secondary school, while 18% reported experiencing racism themselves. This figure was significantly higher among students with non-European parents, with nearly half (49%) of these students reporting personal experiences of racism during their time in secondary education. (Fig. 2) An example of such discrimination is a Turkish student being told by a classmate that his mother forbade him from playing together due to his Turkish background.¹¹

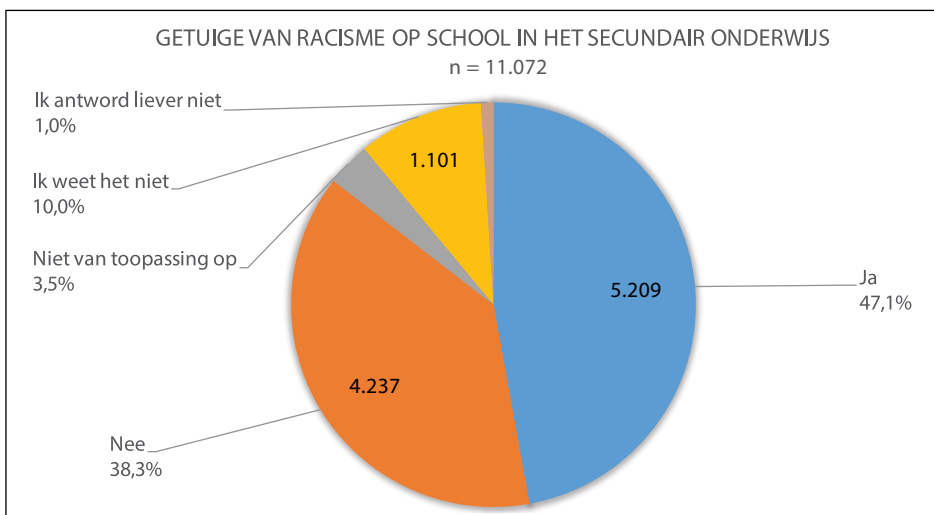


Figure 2: Statistics on students witnessing racism at school at secondary education level. Right to left: Yes (47.1%), No (38.4%), N/A (3.5%), I don't know (10.0%), and I'd rather not answer (1.0%).¹²

10. “Jaarverslag 2023”, UNIA, June 25, 2024, https://www.unia.be/files/UNIA_jaarverslag_2023_NL.pdf, (Access date 28/06/2024).
11. Kelly Van Droogenbroeck, “Vlaamse Scholierenkoepel rapporteert alarmerende cijfers over racisme: ‘Ik moest een bord met droge spaghettislierten eten’”, De Morgen, November 13, 2023, <https://www.demorgen.be/nieuws/vlaamse-scholierenkoepel-rapporteert-alarmerende-cijfers-over-racisme-ik-moest-een-bord-met-droge-spaghettislierten-eten-be23bbca/>, (Access date 28/06/2024).
12. “De Scholierenstem”, Scholierenkoepel, June 25, 2024, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1trFmQ6-qS4iB-KOsVZ31Xud22X2Ue_7H1/view, (Access date 15/06/2024).

In the survey, secondary school students could also choose from a list of education topics they would address first in education. “Racism in secondary education” ranked third on the priority list of all students surveyed, at 28%. Pupils from OKAN (“Reception Class for Newcomers of Other Languages”) indicated in the survey and in the interviews that addressing racism is their top priority. Among pupils with one or more parents of non-European nationality, addressing racism was the second priority. During interviews, OKAN students reported feeling the least safe on the playground where they are more likely to be victims of racism by other students. The fact that they have not yet fully mastered the language makes them less able to defend themselves verbally. This makes them feel helpless. Students further reported that teachers do not respond to racist behavior or try to cover it up. Pupils of different skin color, nationality, ancestry, or culture may be disadvantaged even if they have the same skills and abilities as their peers. Pupils told of compliments they are told that actually conceal prejudice also known as microaggression. Such statements can also be hurtful. A student shared, “There was a teacher who said to me during a parent contact: your sister speaks Dutch so well... My sister wore a headscarf.”¹³ Discrimination related to religious symbols, such as the hijab, remains a contentious issue in Belgian schools. More than half (64%) of the surveyed students opposed bans on religious symbols, indicating a widespread disapproval of such restrictions among the student population. (Fig. 3) The ban on religious symbols was seen as particularly discriminatory against Muslim students, who are most likely to be affected by such policies.¹⁴

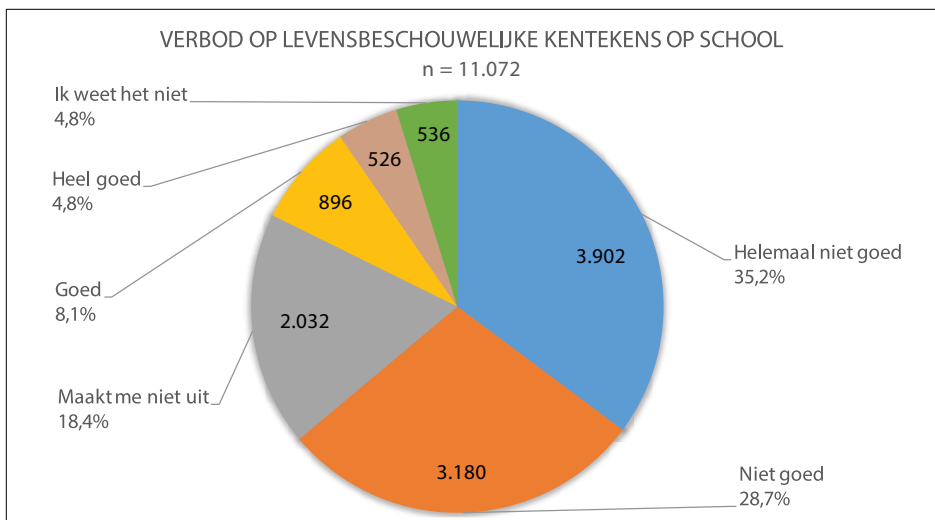


Figure 3: Statistics on students' perspective on the ban of religious symbols. Right to left: Not good at all (35.2%), Not good (28.7%), Doesn't matter (18.4%), Good (8.1%), Very good (4.8%), and I don't know (4.8%).¹⁵

13. Ibid.

14. “De Stem van 20.000 Scholieren”, Scholierenkoepel, June 25, 2024, https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ToQqK-g8kHQKmq5GH4MoterOiNpUHMce7&usp=drive_copy, (Access date 15/06/2024).

15. Ibid.

Politics

The Aalst mosque faced a ban imposed by mayor Christoph D’Haese (N-VA) on January 31, 2023, citing safety concerns. This decision came after a series of fire safety inspections dating back to 2018, which revealed various deficiencies. The mosque had been actively working on renovations to address these issues, including installing evacuation windows, fire-safe doors, and railings on stairs. Despite these efforts and nearing the completion of safety upgrades, the mayor ordered an eight-week suspension of all activities, leading to accusations of political motivation and discrimination from the mosque’s community. The mosque’s lawyer, Abderrahim Lahlali, argued that the closure was unjustified and timed to create maximum disruption, as the safety works were almost complete. He claimed that the mayor was playing a political game to discredit the Muslim community in Aalst, especially following their application for official recognition by the Flemish government. This recognition process had already faced a negative recommendation from the city of Aalst, which Lahlali suggested was part of a broader attempt to undermine the mosque. In response to the closure, the mosque filed an emergency plea with the Raad van State (Council of State), Belgium’s highest administrative court, arguing that the ban violated their constitutional right to freedom of religion.¹⁶ During this legal battle, the mosque’s administration highlighted their proactive measures, such as temporarily halting large gatherings to facilitate the ongoing safety renovations. On February 9, 2023, the Raad van State ruled partially in favor of the mosque. The court lifted the ban on the five daily prayers, allowing these activities to resume immediately in a small room, typically attended by 15 to 20 participants. However, the court upheld the prohibition on larger gatherings and school activities, citing unresolved safety concerns.¹⁷

The recent developments regarding the mosque in Aalst are part of a broader context of scrutiny and regulation of religious institutions in Belgium. In May, Flemish Minister of Internal Affairs Bart Somers (Open VLD) initiated procedures to suspend the recognition of three Turkish mosques due to concerns over foreign influence and compliance with local regulations. In 2021, the Flemish Parliament approved a decree imposing stricter regulations on recognized religious communities to limit foreign influence. Allegedly some twelve mosques connected to the Diyanet, the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Türkiye, were “too exposed” to Turkish influence. Consequently, in May, Minister Somers started procedures to withdraw the recogni-

16. Amélie Outters, “Moskee Aalst naar Raad van State in spoedprocedure: ‘Verplichte sluiting is ongegrond, D’Haese speelt politiek spel’”, VRT NWS, February 06, 2023, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2023/02/06/moskee-aalst-naar-raad-van-state/>, (Access date 13/07/2024).

17. Amélie Outters, “Moskee in Aalst kan vijf dagelijkse gebeden opnieuw organiseren, want Raad van State heeft activiteitenverbod van burgemeester D’Haese deels opgeheven”, VRT NWS, February 09, 2023, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2023/02/09/moskee-aalst-uitspraak-raad-van-state/>, (Access date 13/07/2024).

tion of three mosques: Selimiye in Lommel, Kevser in Aalst, and Selimiye in Heusden-Zolder. The other nine Diyanet mosques initially had until November 2023 to comply with the new rules. The Diyanet network in Belgium, linked to the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, oversees 43 mosques, 12 of which are recognized. According to Somers, none of these recognized mosques adhere to the stricter regulations on recognized religious communities to limit foreign influence. These mosques receive funding and support from the Flemish government, including subsidies for salaries and energy costs. If recognition is withdrawn, the mosques will lose these subsidies, but will not be forced to close.¹⁸ The Diyanet took matters to the Constitutional Court that same month. In June, the latter declared the ban on foreign funding for religious communities and religious service providers unconstitutional. The roots of the ban on foreign funding for religious communities in Flanders can be traced back to long-standing concerns about the influence of foreign actors on local religious institutions, particularly mosques. These concerns have been fueled by fears that foreign funding could be used to promote extremist ideologies or exert undue influence on religious practices and teachings in Belgium. In response to these concerns, Somers introduced a decree aimed at limiting foreign influence by prohibiting foreign funding for religious communities and service providers. The decree was part of a broader effort to ensure that religious institutions operate independently of foreign interests and maintain their autonomy. It was also seen as a way to promote transparency and accountability within religious communities. This decree was disputed by the Diyanet when Somers started the withdrawing procedure for the mosques connected to it. The Constitutional Court's ruling that the ban was unconstitutional centered on the principles of religious freedom and proportionality. The court acknowledged the legitimacy of the government's goal to prevent undue foreign influence, but emphasized that any measures taken must be balanced and not overly restrictive. The ruling highlighted that a blanket ban on foreign funding infringes on the freedom of religion and does not adequately take into account the diverse needs and circumstances of different religious communities.¹⁹

Filip Dewinter, a leading member of the far-right political party Vlaams Belang, remained a prominent figure in spreading Islamophobia. Throughout the year, Dewinter made several inflammatory statements, framing Muslim communities as a threat to Belgian culture and security. On March 15, Dewinter tweeted, "To hell with the #InternationalDayAgainstIslamophobia because #Islam harms our #freedom! I'm afraid of Islam because the Koran is a license to kill. Islamophobia is a term in-

18. Lina El Bakkali & Cisse Michiels, "Minister Somers wil erkenning van drie moskeeën intrekken omdat ze te veel onder invloed van Turkije staan", VRT NWS, May 02, 2023, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2023/05/02/erkenning-diyamet-moskee-somers/>, (Access date 13/07/2024).

19. Victor Van Driessche, "Vlaanderen mag buitenlandse financiering van erkende moskeeën niet verbieden", VRT NWS, July 20, 2023, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2023/07/20/verbod-op-buitenlandse-financiering-geloofsgemeenschappen-ongron/>, (Access date 13/07/2024).

vented by Islamic terror states like #Pakistan who want to carry out their agenda of Islamization.” (Fig. 4) He added a video in which along with fellow party members he can be seen protesting against Islam and the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.²⁰ Later in the year, he tweeted, “If you have a majority of Muslims in a city or a country it’s over and out for democracy because #Islam is anti-democratic. #Islam is a theocracy only committed to #Allah not to #democracy. The real danger for our democracy is Islam!’ <https://youtu.be/vYz-je9S574>.”²¹ These are just some of the provocative posts shared by him on a regular basis.



Figure 4: Tweet posted by Filip Dewinter in response to the International Day to Combat Islamophobia.

Tom Van Grieken, the president of Vlaams Belang, also intensified his Islamophobic rhetoric in 2023. Under his leadership, the party’s platform prominently featured anti-Muslim rhetoric. During a televised debate in April 2023, Van Grieken claimed that “Islam is incompatible with Western values and democracy,” advocating for measures that would limit the presence of Islam in public life. This included proposals to ban the construction of new mosques and to prohibit the wearing of religious symbols in public institutions. Van Grieken’s statements during the debate were widely criticized by human rights organizations, but resonated with a segment of the electorate, contributing to Vlaams Belang’s growing support. On April 23, Van Grieken shared a video of Muslims praying in the streets for the Eid prayer, stating, “What does Islamization actually mean? These are images from #Brussels

20. Filip Dewinter, X (formerly Twitter), March 15, 2023, (https://x.com/FDW_VB/status/1635943161490030593), (Access Date: 25/07/2024).

21. Filip Dewinter, X (formerly Twitter), October 27, 2023, (https://x.com/FDW_VB/status/1717792991358652555), (Access Date: 25/07/2024).

from two days ago. Public roads are being seized for Islam. Is this really the society we want?”²²

The year also saw several significant events where these central figures used high-profile incidents to further their anti-Muslim agendas. Following a violent attack in a neighboring country in February 2023, Dewinter and Van Grieken both issued statements blaming “Islamic ideology” for the violence and calling for a complete halt to Muslim immigration. Their statements were criticized for exploiting the tragedy to promote xenophobic policies, yet they resonated with their supporters and fueled anti-Muslim sentiments. During the lead-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, Islamophobia became a central theme in the campaigns of Vlaams Belang. Dewinter and Van Grieken made repeated references to the “Islamization of Europe” in their speeches, warning that the “European way of life” was under threat. Their campaign strategies, which included graphic advertisements and provocative slogans, were designed to stoke fear and mobilize voters against Muslim communities.

Media

At the end of November, the issue of headscarf policies in the upcoming merger between Antwerp’s hospital groups, ZNA (Ziekenhuis Netwerk Antwerpen, Hospital Network Antwerp) and GZA (Gasthuiszusters Antwerpen, Hospice Sisters Antwerp), sparked significant debate and led to wide media coverage. The controversy stems from the differing policies of the two institutions: GZA allows staff to wear headscarves under specific conditions, while ZNA prohibits them. This discrepancy has brought to light broader ideological conflicts within the country, particularly regarding religious freedom and inclusivity at the workplace. The debate has drawn in numerous political figures, each bringing their perspectives and concerns to the forefront, highlighting the deep divisions and strong sentiments surrounding this issue. Ken Van den Heuvel of the socialist union BBTK (Bond van Bedienden, Technici en Kaderleden/Union of Clerks, Technicians and Executives) expressed concerns about political interference, particularly pointing out ZNA chairman and N-VA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, New Flemish Alliance) politician Els van Doesburg’s conservative stance. Van den Heuvel emphasized that politicians on the board should represent the city rather than impose personal ideologies. He urged for a solution that avoids excluding staff over headscarves, as such exclusions would increase the workload for the remaining staff. Bart Thys of ACV Puls (Algemene Christelijk Vakverbond, General Christian Trade Union Federation) echoed these sentiments, stressing that the board should not succumb to ideological extremism. He highlighted the necessity for a pragmatic approach, fearing that the headscarf debate could lead to staffing shortages

22. Tom Van Grieken, X (formerly Twitter), April 23, 2023, (<https://x.com/tomvangrieken/status/1650113949789044736>), (Access Date: 25/07/2024).

and increased pressure on existing personnel. Politicians from various parties weighed in on the controversy. Tatjana Scheck of Vooruit (Onward, previously known as the [Flemish] Socialist Party) and Karen Maes of Groen (Green Party), both members of ZNA's general assembly, advocated for allowing headscarves, arguing that inclusivity should be a priority in the new hospitals' policy. They pointed out that excluding qualified healthcare workers based on their attire would be detrimental to both staff morale and patient care. Despite the heated debates, the eventual outcome saw a compromise: the new hospital board decided to permit the wearing of headscarves, aligning with GZA's existing policy but with strict adherence to hygiene standards.²³

Justice System

In 2021, a woman from Ans, in the province of Liège, took her case to the labor court in Liège because she was not allowed to wear a headscarf by the municipality where she worked. Having worked as an office manager since 2016 without a headscarf, she requested to wear one at work in 2021. The municipality rejected her request and subsequently amended the workplace regulations to ban all employees from wearing visible religious symbols. The woman argued that her freedom of religion was being violated and that the new regulation was discriminatory. The labor court in Liège referred the case to the European Court of Justice, questioning whether the strict neutrality policy imposed by the municipality conflicted with European Union law. At the end of November, the European Court of Justice stated that a public authority, such as a municipality, can prohibit religious symbols in the workplace to pursue neutrality. However, other municipalities may choose to allow religious symbols or restrict the ban to employees who interact with the public. Public authorities have the discretion to decide how they implement neutrality, as long as the decision is coherent and systematic. They cannot ban headscarves while allowing other religious symbols, such as cross necklaces. The prohibition must also be strictly necessary and not imposed unnecessarily. National courts must verify if these conditions are met in specific cases.²⁴

In 2022, Belgian Justice Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne decided to revoke recognition of the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium (EMB) due to baseless allegations of mismanagement, lack of transparency, and foreign interference from Morocco and Turkey. The EMB was accused of acting unrepresentatively and unprofessionally and was therefore stripped of its annual grant of about €600,000. In June 2023, the Muslim Council of Belgium was established as a replacement for the EMB. This

23. David Van Turnhout, "Vakbonden en bestuur ZNA en GZA bezorgd na politieke inmenging Els van Doesburg: 'Geen personeel weigeren omwille van hoofddoek'", GVA, November 27, 2023, https://www.gva.be/cnt/dmf20231127_96903376, (Access date 15/07/2024).

24. Ine Philippe, "Openbare besturen mogen religieuze tekens op het werk verbieden, oordeelt Europees Hof van Justitie", VRT NWS, November 28, 2023, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2023/11/28/europees-hof-van-justitie-verbod-religieuze-tekens-op-het-werk/>, (Access date 13/07/2024).

new body was fast-tracked into existence by Minister Van Quickenborne and is to serve as the official representative of the Muslim community in Belgium. The council consists of four members: Michaël Privot, Mimou Aquichouh, Esma Uçan, and Taha Zaki, all of whom are active within the private sector and the Muslim community. However, the creation of the council has been criticized for its lack of prior consultation with the Muslim community and the perception that it is a government-imposed body. The EMB and other Muslim organizations have furthermore criticized the creation of the Muslim Council, stating that it constitutes “an unacceptable interference with freedom of worship.” The organizations believe the new council is not representative or legitimate in the eyes of the Muslim community and have taken legal action to restore the EMB’s recognition. These developments have led to significant tensions within the Muslim community in Belgium. The restructuring of official representation of Muslim communities is seen as an attempt to exert more control and reduce foreign influences, but has also led to concerns about religious freedom and representation.²⁵

Internet

According to the yearly report on 2023 by CUTA (Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis), an independent Belgian center of knowledge and expertise in charge of assessing the terrorist and extremist threat in Belgium and against Belgian citizens and interests abroad, right-wing extremism is forever increasing and showing no inclination of slowing down. The general threat assessment for Belgium in 2023 shows that right-wing extremist threats were less common than Islamist-jihadist threats but still present. The right-wing extremist threat increased, especially online and among younger individuals. According to CUTA, despite fewer threat reports, a violent action from this quarter cannot be excluded. The profile of potential perpetrators often aligns with that of lone actors, often referred to as “lone wolves,” although there was a resurgence of smaller cells and networks. The report notes that right-wing extremist threats accounted for 5% of the total threats in 2023. The rise of right-wing extremism in Belgium and Europe is driven by various factors, including anti-establishment and anti-government sentiments from the COVID-19 policies, geopolitical developments in the Middle East, and jihadist violent actions. These elements can polarize the scene and act as “accelerants,” especially visible on social media. The report discusses how right-wing extremists use the internet and social media to spread racist rhetoric and conspiracy theories about population replacement and impending racial war. These narratives are often shared through memes and coded language, making them accessible to vulnerable individuals. Despite the online visibility, there

25. Lukas Taylor, “Muslim Council of Belgium replaces scandal-hit executive body”, *The Brussels Times*, June 14, 2023, <https://www.brusselstimes.com/551341/muslim-council-of-belgium-replaces-scandal-hit-representative-body>, (Access date 16/07/2024).

was a noticeable shift towards more private internet vectors in 2023. The report also highlights the link between right-wing extremism and lone actors. Right-wing extremist perpetrators often act alone, operating on the fringes of organizations and parties, radicalizing primarily online without external instructions. Personal grievances and psychological problems are common factors among these individuals.²⁶

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Several key political figures and parties are at the forefront of promoting Islamophobic rhetoric in Belgium. The right-wing nationalist party, Vlaams Belang, has played a significant role in amplifying anti-Muslim sentiments. Founded as a successor to the far-right Vlaams Blok, Vlaams Belang's political narrative is steeped in xenophobia, with Islam and Muslims often positioned as central threats to Flemish identity and security. Politicians like Filip Dewinter and Tom Van Grieken, Vlaams Belang's leaders, have been outspoken about their belief that Islam is incompatible with Western values, regularly pushing for policies that target Muslim communities, such as banning the wearing of the hijab in public spaces. Key to Vlaams Belang's success is its financial and ideological support from influential right-wing organizations and think tanks.

The New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), another right-wing political party, although more moderate than Vlaams Belang, also engages in Islamophobic rhetoric. Under the leadership of figures like Bart De Wever and Theo Francken, the N-VA has advocated for stricter immigration policies and has made statements that reinforce stereotypes about Muslims. Francken, in particular, has been criticized for his inflammatory remarks about asylum seekers and Muslims. The N-VA and Vlaams Belang both benefit from a network of media outlets that propagate their messages. Right-wing outlets like *SCEPTR* and *Doorbraak* regularly publish content that echoes these parties' anti-Muslim narratives, often framing issues of security and culture as tied to the presence of Muslim communities in Belgium. These outlets amplify the rhetoric of figures like Dewinter and Francken, helping to shape public opinion in line with their political agendas.

At the core of this network is the New Direction Foundation, a pan-European think tank that has provided financial backing and strategic guidance to anti-Muslim campaigns in Belgium and across Europe. With funding from wealthy conservative donors, this foundation helps sustain the political campaigns of Vlaams Belang and N-VA, while also enabling the spread of Islamophobic ideas through conferences, publications, and media appearances. There is a feedback loop between these political parties, think tanks, and media organizations. Wealthy donors provide financial

26. "Activiteitenverslag 2023", OCAD, 2023, https://ocad.belgium.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Jaarverslag_2023.pdf. (Access date: 19/07/2024).

support that allows these parties and think tanks to promote their agendas through paid advertising, political campaigns, and media outreach. In turn, media outlets like *La Libre Belgique* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*—while not exclusively far-right—often give a platform to Islamophobic voices, further entrenching anti-Muslim sentiment in public discourse.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

In 2023, the Collectif pour l’Inclusion et contre l’Islamophobie en Belgique (CIIB, Collective for the Inclusion and against Islamophobia in Belgium) kept up the fight for inclusion and against Islamophobia. The group continued with a series of political and social activities that led to important reports and initiated projects aimed at deconstructing stereotypes and supporting Muslim communities. The CIIB was also mobilized in the political arena, at both European and international levels. These activities aimed at fighting discriminations in the educational, cultural, youth, media, and sports fields. The CIIB contributed to major reports, such as the ODIHR Annual Hate Crime Report, which mapped Islamophobic hate crimes in Belgium in detail. It also collaborated on the ECCAR guide, which presents good practices and policy recommendations for taking action against anti-Muslim racism at the local level. Some of the key initiatives by the CIIB in 2023 were #TCI3IM, which aimed to remove stereotypes and bring inclusion through education, and the MAGIC project funded by the European Commission, which worked on gendered Islamophobia in the media and included Muslim voices.²⁷

As part of the initiatives by the ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities Against Racism), sponsored by UNESCO, two Belgian cities in particular have been active in the battle against Islamophobia as part of the City as Provider of Equal Services framework. Leuven organized collective iftar events to promote inclusivity and cultural understanding. These events help in building bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and foster a sense of belonging among Muslims. The city of Kortrijk has implemented initiatives to benefit from communities as experts, ensuring that Muslim voices are included in policy-making processes. This approach helps in creating policies that are more reflective of the community’s needs and challenges. The city supports NGO work that focuses on debunking myths and misinformation about Muslims. By fostering dialogues and educational programs, Kortrijk aims to reduce prejudice and promote understanding among its citizens. Both cities have been proactive in creating platforms for Muslim citizens to engage in civic activities. These platforms enable Muslims to contribute to soci-

27. “Rapport d’activités 2023”, CIIB, May 25, 2024, https://islamophobia.be/wp-content/uploads/CIIB_PUBLIC_PDF_RapportActivitesCIIB/CIIB_RapportActivites2023.pdf, (Access date 03/07/2024).

etal issues and participate in democratic processes, helping to counteract the marginalization they often face.²⁸

The anti-racism plan for 2023-2026 (Plan de lutte contre le racisme) of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles) has been drawn up to fit in with the philosophy developed by the future National Plan to Combat Racism (NAPAR). In the interests of transparency and political coherence, NAPAR is linked to the action plans of the various levels of government, which are implemented independently. In this sense, the anti-racism plan drawn up by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is committed to the inclusive inter-federal process in order to make all “anti-discrimination” initiatives and legislation more coherent, relevant, and effective. These plans involve collaboration between government members, civil society representatives, and institutions like Unia. They aim to combat racism and promote diversity within sectors such as education, culture, youth, media, and sports through several measures such as:

1. Establishment of antiracism councils to oversee and guide antiracism initiatives.
2. Legislative evaluations to assess existing laws and propose improvements for better protection against racism.
3. Measures to promote diversity within the public sector, ensuring equal opportunities and representation.²⁹

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In 2023, the ongoing discussions about Islam’s place in Belgium have highlighted significant challenges and persistent issues facing the Muslim community. Despite the long-standing presence of Muslims in the country, they continue to encounter various forms of discrimination, both at the individual and institutional levels. These forms of discrimination manifest in numerous ways, including biased hiring practices, exclusionary educational policies, and inadequate legal protections. Additionally, verbal and physical attacks against Muslims remain alarmingly common, contributing to a pervasive sense of insecurity within the community. The lack of comprehensive media coverage further exacerbates the marginalization of Muslims, leaving the broader public unaware of the full extent of Islamophobia in Belgium. This gap in reporting not only diminishes the visibility of the issues faced by Muslims, but also hinders the development of informed public discourse and effective policy responses. Consequently,

28. “ECCAR Guidebook on Local Actions against Anti-Muslim racism”, ECCAR, September 14, 2023, https://www.eccar.info/sites/default/files/document/ENG_ECCAR%20Guidebook%20Local%20Actions%20against%20Anti-Muslim%20Racism.pdf, (Access date 28/06/2024).

29. “2 nieuwe antiracismeplannen in Franstalig België”, UNIA, April 28, 2024, <https://www.unia.be/nl/artikels/antiracismeplannen-franstalig-belgie>, (Access date 28/06/2022).

the challenges experienced by the Muslim community often remain unaddressed, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and prejudice. The political landscape also plays a critical role in shaping the experiences of Muslims in Belgium. Government actions and policies, such as efforts to regulate mosques and Muslim organizations, have raised concerns about excessive interference and control. These measures, often justified by claims of ensuring security and preventing foreign influence, can inadvertently undermine religious freedom and autonomy. The establishment of new regulatory bodies, like the Muslim Council of Belgium, without adequate consultation with the Muslim community, further fuels perceptions of marginalization and disenfranchisement.

Addressing Islamophobia in Belgium requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society. This includes not only the implementation of effective policy measures but also a broader cultural shift towards greater understanding and acceptance of diversity. By raising awareness, promoting empathy, and ensuring that the voices of Muslim communities are heard and respected, Belgium can make significant strides towards creating an environment where all its citizens can thrive. The findings underscore the urgent need for effective measures to address and combat Islamophobia in Belgium. To create a more inclusive and equitable society, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Increased Media Attention:** Encourage mainstream media to provide more comprehensive coverage of issues affecting the Muslim community. This includes reporting on incidents of discrimination, verbal and physical attacks, and institutional biases. Greater media attention can help raise public awareness and foster a more informed and empathetic discourse on Islam and Muslims in Belgium.
- **Education and Training:** Implement continuous education and training programs for public officials, educators, and law enforcement personnel on anti-Muslim racism and its impact. These programs should aim to promote a deeper understanding of Islamophobia and equip individuals with the tools to counteract discrimination and prejudice effectively.
- **Inclusive Policymaking:** Ensure that Muslims are actively engaged in decision-making processes at all levels of government. This includes creating platforms for dialogue and consultation with Muslim communities to understand their concerns and incorporate their perspectives into policymaking. Inclusive policymaking can help develop more effective and culturally sensitive policies that address the specific needs of Muslims in Belgium.
- **Strengthening Anti-discrimination Laws:** Review and strengthen existing anti-discrimination laws to provide better protection for Muslims. This includes ensuring that laws are effectively enforced and that victims of discrimination have access to legal recourse and support services.

- **Community Support and Integration Programs:** Develop and fund community support programs that promote the social and economic integration of Muslims. These programs should focus on areas such as education, employment, and housing, providing resources and opportunities for Muslims to participate fully in Belgian society.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Establish a comprehensive system for monitoring and reporting incidents of Islamophobia. This system should involve collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and community groups to collect and analyze data on discrimination and hate crimes. Accurate data collection is essential for understanding the scope of the problem and developing targeted interventions.
- **Promoting Interfaith Dialogue:** Encourage initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation between different religious communities. These initiatives can help build mutual understanding, reduce prejudices, and foster a sense of solidarity and cohesion within Belgian society.

By implementing these policy recommendations, Belgium can make significant progress towards addressing Islamophobia and creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all its citizens. The commitment to combating discrimination and promoting equality is essential for fostering a society where everyone, regardless of their religious beliefs, can live with dignity and respect.

Chronology

- **31 January 2023:** The Aalst mosque faced a ban imposed by mayor Christoph D’Haese (N-VA) citing safety concerns. The ban was later canceled by the court that found it to be unjustified.
- **24 February 2023:** An unknown woman attempted to set fire to the Ennassr Mosque in Borgerhout, Antwerp. This was the third attack on the mosque in a couple of months.
- **15 March 2023:** On the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Filip Dewinter, a leading member of the far-right political party Vlaams Belang, tweeted, “To hell with the #InternationalDayAgainstIslamophobia because #Islam harms our #freedom! I’m afraid of Islam because the Koran is a license to kill. Islamophobia is a term invented by Islamic terror states like #Pakistan who want to carry out their agenda of Islamization.”
- **23 April 2023:** Tom Van Grieken shared a video of Muslims praying on the streets for the Eid prayer, stating, “What does Islamization actually mean? These are images from #Brussels from two days ago. Public roads are being seized for Islam. Is this really the society we want?”

- **June 2023:** The Muslim Council of Belgium was established as a replacement for the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium (EMB). This new body was fast-tracked into existence by Belgian Justice Minister Van Quickenborne to serve as the official representative of the Muslim community in Belgium.
- **June 2023:** Flemish Minister of Internal Affairs Bart Somers started the procedure for the withdrawal of the recognition of three mosques connected to Diyanet, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, planning to do the same for the remaining nine. The Diyanet took matters to the Constitutional Court in Belgium, which then declared the ban on foreign funding for religious communities and religious service providers unconstitutional.
- **November 2023:** The European Court of Justice ruled on a case transferred from a Belgian court regarding the banning of the hijab, stating that a public authority, such as a municipality, can prohibit religious symbols in the workplace to pursue neutrality.
- **December 2023:** A pork bone was placed at a bus stop in the Brussels district of Evere with a tag attached to it stating, “Authentic pork bone (gift for Muslims).”

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
**BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA**
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Izvršni Rezime

U 2023. godini, društvo u Bosna i Hercegovina suočavalo se sa istrajnom islamofobijom, ukorijenjenom u historijskim sukobima i intenziviranom tokom rata u Bosni (1992-1995). Krajem 1980-ih, prikazivanje slavenskih muslimana kao izdajnika od strane beogradskih univerzitetskih naučnika postavilo je temelje za sadašnje islamofobne sentimente. Republika Srpska (RS) bila je posebno žarište, sa visokoprofilnim ličnostima poput Milorada Dodika koji su pojačavali tenzije kroz separatističke agende i neprijateljsku retoriku, potkopavajući multietničku prirodu Sarajeva i produbljujući etničke podjele.

Vlasti RS-a predložile su zakone o izborima koji marginaliziraju nesrpske populacije i tražile ekonomsku podršku od ekstremno desnih evropskih saveznika, politički se usklađujući s evropskim nacionalistima i Rusijom.

Djelovanje pravosudnog sistema dodatno je naglasilo institucionalne izazove s kojima se suočavaju Bošnjaci, uključujući istrage protiv imama Muharema ef. Štulanova i Amira ef. Mahića, zatvaranje džamije u Neumu i izgradnju hotela Palas u Banjaluci na mjestu nekadašnje džamije, što se smatra pokušajima brisanja bošnjačkog kulturnog naslijeđa. Sistematska diskriminacija u javnim institucijama RS-a, posebno u policiji, dodatno je naglasila etničke tenzije i ozbiljnu podzastupljenost Bošnjaka i Hrvata.

U obrazovanju, povratnici Bošnjaci suočavali su se s diskriminacijom, a njihova djeca su sistematski uskraćivana prava na učenje bosanskog jezika u školama RS-a. Mediji u RS-u igrali su značajnu ulogu u širenju islamofobnih narativa, često izjednačujući “muslimane” sa “Bošnjacima”, potkopavajući nacionalni identitet i jačajući strah i nepovjerenje putem društvenih medija.

Istaknute ličnosti iz akademske zajednice, Srpske pravoslavne crkve i politike u Bosni i Hercegovini, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji, uključujući kanadsko-srpskog filmskog redatelja Borisa Malagurskog, doprinijele su širenju islamofobije. Napori za suzbijanje ovih osjećaja uključivali su izvještaj Memorijalnog centra Srebrenica o govoru mržnje i negiranju genocida na TikToku te imenovanje ulice u Čapljini “Žrtve genocida u Srebrenici”.

Sveukupno, stalno neprijateljstvo i nasilje protiv Bošnjaka odražavaju duboko ukorijenjene etničke i vjerske animozitete, naglašavajući hitnu potrebu za sveobuhvatnim pravnim i društvenim mjerama za zaštitu manjinskih zajednica i promicanje pomirenja i mira u Bosni i Hercegovini.

Executive Summary

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina faced persistent Islamophobia, rooted in historical conflicts and intensified during the War in Bosnia (1992-1995). The late 1980s portrayal of Slavic Muslims as traitors by University of Belgrade scholars laid the groundwork for current Islamophobic sentiments. Republika Srpska (RS) was particularly affected, with high-profile figures like Milorad Dodik exacerbating tensions through separatist agendas and hostile rhetoric, undermining Sarajevo's multi-ethnic nature and deepening ethnic divisions.

RS authorities proposed election laws marginalizing non-Serb populations and sought economic support from far-right European allies, aligning politically with European nationalists and Russia.

The justice system's actions underscored institutional challenges for Bosniaks, with investigations against imams Muharem ef. Štulanović and Amir ef. Mahić, the sealing of a mosque in Neum, and the construction of the Palas Hotel in Banja Luka on a former mosque site seen as attempts to erase Bosniak cultural heritage. Systemic discrimination in RS's public institutions, particularly in the police force, further emphasized ethnic tensions and the severe underrepresentation of Bosniaks and Croats.

In education, Bosniak returnees faced discrimination, with their children denied the right to learn the Bosnian language in RS schools. The media in RS played a significant role in perpetuating Islamophobic narratives, often equating "Muslims" with "Bosniaks," undermining national identity and reinforcing fear and mistrust through social media platforms.

Prominent figures in academia, the Serb Orthodox Church, and politics, including Canadian-Serb filmmaker Boris Malagurski, contributed to spreading Islamophobia. Efforts to counter these sentiments included the Memorial Center Srebrenica's report on hate speech and genocide denial on TikTok and naming a street in Čapljina "Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide."

Overall, the persistent hostility and violence against Bosniaks reflect deep-seated ethnic and religious animosities, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive legal and societal measures to protect minority communities and promote reconciliation and peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Type of Regime: Parliamentary representative democracy

Form of Government: Three-member presidential system

Ruling Parties: Party for Democratic Action (SDA), Serb Democratic Party (SDS), Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990)

Opposition Parties: Democratic Party, Party of Freedom and Justice, People's Party, Serbian Movement "Dveri", Social Democratic Party, Do not let Belgrade down (all of these parties boycotted the last parliamentary and local elections).

Last Elections: 2022 Presidential Election (Denis Bećirović won 57.37% of the vote; Željko Komšić 55.80%; and Željka Cvijanović 51.65%%); **Legislative Election** (SDA: 9 seats, HDZ: 5 seats, SNSD: 6 seats). Local elections held in November 2020.

2022 Parliamentary Elections: The leading parties were the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), each with 9 seats. Other notable results included the HDZ coalition and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), both gaining 5 seats. Several smaller parties also won representation, including the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) with 4 seats; Democratic Front-Civic Alliance (DF-GS) and People and Justice (NiP) with 3 seats each; and other minor parties, such as the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH) and United Srpska (US), each obtaining 1 seat.

Total Population: 3,511,372 (2013)

Major Languages: Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Islam (50.11%), Serbian Orthodoxy (31%), Catholicism (15%), Others/None/Not stated (3%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 1,769,592 (50.11%) in 2013 (Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in Bosnia and Herzegovina - 2013 Final Results)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Riyasat Commission for Freedom of Religion, Center for Education and Research Nahla

Far-Right Parties: Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD, Savez nezavisnih socijaldemokrata); Serb Democratic Party (SDS, Srpska demokratska stranka); Serb Radical Party (SRS, Srpska radikalna stranka); United Srpska (Ujedinjena Srpska); Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ, Hrvatska demokratska zajednica)

Far-Right Movements: Serb Nationalists Chetnik Movement, Croat Neo-Ustasha Movement

Far-Right Militant Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) continues to struggle with Islamophobia, rooted in the region's history and peaking during the War in Bosnia (1992-1995). Contemporary Islamophobia traces back to the late 1980s when University of Belgrade scholars portrayed Slavic Muslims as traitors to Orthodox Christianity.¹ In 2023, Republika Srpska remained a hotspot for Islamophobic incidents, particularly targeting Bosniak returnees. High-profile figures like Milorad Dodik exacerbated tensions with separatist agendas and hostile rhetoric.

In January, Dodik discussed RS secession, threatening the country's unity. His statements undermined Sarajevo's multi-ethnic nature and criticized international representatives, deepening ethnic divisions. RS authorities proposed election laws marginalizing non-Serb populations and faced economic challenges, seeking loans from European far-right allies like Hungary, highlighting RS's political alignment with European nationalists.

RS's ties with Russia were evident through Dodik's close relationship with Russian officials, mirroring Russian geopolitical strategies and receiving both political and economic support. This included diplomatic backing for RS's separatist rhetoric, economic agreements, and cooperation on energy projects, such as natural gas deals, which bolstered RS's economy and strengthened Dodik's political position. The British Embassy, along with other international actors such as the European Union and the United States, reaffirmed RS's integral status within B&H, countering secession narratives. The UK's strong stance was particularly significant due to its historical involvement in the region's postwar recovery and its commitment to maintaining Bosnia and Herzegovina's sovereignty, a position frequently echoed in international diplomatic forums. Throughout 2023, anti-Muslim rhetoric and occasional attacks persisted, reflecting ongoing struggles for interreligious understanding and tolerance. The current report is based on media analysis, institutional reports, and interviews, providing an overview of Islamophobia in B&H for 2023.

1. Prior to the 1980s, Islamophobia in the region was shaped by historical conflicts, such as the Ottoman period, where Bosnian Muslims were often associated with the imperial power. However, the modern Islamophobia that surfaced in the 1980s was distinct in its political and academic dimension, where scholars and political figures began to frame Slavic Muslims not only as a religious minority, but also as a political and existential threat to Orthodox Christianity. This portrayal was used to justify nationalist and separatist agendas, intensifying during and after the War in Bosnia (1992-1995). In contrast to earlier periods, post-1980 Islamophobia became more systematically institutionalized and politically weaponized, particularly in Republika Srpska. It aligned with rising nationalist sentiments, and figures like Milorad Dodik use this rhetoric to undermine multi-ethnic coexistence and deepen ethnic divisions. Thus, the comment "only" seeks to clarify that while earlier forms of Islamophobia existed, it is the contemporary manifestation that became dominant and politically impactful from the late 1980s onward.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to witness numerous incidents of violence and hostility against its Muslim population, reflecting the persistent issue of Islamophobia in the region.

On January 6, in Vlasenica, Bosniak returnees faced provocations during Orthodox Christmas celebrations, with participants shouting “Ustajte balije” (“Rise up, Balijas”), a derogatory slur used by Serb nationalists against Bosniaks. Vlasenica experienced significant violence during the War in Bosnia (1992-1995).²

On January 7, in Potočari, shots were fired from a column of vehicles passing by Bosniak homes near the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial, deeply impacting the local Muslim population.³

On January 14, in Bijeljina, a man was filmed urinating on the wall of a mosque while another hurled insults, an act of desecration emblematic of broader Islamophobic attitudes.⁴

On February 3, graffiti calling for the murder of Bosniaks appeared on the Franjo Tuđman Bridge in Čapljina, exacerbating ethnic tensions and promoting a hostile environment for Muslims.⁵

On March 3, in Bosanska Dubica, a nationalist protest against Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Independence Day turned violent, with participants vandalizing property and attacking symbols associated with the Bosniak community.⁶

On March 23, during Ramadan, Fadil and Ajša Memišević, elderly Bosniak returnees, were brutally attacked and robbed in their home near Višegrad. They were found the next evening, tied up and severely injured.⁷

On June 23, Osman Mehanović, a young Bosniak man, was severely beaten in Bratunac, near Srebrenica. The attackers shouted racial slurs. Phrases like “Do you want us to slaughter you like we slaughtered your people in Srebrenica?”

2. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/ustajte-balije-pogledajte-kako-u-vlasenici-provociraju-povratnike-uoci-bozica/240106076>

3. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/sta-se-u-subotu-dogodilo-u-potocarima-policiji-prijavljeno-da-iz-kolone-pucano-kod-bosnjackih-kuca/240107095>

4. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/skandalozno-muskarac-urinario-po-zidu-dzamije-u-bijeljini-drugi-ga-snimao-i-psovaao/230114035>

5. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/na-mostu-franje-tudjmana-u-capljini-se-pojavili-grafiti-s-pozivom-na-ubistva-bosnjaka/230203194>

6. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/nacionalisticko-divljanje-u-bosanskoj-dubici-na-protestu-protiv-dana-nezavisnosti/230303184>

7. <https://faktor.ba/nije-odabrano/nije-odabrano/fadil-i-ajsa-memisevic-smjesteni-u-kcus-sigurnosna-situacija-u-rs-u-pogorsana-vlast-ohrabrila-nasilnicko-ponasanje/152037>

were shouted during the assault, invoking the horrific memories of the Srebrenica genocide.⁸

On July 29, in Bratunac, a Bosniak returnee received death threats, prompting condemnation from local officials. This is part of a broader pattern of intimidation aimed at discouraging the return of displaced Bosniaks.⁹

On August 8, a video surfaced of Aleksandar Đokić, a Bosnian Serb youth, making threats against the Bosniak community in Bijeljina. The video quickly went viral, prompting public outcry and a police response.¹⁰

On August 22, in Republika Srpska, a minor was beaten by police officers while his father was forced to watch highlighting systemic abuse and the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in law enforcement.¹¹

On September 3, in a village near Zvornik, a Bosniak man was brutally beaten near a mosque, resulting in serious injuries. The incident left the community shaken and fearful for their safety.¹²

On September 17, in Višegrad, graffiti glorifying war criminals and symbols supporting Kosovo and Russia appeared, reinforcing far-right sentiments and contributing to a climate of fear and intolerance.¹³

On September 20, in Brčko, human bones were discovered embedded in the foundations of a family home's fountain, sparking significant public and political outcry and calls for thorough investigations.¹⁴ This incident reflects a broader pattern of denying or covering up war crimes against Bosniaks during the War in Bosnia, with victims' remains often hidden or reburied. These actions contribute to a culture of denial.

On October 2, on the peak of the mountain Dinara, Ustasha symbols, including swastikas and fascist slogans, were spray-painted, showcasing the persistent influence of extremist ideologies in the region.¹⁵

On October 4, a graffiti was painted near the Sveti Sava Elementary School in

8. <https://n1info.ba/english/news/bosniak-young-man-severely-beaten-in-bratunac-near-srebrenica/>

9. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/povratnik-u-bratuncu-dobio-nove-prijetnje-podrzao-ga-ministar-diz-dar/230729093>

10. <https://n1info.ba/english/news/young-man-apprehended-for-spreading-hatred-against-bosniaks-on-tiktok/>

11. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/policaici-u-rs-u-pretukli-maloljetnika-u-stanici-otac-u-drugoj-prostoriji-slusao-jauke/230822142>

12. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/mjestanin-sela-kod-zvornika-pretucen-kod-dzamije-napadaci-uhapseni/230903098>

13. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/osim-murala-ratnim-zlocincima-u-visegradu-nicu-i-murali-posveceni-kosovu-i-rusiji/230917091>

14. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/ko-i-kako-je-ljudske-kosti-zazidao-u-temelje-fontane-porodicne-kuce-u-brckom/230922050>

15. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/na-vrhu-dinare-osvanuli-ustaski-simboli-pojedinci-i-dalje-siju-mrznju/231002187>

Bijeljina, depicting an terrorist attacker killed during a conflict in Kosovo, further inflaming tensions.¹⁶

On November 8, Bosniaks in Kotor Varoš received new threats following the commemoration of wartime crimes committed against them, seeking to instill fear and silence their historical narrative.¹⁷

These incidents underscore the urgent need for comprehensive legal and societal measures to protect minority communities and promote reconciliation and peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The persistent hostility and violence reflect deep-seated ethnic and religious animosities that continue to affect the region.

Employment

The systemic discrimination in Republika Srpska's public institutions, particularly in the police force, underscores deep-rooted ethnic tensions and the challenges of achieving true equality and integration in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. The disproportionate representation of certain ethnic groups violates constitutional principles and international agreements, necessitating urgent reforms and international oversight. This disproportionate representation violates both the Constitution of Republika Srpska and the Law on Police and Internal Affairs, which stipulate that the ethnic composition of public institutions should reflect the 1991 census until the full implementation of Annex 7 of the Dayton Agreement, which ensures the return of refugees and displaced persons.

In this regard, associations representing genocide victims have appealed to the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Christian Schmidt, to ensure greater inclusion of Bosniaks and Croats in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of RS (MUP RS).¹⁸ They argue that the current ethnic composition perpetuates discrimination and undermines trust in law enforcement among minority communities.

Denis Zvizdić, chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, also emphasized the severe underrepresentation of Bosniaks and Croats in the MUP RS.¹⁹ According to the 1991 census, before the war and genocide, Bosniaks made up more than 28% of the population in the current territory of RS and Croats made up 9.2%. Currently, Bosniaks constitute less than 1% and Croats even less within the MUP RS, while over 93% of employees are Serbs, reflecting gross disproportionality and violation of the constitutional mandate for proportional representation based on the 1991 census.

16. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/u-bijeljini-oslikan-mural-posvecen-teroristi-zasto-suti-gradonacelnik-ljubisa-petrovic-897288>

17. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/bosnjaci-u-kotor-varosi-nakon-obiljezavanja-godisnjice-zlocina-dobivaju-nove-prijetnje/231108168>

18. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/udruzenja-zrtava-genocida-od-schmidta-traze-da-osigura-veci-broj-bosnjaka-i-hrvata-u-mup-u-rs-888475>

19. <https://n1info.rs/region/a488732-zvizdic-u-rs-diskriminacija-bosnjaka-i-hrvata-mup-rs-najbolji-primer-za-to/>

Education

In 2023, Bosniak returnees in Republika Srpska continued to face institutional discrimination, particularly in education, where Bosniak children were systematically denied the right to learn the Bosnian language. This issue, persisting since 2020, violates the constitutional rights of Bosniak children to be taught as a “national group” in Serb-majority schools. In response to this discrimination, the Islamic Community established temporary schools adhering to the national curriculum, staffed by teachers from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The refusal to recognize the Bosnian language in RS schools underscores broader ethnic tensions and institutional discrimination in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina. This denial impacts Bosniak students’ educational experiences and their cultural and national identity, exacerbating feelings of exclusion and second-class citizenship.²⁰ RS Minister of Education Željka Stojičić reiterated in 2023 that Bosnian would not be introduced into schools, citing its lack of constitutional recognition in RS, despite legal rulings affirming the right of Bosniak children to learn in their language.²¹ The ongoing resistance of Serb political leaders to recognize the Bosnian language reflects broader political and legal challenges.²² The continued denial of this right highlights the urgent need for intervention to uphold the fundamental rights of Bosniak children and ensure an inclusive educational environment.

Politics

On January 2, Boris Malagurski announced the Sarajevo premiere of his film “Republika Srpska: The Struggle for Freedom,” inviting mayor of Sarajevo Benjamina Karić.²³ The film has faced criticism for its revisionist portrayal of Republika Srpska, seen as downplaying wartime atrocities. Mayor Karić called the invitation a provocation, emphasizing the need to uphold historical truth and international legal judgments.²⁴

On January 7, protests erupted in Srebrenica after men were arrested for firing shots in front of a Bosniak returnee’s house. Protesters demanded their release, increasing ethnic tensions in a town still affected by the 1995 genocide.²⁵

20. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bo%C5%A1njaci-zakon-negiranje-bosanski-jezik/32631250.html>

21. <https://n1info.ba/vijesti/ministrice-prosvjete-rs-o-presudi-bosanski-jezik-nema-uporiste-u-ustavu/>

22. <https://srpskainfo.com/hoce-li-srbi-priznati-bosanski-jezik-sporni-dijelovi-zakona-o-sklapanju-medjunarodnih-ugovora-bih/>

23. <https://faktor.ba/bosna-i-hercegovina/aktuelno/malagurski-najavio-premijeru-svog-propagandnog-filma-o-rs-u-sarajevu-pozvao-karic-da-prisustvuje/144636>

24. <https://sarajevskasehara.com/2023/01/benjamina-karic-odgovorila-borisu-malagurskom-na-poziv-na-premijeru-filma-o-rs-u/>

25. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/protesti-ispred-policijske-stanice-u-srebrenici-zbog-hapsenja-muskaraca-koji-su-pucali-ispred-kuce-bosnjackog-povratnika/240107134>

On February 21, Dodik denied the Srebrenica genocide and attacked High Representative Christian Schmidt, exacerbating tensions and hindering reconciliation. His statements were condemned by the international community.²⁶

On February 25, Igor Stojanović Candidate for (Vice) President of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina accused the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) of prioritizing mosques over the state, provoking strong reactions and highlighting the sensitivity of religious and national identities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁷

On March 1, Bosnian Independence Day, a Serb athlete posted a controversial photograph showing her with a Chetnik symbol, claiming lineage to a WWII Chetnik leader. The incident sparked outrage and debate about national symbols.²⁸

On March 10, in Bratunac, a group of genocide deniers erected a birthday greeting for convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić, condemned as a glorification of war crimes.²⁹

On March 15, International Day to Combat Islamophobia, no official government commemoration was held in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Naša Stranka (Our Party), a political party, issued a statement advocating for a more open society through the fight against Islamophobia.³⁰ Media coverage was present, with outlets like Al Jazeera Balkans³¹ and web portal Preporod³² highlighting increasing levels of Islamophobia, emphasizing the continued attacks and hate speech against Muslims. Academics such as Prof. Dr. Amir Karić³³ and Emir Kovačević³⁴ pointed out the persistent and intensifying dehumanization of Bosniaks in public discourse.

On April 7, Željka Cvijanović, Serb Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, made a racist statement claiming there are more Asians than Serbs in Sarajevo, which was widely criticized and labeled as inflammatory.³⁵

26. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dodik-opet-negirao-genocid-u-srebrenici-i-porucio-schmidtu-da-je-potomak-zlocinaca/230221095>

27. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/stojanovic-optuzio-sda-da-im-je-vaznija-dzamiya-nego-drzava-pa-dobio-zestoke-reakcije/230225090>

28. <https://faktor.ba/sport/ostali-sportovi/ivana-radovic-se-brani-ponosim-se-momcilom-dujicem-on-je-moj-predak/149986>

29. <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/sda-osudjuje-postavljanje-natpisa-u-bratuncu-kojim-se-velicaju-ratni-zlocinci/409184>

30. <https://www.nasastranka.ba/bs/nasa-stranka-borbom-protiv-islamofobije-do-otvorenijeg-drustva>

31. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/teme/2023/3/15/dan-borbe-protiv-islamofobije-napadi-i-retorika-puna-mrznje-prema-muslimanima>

32. <https://preporod.info/bs/article/39414/emir-kovacevic-islamofobija-sve-prisutnija-njen-intenzitet-se-sve-vise-povecava>

33. <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/816346/prof-dr-amir-karic-bosnjaci-su-zrtve-kontinuiranih-dehumanizirajucih-islamofobicnih-narativa>

34. See: Preporod

35. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/rasisticka-izjava-zeljke-cvijanovic-u-sarajevu-ima-vise-azijata-nego-srba/230407020>

On April 12, Višegrad commemorated the Day of Russian Volunteers, honoring fighters who participated in the war. This controversial event glorifies foreign fighters involved in a conflict marked by severe human rights abuses.³⁶

On April 13, Bosnian Serb politician serving as mayor of Banja Luka since 2020 Draško Stanivuković criticized the sale of city property to Bosniak and Muslim investors, sparking backlash and highlighting ongoing ethnic tensions.³⁷

On June 8, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska adopted a resolution calling for the protection of Serbs in Kosovo, criticized for potentially inflaming ethnic tensions.³⁸

On June 27, Milorad Dodik used an ethnic slur against an Albanian judge on the Constitutional Court, further illustrating deep-seated ethnic animosities.³⁹

On June 29, Nenad Nešić, a state minister, published a provocative map of Republika Srpska with enlarged territory, undermining reconciliation and regional stability.⁴⁰

On July 11, Hamdija Kocić, an ethnic Bosniak, sang songs glorifying war criminals and insulting the genocide in Srebrenica in a public place in Sarajevo.⁴¹ The event instigated ethnic, racial and religious hatred, and discord and intolerance.

On July 13, students praised Ratko Mladić and questioned why celebrating war criminals was problematic, highlighting persistent nationalist sentiments.⁴²

On July 31, the statement, which caused an outrage, “Nek smo vas pobili” (“Glad we killed you”) in reference to Bosniaks made by a student was defended by Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia Draško Vranješ, an ethnic Serb, as merely expressing an opinion.⁴³

On August 7, at a political event, a family killed by a grenade from the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) was misrepresented as victims of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH).⁴⁴

36. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/u-visegradu-obiljezen-dan-ruskih-dobrovoljaca/230412116>

37. <https://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/kad-se-stanivukovic-zanese-durakovic-muslimani-mogu-kupiti-manchester-city-i-psg-ali-ne-i-parcelu-u-banjoj-luci-852462>

38. <https://www.narodnaskupstinar.net/?q=la/vijesti/jednoglasno-usvojena-rezolucija-o-za%C5%A1titi-srba-na-kosovu-i-metohiji-i-o-teritorijalnom-integritetu-i-suverenitetu-republike-srbije-uz-zaklju%C4%8D-ke#:~:text=Narodna%20skup%C5%A1tina%20Republike%20Srpske%20danas%2C%20u%20prvom%20dijelu,Srbije%2C%20prijedlog%20predsjednika%20Narodne%20skup%C5%A1tine%2C%20uz%20usvojene%20amandmane.>

39. <https://www.dnevnik.ba/vijesti/dodik-albanskog-suca-u-ustavnom-sudu-bih-nazvao-siptarom-2655425>

40. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/drzavni-ministar-u-ulozi-geometra-nesic-objavio-kartu-rs-a-s-uvacanom-povrsinom/230629131>

41. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/crna-hronika/optuzen-muskarac-koji-je-ljetos-na-stupu-negirao-pocinjeno-genocid-u-srebrenici/240112091>

42. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/sramotna-izjava-studentica-koje-su-velicale-zlocinca-mladica-zasto-je-spor-no-da-slavimo-svoje-vodje/230713162>

43. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/studentica-napisala-nek-smo-vas-pobili-a-ambadoru-vranjesu-je-to-samo-iskazivanje-stava/230731015>

44. <https://www.source.ba/clanak/BiH/652568/dt>

On September 17, representative in the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly Milan Petković commented on the attacks on returnees, stating that incidents have always occurred and will continue to happen.⁴⁵

On September 24, a mural featuring symbols of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was unveiled in Stolac, prompting strong reactions.⁴⁶

On September 22, it was discovered that human bones were embedded in the foundation of a family house's fountain in Brčko.⁴⁷ The incident is under investigation, with authorities trying to uncover who managed to hide this crime and for how long.

On November 12, parliamentarians from Republika Srpska wrote to the U.S. Congress, warning that alleged sleeper cells of ISIS in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be activated.⁴⁸

On November 29, Milorad Dodik discussed the dismissal of accused Reis Hussein Kavazović of covering for radical Islamic groups known as “paradžemati” (informal congregations).⁴⁹

On December 31, Željka Cvijanović, Serb Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, issued a New Year's greeting exclusively to the citizens of RS, omitting the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵⁰

Media

In Republika Srpska, the media landscape has increasingly become a tool for perpetuating Islamophobic narratives, often equating the terms “Muslims” and “Bosniaks” to undermine the Bosniak national identity. This tactic serves to erase the distinction between religious and national identity, thus facilitating the political goals of RS authorities. A review of articles from RTRS, RS's public broadcaster, reveals a persistent pattern of rhetoric that both negates the existence of Bosniaks as a distinct nationality and leverages anti-Islamic sentiment for political gain.

The usual media focus on the Muslim identity of Bosniak leaders in political debates detracts from their political arguments and positions. This approach undermines their political credibility and reinforces negative stereotypes.⁵¹

45. <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/855673/petkovic-o-napadima-na-povratnike-uvijek-je-toga-bilo-i-bit-ce-ali-to-je-posao-za-pravosudne-institucije>

46. <https://bljesak.info/vijesti/flash/pljuste-reakcije-stolac-dobio-mural-sa-simbolima-ndh/433208>

47. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/ko-i-kako-je-ljudske-kosti-zazidao-u-temelje-fontane-porodicne-kuce-u-brckom/230922050>

48. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/parlamentarci-bih-iz-rs-a-pisali-kongresu-sad-a-spavacke-celije-isil-a-u-bih-mogle-bi-bit-aktivirane/231112063>

49. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/dodik-govorio-o-smjeni-heleza-pa-reisa-optuzio-da-pokriva-paradzemate/231129158>

50. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/selektivna-cestitka-cvijanovic-zeli-sve-najbolje-za-novu-godinu-ali-samo-gradjanima-rs-a/231231025>

51. <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=504746>

Also, media in RS showcase a deliberate attempt to victimize the perpetrators and distort the facts, which was very evident, for example, during the coverage of the annual commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide, during which period an event was organized in Srebrenica for the celebration of the municipal baptismal glory of Petrovdan (St. Peter's Day) which is held a day after annual commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide). During this event, the song "Veseli se srpski rode" (Rejoice, Serbian People) was played in the center of Srebrenica, a move which was obviously provocative given the context of the genocide commemoration.⁵² Biased media coverage of this incident asserted that Serbs have the right to celebrate their religious holidays without offending anyone and claimed that the threats were misinterpreted and maliciously exaggerated by the Bosniak community.⁵³

The utilization of anti-Islamic sentiment is another tactic used by RS authorities to advance their political agenda. By fostering fear and suspicion towards Islam, the media help to justify policies and actions that discriminate against Bosniaks. This is evident in the frequent portrayal of Islamic practices and institutions in a negative light. Articles often highlight supposed threats posed by Islamic extremism, which, although isolated, are generalized to the entire Bosniak population, creating a climate of fear and mistrust.⁵⁴

Justice system

On February 10, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of RS (MUP RS) launched an investigation against imam Muharem ef. Štulanović for calling Republika Srpska a "genocidal creation" during a sermon in Bihać.⁵⁵ This investigation, invoking Article 280a of the RS Criminal Code, addresses offenses against the entity's reputation. The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina condemned the move, viewing it as an attempt to silence discussions on historical truths, especially the genocide recognized by international courts.

On February 14, municipal authorities in Neum sealed a mosque a day after a minaret was added, citing building permit irregularities.⁵⁶ The Islamic Community and local Bosniak residents argued this action was discriminatory and aimed at limiting religious freedoms, reflecting broader struggles of religious minorities in certain regions.

On February 17, the MUP RS filed a report against imam Amir ef. Mahić, accusing him of inciting violence and hatred during a sermon about the War in Bos-

52. <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/bez-trunke-suosjecanja-centrom-srebrenice-odzvanjala-pjesma-veseli-se-srpski-rode/504231>

53. <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=519500>

54. <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=531915>

55. <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/mup-rs-otvara-istragu-protiv-ef-stulanovica-jer-je-rs-nazvao-genocidnom-tvorevinom/483375>

56. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/opcinske-vlasti-u-neumu-zapecatile-dzamiyu-na-koju-je-jucer-postavljena-munara/230214170>

nia.⁵⁷ The Islamic Community defended Mahić, asserting he spoke truthfully about historical events, highlighting tensions between freedom of speech and efforts to maintain a particular narrative in RS.

On May 21, the Islamic Community raised concerns about the construction of the Palas Hotel in Banja Luka on the site of a demolished mosque from the War in Bosnia.⁵⁸ They argued the project aimed to erase historical evidence of crimes against Bosniaks and called for the site to be preserved as a historical monument.

In Mostar, a dispute arose over the construction of the Croatian National Theatre on the site of the former Lakišića harem, a historic Muslim burial ground.⁵⁹ The Islamic Community's requests to build an Islamic Cultural Center on the same site have been ignored or delayed, seen as an attempt to erase Bosniak cultural heritage from the city's central zone.

On September 11, the Medžlis Islamic Community (MIZ) of Konjic refuted claims that a mosque in Donje Selo was built on land owned by a Croat family.⁶⁰ The Trlin family demanded the mosque's demolition, claiming ownership. MIZ Konjic clarified that the mosque was constructed on legally acquired *vakuf* (endowment) land, highlighting the historical and legal complexities of property rights in ethnically diverse areas.

Internet

Social media remain a primary platform for disseminating Islamophobic rhetoric. Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok continue to be used by nationalist groups to publish content that incites fear and hatred towards Bosniaks and includes genocide denial.

The actors, more or less, remain the same, such as the Facebook page "Army of the Republic of Srpska" which remains highly active with around 55,000 followers and the Instagram account "republic.of.srpska30" which perpetuates the same narratives, celebrating the "feats" of the RS Army, glorifying war criminals, and supporting genocide denial in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This trend continued throughout 2023. An example of an online source of hate speech is the Facebook page "Chetnik Movement of Republika Srpska," where an apparent older man incited violence against Muslims.⁶¹ The page has been reported by local media, highlighting the terrifying content that calls for the killing of Muslims.

57. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/mup-rs-a-prijavio-amira-ef-mahica-tuzilastvu-u-prijedoru-zbog-podsticanja-nasilja-i-mrznje/230217176>

58. <https://vakuf.ba/bs/aktuelnosti/saopcenje-povodom-pocetka-gradnje-novog-hotela-palas-u-banjoj-luci/2028>

59. <https://preporod.info/bs/article/42899/kako-moze-hrvatsko-narodno-kazaliste-na-bivsem-lakisica-haremu-u-centralnoj-zoni-grad-a-mostara-a-ne-moze-islamski-kulturni-centar>

60. <https://www.mina.ba/29101-demanti-miz-konjic-dzamiya-u-donjem-selu-nije-izgradena-na-hrvatskom-nego-na-vakufskom-zemljistu>

61. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/zastrasujuca-cetnicka-stranica-na-facebooku-na-kojoj-stariji-muskarac-poziva-na-ubijanje/230205089>

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republika Srpska identified individuals behind the Facebook page and revealed that many of these groups, like the “People’s Patrol,” operate from Serbia and target Muslims in B&H and the wider Muslim community.⁶²

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Islamophobia in Bosnia and Herzegovina is propagated by three main groups. First, academic and semi-academic circles in Serbia and Republika Srpska, including figures like Predrag Ceranić (University of Banja Luka),⁶³ Miroljub Jevtić (University of Belgrade),⁶⁴ self-professed terrorism expert Dževad Galijašević,⁶⁵ and Darko Trifunović (University of Belgrade)⁶⁶. These individuals often discuss alleged Islamic threats and link Bosniak Muslims to terrorism. Ceranić claims the largest Bosniak political party, Party for Democratic Action (SDA), has war goals and that international powers want to restore the Islamic State in B&H.⁶⁷ Jevtić attributes violence to Islamic tradition,⁶⁸ while Galijašević frequently speaks about Islamic terrorism linked to the SDA.

A second group that propagates Islamophobia in B&H is several high-ranking officials from the Serb Orthodox Church, including Patriarch Porfirije.⁶⁹

Third, politicians from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia, such as Milorad Dodik (President of Republika Srpska), Milan Tegeltija (Dodik’s advisor), and Mario Karamatić (Bosnian Croat Politian and Croatian National Assembly member), often make anti-Muslim statements. These figures intensify hatred towards Bosniak Muslims, framing them as a threat.

Additionally, Canadian-Serb film director Boris Malagurski, known for conspiracy theories and denial of mass atrocities, contributes to anti-Muslim rhetoric through his documentaries, which have been banned in several European cities.⁷⁰

62. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/mup-rs-a-otkrio-ko-stoji-iza-sramne-fb-stranice-cetnicki-pokret-republika-srpska/230213078>

63. See: <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/bih/Ceranic-Paradzemati-su-politicko-krilo-Islamske-drzave-u-BiH/357529#:~:text=BEOGRAD%20-%20Stru%C4%8Dnjak%20za%20bezbjednost%20Predrag%20%C4%86erani%C4%87%20Upozorio%20je%20da%20https://standard.rs/2023/04/20/terorizam-u-svetlu-promena-u-islamskom-svetlu/#:~:text=Svet%20terorizam%20vehabizam%20Predrag%20%C4%86erani%C4%87.%20Istorijsko%20pomirenje%20Saudijske%20Arabije%20i>

64. See: Miroljub Jevtić, “Njegoš i Islam”, in *Polja geopolitike – zbornik radova*, editors: Ljubisa Despotović Veselin Konatar, Kultura polis, 13(1), Fakultet za evropske i pravno političke studije, Novi Sad, 2016, p. 245–260

65. See: <https://raskrinkavanje.ba/analiza/lazni-terorizam-i-eksperti-koji-to-nisu>

66. See: Enver Halilović, “Bosna i Hercegovina na ledu između Zapada i Ruske Federacije”, in *Godišnjak BZK “Preporod”, Godina XIII*, Sarajevo, 2013, p. 67

67. See: <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=351327>

68. See: <https://www.ekspres.net/drustvo/intervju-miroljub-jevtic-profesor-fpn-a-islam-zaustavlja-samo-sila>

69. See: <https://banjaluka.net/sarajevski-muftija-patrijarh-porfirije-da-razjasni-da-li-mitropolit-hrizostom-iznosi-licni-ili-stav-spc/>

70. See: <https://www.klix.ba/magazin/film-tv/dok-se-nizu-pozivi-na-zabranu-prikazivanja-filma-borisa-malagurskog-milos-bikovic-ga-podrzava/221017153> https://www.meinbezirk.at/meidling/c-lokales/kontroverse-serbische-doku-wird-in-wien-erneut-nicht-gezeigt_a5821687 <https://www.lemkinstitute.com/statements-new-repube/repube-republica-srpska%3A-the-struggle-for-freedom>

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

The Memorial Center Srebrenica presented a report addressing the prevalence of hate speech and genocide denial on TikTok.⁷¹ The report, part of an ongoing effort to combat online hate, highlighted the alarming rise in content denying the Srebrenica genocide and spreading ethnic hatred. The study analyzed numerous TikTok videos, noting that the platform has become a significant space for disseminating harmful narratives. The center called for stricter regulations and greater accountability from social media companies to curb the spread of such content.

In an effort to combat Islamophobia and honor the memory of the victims, the predominately Croat-Catholic town of Čapljina in Bosnia and Herzegovina has named a street “Victims of the Srebrenica Genocide.”⁷² This act is part of a broader initiative to recognize and remember the atrocities committed during the war in Bosnia, promoting awareness and reconciliation. The naming ceremony underscores the importance of acknowledging historical truths and supporting efforts to combat ethnic and religious hatred.

The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is actively involved in promoting religious freedoms and combating Islamophobia, operates through the Commission on Freedom of Religion (Komisija za slobodu vjere). Members of this commission have been proactive in monitoring violations of religious freedoms and providing legal counsel to various appellants. Additionally, the Center for Education and Research Nahla remains dedicated to addressing these issues.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Considering the ongoing presence of Islamophobia in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following policy recommendations ... for effectively combatting Islamophobia remain valid:

- Foster continued cooperation between governments (at the state, entity, and Brčko District levels), the Islamic Community, and NGOs to fight discrimination against Muslims.
- Raise public awareness of human rights and freedom of religion and belief through NGOs, media, and other channels. Enhance methods for documenting violations of Muslim rights by the Islamic Community, NGOs, police, and judiciary.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2022/10/13/petition-targets-bosnian-serb-history-film-for-genocide-denial/>

71. <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/mc-srebrenica-predstavio-izvje%C5%A1taj-o-govoru-mr%C5%BEnje-i-negiranju-genocida-na-tiktoku/2845109>

72. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/capljina-dobila-ulicu-zrtava-srebrenickog-genocida/230714107>

- Increase awareness of hate crimes against Muslims, ensuring proper registration and prosecution by the Islamic Community, NGOs, police, and judiciary.
- Raise awareness of hate speech (both online and offline) perpetuated by media and politicians.
- Educate the public about Islamic practices (such as prayer, Jumaah, and wearing the headscarf) and how these can be accommodated in education and employment, adjusting regulations accordingly.
- Amend laws that require public officers to refrain from manifesting their religious beliefs, which discriminate against Muslim employees fasting, praying, or wearing the headscarf. Refer the most flagrant cases to the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council (HJPC).
- Raise awareness among citizens and NGOs about reporting offensive media language to the Press Council in B&H and the Communications Regulatory Agency.
- Encourage citizens and NGOs to file complaints related to human rights violations with the B&H Ombudsman's Office, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, and regular courts.
- Foster a commitment to countering violent extremism, focusing on far-right and extreme nationalist ideologies and movements.
- Prioritize the prosecution of genocide denial in Bosnia and Herzegovina, enabled by the Office of the High Representative's legal intervention.

Chronology

- **2 January:** Boris Malagurski announced the Sarajevo premiere of his film “Republika Srpska: The Struggle for Freedom,” inviting mayor Benjamina Karić.
- **6 January:** In Vlasenica, Bosniak returnees were subjected to provocations during Orthodox Christmas celebrations.
- **7 January:** In Potočari, shots were fired from a column of vehicles passing by Bosniak homes near the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial.
- **7 January:** Protests erupted in Srebrenica after men were arrested for firing shots in front of a Bosniak returnee's house.
- **14 January:** In Bijeljina, a man was filmed urinating on the wall of a mosque while another recorded the act and hurled insults.
- **3 February:** Graffiti calling for the murder of Bosniaks appeared on the Franjo Tuđman Bridge in Čapljina.
- **10 February:** The Ministry of Internal Affairs of RS (MUP RS) launched an investigation against imam Muharem ef. Štulanović for calling Republika Srpska a “genocidal creation.”

- **14 February:** Municipal authorities in Neum sealed a mosque a day after a minaret was added, citing irregularities in building permits.
- **17 February:** The Ministry of Internal Affairs of RS (MUP RS) filed a report against imam Amir ef. Mahić, accusing him of inciting violence and hatred during a sermon.
- **21 February:** Dodik denied the Srebrenica genocide and attacked High Representative Christian Schmidt.
- **25 February:** Igor Stojanović accused the Party for Democratic Action (SDA) of prioritizing mosques over the state, provoking strong reactions.
- **1 March:** A Bosnian athlete posted a controversial photograph showing her with a Chetnik symbol.
- **3 March:** In Bosanska Dubica, a nationalist protest against Bosnia and Herzegovina's Independence Day turned violent.
- **10 March:** In Bratunac, a group of genocide deniers erected a birthday greeting for convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić.
- **23 March:** During Ramadan, Fadil and Ajša Memišević, elderly Bosniak returnees, were brutally attacked and robbed in their home near Višegrad.
- **7 April:** Željka Cvijanović, Serb Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, made a racist statement claiming there are more Asians than Serbs in Sarajevo.
- **12 April:** Višegrad commemorated the Day of Russian Volunteers, honoring fighters who participated in the war.
- **13 April:** Bosnian Serb politician serving as mayor of Banja Luka since 2020, Draško Stanivuković criticized the sale of city property to Bosniak and Muslim investors.
- **21 May:** The Islamic Community raised concerns about the construction of the Palas Hotel in Banja Luka on a former mosque site.
- **8 June:** The National Assembly of Republika Srpska adopted a resolution calling for the protection of Serbs in Kosovo.
- **23 June:** Osman Mehanović was severely beaten in Bratunac, near Srebrenica.
- **27 June:** Milorad Dodik used an ethnic slur against an Albanian judge on the Constitutional Court.
- **29 June:** Nenad Nešić published a provocative map of Republika Srpska with enlarged territory.
- **11 July:** Hamdija Kocić sang songs glorifying war criminals and insulting the Srebrenica genocide in Sarajevo.
- **13 July:** Students praised Ratko Mladić and questioned why celebrating war criminals was problematic.
- **29 July:** In Bratunac, a Bosniak returnee received death threats.

- **31 July:** A student wrote “Nek smo vas pobili” (“Glad we killed you”) about Bosniaks, which was later defended by Draško Vranješ, ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Serbia.
- **7 August:** A family killed by a grenade from the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) was misrepresented as victims of the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH).
- **8 August:** A video surfaced of a Serb youth Aleksandar Đokić making threats against the Bosniak community in Bijeljina.
- **22 August:** In Republika Srpska, a minor was beaten by police officers while his father was forced to watch.
- **3 September:** In a village near Zvornik, a Bosniak man was brutally beaten near a mosque.
- **11 September:** The Medžlis Islamic Community (MIZ) of Konjic refuted claims that a mosque in Donje Selo was built on Croat-owned land.
- **17 September:** Representative Milan Petković commented on attacks on returnees, stating such incidents will continue.
- **17 September:** In Višegrad, graffiti glorifying war criminals and symbols supporting Kosovo and Russia appeared.
- **20 September:** Human bones were discovered embedded in the foundation of a family home’s fountain in Brčko.
- **24 September:** A mural featuring symbols of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was unveiled in Stolac.
- **2 October:** On the peak of the mountain Dinara, Ustasha symbols and swastikas were spray-painted.
- **4 October:** A mural was painted near Sveti Sava Elementary School in Bijeljina depicting an attacker from the Kosovo conflict.
- **8 November:** Bosniaks in Kotor Varoš received threats following the commemoration of wartime crimes.
- **12 November:** Parliamentarians from Republika Srpska warned the U.S. Congress about alleged ISIS sleeper cells in Bosnia.
- **18 November:** The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina rejected the entry of Palestinian nationals.
- **29 November:** Milorad Dodik accused Reis Husein Kavazović, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of covering for radical Islamic groups.
- **31 December:** Željka Cvijanović, Serb Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, issued a New Year’s greeting exclusively to RS citizens, omitting the rest of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
BULGARIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Executive Summary

Similar to previous years, in 2023, there were no reported Islamophobic attacks on Muslim individuals in Bulgaria. Still, representatives of the Bulgarian political class, TV, and online podcast presenters hosting pseudo-experts on Islam and Middle Eastern Studies used their airtime and social media profiles, to articulate hate speech against imaginary Muslim threats to Europe's civilizational values and security. In their views, these threats, were embodied by the usual suspects: Turkish President Erdoğan, who on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic was expected to announce an Islamic caliphate and a holy war on the West; the "radicalized" Muslim Roma communities ready to blow up the peaceful coexistence of the main two religions in the country; the Chief Muftiate, striving to regain by legal means mosques and waqf properties taken from the Muslim Denomination during the communist period; and, last but not least, the refugees from the Middle East, using Bulgaria as a transit territory on their way to Western Europe.

The start of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza on 7 October and the way it was presented by Bulgarian media became a new source for anti-Muslim hate speech to be heard mainly in TV studios and as part of popular podcasts discussing the events in the Middle East in the last three months of the year.

In the beginning of 2023, a PhD thesis titled "Social Aspects and Prevention of Radicalization among Roma in Pazardzhik and Plovdiv Regions" was accepted without objections at the "Georgi Stoykov Rakovski" Military Academy in Sofia. According to the leading research hypothesis of the PhD candidate, there is a possibility for a nationwide conflict between Christians and Muslims.

In the period January-December 2023, after a nine-year-long legal battle for ownership between the Chief Muftiate and the local municipality, the historical Kurshum Mosque in the city of Karlovo was officially granted to the latter and will be transformed into a gallery. This is already an established practice: historical mosques and *tekkes* across the country are announced as museums by the Ministry of Culture or function as touristic information centers; others are left to destruction, due to the fact that they are not governed by the Muslim Denomination, whose appeals for renovation of such religious shrines are left unheard by the official authorities, both, on national and local level.

Резюме

Подобно на предишни години и през 2023 г. в България няма регистрирани нападения върху физически лица, продиктувани от ислямофобия. Тя запазва силни позиции главно под формата на реч на омразата, която си позволяват представители на българската политическа класа, водещи и нарочени за експерти по ислям и Близък изток гости на телевизионни предавания и подкасти, използващи предоставеното им ефирно време и социалните мрежи, за да артикулират мюсюлманската заплаха за България и европейските цивилизационни ценности и сигурност. Тази заплаха според тях се въплъщава от обичайните заподозрени в лицето на турския президент Ердоган, който, по случай 100-годишнината на Републиката, се готви да обяви ислямски халифат и свещена война на Запада; „радикализираните“ ромски общности; Главно мюфтийство, водещо юридически битки за отнетите им през комунистическия период вакъфски имоти и не на последно място – емигрантския поток от Близкия изток, използващ България като транзитна територия по пътя им към Западна Европа.

Началото на войната между израел Израел и Хамас в Газа на 7 октомври и начинът, по който тя беше представена от българските медии, се превърна в нов източник на антимиюсюлманска реч на омразата, която можеше да бъде чута основно в телевизионни студия и популярни подкасти, обсъждащи събитията от последните три месеца в годината в Близкия изток.

В началото на 2023 г. във Военна академия „Георги Стойков Раковски“ в София е приета без възражения докторска дисертация на тема: „Социални аспекти и превенция на радикализацията сред ромите в областите Пазарджик и Пловдив“. Според една от водещите изследователски хипотези на докторанта, съществува реална възможност за конфликт между християни и мюсюлмани, който да обхване цялата страна.

В периода януари-декември 2023 г. историческата „Куршум джамия“ в град Карлово, след 9-годишна юридическа битка за собствеността върху сградата между Главно мюфтийство и местната власт, официално бе присъдена на общината и беше превърната в галерия. Това е вече утвърдила се практика – историческите джамии и текета на територията на страната да бъдат обявявани от Министерство на културата за музеи или да функционират като туристически информационни бюра; други, които не са стопанисвани от Главно мюфтийство, са оставени постепенно да се разрушават, а призивите на мюсюлманите за реставрирането им, остават нечути от официалните институции, както на национално, така и на местно ниво.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Bulgaria

Type of Regime: Democracy

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: In 2023, Bulgaria was ruled by three governments: two caretaker governments (100th and 101st) headed by Galab Donev, appointed by President Rumen Radev, on 2 August 2022 and, for a second time, on 2 February 2023, followed by the regular (102nd) cabinet of Nikolai Denkov approved by parliament on 6 June 2023. The latter was formed by a majority coalition incorporating Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria – GERB (acronym translated in Bulgarian as “Coat of Arms,” a right-centrist, populist party) and Prodalzhavame Promianata (We Continue the Change, PP, newly founded centrist, pro-European)–Demokratichna Bulgariya (Democratic Bulgaria, DB, liberal, conservative, member of EPP). Per the coalition agreement, it was set to be a rotation government, where PP–DB’s Nikolai Denkov would start with the premiership, with GERB’s Mariya Gabriel serving as deputy prime minister, and after nine months (as of March 2024), the two would switch positions.

Opposition Parties: Movement for Rights and Freedoms (centrist, liberal party); Ima Takav Narod (There Is Such a People, populist, nationalistic party), Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, center-left, social-democratic, left-wing populism with a pro-EU stance), and Vazrazhdane (Revival, populist, far-right party)

Last Elections: Early Parliamentary Elections, 2 April 2023 (in previous elections on 2 October 2022 no party was able to form a government): GERB, 26.49% of the vote with 69 of 240 seats; We Continue the Change (PP) – Democratic Bulgaria (DB) coalition, 24.56% and 64 seats; Movement for Rights and Freedoms, 13.75% and 36 seats; Vazrazhdane (Revival), 14.16% and 37 seats; Bulgarian Socialist Party, 8.93% and 23 seats; There Is Such a People, 4.11% and 11 seats.

Local Elections, 29 October 2023: On the provincial level (from a total of 25), GERB won 12 mayoral positions; We Continue the Change (PP) – Democratic Bulgaria (DB) coalition 4; BSP: 4; The Movement for Rights and Freedoms: 1; There Is Such a People: 1; Others: 5.

Presidential Elections, 14 November/21 November 2021: Incumbent president Rumen Radev won 66.72% of the vote, defeating university professor Anastas Gerdzhikov in a runoff.

European Parliament Elections, 26 May 2019: The list of parties, seats and percentages of votes is as follows: GERB (member of EPP): 6 (31.07%); Bulgarian Socialist Party (member of PES): 5 (24.26%); Movement for Rights and Freedoms

(member of ALDE): 3 (16.55%); Bulgarian National Movement - VMRO (member of ECR): 2 (7.36%). The next EP elections will be held on 9 June 2024.

Total Population: 6,519,789 (September 2021, compared to 7,364,570 in 2011)

Major Languages: Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism). The constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the country's "traditional religion."

Statistics on Islamophobia: In 2023, the Grand Mufti's Office did not report any attacks against Muslims or Islamic places of worship.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: There are no special statistics and a database on racism and discrimination.

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity 71.5% or 4,219,270 (Eastern Orthodox 4,091,780; Protestant 69,852; Catholic 38,709; Armenian Apostolic 5,002; Other Christian 13,927); Islam 10.8% or 638,708; No religion 5.2% or 305,102; People who cannot identify their religion 4.4% or 259,235; People who did not want to answer 8.0% or 472,606; Judaism 0.026% or 1,736; Other 6,451.

Muslim Population (% of Population): 10.8% or 638,708 (<https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/766/statistical-data>) (compared to 7.8% or 577,139 in 2011)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria (Grand Mufti's Office)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: N/A

Far-Right Parties: Bulgarian National Union – New Democracy, Ataka, Conservative Bulgaria (former National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria), Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO), Vazrazhdane (Revival)

Far-Right Movements: National Resistance, Blood and Honor, Union of the Bulgarian National Legions

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No (depends on local municipality decisions)
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** The Parliament adopted the so-called Anti-burqa Law or Law for Prohibiting the Wearing of Clothing Concealing One's Face in Public Spaces. (30 September 2016)

Introduction

Bulgaria is home to the largest indigenous Muslim minority within the boundaries of the European Union (around 11% according to a census held in 2021). Despite the continuing rise of Islamophobic hate speech practiced even by high-ranking officials, both Bulgaria's historical Muslim population (Turks, Pomaks, and Roma), and the recently formed, relatively small, immigrant Arab Muslim community,¹ did not face major conflicts with Bulgaria's non-Muslim majority. Nevertheless, in 2023, there were numerous cases in which Muslims and Islamic symbols were subjected to various forms of violation. These included biased representations by the media of religious and juridical activities initiated by the chief and regional muftiates, generating unease and loss of confidence in public institutions among the representatives of the community, and, to a lesser degree, vandalized places of worship.

An early parliamentary election was held on 2 October 2022. The extreme nationalist parties known for their anti-Muslim positions (namely the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria [NFSB], the Bulgarian National Movement [VMRO], and Ataka), forming the United Patriots alliance, who had ruled as coalition partners with the leading center-right party, Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) in the period 2017-2021, could not enter the newly established 48th parliament. The United Patriots entered politics through the use of hate speech and aggressive stances towards vulnerable groups, such as refugees from the Middle East, ethnic Roma, and Turks belonging to local Muslim communities. Nevertheless, one relatively new political actor pretending to represent the interests of the patriot voters managed to double its seats in the parliament from 13 to 27: the far-right parties Vazrazhdane (Revival). However, so far, their leader Kostadin Kostadinov and MPs, who consider themselves a future ruling alternative, have not been involved in Islamophobic activities.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

There is a tendency in recent years towards a decrease in the number of physical attacks against representatives of the Muslim community and Muslim shrines. Nevertheless, anti-Muslim and racist verbal assaults undertaken by leaders of far-right parties or their patriotic followers are not a rarity. The main law in Bulgaria banning discrimination based on religion, race, and ethnicity is the Protection against Discrimination Act (PADA).² The organ established under PADA as an independ-

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1. This group consists of immigrants in transit to Western Europe and former university students who came to the country during the communist period.
 2. https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7046/file/Bulgaria_anti-discrimination_act_2003_2006_am.pdf, (Access date: 4 March 2024).

ent collegiate semi-judicial authority with adjudicating powers exercising control over its implementation is the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD). It is worth mentioning that two of its nine current members, Baki Hasanov Hyuseinov (Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Policy, 2006-2009), a member since 2012, and Sabrie Tayfi Sapundzhieva (Deputy Minister of Justice, 2005-2009, 2013-2014), a member since 2017,³ are Muslims. Discrimination based on belief and religion is hard to prove, which perhaps explains why the majority of Muslims in Bulgaria do not expect their rights to be defended and restrain from reporting them. In the list of scheduled open monthly meetings of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination for 2023, we find the names of at least four Muslim complainants claiming that they were subjected to religious, ethnic, or multiple discrimination: Samir Otman (7 November 2023), Ismail Siderov (19 October 2023), Sevgin Sefer Shevked (15 November 2023), and Sayde Mehmed Derian (23 November 2023). Since the CPAD did not release its yearly decisions report, it is hard to determine the circumstances that led to the filing of these complaints and which of the cases were related to Islamophobic acts undertaken by the defendants; however, the names and the party affiliated with the defendants speak for themselves: VMRO – Bulgarian National Movement vice-chairmen Aleksandar Sidi, Iskren Veselinov, and Angel Dzhambazki, a member of the European Parliament.⁴ As a matter of fact, not a single of the last years' defendants related to similar cases (Ataka leader Volen Siderov from Alfa 2018 Foundation, VMRO leaders Krasimir Karakachanov and Angel Dzhambazki, NFSB leader Valeri Simeonov, and Dancho Hadjiev and Petyo Georgiev from Skat OOD)⁵ was punished. In the course of the same year, for instance, the 3rd Specialized Permanent Trial Chamber of the CPAD dealing with complaints based on “personal situation, nationality, citizenship, origin, religion and belief” has refused to initiate an investigation procedure 48% (28 decisions) of the complaints of discrimination. The primary reason for this average was the inability of the complainants to present minimal evidence indicating possible violations of the Law on Discrimination. Meanwhile, 39% (17 decisions) of proceedings based on Art. 52 of the Anti-Discrimination Act were terminated, and 9% (5 decisions) of the cases are still pending.⁶

3. <http://www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com/layout/index.php/za-nas/chlenowe>, (Access date: 15 January 2024).
4. <https://www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com/layout/index.php/otkriti-zasedaniq/archive-zasedaniq>, <https://www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com/layout/images/stories/2015/graphic/%D0%93%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%A4%D0%98%D0%9A%20%D0%97%D0%90%D0%A1%D0%95%D0%94%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%AF%20%D0%93%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%96%D0%94%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%98%20%D0%9D%D0%9E%D0%95%D0%9C%D0%92%D0%A0%D0%98%202023.pdf>, p. 3, 4, 6 (Access date: 15 January 2024).
5. See Aziz Nazmi Şakir: Islamophobia in Bulgaria: National Report 2022, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2022, p. 135.
6. <https://kzd-nondiscrimination.com/layout/images/stories/2015/otchet/KZD-ot4et-2022.pdf>, p. 19 (Access date: 15 January 2024).

On 18 January 2023, the defense of a PhD thesis titled “Social Aspects and Prevention of Radicalization among Roma in Pazardzhik and Plovdiv Regions” took place in Sofia. The dissertation prepared by Daniela Doneva Dimitrova was discussed and approved by a scientific jury at the departmental council of the Ground Forces Department of the Command – Staff Faculty of the “Georgi Stoykov Rakovski” Military Academy.⁷ The leading research hypothesis read as follows, “Conflict situations are possible in Bulgaria based on the relationship between Christianity and Islam with the following possible outcomes: it is very likely that a conflict situation will turn into a national conflict and cover the whole country. A prerequisite for the realization of this hypothesis is the fact that the sentiments among the ‘majority’ and the ‘minority’ are equally negative, and there are interested groups of people in Bulgaria and beyond, that it should be destabilized.”⁸ The hypothesis was supported by Prof. Eng. Stoyko Stoykov at Vasil Levski National Military University in Veliko Tarnovo, who wrote reviews evaluating the thesis.⁹ Among the scientific contributions listed by the latter, one deserves special attention: “The existing theory of the contemporary content of jihad and jihadism is enriched.”¹⁰ According to Dimitrova, one of the reasons for the radicalization of a part of the Muslim community in Bulgaria is “Greater Jihad: the spiritual effort that every Muslim must make in order to observe the laws of religion and the canons of the Quran.” The author continues, “It is his duty to constantly maintain a strong religious faith that will enable him to maintain himself as a true Muslim.”¹¹ According to this claim, being a good Muslim causes radicalization. So, it comes as no surprise that the doctoral student highlights the following indicators of radicalization regarding some of the Roma communities in Central Bulgaria: “Changes in appearance; The adoption of a characteristic Salafi way of dressing; Veiling of women, including little girls, whose parents have accepted the radical version of Islam. Men – the formation of specific beards, without moustaches and characteristic clothes (gallabiyah); It is necessary to emphasize that external marks are the end, not the beginning, of the radicalization process.”¹²

Employment

For 2023, there was no data issued by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD) or any other state equality body concerning discrimination cases in the Bulgarian job market based on being Muslim.¹³

7. <https://rncd.bg/daniela-dimitrova/>, (Access date: 31 January 2024).

8. <https://rncd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/avtoreferat.pdf>, p. 6, (Access date: 31 January 2024); I preserve the wording of the cited dissertation abstract in its English version.

9. <https://rncd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Stoykov.pdf>, p. 3, (Access date: 31 January 2024).

10. *Ibid.*, p. 7, (Access date: 31 January 2024).

11. <https://rncd.bg/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/avtoreferat.pdf>, p. 28-29, (Access date: 31 January 2024).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

13. <https://www.kzd-nondiscrimination.com/layout/index.php/component/content/article/2347>,

Education

In 2023, the Bulgarian education system continued to reproduce the image of the country's "historical enemy": Muslim Ottomans enslaving Christian Bulgarians and forcibly converting large groups from the population to Islam. Inevitably, Muslim students attending classes in which their ancestors are depicted as grinning janissaries armed with yataghans, and tax collectors forcing Christian families to pay their "blood-tax," are prone to develop a guilt complex. In this regard, the roots of the Islamophobic approach are deeply implanted in the history and literature-related subjects taught in Bulgarian elementary and high schools. Despite the total revision of all school curricula after the end of the communist era, history textbooks regarding the Ottoman period still preserve most of their Islamophobic characteristics. The students are introduced only to nameless figures of sultans, janissaries, Muslim fanatics, etc., acting in a continuum, spread over the whole Bulgarian territory for a five-centuries-long period. This fact results in establishing the mindset in students of a trivial collective image of Muslims as uncivilized conquerors and bloodthirsty oppressors.

Politics

On 15 March 2023, neither a government representative nor any political party or civil society organization commemorated the International Day to Combat Islamophobia; accordingly, no media outlet mentioned this date on any occasion.



Figure 1: Supporters of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip gathered in the center of Sofia despite the ban by mayor Yordanka Fandakova, October 13, 2023.¹⁴

14. <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/fandukova-palestinsko-shestvie-zabrana/32635839.html> (Photographer: Veselin Borishev), (Access date: 1 April 2024).

On 13 October 2023, Sofia Municipality banned a procession organized by the Palestinian Committee for the Defense of Jerusalem in Bulgaria. Despite the ban, a protest was held in the vicinity of the National Palace of Culture in the center of the capital. (Fig. 1) The ban was imposed by the mayor Yordanka Fandakova based on reports from the State Agency for National Security and the Ministry of the Interior. The Prosecutor's Office announced it would be uncompromising in exercising its powers to ensure public order. According to the office, there was more frequent use of hate speech in the recent past and "calls for radical actions based on religious and ethnic grounds, including radical Islam."¹⁵

Regardless of the data showing the human impact on Palestinians resulting from Israel's genocidal practices of carpet bombing, starvation, denial of water, and ethnic cleansing, not a single party in Bulgaria has expressed a position against the killing of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip.

On 16 July 2023, Krystian Szkwerek, a representative of the group European Conservatives and Reformists for Bulgaria and the foundation Conservative Society, posted on his Facebook wall, which is followed by 128,000 people, his impressions from a visit to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, using several Islamophobic expressions.

One visit to the pearl of Christianity – Hagia Sophia – was enough for me to understand just how insignificant the division within our faith is against the background of what happens when something completely external, like Islam, arrives... For three years now one of the wonders of the world has again been desecrated and reduced to a humiliating state. As it was during the Ottoman Empire. Especially humiliating for all of us – Christians, its creators and successors. In 2020, for the first time in 85 years as a museum, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque... The first thing that happens when you enter the temple is an amazing, heavy and painful blow. No, not an emotional or spiritual blow – a physiological one. You are hit by a wall of stench of sweaty feet, dirt and tallow. Of appalling human filth. Because taking off shoes in mosques is mandatory. And the beautiful, mosaic floor is completely covered with a cheap carpet-imitating fabric. This carpet is heavily soaked with the sweat and filth of thousands of dirty, damp feet, as the Muslims like to take off their socks as well. And no, don't explain to me at all that they wash their feet outside... There, in front of you today, a tormented temple rises in its majesty and dignity. Scarred, desecrated, with amazing and detailed elements and frescoes hidden behind cheap and ugly screens and inscriptions from the Koran... The view is like one of those classic paintings of barbarians in the ruins of a great civilization. And that's exactly it... I've always been extremely respectful of other religions and churches, especially the

15. "Столична община забрани шествие в подкрепа на Палестина" ("Sofia Municipality Bans March in Support of Palestine"), 13 October 2023, in: <https://www.mediapool.bg/stolichna-obshtina-zabrani-shestvie-v-podkrepa-na-palestina-news352260.html>, (Access date: 1 April 2024).

Abrahamic ones... But with regard to Hagia Sophia, I'll tell you that I don't care at all if I offend someone's feelings or religion...

The text was published the following day by the site Bulletin.bg under the following offensive title citing a sentence from the text: "What Is Probably the Greatest Christian Temple Has Been Turned into Utter Hogwash."¹⁶ (Fig. 2)

Кристиян Шкварек
17 Temmuz 2023 · 🌐

Навърх 969 години от Великата Схизма се озовах тъкмо там, където се е случила - в Цариград.

Едно посещение до перлата на Християнството - „Света София“, бе достатъчно да разбере колко точно незначително е разделението вътре във вярата ни на фона на това, което се случва, когато нещо напълно външно, като Исляма, пристигне.

Предупреждавам, че ще бъда изключително директен, едностранчив и неуважителен.

Казано с две думи: от три години насам едно от чудесата на света е отново осквернено и сведено до унизително състояние. Както беше по време на османската империя. Особено унизително за всички нас - християните, неговите създатели и наследници.

През 2020-та, за първи път от 85 години като музей, "Света София" бе превърната в джамия. Ще ви разкажа какво точно значи това и как изглежда в очите на един християнин.

Първото, което се случва, когато влезеш в храма, е изумителен, тежък и болезнен удар. Не, не емоционален или духовен удар - физиологичен. Удря те стена от смрад на потни крака, кир и лой. На потресваща човешка нечистота. Защото, бидейки джамия, събуването е задължително. А прекрасният, мозайков под е покрит изцяло с евтин плат, имитиращ килим. Този килим е обилно напоен с потта и кирта на хиляди мръсни, влажни крака, тъй като мюсюлманите държат да си събуят и чорапите. И не, въобще не ми обяснявайте, че навън са си измили задължително краката. Елате и помиришете, елате и вижте мазните петна по килима от всичката човешка, мъртва кожа от стъпала, поленнала по него.

Пробиваш си път през стената от смрад и влизаш в същинския храм. Там, където езически владетели са падали в захлас от видяното, достатъчен да ги накара да се покръстят. Там, пред теб днес се извисява в своето величие и достолепие един измъчен храм. Изчегъртан, оскверняван, с изумителни и детайлни елементи и фрески, прикрити зад евтини и грозни паравани и надписи от Корана.

Минаваш по пътя, по който са минавали Юстиниан Велики и безброй императорски и църковни процесии, а днес потни индонезийски чичковци лежат на пода и дремят с босите си крака до колоните. Гледката е като от онези класически картини на варварите в руините на велика цивилизация.

И е точно това.

Стигаш до там, където би трябвало да е олтарът. На мястото му се молят мюсюлманите, а тъкмо там, над тях, е известната мозайка на Богородица с младенца. Днес - покрита, сякаш срамно, сякаш да не гледа, с бели чаршафи. Но недостатъчно покрита - виждам между два чаршафа част от лицето ѝ, гледаща мюсюлманите под нея. И случващото се в храма ѝ. Хваща ме срам и решавам да изляза.

Винаги съм бил изключително уважителен към другите религии и църкви, особено аврамическите такива. Няма как иначе - роден и вярващ католик в православна страна, предразполага към разбиране и уважение към другите вери.

Но по отношение на "Света София" ще ви кажа, че въобще не ми дреме ако обидя нечии чувства или религия. Съжалвам, но това, на което е обрнат може би най-великият християнски храм е пълна свинщина. Грозна, занемарена, умишлено чегъртана, миришеща на крака. Не ми дреме, че вашата традиция или обичай е такава. Чез въ вашите храмове "е така". Това не е ваш храм. Наш е.

Христос гледа, но не само от една от мозайките, които сте се опитали да заличите.

4,5 B 683 547

Beğen Yorum Yap Gönder Paylaş

Figure 2: The conservative reformist Krystian Szkwarek sharing his impressions from a visit to Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and using anti-Muslim hate speech on his Facebook wall.¹⁷

On 16 December 2023, Szkwarek demonstrated how “respectful of other religions” he really is during his participation in the program “Geopolitics with Simeon Ivanov” broadcast on the national TV channel Kanal 1 dedicated to the integration of immigrants in Europe and multiculturalism. While disagreeing with anthropologist Zhana Tsoneva, he stated, “The problem is that the emigrants are Muslims... Why shouldn't it be a problem that Europe will become Islamized?... The main problem is that Europe is being filled with people from the Maghreb and the Middle East, people who are Mus-

16. <https://bulletin.bg/shkwarek-tova-na-koeto-e-obarnat-mozhe-bi-nay-velikiat-hristianski-hram-e-palna-svinstina/>, (Access date: 17 July 2023).

17. <https://www.facebook.com/kr.szkwarek>, (Access date: 16 July 2023).

lims. (France-Belgium-Netherlands)... The Islamic area is superimposed on the European one.... Europe is filled with only one specific profile of people: Arabs-Muslims...”¹⁸

Media

Unlike politicians, who are centers of attention for journalists and NGOs, media is rarely subjected to public censure and it never comes under the law for “innocent” offenses such as the use of Islamophobic speech. The war in the Gaza Strip that followed the terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the arguable ways Bulgarian media organs reflected it in the last three months of 2023, brought before viewers a bunch of chosen “experts” and “public figures” touring programs and podcasts to present the armed conflict and the ensuing humanitarian crisis as a normal sequence. None of them blamed Zionism or criticized the use of disproportionate force against innocent Palestinians.

On 4 November 2023, Prof. Vladimir Chukov, a Middle East expert, during his participation in what is perhaps the most watched podcast in Bulgaria “2&200” (with almost 155,000 views and 300 comments only on YouTube of this very episode) called the prophet Muhammad “The first anti-Semite.” (Fig. 3)

They [Gazans] have been taught all their lives to hate the Jews from the bottom of their souls... In 2005, when I wrote my big doctorate, 34% of the young people in Gaza dreamed of becoming suicide bombers... By birth, entering school and university – they hate the Jews. My thesis is that this hatred is age-old. Millennial. Immediately, a Muslim will tell me: “Well, it’s not true.” I’ve written dissertations, I’ve researched these things, let’s be honest!... Muhammad returns to Medina and begins to persecute the Jewish tribes, because he suspects them of being informers of the Gentiles... There were no Christians there then. If there had been Christians, surely this attitude would have been towards Christians as well. But there were no Christians in Medina; i.e., it is part of the Sharia... Prophet Muhammad is the first anti-Semite... The word “Jews” is mentioned nine times in the Koran and they are all frauds, thieves, robbers...

When asked, “Is it possible to avoid the huge number of innocent victims?” Chukov replied, “I realize that the people of Palestine are hostages of Hamas... What can Israel do in this respect, because the whole thing is becoming very fuzzy and gray?” Instead of answering the question, the guest started talking about the high birth rate in Gaza and concluded, “There is a media war going on right now that there were 8,000 civilian casualties. Who submits this information, Hamas submits it. We don’t trust Putin, why should we trust Hamas?”¹⁹

18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5L9cyXm3lsE&t=1323s> 9 December 2023: Are Immigrants Taking over Europe? - Part 1, Geopolitics with Simeon Ivanov, Ep. 8, (Access date: 16 March 2024).

19. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isKSPcbSTAo>: 2&200podcast: Israel and Hamas with Prof. Vladimir Chukov, Ep. 241, (Access date: 16 January 2024).



Figure 3: Vladimir Chukov, a Middle East expert, during the podcast “2&200” called Prophet Muhammad “The first anti-Semite.”²⁰

On 12 December 2023, David Levi, introduced as an analyst “directly affected by the tragedy of war,” during his participation in one of the most popular podcasts hosted by the well-known journalist Martin Karbowski (with 205,000 subscribers), on the subject of what is happening in the Gaza Strip, in front of a huge audience (more than 68,000 views and more than 2,000 comments so far) articulated unacceptable anti-Muslim hate speech. (Fig. 4)



Figure 4: David Levi in the TV studio of Eurocom channel called the Gaza Strip the “State of Hamas.”²¹

20. Ibid.

21. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23i3OyNwpn8>, 10 October 2023, (Access date: 16 June 2024).

The Ministry of Education of Palestine has been teaching children in Gaza since 2007 that all non-Muslims are animals and pigs and they must be slaughtered... The Israeli army is the most humane army in the world... We fight the war with tweezers... 15,000 are the victims, but according to Ahmed with the kufiyah, who called himself the minister of health... If the Arabs win the war, there will be no Israel. If Israel wins it will be peace... Eliminating Israel is one of the intermediate goals. The goal is then to remove this arrowhead of Western civilization from the Middle East so that there is no obstacle to enter Europe. Their goal is Bulgaria, their goal is Spain, their goal is England, France and Germany, their goal is to subjugate the whole world...²²

In 2023, the most active “provider” of anti-Muslim hate speech in Bulgaria was the television channel Skat Television. This comes as no surprise since the latter is owned by the far-right party Conservative Bulgaria. The list of cases in which anti-Muslim discourse has been used in different programs and podcasts through the year is too long, and we will confine ourselves to mentioning only few examples. On 30 October, on its YouTube channel, Skat Television launched a podcast with the participation of a couple of program presenters from its television channel who have been cited in previous Islamophobia reports: Lyubomir Zhelev from “Along the Bosphorus” and Nikolay Pankov from “Unveiling.” (Fig. 5) Most of the episodes of the podcast named “Zhelev and Pankov” contain accusations against the Chief Mufti of conspiring with the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) against Bulgarian state interests. Other usual suspects involved in this conspiracy theory are the President of the Republic of Türkiye and the Turkish Embassy in Sofia, headed by Ambassador Aylin Sekizkök. The latter is accused without any evidence of being part of a system to impose Islamic hegemony on the Balkans and Europe. Here are some excerpts taken from the first four episodes released in the period 31 October-27 November 2023.

Pankov (P): I believe that Erdogan will announce the end of the republic and declare a caliphate on the 100th anniversary of the republic... The Turkish-Islamic minority there [in Greece] is not so much repressed, but kind of limited by the authorities in order to prevent the spread of Turkish state political Islam, which, by the way, I equate with Islamism... The Islamism that associated with a militant doctrine has nothing to do with Islam, which is a religion of peace.

...it is very important to me what SANS [The State Agency for National Security] does, what the president does, what our services do, because this [what the Chief Mufti does] is not only false and slanderous, but also a policy of opportunism...

Zhelev (Z): ...For division!

22. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR5-0BDF9WU>: The Goal of Hamas is the Destruction of Israel - David Levy in the Studio of Martin Karbowski, (Access date: 16 June 2024).

P: ... and for opposition, which opposition may one day be armed.²³

The Turkish Diyanet with the imams... Now, these warriors are in Europe and consolidating over 8 million young revolutionaries... Europe is not capable of opposing this [threat].²⁴

Turkey, in its capacity as a regional power with a predominantly Muslim population, is portrayed as a constant threat not only to its Balkan neighbors, but also to the whole of Europe. Given the presence of Turkish and Muslim communities here [Europe], the activities of the Diyanet are spread across this entire territory [Europe] and, despite their peaceful nature, cause concern among most local patriotic organizations, who use media channels to trumpet the impending danger.

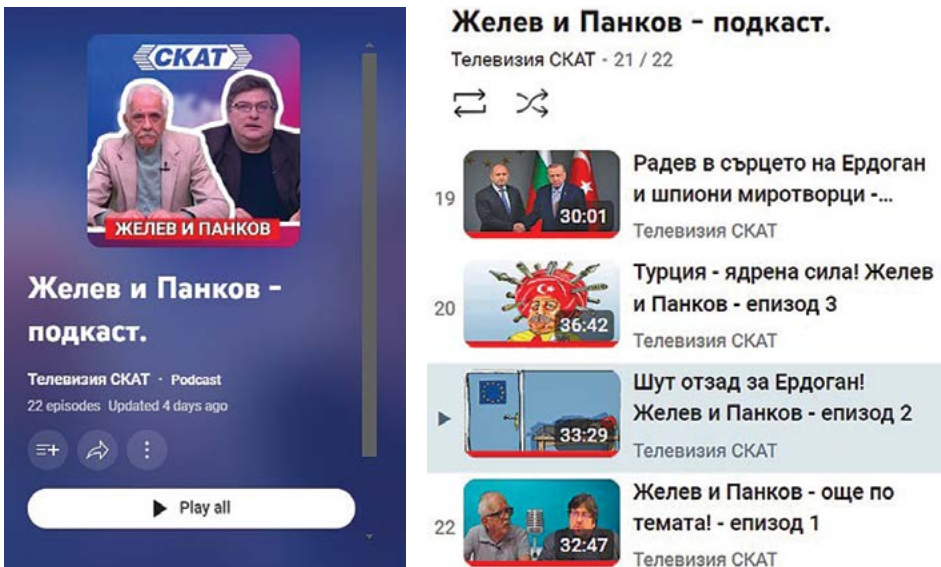


Figure 5: A couple of screenshots from the YouTube channel of Skat Television's podcast "Zhelev and Pankov" showing the titles of the episodes released in 2023: 1: "More on the Topic!"; 2: "Jester from behind for Erdogan!"; 3: "Turkey - ANuclear Power!"; 4: "Radev in the Heart of Erdogan and Spy Peacekeepers."²⁵

Justice System

In 2023, the Chief Muftiate continued to search for legal ways to litigate its recognition as the successor to all pre-1949 Muslim religious communities for the purpose of reclaiming properties, including eight mosques, two schools, two bathhouses, and a cemetery seized by the former communist governments. However, one by one the ownership of such waqf properties passes under the jurisdiction of the state or the municipalities where they are located. At the end of 2022, the judges of the Plovdiv Court of

23. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRbaqkW1r4vJy2OCpPEhu_VF20b25uPIO, (Access date: 15 March 2024).

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

Appeal rejected the ownership claim by the Chief Muftiate of Kurshun Mosque (built 1485) in the city of Karlovo noting that it was a cult building of historical importance declared an immovable cultural heritage.²⁶ As a result, after a nine-year-long juridical battle, the mosque and its vicinity were granted to the municipality, which only three weeks later, on 16 January 2023, organized a ceremonial turning of the first sod of a project that would turn the iconic mosque building into a gallery of important and valuable antiquities. During the event attended by a number of MPs from the 48th Parliament and uniformed generals from the Bulgarian army, the mayor of Karlovo, Dr. Emil Kabaivanov, stated, “We have been working on the project for several years, but the approval procedures were difficult. It took a whole year for the National Institute of Immoveable Cultural Heritage to agree on the design.”²⁷ From these words, it becomes clear that the municipality leadership knew in advance that it would win the case and took the necessary administrative steps to activate the project long before the court ruling. It is not clear how an official institution such as the National Institute of Immoveable Cultural Heritage can start a procedure for approving a project foreseeing a radical transformation of a historical site whose legal status is unspecified.

On the same date, 16 January 2023, the Chairman of the Supreme Muslim Council, Vedat Ahmed, used his Facebook page to express his disappointment by the above news. (Fig. 6)

The Emblematic Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo Becomes a Gallery for Valuable Archaeological Discoveries: The mosques have been built only for the sake of mentioning Allah’s name... And what the Municipality of Karlovo is doing under the plausible pretext of “respect” and “preservation” is an act of complete dishonor, demolition, theft, Islamophobia and an attempt to stop the mentioning of Allah. This is happening in democratic Bulgaria, which is a member of the European Union. This is a mosque built more than 530 years ago by Karlizade Ali Bey, who was the founder of the city that bears his name. Where are Levski’s covenants?!

The deadline for the project aimed at the transformation of the mosque building into a gallery was December 2023. After its completion, Vedat Ahmed’s subsequent reaction in Facebook read, “In yet another mosque of ours, we [Muslims] will now enter as tourists and pay an entrance fee, as we already do in Stara Zagora.”²⁸ What cove-

26. Mahkeme, Karlovo’daki Kurşun Camii’nin Başmüftülüğe İade Edildiği Kararı Bozdu (The Court Canceled the Decision According to Which Kurshun Mosque in Karlovo Was Returned to the Chief Muftiate), in: <https://kircaalihaber.com/kircaali/-mahkeme-karlovodaki-kursun-camiinin-basmuftuluge-iade-edildigi-karari-bozdu-?fbclid=IwAR0SR9i0cfkv7Jx5w9gickDGXf9B4RqQItgTUx2UwzBF7yAyMB7QwRl5MM>, (Access date: 16 January 2023).

27. Емблематичната Куршум Джамиа в Карлово става галерия за ценни археологически открития (“The emblematic Kurshum Mosque in Karlovo Becomes a Gallery for Valuable Archaeological Discoveries”), in: <https://www.pbnovini.com/gradat/2023/emblematichnata-kurshum-dzhamiya-v-karlovo-stava-galeriya-za-tsenni-arheologicheski-otkritiya-video/> 16 January 2016, (Access date: 22 January 2024).

28. In 2013, Eski Jami Mosque (built 1408/09) in Stara Zagora was converted into a “Museum of Religions.”

nants of Levski's are you talking about, when next to Levski's house, you do not keep them... But remember that whatever you transform it into, it is still a mosque and will remain so in our hearts..."²⁹ In both posts, the Chairman of the Supreme Muslim Council referred to Bulgaria's most respected national hero Vasil Levski (1837-1873), who fought against the Ottoman rule and held that all religious and ethnic groups in a free Bulgaria – whether Bulgarians, Turks, Jews, or others – should enjoy equal rights. Levski reiterated that the Bulgarian revolutionaries fought against the sultan's government, not against the Turkish people and their religion: "We're not driving away the Turkish people nor their faith, but the emperor and his laws..."³⁰



Figure 6: Vedat Ahmed, Chairman of the Supreme Muslim Council, comments on his personal Facebook wall on the news about the transformation of the half-millennium-old Karlovo Mosque into a gallery.³¹

29. <https://www.facebook.com/vedat.ahmed>, (Access date: 22 April 2024).

30. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasil_Levski, (Access date: 25 June 2024).

31. <https://www.facebook.com/vedat.ahmed>, (Access date: 16 January 2024).

Internet

Due to widespread anti-Muslim stereotypes in Bulgarian society, in the last years, the internet has become an important space for those who want to express their Islamophobic attitudes. The comfort of remaining anonymous in the comments section of podcasts or other such media outlets, following news related to the tensions in the Middle East, Chief Muftiate initiatives, Muslim immigrants, or Türkiye, encourages the production of hate speech. Thousands of such comments can be found, which is proof not only of the high levels of “viral” Islamophobia, but also of the lack of will among the site moderators to control its free fluctuation throughout the year. Last but not least, only few Islamophobic comments are reported as something unacceptable.

In the following figure, there is a series of average comments of the above-described type. (Fig.7) These are found under a news related to the 7 October events in Gaza titled “ Hamas Attacks from All Sides Exactly 50 Years after the Yom Kippur War – What’s Next,” which was read by more than 34,000 readers.³² Only a couple of comments, numbers 9 and 33, of those cited below were deleted by moderators because of “offensive qualifications, racial, sexual, ethnic or religious slurs or calls for violence directed at specific individuals,” while the content of the rest clearly shows, that they also fall under this category. Those who liked these comments are several times more than those who disliked them, which is an indicator of the level of Islamophobia among readers.

No. 9: This time Israel must raze Gaza to the ground. Carpet bomb, then tanks. No mercy for these gypsies.

No. 33: Death and total extermination to Hamas, the remaining shepherds should be enslaved, and no mercy! Israel must reject this scumbag once and for all through hellish cruelty and tens of thousands of subhumans killed!

No. 37: Now a howl will start with pictures of collapsed Palestinian copters and butchered towels, but I don’t think that will stop them [presumably IDF], they will crush them all and purge everything from Hamas, they will not allow their genes to reproduce either – veiled bitches, gypsy kids, they will bomb everything until it stops moving.

No.42: Hey, there is no such a cunning scum like the Muslims!

No. 76: w1908 Petrov: I have had doubts about the behavior of Israel, but imagining the bloodthirsty and maniacal Arabs who will never give up the idea of a Caliphate and who do not care about their own lives and the lives of their children, let alone for the others’, I have no doubt that Israel must crush them. They are attack-

32. Petar Karaboev, “Хамас” напада от всички страни точно 50 години след войната от Йом Кипур – какво следва” (Hamas Attacks from All Sides Exactly 50 Years after the Yom Kippur War – What’s Next), 7 October 2023, in: https://www.dnevnik.bg/sviat/2023/10/07/4536644_hamas_napada_ot_vsichki_strani_tochno_50_godini_sled/, (Access date: 7 October 2023 and 15 July 2024).

ing us quietly from all sides in Europe as well, thanks to the Trojan horse of mercy, the bomb is ticking.

No. 98: Gen. Kolev: 7 Oct 23: In front of the gates of the Muslim paradise, there is already a large line of Mumins [used as plural of a collective personal name for Muslims], waiting for a harem of maidens, promised to them by the imams during their lifetime. An even greater anarchy is expected these days, as more hordes of “martyrs” have already begun to arrive.³³

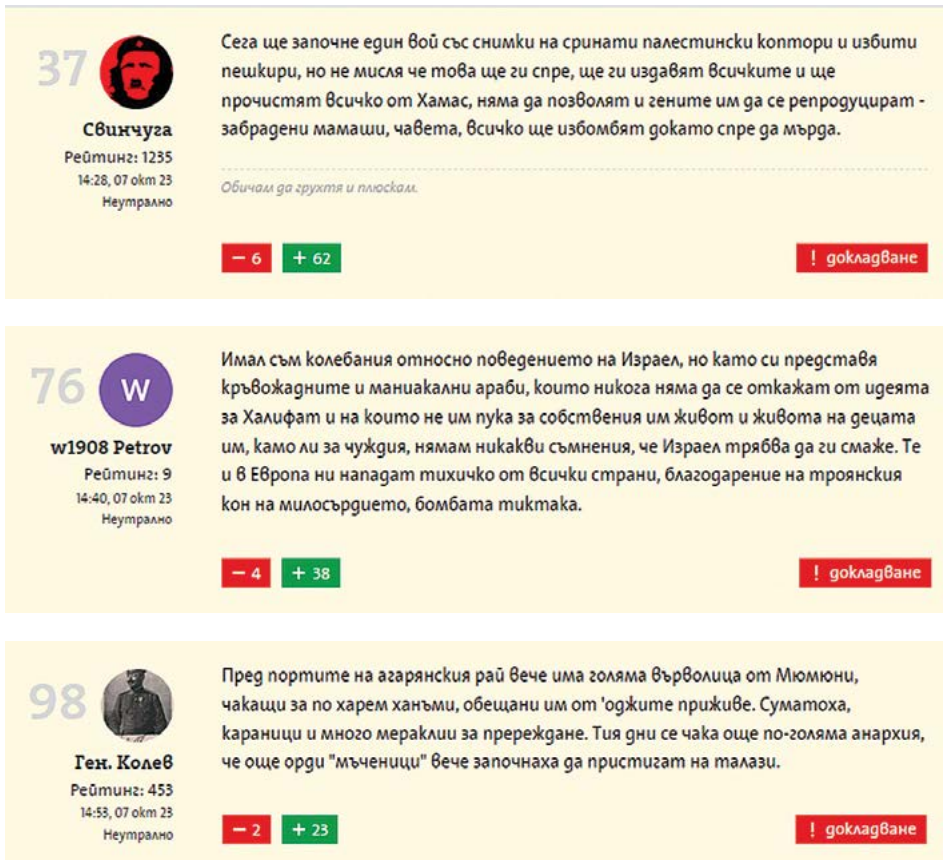


Figure 7: A series of Islamophobic comments under news about the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023.³⁴

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Major figures triggering Islamophobia in Bulgaria are the leaders of the far-right nationalistic parties and movements, including members of the European Parliament: Conservative Bulgaria (previously known as National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria), Bulgarian National Movement – VMRO, Ataka, Bulgarian National Union – New De-

33. https://www.dnevnik.bg/sviat/2023/10/07/4536644_hamas_napada_ot_vsichki_strani_tochno_50_godini_sled/comments, (Access date: 7 October 2023 and 15 July 2024).

34. Ibid.

mocracy, and National Resistance. They are backed by various channels for dissemination of anti-Muslim propaganda such as media organs either owned by their parties (such as Conservative Bulgaria's Skat Television and Ataka's Alfa TV) or daily presses.

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In 2023, there were no political initiatives to counter Islamophobia in Bulgaria. For decades, such a topic does not seem to exist at all for local politicians. Even in anti-hate speech forums of non-governmental organizations, Islamophobia is the least discussed topic, usually raised by a representative of the Chief Muftiate.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In 2023, anti-Muslim hate speech rather than physical attacks on Muslim citizens was prevalent in Bulgaria. There is a need for both official and non-governmental organizations to monitor politicians' and public figures' verbal behavior in the public space and enable the judiciary to take adequate action in cases dictated by Islamophobia. Educational institutions have to work towards creating an alternative narrative regarding Muslims' place in Bulgaria. Media organs should exert more sufficient efforts to change the negative image of Islam by broadcasting programs and articles discussing up-to-date Islamic issues, since lack of adequate knowledge about Islam enables the spread of biased stereotypes in the public domain.

Chronology

- **16 January 2023:** Three weeks after the Plovdiv Court of Appeal ruled that Kurshum Mosque in the city of Karlovo will not be managed by the Chief Muftiate, but by the municipality, the latter announced a project aimed at the transformation of the shrine into a gallery. By the end of the year, the transformation was a fact.
- **19 January 2023:** A PhD thesis titled "Social Aspects and Prevention of Radicalization among Roma in Pazardzhik and Plovdiv Regions" foreseeing a major conflict between the Christian majority and the Muslim minority in the country was accepted without objections at the "Georgi Stoykov Rakovski" Military Academy in Sofia.
- **13 October 2023:** Sofia Municipality banned a procession organized by the Palestinian Committee for the Defense of Jerusalem in Bulgaria. Despite the ban, a peaceful protest was held by tens of citizens in the vicinity of the National Palace of Culture in the center of the capital. The ban was based on reports from the State Agency for National Security and the Ministry of the Interior.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
CROATIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Sažetak

Kao i proteklih godina, islamofobiju u Hrvatskoj obilježio je manji broj incidenata koji ukazuju na različite izazove s kojima su se muslimani susretali, te različite utjecaje geopolitičkih zbivanja i kretanja na diskriminaciju i uskraćivanje ljudskih prava temeljem religijskog identiteta.

Europa i svijet od 7. listopada 2023. bilježe drastičan rast islamofobnih i antisemitskih incidenata iako ovo nije vjerski sukob i rat. Dok u Palestini divlja rat, u Europi i svijetu divlja antisemitizam i islamofobija. Sve brojniji slučajevi antisemitizma i islamofobije do Hrvatske tijekom 2023. nisu doprli. U kontekstu rata na području Bliskog istoka, u Hrvatskoj je zamijećen porast govora mržnje na internetu, ponajviše u komentarima na članke u elektroničkim medijima te komentarima na društvenim mrežama. Riječ je o stereotipima i predrasudama o muslimanima iz tog dijela svijeta, a primjetna i polarizaciju društva nametanjem biranja strana. Pri tome i kritiziranje i osuđivanje nasilja i genocida te zauzimanje za osnovna ljudska prava Palestinaca često zna biti protumačeno kao aktivnost antisemitskog predznaka.

Islamofobija je u političkim krugovima uglavnom bila dijelom antimigrantske retorike bazirane na jačanju straha kroz manipuliranje pojmom sukoba civilizacija i pitanjem sigurnosti. Neizravno promicanje antimuslimanske retorike se moglo naslutiti uz antimigrantsku retoriku, a u slučaju izravnog dijeljenja negativnog stava prema muslimanskim govornici su napominjali da pri tome ne misle na muslimane u Hrvatskoj koji se očito ne uklapaju u stereotipe i predrasude koje imaju prema muslimanima s drugih područja.

Unatoč rastu islamofobije u Europi i svijetu, položaj pripadnika Islamske vjerske zajednice u Hrvatskoj ostao nepromijenjen zahvaljujući njezinoj dugoj tradiciji.

Executive Summary

As in previous years, Islamophobia in Croatia was marked by a small number of incidents that highlight various challenges faced by Muslims, the different influences of geopolitical events and movements on discrimination, and the denial of human rights based on religious identity.

Since October 7, 2023, Europe and the world have seen a drastic increase in Islamophobic and anti-Semitic incidents, even though the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a religious conflict. While war rages in Palestine, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are rampant in Europe and around the world. However, the growing number of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes in 2023 did not reach Croatia. In the context of the war in the Middle East, there has been an observed increase in hate speech online in Croatia, primarily in comments on articles in online media and social media posts. This hate speech includes stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims from that part of the world, and there is a noticeable polarization of society, with a tendency to force people to take sides. Additionally, criticism and condemnation of violence and genocide, as well as advocacy for the basic human rights of Palestinians, are often misinterpreted as activities with anti-Semitic undertones.

In political circles, Islamophobia has mostly been part of anti-immigrant rhetoric, which is based on amplifying fear through manipulation of the concept of a clash of civilizations and security concerns. The indirect promotion of anti-Muslim rhetoric could be inferred from anti-immigrant rhetoric, and in cases of directly expressing negative views toward Muslims, speakers often emphasized that they did not mean Muslims in Croatia, who “obviously” do not fit the stereotypes and prejudices they hold toward Muslims from other regions.

Despite the growth of Islamophobia in Europe and the world, the position of members of the Islamic religious community in Croatia has remained unchanged, thanks to its long tradition.

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Croatia

Type of Regime: Democratic republic

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

Ruling Parties: Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)

Opposition Parties: Social Democratic Party (SDP), Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret), The Bridge (Most), We Can! – Political Platform (Možemo! – politička platforma), Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS), and others

Last Elections:

2020 Presidential Elections: Zoran Milanović won 52.66% of the vote against 47.34% that went to Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in the second round.

2020 Legislative Elections: HDZ–HLSL–HDS–HDSSB: 66 seats; SDP–HSS–GLAS–IDS–HSU–SNAGA–PGS: 41 seats; DPMŠ–HKS–HRAST–BzH–ZL–SU: 16 seats; Bridge of Independent Lists (Most): 8 seats; Green–Left (Možemo!–RF–NL–ORaH): 7 seats; SIP–Smart–Focus: 3 seats; Croatian People’s Party – Liberal Democrats: 1 seat; People’s Party – Reformists: 1 seat; National Minorities: 8 seats

Total Population: 3,871,833 (2021)

Major Languages: Croatian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Statistics are made available in the Croatian Ombudswoman’s annual survey “Report of the Ombudswoman for 2023 - Analysis of the state of human rights in Croatia”¹ and “Research on Attitudes and Levels of Awareness about Discrimination and Its Forms in 2022”²

Major Religions (% of Population): Catholics (78.79%), No religion (4.71%), Orthodox (3.32%), Muslims (1.32%), No answer (1.72%). When comparing the 2011 and 2021 censuses, the number of Muslims fell from 1.47% to 1.32%; the number of Catholics fell from 86.28% to 78.97%; and that of Orthodox from 4.44% to 3.32%. The share of non-believers/atheists in Croatia increased from 3.81% to 4.71%.

Muslim Population (% of Population): 50,981 (1.32%) (2021)

1. Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia, The annual report of the Ombudswoman for 2023 (March 2023), retrieved November 23, 2023 from: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/interaktivno-izvjesce-za-2023/>
2. Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia, Research on attitudes and level of awareness about discrimination and forms of discrimination in 2022. (February 2023), retrieved November 23, 2023 from: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/istrazivanje-o-stavovima-i-razini-svijesti-o-diskriminaciji-i-pojavnim-oblicima-diskriminacije-2022/>

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Community in Croatia (Islamska zajednica u Hrvatskoj)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Center for Cultural Dialogue (CCD), Human Rights House Zagreb, Are you Syrious?, D-team

Far-Right Parties: N/A

Far-Right Movements: N/A

Far-Right Militant Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

The integrative role of the Islamic community in Croatian society has been present for a long time and known to most. Even at gatherings where the Islamic community is absent, others kindly mention the significant role and status that the Islamic community enjoys in Croatian society in terms of strengthening interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and influencing mutual respect and appreciation among Muslims and the majority Catholic population and members of other religions and beliefs in Croatia. On the one hand, Muslims rely on the Islamic community because they see it as a leader in representing their rights and interests as a religious minority, which the signed “Agreement on Issues of Common Interest between the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Islamic Community in Croatia,” ensures. On the other hand, citizens of Croatia who are members of other religions and beliefs see the Islamic community as an interlocutor and partner in the integration of foreigners into Croatian society, strengthening the welcoming society and an important factor of security, peace, and dialogue between members of different religious identities in Croatia.

Croatian policy makers see the good relations with the Islamic community in Croatia as a model that could be copied as a good practice for other European countries. This is even more relevant due to the unique position of the Islamic community, which gathers Muslims of different ethnic and national identities in Croatia, something that is not usual for Islamic communities in Europe, which are mostly divided by these prefixes.

Reports and appeals made by Muslims on discrimination on the basis of religion were sporadic. Assistance in reporting and protection against discrimination is mainly provided to all Croatian citizens by the Croatian Ombudswoman, who also keeps records on discrimination. The research for this national report addressing discrimination based on religion and freedom of belief was based on “The Report of the Ombudswoman for 2023 - Analysis of the state of human rights in Croatia.”³ The research findings regarding Islamophobia are discussed in detail in the Internet and Employment sections of this report.

Stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims are amplified by immigration, which has seen a significant increase in Croatia in recent years. Although stereotypes and prejudices are not discrimination, they can lead to it because they affect our behavior towards others. To reduce the former, it is important to raise awareness of the needs of different groups and the circumstances in which they live.

3. Ibid.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Since October 7, 2023, Europe and the world have seen a drastic increase in Islamophobic and anti-Semitic incidents. While war rages in Palestine, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are rampant in Europe and around the world. However, the growing number of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic cases in 2023 did not reach Croatia.

Employment

During 2023, the Office of the Ombudswoman received two inquiries regarding the possibility of allowing a headscarf to be worn by a civil servant of the Islamic faith in the workplace. As this concerns a potential case of religious discrimination, which has been the subject of numerous prior cases referred to the EU Court of Justice, the office provided general legal information and pointed out relevant case law.

The EU Court of Justice, based on previous cases, has concluded that a ban on wearing a headscarf arises from an internal rule of a private company that prohibits the visible display of all political, philosophical, or religious symbols in the workplace. This does not constitute direct discrimination based on religion or belief within the meaning of Directive 2000/78, as it applies equally to all employees of the company. However, the EU Court has not ruled out the possibility that such a ban could represent indirect discrimination if it is found that an apparently neutral obligation places individuals of a certain religion or belief at a disadvantage. Such differential treatment based on religion may be justified if it passes the proportionality test, which the EU Court clarified in the Achbita case ruling.

Thus, the EU Court suggests that a national court, in the event that an employer has an internal dress code rule that imposes an obligation of religious, political, and philosophical neutrality on workers, is required to conduct a proportionality test. In this context, a client's desire that services no longer be provided by an employee of the Islamic faith who wears a headscarf cannot be considered a genuine and determining occupational requirement.

In its ruling on November 28, 2023, in the case of *OP v. Commune d'Ans*, C-148/22, the EU Court, while examining the possibility for public administration to establish a completely neutral administrative environment and to ban its staff from wearing symbols that may reveal their religious beliefs, confirmed the criteria established in previous case law regarding internal neutrality rules for private employers. The Court concluded that these established criteria can similarly be applied in the public sector, which, through such a rule, establishes a 'neutral administrative environment.' Given the potentially conflicting rights of the employer and the employee, the decision on the justification of restrictions in each specific case will depend on which right or interest of the employer is at stake, taking into account whether the em-

ployer has internal dress code rules, how these rules are prescribed, and the purpose of these rules. In this context, unfavorable treatment of Muslim women who wear headscarves may constitute intersectional discrimination, as the grounds for discrimination based on religion and gender are inseparable in this instance and would not lead to unfavorable treatment of this group if considered separately.⁴

Another inquiry received by the Office of the Ombudman regarding the violation of the rights of Muslims in the workplace is the following:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you because I need help. My husband is a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina and is of the Islamic faith. He has been working in Croatia for more than 5 years. His employer is demanding a certificate of religious affiliation and claims that proof of it must be provided when signing an employment contract. On the day of Eid, his employer deducts one day from his annual leave.⁵

According to the Law on Holidays, Memorial Days, and Non-Working Days in the Republic of Croatia, employers are required to allow believers a non-working day for religious holidays, without any additional conditions that workers need to fulfill.

The employer's request for a certificate of religious affiliation and deducting a day from the worker's annual leave for Eid is contrary to the aforementioned law, which stipulates that this day is a non-working day, regardless of the use of annual leave.

In 2023, a Croatian citizen also requested clarification on the potential right to be absent from work on Fridays during the time of the Jumu'ah prayer. The regulations of the Republic of Croatia do not explicitly grant workers of Islamic or other faiths the right to a break for religious rituals or prayers. However, according to Article 73 of the Labor Law, an employee who works at least six hours a day is entitled to a break (rest period) of at least thirty minutes each working day, which can be used for religious worship.⁶

Education

In 2023, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) published a practical guide titled "Understanding Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes: Addressing the Security Needs of Muslim Communities," which describes how anti-Muslim hate crimes hinder Muslims' ability to express their identity freely, and create a sense of fear and insecurity within Muslim communities. The guide highlights positive practices in preventing such attacks and discrimination through the "New Neigh-

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

bors” project and recognizes Croatia as a positive example, noting that during 2017 and 2018, Croatia had mechanisms for data collection through which the police recorded anti-Muslim incidents and reported them to ODIHR for joint record-keeping and statistical purposes.

In a research paper by the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb titled “The Level of Islamophobia in Croatia Caused by the Paris Terrorist Attacks and the Migrant Crisis in 2015,” student Matea Radoš concludes that Islamophobia against immigrants shares a central position in the criminalization of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. The paper addresses two issues related to the consolidation of anti-migrant Islamophobia in Europe. The first point concerns a specific form of racism against Muslims, which materially and discursively constructs them as a race. Although this process falls into the category of cultural racism, there is also a component of biological (neo)racism in the idea that Muslim culture is rooted in nature and is thus constructed as the “Muslim race.” This component, which establishes the incompatibility of cultural diversity as something naturally fixed, is increasingly present and systematically combined with contemporary cultural racism. The second point relates to the consequences of Islamophobia on European societies. Its effects resonate across all immigrant populations, casting a shadow of suspicion and the threat of repression over them. At the same time, Islamophobia predisposes large segments of the European population to accept discrimination and anti-Muslim racism, thereby creating a serious problem of communication and interaction among populations. Based on the research conducted for this thesis, it is evident that respondents do not view members of the Islamic faith as a threat to Croatian society or Croatia itself and accept them, expressing compassion that they had to leave their own country in search of a better life. The author concludes that the attitude toward the Muslim population is a decisive test for European societies and the greatest challenge for anti-racism.

On June 2, 2023, the Center for Culture of Dialogue and the Islamic Community in Croatia organized a public forum titled “Islamophobia or Anti-Muslim Racism – What Is It?” to foster better understanding of the phenomenon of Islamophobia by both Muslims and non-Muslims. (Fig. 1) The forum was led by Đermana Kurić, an independent expert who has been studying the phenomenon for many years, including five years of work as an advisor on intolerance toward Muslims at ODIHR. Representatives from various government and public institutions, international and non-governmental organizations, as well as the general public, were informed that Islamophobia is a strategy in which a negative, stereotyped, and essentialized image of Muslims is used not only to manipulate the masses, but also to exclude Muslims from a common identity, which includes denying them access to shared resources and capital in a given society.



Figure 1: Poster for the public forum titled “Islamophobia or Anti-Muslim Racism – What Is It?”

Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=619369446898825&set=a.448325164003255&locale=hr_HR

Politics

In his essay “Islamophobia as the Anti-Semitism of the 21st Century,” author Karlo Mikić states,

It seems that the eyes of the interested public are fixated on any violent event, searching for a bearded Islamist barbarian to blame. For instance, Krešo Beljak, the president of the Croatian Peasant Party (HSS) and one of the most vocal self-proclaimed leftists among Croatians, commented on the hooligan riots in Dublin⁷ with resentment toward ‘the latest migrants’ who have moved to Europe in recent years and ‘who want to turn Europe into their cultural, if not religious, environment.’ Beljak calls these migrants extremists and blames them for ‘riots and insecurity in European cities,’ provoking and changing the environment ‘that has accepted them.’ Islamophobia and spreading anti-immigrant panic are nothing new for Beljak. A month earlier, he voiced his fear that Croatia could become a ‘hot spot’ for illegal migrants ‘who could flood our homeland in ways that none of us could imagine even in our

7. For the comments, see Krešo Beljak’s Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=900894631400488&set=a.394864245336865>

darkest nightmares,' and during the refugee crisis of 2015, he was convinced that the million migrants who then arrived in Europe were neither refugees nor economic migrants but colonizers of Europe.⁸

Islamophobia has recently entered the social spheres where in the earlier decades of the 21st century it had met with resistance. Thus, alongside the standard repertoire of right-wing paranoia, we increasingly see examples of Islamophobia among leftists and liberals. Islamophobic rhetoric is often linked with anti-immigrant policies. Mikić, in the same text, cites liberal Karlo Jurak, who refers to immigrants as "Europe's biggest problem."

But then he quickly moves from immigrants to characterizing Muslims as fifth-columnists not integrated into the 'political, social, and cultural frameworks of the native community,' who live in ghettos and 'their own parallel orders' where they refuse to accept 'the rules of the society they have entered' but are entrenched in the trenches of 'traditional cultural traits of the societies they come from,' and that their values 'inevitably clash with the modern achievements of European countries and liberal democracy.' Jurak anxiously asks 'how and for how long should we tolerate the intolerant' and 'why should we tolerate those who consider women to be inferior beings, who arrange marriages, who are in favor of expelling homosexuals, etc.?' Jurak considers all these phenomena characteristic of Muslims. Jurak relentlessly continues, claiming there is an 'undeniable connection between the increase in crime, especially attacks on vulnerable members of society (such as women, homosexuals, the elderly, people with disabilities, and children), and the increase and radicalization of the migrant population in a given area.'⁹

However, studies by various economists published in 2017,¹⁰ 2019,¹¹ and 2021 have shown that the million migrants who arrived to Germany during the so-called refugee crisis had no significant impact on raising crime rates in Germany nor on the likelihood that Germans would become victims of crime. Therefore, the argument that something is "often heard," used to scare the population in Croatia, holds little value, as depending on whether we follow studies on these phenomena or gossip groups and pages like those of the AfD on social media, we will come to completely opposite conclusions. The fear of Muslims as "foreign" is more pronounced in populations with less contact with Muslims and the fear itself is a bigger problem than any real issues of coexistence. From a practical perspective, it turns out that migrants

8. Karlo Mikić, "Islamofobija kao antisemitizam 21. stoljeća" H-alter.org (December 8, 2023), retrieved December 23, 2023, from Web page: <https://h-alter.org/svijet/islamofobija-kao-antisemitizam-21-stoljeca/>

9. Ibid.

10. Markus Gehrsitz, "Jobs, Crime, and Votes: A Short-Run Evaluation of the Refugee Crisis in Germany", IZA Institute of Labor Economics, January 22, 2017, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2903116

11. Yue Huang, "Immigration and Crimes Against Natives: The 2015 Refugee Crisis in Germany", IZA Institute of Labor Economics, July 29, 2019, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3427607

from Muslim countries are, on average, just as pragmatic as anyone else and, through facing sanctions, relatively quickly adapt to certain legal boundaries and prohibitions they may not have been accustomed to before.¹²

Member of Parliament Ivana Kekin (We Can! – Political Platform, Možemo!) publicly responded to and characterized the statement by the mayor of Sinj (The Bridge, Most) as Islamophobic.¹³ The mayor had stated, “We will have to unite in that area when uncontrolled migrants, including terrorists, start entering. They bring their wars and cultures, and they don’t care about us, nor does the state. If they start shooting at our people, we will have to respond in kind. One hair or fingernail of a child is more important to me than all the migrants. Half of them are terrorists.”¹⁴

On December 1, 2023, a Conference on Religious Freedoms was held in the Croatian Parliament, organized by the Croatia-Israel Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group. The leader of this group, Marijana Petir, highlighted the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and emphasized Croatia’s efforts to protect these fundamental rights both domestically and internationally.¹⁵ In the dialogue, whose importance was particularly emphasized by the conference organizers, the perspective of Muslims in Croatia and the world was absent, while participation by representatives of the Islamic community in Croatia and organizations promoting a culture of dialogue that are not of Christian heritage, was again non-existent. At a time of a sharp increase in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia globally due to the war in the Middle East, reporting a hostile attitude towards one religious group at the Conference on Religious Freedoms leaves an impression of bias. The promotion of interreligious dialogue at the conference becomes particularly absurd when direct and indirect statements that “anti-Semitism in Europe is of Islamic origin” go unchallenged.

Media

Certain online media platforms offer opportunities for critical commentary by experts, such as the reflection provided by the author of an article published on H-al-

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12. Karlo Mikić, “Islamofobija kao antisemitizam 21. stoljeća” H-alter.org (December 8, 2023), retrieved December 23, 2023, from Web page: <https://h-alter.org/svijet/islamofobija-kao-antisemitizam-21-stoljeca/>
 13. Nacional, “Ivana Kekin objasnila zašto je Mostova retorika izuzetno opasna: ‘I naši ljudi su išli trbuhom za kruhom...’”, Nacional.hr (October 27, 2023), retrieved December 20, 2023, from Web page: <https://www.nacional.hr/ivana-kekin-mostova-retorika-je-izuzetno-opasna-i-nasi-ljudi-su-isli-trbuhom-za-kruhom/>
 14. HRT, “Bulj najavljuje straže uz granicu: ‘Ako budu pucali, vratit ćemo’”, HRT.hr (October 24, 2023), retrieved December 21, 2023, from Web page: <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/hrvatska/bulj-poziva-vojsku-protiv-nezakonitih-ulazaka-migranata-11108952>
 15. Hrvatski sabor, “Konferencija o vjerskim slobodama u Saboru: najnoviji trendovi pokazuju da su u Europi najugroženiji Židovi, a iza njih kršćani”, www.sabor.hr (December 1, 2023), retrieved January 15, 2024, from Web page: <https://www.sabor.hr/hr/press/priopcenja/konferencija-o-vjerskim-slobodama-u-saboru-najnoviji-trendovi-pokazuju-da-su-u>

ter¹⁶: “Generally, those who claim to hate Islam know almost nothing about its dominant traditional form, and in their understanding of the religion, they are closer to the extremists themselves. There is no indication that Muslims, compared to native Europeans, are less democratically inclined or that they rigidly adhere to traditionalist values intergenerationally—neither more so nor equally.”¹⁷

On December 5, within an hour of the first reports from British tabloids, *Index* copied a news story about an attack in which a young pregnant woman was stabbed in a small Welsh town.¹⁸ The text ended with “more details to follow.” The attacker was arrested the same day and turned out to be the victim’s ex-lover; both are Romanian. However, as of the day of writing this report (December 7, 2023), nothing has been added to the article. The result? Islamophobic outbursts in around fifty comments.

On December 6, the daily Zagreb-based newspaper *Jutarnji* published an article copied from the portal klix.ba,¹⁹ with the sensationalist headline “Bosnia’s Big Fall on the World Freedom Index: This Is Just the Prelude to What Could Follow.” The article discusses Bosnia’s drop on the Human Freedom Index from “restricted” to “obstructed,” due to trends described in Republika Srpska, such as the rise in attacks on the local LGBT community, police bans, crackdowns among leading politicians, the criminalization of defamation threatening media freedom, and attempts to obstruct civil society through the government’s effort to push the Foreign Agents Law. The subject of the article is, therefore, exclusively events in Republika Srpska. However, the front page features a photo of Sarajevo, Baščaršija, and the Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque. This is a stark example of what Noam Chomsky calls the “manufacturing of consent” in mass media.²⁰

Justice system

In the Republic of Croatia, discrimination based on religion is prohibited in almost all areas of life, while in EU law, protection against discrimination based on religion still applies only to the area of work and employment.²¹

16. H-alter (www.h-alter.org) is an independent web portal that is part of the Association for Independent Media Culture and was founded in 2005 by journalists and other employees in electronic publishing, with the aim of developing the independence and professionalism of the journalistic profession, and ensuring the public’s right to information and education on issues in the fields of civil society, culture, social science and politics.

17. Karlo Mikić, “Islamofobija kao antisemitizam 21. stoljeća” H-alter.org (December 8, 2023), retrieved December 23, 2023, from Web page: <https://h-alter.org/svijet/islamofobija-kao-antisemitizam-21-stoljeca/>

18. <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/u-walesu-izbodena-mlada-trudnica-zatvorene-skole-ovo-je-ozbiljan-incident/2518278.aspx>

19. <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/svijet/veliki-pad-bih-na-svjetskom-indeksu-slobode-ovo-je-samo-uvertira-u-ono-sto-bi-moglo-uslijediti-15401756?fbclid=IwAR3JWWjKG1da6cQvAEej75Z1iy47zUZ-Ieaqz0WO-QcxdrXtRXLLD8my-DdY>

20. Karlo Mikić, “Islamofobija kao antisemitizam 21. stoljeća” H-alter.org (December 8, 2023), retrieved December 23, 2023, from Web page: <https://h-alter.org/svijet/islamofobija-kao-antisemitizam-21-stoljeca/>

21. Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia, The annual report of the Ombudswoman for 2023.

Internet

The 2023 annual report of the Ombudswoman states,

The war in the Middle East unfortunately impacts the rise of hatred towards Muslims. The Center for Dialogue – CKD and the Islamic Community in Croatia have noticed an increase in hate speech online, particularly in comments on articles in electronic media and on social media. They note that these are stereotypes and prejudices about Muslims from that part of the world, and they also observe a polarization of society through the imposition of choosing sides.²²

In the context of the war in the Middle East fueling hatred towards Muslims, there have been online channels exacerbating Islamophobia with content such as the podcast “55 Minutes with Željka Markić,” where Professor Boris Havel is featured, providing a one-sided view of a historically divided issue without offering a comprehensive impression or complete facts.²³ Such appearances are akin to one-sided propaganda pamphlets, which do not inform viewers or readers about the origins of the Palestine-Israel conflict or provide objective facts.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Professor Boris Havel indirectly promotes negative attitudes towards Muslims through anti-migrant views, suggesting that migration is not a humanitarian but solely a security issue. Referring to Muslim migration, Prof. Havel has stated, “The violence existing in the Middle East that is coming to Europe has a certain theory behind it. At the Faculty of Political Science, we conduct research and are the only ones in Croatia addressing the issue of violent jihadism coming to us.”²⁴ He explains his anti-migrant stance, claiming Muslims cannot effectively integrate despite all available conditions for integration, by stating, “The anti-migrant segment is, if you will, a common-sense approach – I don’t want my child to be unable to walk on the street tomorrow, or my wife to go shopping without covering her head.”

Other participants in spreading misinformation or generalizing and inciting anti-Muslim racism have been mentioned in earlier sections of this report.

22. Ibid.

23. Narod.hr, “Havel: Ime Palestina izmišljeno je kako bi se suzbilo ime Judeja, teško je reći da Židovu nije mjesto tamo”, Narod.hr (October 16, 2023), retrieved December 12, 2023, from Web page: <https://narod.hr/svijet/boris-havel>

24. Narod.hr, “Havel: Ako se ne spriječi priljev ilegalnih migranata Hrvatsku čeka isto što i Švedsku – vojska na ulicama”, Narod.hr (October 3, 2023), retrieved December 15, 2023, from Web page: <https://narod.hr/eu/havel-ako-se-ne-sprijeci-priljev-ilegalnih-migranata-hrvatsku-ceka-isto-sto-i-svedsku-vojska-na-ulicama>

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessments and Initiatives

In October 2023, protests in support of Palestine were held in Zagreb's Square of the Victims of Fascism and in Rijeka under the same slogan "Solidarity with Palestine." (Fig. 2) The peaceful protests, which did not display symbols of hate, called for condemnation of the apartheid, settler regime and demanded freedom for all Palestinians, as well as de-occupation, decolonization, and cessation of war.²⁵ Although the organizers distanced themselves from any hate, at the Conference on Religious Freedoms organized in the Croatian Parliament, Professor Naida-Mihal Brandl from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb characterized the protests as "anti-Semitic" due to the call for the decolonization of Palestine.²⁶



Figure 2: Photo from protests for Palestine held on October 25, 2023. **Source:** <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/prosvjed-za-palestinu-dosao-i- perjanar-sokiran-sam-izraelskom-zastavom-u-zagrebu/2507101.aspx>

25. Index.hr, "Stotine na prosvjedu za Palestinu u Zagrebu: 'Europa ne želi priznati genocid'", Index.hr (October 25, 2023), retrieved October 25, 2023, from Web page: <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/prosvjed-za-palestinu-dosao-i- perjanar-sokiran-sam-izraelskom-zastavom-u-zagrebu/2507101.aspx>

26. Saborska TV – odbori, Međuparlamentarna skupina prijateljstva Hrvatska – Izrael, (December 1, 2023) retrieved December 1, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2rknNTm_RE

The Initiative for a Free Palestine continues with various activities advocating for a solution that does not misrepresent the Israel-Palestine as a Jewish-Muslim issue, as, first and foremost, it is a political conflict.

On October 11, 2023, the political party Workers' Front (Radnička fronta) issued the following statement: "The Workers' Front stands by the international parties of the left that point to the extent of the Israeli occupation, apartheid against the Palestinians in their homeland, to violations of the Geneva Conventions and UN resolutions. We have always been of the opinion that every occupation must be condemned and every crime prevented."²⁷

On October 25, 2023, the Workers' Front invited Croatians to protests for Palestine: "Solidarity with Palestine! Against the war, against the occupation." (Fig. 3)



Figure 3: Screenshot of the Facebook account of the political party Workers' Front (Radnička fronta), October 25, 2023.

27. Radnicka fronta, "Izjava povodom eskalacije u Palestini", Radnickafronta.hr (October 11, 2023), retrieved November 11, 2023, from Web page: <https://www.radnickafronta.hr/hr/t/tekstovi/clanci/3019/izjava-povodom-eskalacije-u-palestini/>

On November 14, 2023, We Can – Political Platform (Možemo!) submitted five requests to the parliamentary procedure regarding Palestine: (1) the government to request an immediate ceasefire and all military activities in Gaza within the framework of the European Council; (2) stronger advocacy for the opening of humanitarian corridors; (3) support for the opening of an investigation of war crimes against civilians in Gaza and Israel; (4) an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories; (5) and to move towards a diplomatic solution which is a two-state solution. On November 16, 2023, the parliamentary majority rejected all these demands.

It should be noted that Croatia is one of the 14 countries and one of the four EU countries that voted against the resolution proposed by Jordan at the General Assembly of the United Nations which called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Everywhere in the world, including Croatia, there is room for the improvement of the culture of dialogue, tolerance, and respect for diversity in public discourse, especially on social media and conventional media. On some occasions, public speech in Croatia was marked by indirect negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants in Europe. When directly discussing the intentions of Muslims in Europe, some Croatian speakers would clarify that their skepticism was directed at Muslim immigrants coming from the East to Europe or Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but not towards Muslims in Croatia and their institutional arrangement, which they view as a model for other Muslim communities.

There is a clear need for objective, unbiased reporting and for preparing activities such as conferences and media programs that provide equal space for opposing views to ensure a comprehensive picture.

Islamophobia has been part of anti-migrant rhetoric based on amplifying fear through manipulating the concept of the clash of civilizations, which no serious political scientist, sociologist, theologian, or historian who values the abundance of real-world data available to all of us would support and which contradicts right-wing hysteria. Migrants will become “Europe’s biggest problem” to quote liberal Karlo Jurač if Europeans *make them* their greatest problem, just like cascading inflation and similar self-fulfilling prophecies.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
DENMARK
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Sammenfatning

Årets Islamofobi-rapport fremhæver et voksende problem med systemisk diskrimination og udfordringer med registreringen af hadforbrydelser. I 2022, rapporten for 2023 er endnu ikke udgivet, var 50 ud af 101 religiøst motiverede hadforbrydelser rettet mod muslimer. På trods af et fald på 21 % fra 2021 står muslimer stadig over for betydelige udfordringer og udgør 10 % af alle hadforbrydelser. I samme periode var der en stigning i sager med et racistisk motiv fra 254 sager i 2021 til 300 sager i 2022, svarende til en stigning på 18 %. Det kan ikke udelukkes, at en ikke uvæsentlig andel af disse sager angår muslimer, da en betydelig andel af muslimer i Danmark har anden etnicitet/race, og en betydelig andel af personer med en anden etnicitet/race i Danmark er muslimer. I en ny rapport kritiserer Institut for Menneskerettigheder politiet for utilstrækkelige data om hadforbrydelser, hvilket resulterer i inkonsekvente statistikker sammenlignet med nationale undersøgelser. En anden rapport fra Institut for Menneskerettigheder afslører, at diskrimination fortsat er udbredt i Danmark. Over 80 % minoritetsetniske personer siger, at de møder fordomme. Synlige markører for religiøs identitet, som f.eks. tørklæder, øger sandsynligheden for diskrimination. Den 25. august 2023 forbød regeringen "utilbørlige behandling" af genstande med væsentlig religiøs betydning med henvisning til nationale sikkerhedshensyn. En aktindsigt afslørede amerikanske diskussioner med Danmark om Rasmus Paludans koranabrændinger og hvordan disse ville kunne påvirke Sveriges NATO-medlemskab. Den danske regering har indført en 37-timers-arbejdspligt for borgere i kontanthjælpssystemet, som ikke opfylder et opholds- og beskæftigelseskrav. Loven, som er forankret i et islamofobisk narrativ, er rettet mod "ikke-vestlige" indvandrerkvinder, og kan ifølge kritikere føre til ulovlig diskrimination og fattigere familier. I november 2023 iværksatte Statsminister, Mette Frederiksen, en undersøgelse af, hvorvidt pro-palæstinensiske demonstrationer og offentlige udtalelser i relation til den såkaldte konflikt i Israel og Gaza tilskynder til og billiger terrorisme. Den 15. december 2023 gennemførte politiet en større antiterroraktion flere steder i Danmark. Sagen, der blev ført bag dobbeltlukkede døre, involverede en kendt dansk-palæstinensisk velgørenhedsarbejder. Mossad, Israels nationale efterretningstjeneste, hævdede at være involveret i aktionen. Disse, og andre, begivenheder i 2023 understreger kompleksiteten og dybden af islamofobi i Danmark. Rapporten opfordrer til øget dataindsamling, større gennemsigtighed i myndighedernes rapportering og retsprocesser samt mere effektive foranstaltninger til at bekæmpe og reducere islamofobi i Danmark.

Executive Summary

The 2023 report on Islamophobia in Denmark highlights problems with systemic discrimination and the registration of anti-Muslim hate crimes. In 2022, The report for 2023 was not published at the time of writing, 50 out of 101 religiously motivated hate crimes targeted Muslims. Despite a 21% decrease from 2021, Muslims still face significant challenges, with hates crimes against them representing 10% of all hate crimes. In the same period, there was an increase in cases with a racist motive, from 254 cases in 2021 to 300 cases in 2022, corresponding to an 18% rise. It cannot be ruled out that a significant portion of these cases involve Muslims, as a considerable proportion of Muslims in Denmark have a different ethnicity/race, and a substantial proportion of people with a different ethnicity/race in Denmark are Muslims. In a new report, the Danish Institute for Human Rights criticizes police for inadequate hate crime data, resulting in inconsistent statistics compared to national surveys. Another report from the Danish Institute for Human Rights reveals that discrimination remains pervasive in Denmark. More than 80% of minority ethnic individuals say they face prejudice. Visible markers of religious identity, such as headscarves, increase the likelihood of discrimination. On August 25, 2023, the government banned “improper treatment” of significant religious objects, citing national security concerns. Documents revealed U.S. discussions with Denmark about Rasmus Paludan’s Quran burnings and their impact on Sweden’s NATO membership. The Danish government introduced a 37-hour work requirement for social assistance recipients, explicitly targeting “non-Western” immigrant women. The law, which is rooted in Islamophobic narratives, could lead to unlawful discrimination and poorer families according to critics. In November 2023, the Danish Prime Minister initiated an investigation into whether pro-Palestinian protests and public statements related to the so-called conflict in Israel and Gaza foster terrorism. On December 15, 2023, police carried out a major anti-terrorist operation in several locations in Denmark. The case, conducted behind closed doors, involved a well-known Danish-Palestinian charity worker. Mossad, Israel’s national intelligence agency, claimed involvement in the action. These and other events in 2023 highlight the complexities and depth of Islamophobia in Denmark. The report calls for enhanced data collection, greater transparency in reporting and judicial processes, and more effective measures to combat and reduce Islamophobia in the country.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Denmark

Type of Regime: Constitutional monarchy

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentarism

Ruling Parties: Social Democratic Party; Venstre, Denmark's Liberal Party; and the Moderates. This is a majority cross-party government that consists of parties across the political spectrum. There has not been a majority government in Denmark since 1993/94.

Opposition Parties: Green Left, Social Liberal Party, Denmark Democrats, Liberal Alliance, Conservative Party, Red-Green Alliance, New Right, Danish People's Party, The Alternative

Last Elections: 2023 National Elections: The Social Democratic Party won 27.5% of the votes, Denmark's Liberal Party won 13.3%, and the Moderates won 9.3% of the votes.

Total Population: 5.9 million

Major Languages: Danish

Official Religion: Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Denmark (Church of Denmark)

Statistics on Islamophobia: The 2022 Hate Crime Report by the National Police of Denmark (Rigspolitiet) shows that 50 out of a total of 101 religiously motivated cases registered by the police targeted Muslims. This corresponds to 10% of all hate crime cases in 2022. (The report for 2023 was not published at the time of writing.)

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: According to a survey conducted by the Danish Institute for Human Rights in 2023, eight out of ten people have experienced prejudice or discrimination in the past year because of their ethnic background, while more than six out of ten minority ethnic people have experiences that can be characterized as illegal discrimination.

Major Religions (% of Population): Protestant Christians (74.7%), Muslims (est. 5.5%), Catholics (0.6%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): est. 320,000 (5.5%)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Dansk-Tyrkisk Islamisk Stiftelse, Det Islamiske Trossamfund (DIT), Dansk Islamisk Center (DIC), Muslimsk Ungdom i Danmark (MUNIDA), Dansk Islamisk Trossamfund, Minhaj-ul-Quran Denmark, Dansk Muslimsk Union (DMU), Dansk Islamisk Råd, Imam Ali Moskeen, Muslimernes Fællesråd (MFR), IslamAkademiet, Udforsk Islam

Main NGOs combatting Islamophobia: Centre for Muslims' Rights in Denmark (CEDA), Sameksistens.dk, SOS Racisme, Kvinder I Dialog (Women in Dialogue), European Network Against Racism-Denmark (ENAR Denmark), Center for Forebyggelse af Eksklusion (Centre for Prevention of Exclusion), DEMOS, Muslimernes Fællesråd (MFR), iChange, Psykologfagligt Netværk mod Diskrimination (PND)

Far-Right Parties: Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti), The New Right (Nye Borgerlige), Denmark Democrats (Danmarksdemokraterne)

Far-Right Movements: Generation Identitær, For Frihed (former Pegida Denmark), Nordfront, Nordisk Modstandsbevægelse (Nordic Resistance Movement)

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: Feuerkrieg Division

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No. The parliament rejected a bill proposal to ban public servants from wearing religious symbols in December 2020.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No, although there has been a ban on slaughtering non-stunned animals since 2014, which to some Muslims is a crucial part of halal slaughter.
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** Yes, since 2018 it has been illegal to cover one's face without a valid reason in public places; religion is not considered a valid reason.
- **Prayer Ban:** Yes, several secondary schools have implemented bans on religious rituals, including the Muslim prayer.

Introduction

The 2023 report on Islamophobia in Denmark provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of anti-Muslim sentiment and discrimination in the country. This report aims to shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by the Muslim community in 2023, including limitations in hate crime statistics and the growing number of non-Western descendants without citizenship. The report draws on a range of data sources, including police reports, human rights reports, surveys, and media examples of Islamophobia in 2023. In the report, we include issues and policies pertaining to "non-Westerners", as non-Western immigrants and descendants often are presumed to be Muslims within the Danish public consciousness. While politicians will sometimes specifically target Muslims in their discourse, it is common in policy documents and public discourse to use non-Western synonymously with Muslims.

After October 2023, there was an increase in the pro-Palestinian solidarity movement, mobilizing diverse communities including the Palestinian diaspora, the Muslim community, and the political left. However, simultaneous with this there has been an increase in surveillance and vilification of the pro-Palestinian movement. Some of these incidences have been included in this report as we understand that the anti-Palestinian racism in Denmark has important intersections and overlaps with Islamophobia.

The report highlights issues such as debates on compulsory school material on the Danish cartoon crisis, the ban on burning the Quran (and other sacred scriptures), discrimination in policies affecting religious practices such as wearing the hijab in private schools, heightened surveillance on pro-Palestinian protesters, the increase of young people without Danish citizenship, and policy changes targeting immigrant women on social welfare.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations, including enhanced data collection to ensure that hate crime statistics reflect the true scale of the issue; educational campaigns on the harmful effects of Islamophobia to promote tolerance and understanding; easier access to citizenship for young people born and/or raised in Denmark; reviewing and reforming Islamophobic policies; and ensuring consultation with Muslim communities.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

On January 1, 2022, a number of changes to the hate crime legislation came into force. These changes enable the police to allocate multiple hate motives, as opposed to previous years when a hate crime could only be linked to the main hate motive.

Regarding the current police report on hate crimes this means that the number of cases (487) will not equal the number of hate motives (571 hate motives/510 overall motive categories).¹

According to the Danish National Police's newly published report on hate crimes for 2022 - the report for 2023 was not published at the time of writing - a total of 101 cases were registered by the police as religiously motivated hate crimes of which 50 cases targeted Muslims. This is a decrease of 21% since 2021. The 50 cases with an Islamophobic motive correspond to 10% of all hate crime cases in 2022. The proportion of Islamophobic hate crime cases between 2017 and 2021 has remained between 13% and 19%. According to the police report, cases related to Islam often also have a racist element. Out of the 50 cases related to Islam, 13 cases also have a racist hate motive (which corresponds to 26% of the cases related to Islam). Among the religiously related hate crime cases online, nine were directed at Islam, accounting to 18% of all hate crime cases related to Islam.² In the same period, there was an increase in cases with a racist motive, from 254 cases in 2021 to 300 cases in 2022, corresponding to an 18% rise. It cannot be ruled out that a significant portion of these cases involve Muslims, as a considerable proportion of Muslims in Denmark have a different ethnicity/race, and a substantial proportion of people with a different ethnicity/race in Denmark are Muslims.

With 439 cases out of 893 in the period 2017-2022, Muslims are the religious group that accounts for the largest share of religiously motivated hate crime cases.³

In 2023, the Danish Institute for Human Rights published a report criticizing the police registration system for its inadequacies. The system lacks data on hate crime reports and convictions, leading to inconsistent statistics. National surveys reveal higher numbers of hate crime cases than those recorded by the police.⁴

The institute notes that a Ministry of Justice survey found around 12,000 people experienced hate-motivated violence in 2020, but the police recorded only 635 hate crime cases. This discrepancy may arise because police are not required to note if victims perceive the crime as hate-motivated. Consequently, many hate crimes might be registered as ordinary crimes.⁵

The institute also highlights the absence of comprehensive data on hate crime convictions and the influence of hate motives in sentencing. Convictions where hate

1. Rigspolitiet, *Hadforbrydelser 2022*, "Rigspolitiets årsrapport vedr. Hadforbrydelser," (November 8, 2023), retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://politi.dk/-/media/mediefiler/landsdaekkende-dokumenter/statistikker/hadforbrydelser/hadforbrydelser-2022.pdf>

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Lumi Zuleta & Tinne Steffensen, "Registrering af hadforbrydelser skal styrkes. Analysenotat", Institut for Menneskerettigheder (January 2023), retrieved October 10, 2024, from https://menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Registrering%20af%20hadforbrydelser%20skal%20styrkes.%20Notat%2C%20januar%202023_0.pdf

5. Ibid.

crimes are considered an aggravating factor are not specifically recorded, leading to a lack of clarity on what leads to a hate crime conviction in Denmark.⁶

A new report from 2023 by the Danish Institute for Human Rights shows that more than 8 out of 10 people have experienced prejudice or discrimination in the past year because of their ethnic background. The report includes 4,300 minority ethnic adults born or raised in Denmark, who were asked about their experiences on prejudice and discrimination in a number of social areas, such as the labor market, leisure life, health, and education. Half of the respondents originate from either Turkey (21%), Lebanon (10%), Iraq (8%), Pakistan (7%), or Somalia (6%). Seventy-five percent of the respondents report having one or more visible characteristics that may express their religious or cultural background (either skin color, beard, headwear, clothing, jewelry, or tattoo). Around 60% responded that their skin color makes the surrounding community assume their religious or cultural background, while 32% of men say they have a full beard and 22% of women say they wear religious headwear.⁷

The report is one of the most comprehensive studies of racism in Denmark based on *perceived* discrimination and prejudice.⁸

Some of the report's most significant results include:

- 84% say they have experienced discrimination and prejudice because of their ethnic background.
- 65% state that they have experienced (illegal) discrimination because of their ethnicity.
- Minority-ethnic people with visible religious characteristics such as full beards and hijabs are more likely to report experiencing discrimination or prejudice.
- Around 1 in 2 (48%) have experienced rejection because of their ethnic background; this particularly applies to jobs, training, housing, and banking.
- One in 2 (49%) have received poorer service in e.g. shops, restaurants, and healthcare and educational institutions, because of their ethnic background.
- 80 percent report that they have either been subjected to insulting words, excluded from communities, or met with prejudice. In addition, young men in particular report that people behave as if they are afraid of them.

The report reveals that only 11% of discrimination victims make official complaints. Instead, 55% of minority-ethnic individuals alter their behavior in public, change their names, or avoid wearing religious symbols. Additionally, 38% are considering leaving Denmark due to discrimination.⁹

6. Ibid.

7. Sigrid Alexandra Koob et al., "Oplevet etnisk diskrimination i Danmark," Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Oplevet%20etnisk%20diskrimination%20i%20Danmark.pdf>

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

Employment

In the beginning of 2023, a mother wrote in sheer frustration about her son's experience finding an apprenticeship as an electrician on LinkedIn. (Fig. 1) The mother shared how her 19-year-old son, who is an electrician student, was rejected based on his ethnicity. She wrote,

My son is training to become an electrician and has not yet been successful in finding an apprenticeship. My sweet, kind, smart, talented and hardworking son who just wants to be an electrician. Time and time again, he receives the same answer, "unfortunately we are not looking for someone like you"! What is someone like him? Because he doesn't have blue eyes, blond hair and his name isn't Brian, he is rejected. Just today he received this response. As a mother, I am shocked and angry for my son. When politicians and media talk about integration and more immigrants in work etc. etc. they forget an important detail, namely that many are rejected just because of their appearance or name.

Greetings from an angry and deeply shaken mother

[X] is 19 years old and lives in Copenhagen and will start the main course 3 weeks in August, if he finds a training position. Hope there is someone out there who can use him.¹⁰

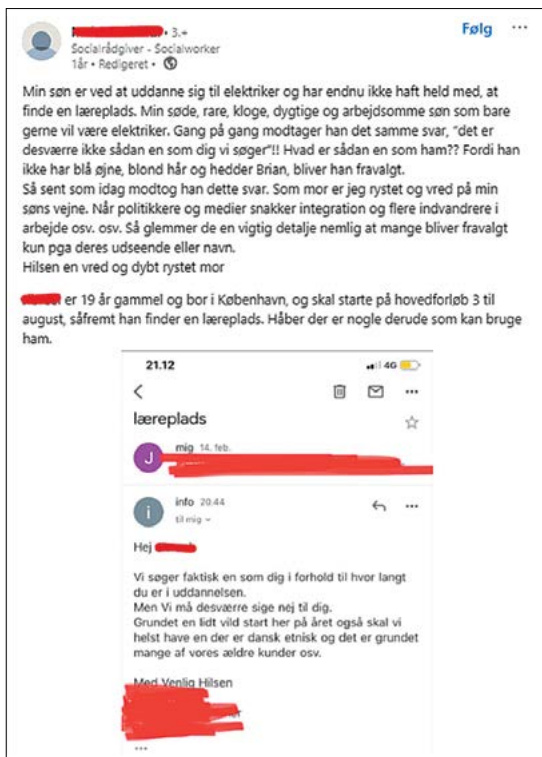


Figure 1: LinkedIn post on discrimination
Source: LinkedIn post, February 20, 2023, anonymised at the request of the mother.

10. LinkedIn post, February 20, 2023, anonymised at the request of the mother.

The mother also attached the response her son got from the company he had applied for. It read,

Hi [X]

We're actually looking for someone like you in relation to how far you are in the program. But unfortunately, we have to say no to you. Due to a slightly wild start this year, we preferably need someone who is of Danish ethnicity, and this is due to many of our older customers etc.

Kind regards¹¹

The post reignited the debate about apprentices being rejected by companies due to their non-Danish background and was followed by a 2023 survey by the Danish Institute for Human Rights that revealed that 36% of vocational school training consultants frequently encounter companies demanding specific ethnicities for apprenticeships.¹² Of these, 51% of consultants try to meet these illegal demands to some degree.¹³

Data from 2021 shows that 46% of “non-Western descendants” drop out of vocational education during the training period, compared to 27% of ethnic Danes. According to the institute, this disparity suggests that minority ethnic students struggle to find apprenticeships due to companies’ illegal discrimination based on ethnicity and a lack of focus on countering such practices.¹⁴

A smaller-scale case study by the trade magazine *3F* had two journalists, pretending to be “Martin” and “Mohammad,” apply for an apprenticeship at Jeudan, Denmark’s largest real estate company. Despite identical qualifications, “Mohammad” was rejected while “Martin” was invited for an interview, even though “Mohammad” applied earlier.¹⁵

Jeudan’s Managing Director Per W. Hallgren claimed they did not reject “Mohammad” based on ethnicity, but selected the last applicant due to having only one spot left. However, the timeline showed “Mohammad” was rejected before “Martin” was contacted.¹⁶

11. Ibid.

12. Institut for Menneskerettigheder, “Virksomheder stiller ulovlige krav til lærlinges etnicitet”, menneskeret.dk, April 27, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://menneskeret.dk/nyheder/virksomheder-stiller-ulovlige-krav-laerlinges-etnicitet>

13. Institut for Menneskerettigheder, “MINORITETSETNISKE ELEVER FRAVÆLGES TIL OPLÆRING”, analyse, menneskeret.dk, April 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://menneskeret.dk/files/media/document/Minoritetsetniske%20elever%20frav%C3%A6lges%20til%20opl%C3%A6ring.%20Analyse%20april%202023_0.pdf

14. Ibid.

15. Alexander Sokoler et al., “Søgte læreplads hos dansk ejendomsgigant: Nej til Mohammed og ja til Martin”, *Fagbladet3f.dk*, June 14, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://fagbladet3f.dk/artikel/nej-til-mohammed-og-ja-til-martin?fbclid=IwAR09YMPst329hmdW9ht7xidSwTS9EK9nMxyj0wYqSEazACDB_dtM-WpD2sWQ

16. Ibid.

In 2023, the organization Equal Access published a report on minority stress in Danish workplaces. Minority stress is defined as “the elevated stress levels and particular strains experienced by people with minority ethnic backgrounds as a consequence of discriminatory and racist structures in society and the workplace.”¹⁷

The report highlighted the following:

- 68.2% experience discrimination in their workplace in the form of comments and jokes about their ethnicity, skin color, language, or religion.
- 74.7% say that being met with prejudice, comments, and jokes affects their overall well-being at work.
- 66.3% experience physical discomfort as a result of perceived discrimination, such as headaches, lack of or increased appetite, palpitations, body anxiety, and/or difficulty sleeping.
- 43.8% experience discomfort “often” or “every day.”
- 90.1% experience emotional reactions as a result of discrimination such as anxiety, anger, sadness, discouragement, racing thoughts, frustration, and/or powerlessness.
- 59.2% feel that they have to go the extra mile in relation to their colleagues at their workplace, with 90.6% saying they believe this is due to their ethnic or religious background. The extra effort includes never being late and completing tasks faster and more efficiently.

Education

In 2023, the Green Left, Denmark Democrats, Liberal Alliance, Conservative People’s Party, and the Danish People’s Party proposed to make the Danish cartoon crisis from 2005 a compulsory part of primary school education and create state teaching material that teachers can choose to use. The cartoon crisis arose in 2005 after a Danish newspaper depicted several satirical drawings of the Prophet Muhammed, one of which showed a bearded man wearing a turban with a bomb in it. These drawings would not necessarily be compulsory to show.¹⁸ Mette Thiesen, the Danish People’s Party’s freedom of expression spokesperson and the initiator of the proposal, claimed that it is important to “take legislative action to ensure teachers’ freedom of expression”¹⁹ following what happened to the French teacher Samy Paty.

17. Lige Adgang, “Etnisk minoritetsstress på arbejdspladsen En undersøgelse af erfaringer med etnisk minoritetsstress samt anbefalinger til danske arbejdspladser”, 2023, <https://usercontent.one/wp/www.ligeadgang.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Etnisk-minoritetsstress-paa-arbejdspladsen-FINAL.pdf>

18. Emil Eller & Line Ronn Tofte, “Forslag om Muhammed-krisen blev debatteret i timevis i Folketinget - og endte igen, igen med afvisning”, dr.dk, May 10, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/forslag-om-muhammed-krisen-blev-debatteret-i-timevis-i-folketinget-og-endte-igen>

19. Amalie Høgsbro Jørgensen & Rasmus Fahrenhorff, “SF og borgerlige partier vil gøre Muhammed-krisen til obligatorisk pensum i folkeskolen”, kristeligt-dagblad.dk, May 9, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/sf-og-borgerlige-partier-vil-goere-muhammed-krisen-til-obligatorisk-pensum-i-folkeskolen>

The proposal was rejected by the government. The Minister for Children and Education Mattias Tesfaye from the Social Democrats stated: “It risks putting teachers in an uncertain situation without a choice. Are we really interested in that? Can we afford to ask them to do something they are not comfortable with or want to do? I don’t think we can. You can be brave on your own behalf, but not on someone else’s.”²⁰ During the debate, the discourse was centred around the trope that Muslims are violent, and that any rejection to the proposal is because people are fearful of Muslims, as the Green Left’s chairperson, Pia Olsen Dyhr, wrote on her Facebook page on the day of the voting: “But let’s at least be honest about why the proposal cannot find a majority. The reason is fear. Fear of the anger and rage of certain Muslims. Fear of Islamist terror.”²¹ The Danish Union of Teachers, however, objected to the proposal on the premise of it representing political interference in schools’ freedom of methodology.²²

A new study, “The Copenhagen Study,” conducted by four researchers shows that the oldest primary school students in vulnerable housing areas with a large amount of so-called non-Westerners are happier attending school than their teachers, educators, parents, and other peers think. The study also revealed that the lack of expectations from teachers, educators, parents, and peers can affect the learning, well-being, and life chances of young students in vulnerable housing areas.²³

The Muslim-led radio program “Det Muslimer Taler Om” (The Muslim Conversation) revealed that an 11-year-old Muslim girl was expelled from Prins Henrik School (Lycée Français Prins Henrik), a French private school in Denmark, for wearing a hijab.²⁴ The girl, who had attended the school since kindergarten, was given an ultimatum to remove her hijab or go home, according to her father. The school referenced the French concept of “laïcité” to justify the expulsion, though the hijab ban was not explicitly stated in their internal regulations at the time. The school had previously allowed the hijab, but updated its rules in June 2023 to forbid religious symbols or clothing.²⁵

20. Emil Eller & Line Rønn Tofte, “Forslag om Muhammed-krisen blev debatteret i timevis i Folketinget - og endte igen, igen med afvisning”, dr.dk, May 10, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/forslag-om-muhammed-krisen-blev-debatteret-i-timevis-i-folketinget-og-endte-igen> (own translation)

21. Ibid.

22. Amalie Høgsbro Jørgensen & Rasmus Fahrenhorff, “SF og borgerlige partier vil gøre Muhammed-krisen til obligatorisk pensum i folkeskolen”, kristeligt-dagblad.dk, May 9, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/sf-og-borgerlige-partier-vil-goere-muhammed-krisen-til-obligatorisk-pensum-i-folkeskolen>

23. Flemming Balvig, Lars Holmberg & Aydin Soei, “Københavnsprojektet: FORESTILLINGER OG VIRKELIGHED OM SKOLETRIVSEL - et forsøg på at mindske sociale misforståelser og øge skoleglæde blandt elever på skoler i udsatte områder”, AFFORD for Københavns Kommune, March 2023, <https://www.kk.dk/sites/default/files/2023-03/K%C3%B8benhavnsprojekter%20marts%202023.pdf>

24. Det, Muslimer Taler Om, (@detmuslimertalerom), instagram.com, August 15, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cv9wxliRg5X/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFiZA==

25. 24syv, “Skole indførte tørklædeforbud flere måneder efter bortvisning af 11-årig”, kopenhavnliv.dk, August 18, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, <https://kopenhavnliv.dk/kobenhavn/skole-indfoerte-toerklædeforbud-flere-maaneder-efter-bortvisning-af-11-aarig>

The case received significant media attention, with several experts deeming the expulsion illegal. Klaus Josefsen, associate professor of law at Aarhus University, stated that it violated the Danish Constitution's provision on freedom of religion. "Quite simply, it is illegal. It is a restriction of the Constitution's provision on freedom of religion, and you can't infringe this. We are in Denmark and not in France, and here you cannot make a material restriction on freedom of expression," he stated. However, the Danish Agency for Education and Quality found that the school's ban did not violate democratic principles. In a letter, the board wrote, "The Board thus does not find that the school's ban on wearing religious symbols and garments is incompatible with freedom and the requirement of democracy."²⁶ The father contacted public authorities 6 months before going public, but received no response until the media covered the story. He has since sued Prins Henrik School and the trial is expected to begin in 2025.²⁷

Politics

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was not commemorated by the government. Instead, a former MP wrote about the day criticizing that her party leader had been used as an example of Islamophobia in a UN report on Islamophobia, stating: "I can feel that trust in the UN as a system suffers daily when such nonsense is allowed to be elevated to truth."²⁸ The day was, however, commemorated by civil society, which posted about it on social media. Amongst those were Minhaj ul Quran International Denmark,²⁹ the Centre for Muslims' Rights in Denmark (CEDA),³⁰ and the UN association in Denmark,³¹ an NGO united under the World Federation of United Nations Associations.

In October 2023, the Danish government (Social Democrats, Denmark's Liberal Party, and the Moderates), Denmark Democrats, and Danish People's Party agreed to implement a 37-hour work requirement for social benefit recipients who do not meet residency and employment criteria.³² Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen stated this rule

26. Jeppe Schropp, "Skole bortviste 11-årig elev for at bære tørklæde. Nu blåstempler myndighederne beslutningen", *kristeligt-dagblad.dk*, February 13, 2024, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/skole-bortviste-11-aarig-elev-baere-toerklæde-nu-blaastempler-myndighederne-beslutningen>

27. Ibid.

28. Halime Oguz, "Vi må alle acceptere, at vi kan blive stødt på mancherterne i det offentlige rum – også selv om du er muslim, kristen, transkønnet eller goth", *berlingske.dk*, March 27, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.berlingske.dk/kommentatorer/vi-maa-alle-acceptere-at-vi-kan-blive-stoedt-paa-mancherterne-i-det>

29. Minhaj-ul-Quran International Denmark (@minhajulquranDK), Facebook.com, March 15, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/100064279975864/posts/pfbid0mNyQ2NflgUahqqmpa8huQv1Yz3Phry1zBmijHsDCxTy9YfUwq4u2aGFg76fxn5Aml/?app=fbl>

30. Center for Muslims Rettigheder i Danmark (@ceda_dk), *instagram.com*, March 15, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/C4iZWtBi3hx/?igsh=dDRwZTJ4am5hNmps>

31. FN-Forbundet København (@FNforbundetKBH), *facebook.com*, March 15, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=443441818028272&set=a.310307138008408>

32. Ministry of Employment, "Ny aftale indfører arbejdspligt", press release, *bm.dk*, October 13, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://bm.dk/nyheder/pressemeddelelser/2023/10/ny-aftale-indfoerer-arbejdspligt/>

targets “non-Western” immigrant women.³³ The agreement states, “The agreement will ensure that more children experience both parents getting up in the morning and going to work. Compulsory work will also help break the negative social control that too many women from non-Western backgrounds are subjected to. Instead, they must be activated into meaningful communities and learn to stand on their own two feet.”³⁴

The discourse around the 37-hour work requirement draws on an Islamophobic narrative about Muslim women being prohibited from working by their controlling male relatives, and they therefore need liberation through government policies.

Municipalities will assign utility jobs to social benefit recipients and politicians have suggested these jobs could include making sandwiches in nursing homes, picking up trash, and cleaning public restrooms.³⁵ The Trade Union Confederation vice chairman Nanna Højlund criticized the plan, stating it would likely lead to layoffs due to strained municipal budgets and the removal of safeguards against replacing regular employees with utility workers. The abolition of the 13-week time limit for utility jobs may also result in prolonged use of unemployed individuals in these roles.³⁶

Legal experts and the Danish Institute for Human Rights argue the work requirement could constitute unlawful discrimination under Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.³⁷ Organizations like Save the Children, Red Cross, and the Social Workers Association warn it will lead to poorer families and more children in poverty.³⁸

According to a freedom of information request received by Jyllands-Posten, Rasmus Paludan was barred from the democracy festival Folkemødet because the U.S. expressed concerns following his Quran burning in front of the Turkish embassy, which complicated Sweden’s NATO membership discussions, and potentially impacting Mette Frederiksen’s assumed candidacy for NATO Secretary General.³⁹

33. Mie Obbekær, “Slut med årelang kontanthjælp: Regeringen vil indføre 37 timers ‘arbejdspligt’”, *fagbladet3f.dk*, April 25, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://fagbladet3f.dk/artikel/regeringen-vil-indfoere-37-timers-arbejdspligt>

34. Ministry of Employment, “Aftale om en ny arbejdspligt med klare krav til borgere i kontanthjælpssystemet som ikke opfylder optjeningsreglerne”, agreement, *bm.dk*, October 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://bm.dk/media/yxkf5uza/aftale-om-en-ny-arbejdspligt.pdf>

35. Emil Eller, “Flertal indfører 37 timers ‘arbejdspligt’ for udlændinge på kontanthjælp”, *dr.dk*, October 13, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/flertal-indfoerer-37-timers-arbejdspligt-kontanthjaelpsmodtagere>

36. Nanna Højlund, “Nanna Højlund: 37 timers arbejdspligt er en bombe under arbejdsmarkedet”, *fho.dk*, November 18, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://fho.dk/blog/2023/11/18/nanna-hoejlund-37-timers-arbejdspligt-er-en-bombe-under-arbejdsmarkedet/>

37. Laura Friis Wang, “Juridiske eksperter advarer om, at ny arbejdspligt kan stride imod menneskerettighederne”, *information.dk*, November 4, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.information.dk/indland/2023/11/juridiske-eksperter-advarer-ny-arbejdspligt-kan-stride-imod-menneskerettighederne>

38. Amanda Luna Holm, “Kritik: Regeringens planer kan kaste tusindvis af borgere ud i fattigdom”, *information.dk*, May 17, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.information.dk/indland/2023/05/kritik-regeringens-planer-kan-kaste-tusindvis-borgere-fattigdom>

39. Helene Kristine Holst, “Forud for Paludans Folkemøde-forbud var USA i dyb korrespondance med Justitsministeriet”, *Jyllands-Posten.dk*, July 19, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://jyllands-posten.dk/ind>

Subsequently, it came to light that prior to this ban, the U.S. was in communication with the Danish Department of Justice. The dialogue began a month and a half after Paludan burned a Quran in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, leading to Turkish opposition to Sweden's NATO membership. This occurred in the weeks preceding media speculation about Mette Frederiksen becoming the new NATO Secretary General. A few days after Paludan's Quran burning, the U.S. State Department condemned it as a "highly disrespectful act" towards those who consider the Quran sacred.⁴⁰

Jakob Holtermann, an associate professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Copenhagen, suggests that the U.S. has long understood the international repercussions of Quran burnings. He argues that Frederiksen, as a potential NATO chief, would require Turkey's approval. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for her to remain passive while Paludan burned the Quran, especially amidst discussions about Sweden's NATO membership.⁴¹

Media

In December 2023, TV2 published an article titled "Israel Warns of Hamas Leader in Denmark." After criticism they changed the headline to "Israel Claims Hamas Leader Is in Denmark" to clarify it was an Israeli assertion. The article named a Danish-Palestinian imam as a Hamas leader, based on a claim by Israeli Minister Amichai Chikli. The warning was sent to Danish Minister Sophie Løhde and forwarded to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET).⁴² Journalist Jotam Confino, who has faced accusations of pro-Israel bias, co-wrote the article.⁴³

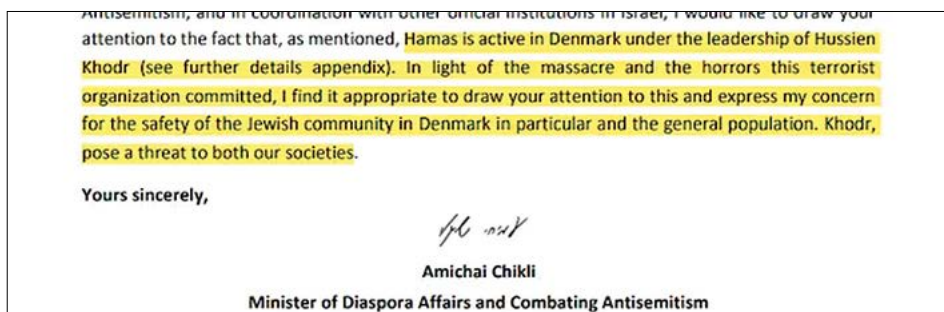


Figure 2: Excerpt from email from Israeli Minister, Amichai Chikli, to Danish Minister, Sophie Løhde.
Source: Sanne Lau Pedersen & Jotam Confino, "Israel påstår, at Hamas-leder er i Danmark", tv2.dk, December 22, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-12-20-israel-paastaar-at-hamas-leder-er-i-danmark>

land/ECE16294414/forud-for-paludans-folkemoedeforbud-var-usa-i-dyb-korrespondance-med-justitsministeriet/?st=1&fbclid=IwAR2sppFtvUr4iglYXzDciyZ6Gfj2bH9Y1UtmOxHHnGjVZpvq1idlLzjCT2k

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Sanne Lau Pedersen & Jotam Confino, "Israel påstår, at Hamas-leder er i Danmark", tv2.dk, December 22, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-12-20-israel-paastaar-at-hamas-leder-er-i-danmark>

43. Ritau, "Journalist beskylder TV 2 for uværdig afsked", tv2.dk, February 20, 2024, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2024-02-20-journalist-beskylder-tv-2-for-uaerdig-afsked>

Despite three terrorism experts consulted by TV2 doubting the claim and considering it an attempt by Israel to influence Denmark, the article was published, revealing the man's identity.⁴⁴ The imam denied the allegations, calling them to be Israeli manipulation.⁴⁵ The article faced criticism for revealing the imam's identity without evidence. Freelance journalist Steffen Groth criticized both Israel and TV2 for spreading unsubstantiated claims.⁴⁶ Groth wrote on Facebook,

The combination of the fact that TV2 received the letter from a government at war, that the researchers have told TV2 that there is no evidence to support the letter's claim that the man is a Hamas leader in Denmark, and that the accusation is extremely serious, should in my opinion have made TV2 drop the story or at least anonymize the man. I'm actually amazed that there isn't an editor who has insisted on one of the two options. Instead, in the article and in the correspondent's analysis, TV2 suggests that the allegation may very well be true and should be taken very seriously.⁴⁷

The article also made Danish-Palestinian debater and former politician, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, raise the question of the correspondent's affiliation with the Israeli military and intelligence services. She asked,

In my view, they have repeatedly acted propagandistically in their coverage of Israel's genocide and invasion of Gaza. The propaganda is amplified with the choice of Confino as mediator and narrator, and we are left with the question: Is Confino an agent of influence for the occupation and apartheid state of Israel? Because whether it is Confino or a representative of the Israel Occupation Force who appears on TV2 - in relation to the content currently provided, is potato, patata.⁴⁸

Afterwards Confino stated, "To insinuate that I'm an agent of influence because I've gained insight into a letter request from Israel to Denmark is a completely insane claim."

Confino later warned, he would file a defamation suit against Abdol-Hamid, stating, "I want the lawsuit to act as a deterrent to the many people on social media who incite and launch systematic boycott campaigns against journalists doing their job."⁴⁹

44. Sanne Lau Pedersen & Jotam Confino, "Israel påstår, at Hamas-leder er i Danmark", tv2.dk, December 22, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-12-20-israel-paastaar-at-hamas-leder-er-i-danmark>

45. Ibid.

46. Steffen Groth (@ steffen.groth.77), facebook.com, September 13, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/profile/1569635185/search/?q=jotam%20confino>

47. Steffen Groth (@ steffen.groth.77), facebook.com, December 27, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10231380489126663&set=a.3167064186745>

48. Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, (@ asmaa.abdol), facebook.com, December 27, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/506630782/posts/10160830714945783/?mibextid=rS40aB7S9Ucbxw6v>

49. Kristian Lindberg, "TV 2s journalist truer eksplotiker med injuriersag: Vil have økonomisk erstatning", berlingske, December 29, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.berlingske.dk/kultur/tv-2s-journalist-truer-eksplotiker-med-injuriersag-vil-have-oekonomisk>

In May 2024, Confino, who was since let go from his position in TV2,⁵⁰ sued Abdol-Hamid, demanding DKK 200,000 (approx. EUR 27.000) for defamation.⁵¹ Abdol-Hamid says the lawsuit is an attempt to curb her freedom of expression: “I experience it as very violent and aggressive. But I don’t want to be restricted. Freedom of speech is a right that I want to protect.”⁵²

Public service media, DR, also faced massive criticism after airing a report from Israel on December 18, where the Muslim call to prayer was mistranslated as “Kill the Jews.”⁵³ DR apologized, attributing the mistake to poor editing. “The translation was not related to the call to prayer heard in the sequence just before the conversation about the translation. But the segment was edited in such a way that it is understandable that this connection could be made. We should have been aware of this, and the segment should have been edited so that the context was clear and unmistakable.”⁵⁴

Justice system

In 2023, it was ruled that the Danish Immigration Service acted unlawfully when it placed two Muslim organizations, International Islamic Charity Organization and Assalam Charity, on the so-called ban list. The ban list, implemented in 2021, made it a criminal offense to receive more than DKK 10,000 from persons or organizations on the prohibited list.⁵⁵ The purpose of the list was, according to then minister for immigration and integration Mattias Tesfaye from the Social Democrats, to combat anti-democratic “extreme” forces that seek to “turn our Muslim fellow citizens against Denmark and thereby divide our society” and “undermine the values on which Danish society is based.”⁵⁶

The organizations were put on the list based on classified information, which is against the law. The current minister, Kaare Dybvad Bek from the Social Democrats, however reports that the two organizations are now back on the list.⁵⁷ In 2023, five

50. Emma Busk, “Langer ud efter TV 2: ‘Giver efter for racistisk pres’”, *ekstrabladet.dk*, February 20, 2024, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://ekstrabladet.dk/underholdning/filmogtv/langer-ud-efter-tv-2-giver-efter-for-racistisk-pres/10135244>

51. Johanne Lerhard & Nanna Sofie Pehrson, “Tidligere TV 2-journalist stævner kendt debattør for 200.000 kroner”, *politiken.dk*, May 15, 2024, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://politiken.dk/kultur/medier/art9901036/Tidligere-TV-2-journalist-st%C3%A6vner-kendt-debatt%C3%B8r-for-200.000-kroner>

52. *Ibid.*

53. Center for Muslimers Rettigheder i Danmark (@ceda_dk), Instagram post, December 20, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/C1FXnDgMHLB/?igsh=MTM0dTh1Njl5NTY4YQ==>

54. Niels Kvale, “Klip i TV Avisen kunne misforstås”, *dr.dk*, December 20, 2023, retrieved October 23, from <https://www.dr.dk/etik-og-rettelser/fejl-og-fakta/klip-i-tv-avisen-kunne-misforstaas>

55. Danish Immigration Service, “Personer på forbudslisten”, *us.dk*, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://us.dk/center-for-dokumentation-og-indsats-mod-ekstremisme/indhentning-og-analyse/forbudslisten/selve-forbudslisten/>

56. Camilla Klarskov, “Staten brød loven, da den satte muslimske organisationer på forbudsliste. Nu beklager minister”, *kristeligt-dagblad.dk*, July 18, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/skal-fremtidens-aeldrepleje-vaere-selvfinansieret-debatten-er-sparket-igang>

57. *Ibid.*

legal entities and one person were on the ban list; of the six people in total, five of them were Muslim and one of them was Russian.⁵⁸

Equality spokesperson, Tine Bramsen, and former immigration spokesperson, Kasper Sand Kjær, both from the Social Democrats, announced that they want to close a “loophole” in legislation that makes it possible to take multiple wives in religious communities through religious marriages, even though it is only judicially legal to marry one person at a time.⁵⁹

According to Kasper Sand Kjær, immigration spokesperson for the Social Democrats, “It’s not enough to criminalize it in itself. We also need to talk more about how to win the cultural battle that is going on in some of the minority ethnic communities today.”⁶⁰

An analysis by the Danish Institute of Human Rights in 2023 revealed that the proportion of residents in Denmark without Danish citizenship has increased over the years due to repeated tightening of Danish citizenship rules in 2006, 2008, 2015, 2018, and 2021.⁶¹

The analysis shows:

- 1. Increase in Non-Citizen Residents:** From 1980 to 2023, the proportion of residents without Danish citizenship has surged from 1.9% to 10.5%. This represents a substantial demographic shift, with approximately 620,000 individuals in Denmark falling into this category, a sizable portion of whom are born in Denmark and are descendants of immigrants.
- 2. Decrease in Citizenship among Descendants:** Descendants under 18 with Danish citizenship are declining. Specifically, this proportion has dwindled from 65% in the period between 2006 and 2011 to just 48% as of January 1, 2023, marking the lowest point since 2000. Moreover, as of January 1, 2023, only 64% of approximately 213,000 descendants of immigrants born in Denmark have Danish citizenship. Consequently, around 77,000 descendants lack Danish citizenship and, therefore, have fewer rights.
- 3. Limited Access to Citizenship for Non-Nordic People:** Despite legal obligations to facilitate citizenship for individuals born and raised in Denmark, the process is not as straightforward for non-Nordic citizens. Unlike Nordic citizens, who can obtain Danish citizenship by declaration after residing in Den-

58. Danish Immigration Service, “Personer på forbudslisten”, us.dk, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://us.dk/center-for-dokumentation-og-indsats-mod-ekstremisme/indhentning-og-analyse/forbudslisten/selve-forbudslisten/>

59. Kristian Skovby Ørbæk, “S vil gøre op med flerkoneri: - Vi vil ikke acceptere et parallelsamfund”, tv2.dk, July 26, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-07-16-s-vil-goere-op-med-flerkoneri-vi-vil-ikke-acceptere-et-parallelsamfund>

60. (Ibid.)

61. Institut for Menneskerettigheder, “HISTORISK MANGE BØRN OG UNGE UDEN DANSK STATS-BORGERSKAB”, analysis, February 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://menneskeret.dk/udgivelser/historisk-boern-unge-uden-dansk-statsborgerskab>

mark for seven years once they reach adulthood, non-Nordic citizens must meet more stringent general conditions for citizenship.

The requirements for obtaining both permanent residence and citizenship place a number of restrictions on young people's life choices, when it comes to travel, education, employment, and the right to vote in parliamentary elections.⁶²

In 2023, Nye Borgerlige (New Right) MP Mikkel Bjørn was elected as the new chairman of the Danish Parliament's Citizenship Committee. Bjørn has previously voiced Islamophobic opinions, including calling the hijab a "tool of torture" and said that "freedom and the homeland must be reclaimed and given back to the Danes."⁶³

When asked whether he will take into account whether an applicant for citizenship comes from a country with a predominantly Muslim population, he said, "We have such bad experiences with giving citizenship to people from Islamic countries that unless we have a model where I can get more insight into people's attitudes, views, and values, I will have a hard time defending giving citizenship to people I know nothing about."⁶⁴

In May 2021, a political agreement called the "Children First" reform was enacted. According to politicians, the Children First and the Children's Act reform will help children and young people in vulnerable positions, but the reform has been criticized for being 'superficial' and 'on the edge of violating human rights.'⁶⁵ Furthermore, the reform implicitly targets so-called non-Western families imposing tougher sanctions against parents when children are sent on so-called re-education trips to the parents' countries of origin, and tougher sanctions against immigrants who exercise so-called negative social control against their children.⁶⁶

A 2023 study by the Danish Institute for Human Rights shows a significant increase in the number of forced adoptions, a trend that appears to be continuing. The study indicates that the threshold for authorities to opt for the adoption of a child has been set so low that there is a risk of violating the right to family life for both children and parents. This interference can lead to the loss of a child's identity and connection to their origins, including their ethnic and religious background.⁶⁷

62. Ibid.

63. Ritza, "Formand vil lade nationalitet påvirke nye statsborgerskaber", *amtsavisen.dk*, January 8, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://amtsavisen.dk/danmark/formand-vil-lade-nationalitet-paavirke-nye-statsborgerskaber>

64. Ibid.

65. Andreas Wind, "'Overfladisk' og 'på kant med menneskeretten': Lovforslag om tvangs bortadopter af ufødte børn møder kritik", *altinget.dk*, November 14, 2022, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/overfladisk-og-paa-kant-med-menneskeretten-lovforslag-om-tvangsbortadopter-af-ufoedte-boern-moeder-kritik>

66. Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, "Børnene Først Et trygt hjem og flere rettigheder til udsatte børn", *Social- og Ældreudvalget 2020-21 SOU Alm.del - endeligt svar på spørgsmål 266 Offentligt*, January 2021, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20201/alm.del/sou/spm/266/svar/1751501/2342701.pdf>

67. Anette Faye Jacobsen, et al., "TVANGSADOPTION I ET MENNESKERETTLIGT PERSPEKTIV", *Institut for Menneskerettigheder*, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://menneskeret.dk/udgivelser/tvangsadoptioner>

The report highlights differences between two groups of parents: those whose children have been placed for forced adoption and those whose children have been placed in foster care. One notable difference between these groups is ethnicity.

Both the European Court of Human Rights and the Danish Supreme Court have stressed that children have the right to know their origins, including their ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic origins, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, in Denmark, contact between the child and their biological family is rarely established after adoption, leading to a break in the child's bond with their parents and a lack of access to their cultural background. In Denmark, visitation is never established after an adoption, even though it is a right of the child and their biological family to maintain contact after adoption.⁶⁸

On June 30, the Danish government condemned Quran burnings and pledged to explore interventions in situations where other cultures or religions are insulted, especially if they pose security risks to Denmark.⁶⁹

With 94 votes in favor and 77 votes against, a ban on the “improper treatment” of significant religious objects was voted through in the Danish Parliament, extending beyond embassy areas to public places.⁷⁰ The ban, that is popularly known as the “Quran Law,” covers public burning, smearing, or trampling, and carries penalties of fines and up to two years’ imprisonment. The law excludes satirical drawings and expressions. Several opposition parties criticized the government in a joint statement, stating: “The violent man’s veto must not apply and must not set the framework for Danish politics and Danish democracy.”⁷¹ However, a poll conducted by Megafon, an analysis and consulting firm, showed that most Danes support the government’s proposal to ban Quran burnings, with 51% in favor and 39% opposed.⁷²

Danish Muslims welcomed the ban; however, they expressed disappointment that the ban was influenced by foreign policy and economic pressure rather than concern

68. Anette Faye Jacobsen, et al., “TVANGSADOPTION I ET MENNESKERETLIGT PERSPEKTIV”, Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://menneskeret.dk/udgivelser/tvangsadoptioner>

69. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Statement by the Danish government”, press release, [via.ritzau.dk](https://via.ritzau.dk/embedded/release/13707185/statement-by-the-danish-government?publisherId=2012662&lang=en), July 30, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://via.ritzau.dk/embedded/release/13707185/statement-by-the-danish-government?publisherId=2012662&lang=en>

70. Mette Pabst, “Folketinget stemmer ja til omstridt koranlov”, [dr.dk](https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/folketinget-stemmer-ja-til-omstridt-koranlov), December 7, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/folketinget-stemmer-ja-til-omstridt-koranlov>

71. Ritzau, “Oppositionspartier går sammen i protest mod koranafbrændingsforbud”, [tv2.dk](https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-08-02-oppositionspartier-gaar-sammen-i-protest-mod-koranafbraendingsforbud), August 2, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-08-02-oppositionspartier-gaar-sammen-i-protest-mod-koranafbraendingsforbud>

72. Anne Klejsgaard Friis, “Koranafbrænding skal forbydes, mener flertal af danskere”, [tv2.dk](https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-08-10-koranafbraending-skal-forbydes-mener-flertal-af-danskere), August 12, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2023-08-10-koranafbraending-skal-forbydes-mener-flertal-af-danskere>

for the protection of the Muslim community.⁷³ They advocated for extending the ban to all forms of Quran mockery.⁷⁴

After the ban was implemented, Rasmus Paludan, a Danish-Swedish politician and lawyer, who is the founder and leader of the right-wing party Stram Kurs (Hard Line) and who is known for his Quran burnings, announced plans to form a theatre group named “Official Message from Prime Minister of Denmark” to criticize anti-democratic forces, including politicians.⁷⁵ By doing this, Paludan is able to avoid breaking the law as the latter exempts works of art where “improper treatment” is a minor part.

Following the political awareness of anti-Semitism, a 26-year-old man from Copenhagen was charged with public approval of terrorist acts on SnapChat. Three other cases have been dropped. In total, 32 cases have been registered in the police districts as of December 15 for public approval of terrorist acts.⁷⁶ Amongst the cases that were made public, all targeted Muslims, feeding into the trope of Muslims being anti-Semitic and terrorists.

On December 14, two men and a woman were arrested in a large and coordinated operation by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) and a number of police districts on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack in Denmark. In total, six people were imprisoned as a result of the police counterterrorism operation.⁷⁷

On the day of the arrests, PET’s head of operations said that the police were “at-tentive to Jewish locations.”⁷⁸ The court case is being conducted behind closed doors, which means that the public does not know the names of the individuals or what the individuals are charged with.⁷⁹ However, it was later revealed that the accused 60-year-

73. Rasmus Jungersen, “Danske muslimer hilser koran-forslag velkommen, men håber at regeringen går endnu længere”, dr.dk, August 2, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/danske-muslimer-hilser-koran-forslag-velkommen-men-haaber-regeringen-gaar-endnu>

74. Karoline Noer, “Dansk Muslims Union: Vi er blevet en lus mellem to negle i debatten om koranabændringer”, berlingske.dk, August 8, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.berlingske.dk/pilestraede/dansk-muslimsk-union-vi-er-blevet-en-lus-mellem-to-negle-i-debatten-om>

75. Ritzau, “Paludan stifter teatertrup for at komme uden om koranlov”, December 11, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/paludan-stifter-teatertrup-komme-uden-om-koranlov>

76. Anette Pedersen, “Mand tiltalt for billigelse af terror”, anklagemyndigheden.dk, December 18, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://anklagemyndigheden.dk/da/mand-tiltalt-billigelse-af-terror>

77. Frederik Hagemann-Nielsen, “Anklagemyndigheden bekræfter: Terroranholdelser har trådt til Hamas”, dr.dk, January 12, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/anklagemyndigheden-bekraefter-terroranholdelser-har-traade-til-hamas>

78. Louise Dalsgaard, “Analytiker: Hamas-kobling i mørklagt terrrorsag rejser flere centrale spørgsmål”, dr.dk, January 9, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/analytiker-hamas-kobling-i-moerklagt-terrorsag-rejser-flere-centrale-spoergsmaal>

79. Frederik Hagemann-Nielsen, “Anklagemyndigheden bekræfter: Terroranholdelser har trådt til Hamas”, dr.dk, January 12, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/anklagemyndigheden-bekraefter-terroranholdelser-har-traade-til-hamas>

old man is a Danish-Palestinian man who is a well-known for his international charity work in the Muslim community in Copenhagen.⁸⁰

Following the arrests in Denmark, the Prime Minister of Israel claimed that its Mossad intelligence service had helped prevent Hamas attacks on Israeli, Jewish, and Western targets on European soil.⁸¹ (Fig. 3)

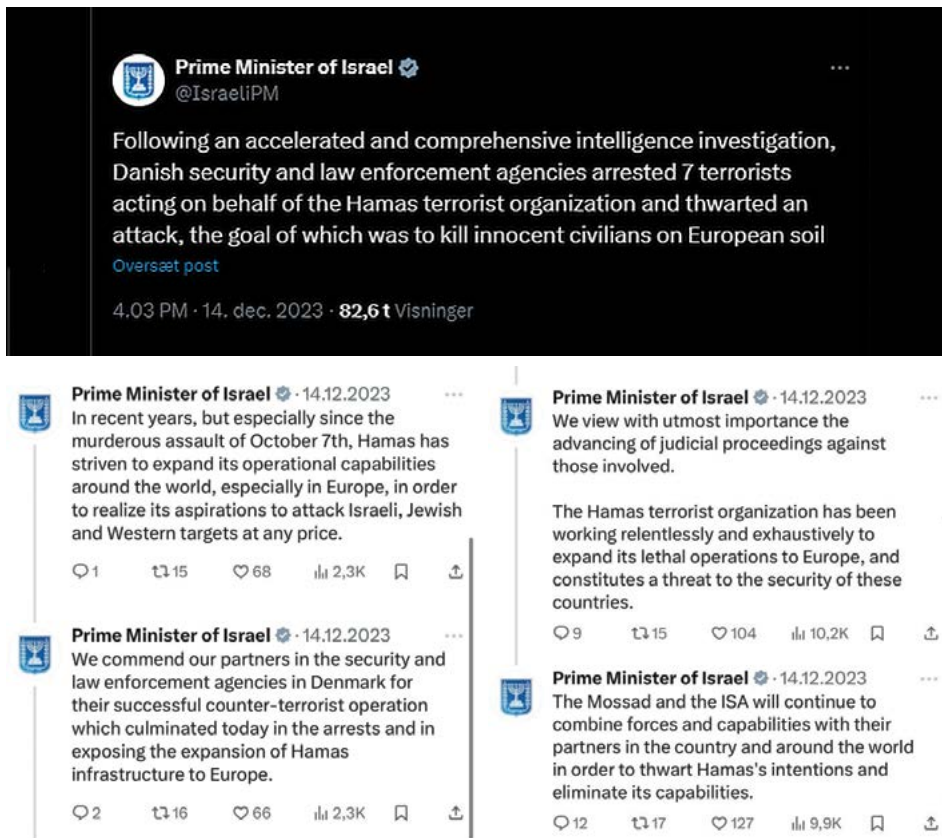


Figure 3: Prime Minister of Israel on X

Source: Prime Minister of Israel, X, 14 December 2023, <https://x.com/IsraeliPM/status/1735314600877334936>

The case has been criticized for being behind double-closed doors and covered up for months, with not even the families of the accused knowing what the police allegations are.⁸²

80. Louise Dalsgaard, "Analytiker: Hamas-kobling i mørklagt terrrorsag rejser flere centrale spørgsmål", dr.dk, January 9, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/analytiker-hamas-kobling-i-moerklagt-terrorsag-rejser-flere-centrale-spoergsmaal>

81. Reuters and ILH staff, "Denmark foils Hamas plot with help of Mossad", israelhayom.com, December 14, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.israelhayom.com/2023/12/14/4-arrested-in-denmark-on-suspicion-of-planning-terror-attack-on-jewish-targets/>

82. Mathias Oldager, "Mørklagt sag om planlægning af terrorhandling møder kritik fra forsvarsadvokat", dr.dk, March 27, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/seneste/moerklagt-sag-om-plan-laegning-af-terrorhandling-moeder-kritik-fra-forsvarsadvokat>

In January 2024, the police said that the case has links to Hamas, but the exact link between Hamas and the arrests remains unclear.⁸³ The police claim that it is due to police investigative work. On October 11, 2024, the man was released. However, he is still charged in the case. He is also still incarcerated, awaiting a trial on other charges not known to the public.⁸⁴

Internet

In May 2023, the fashion magazine *Elle* featured its first cover of a Muslim woman, namely soccer player Nagin Ravand wearing a hijab. (Fig. 4) However, the cover drew criticism from the Muslim community, accusing *Elle* of Islamophobia and discrimination. The controversy arose because *Elle* stated on Instagram that they had previously chosen not to feature hijab-wearing women, believing the hijab is rarely a woman's free choice.

At *Elle*, we have so far actively chosen not to feature headscarf-wearing women on our cover. We have done this because it is our ambition to portray people as free and equal. (...) Wearing a headscarf is rarely a woman's free choice.⁸⁵

Critics, including columnist Zainab Nasrati, argued that *Elle* was projecting its own prejudices and not listening to Muslim women.

Danish headscarf-wearing women have no shortage of words to express their reasons for wearing hijab. They do it all the time. The problem lies with the power elite to which Cecilie Ingdal [editor-in-chief of ELLE Denmark.] belongs. They are unable to listen to what the Muslim women themselves are saying.⁸⁶

Nagin Ravand herself also expressed her disappointment on Instagram.

I would never have participated if I had known it would end up here. I honestly thought I had finally made a little more space for girls and women like me, just like I have done on the soccer field. This time on a cover page.⁸⁷

83. Frederik Hagemann-Nielsen, "Anklagemyndigheden bekræfter: Terroranholdelser har trådt til Hamas", dr.dk, January 12, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/anklagemyndigheden-bekraefter-terroranholdelser-har-traade-til-hamas>

84. Ida Meessenburg, "58-årig løsladt i mørklagt terrorsag med tråde til Hamas", dr.dk, October 10, 2024, retrieved October 14, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/seneste/58-aarig-loesladd-i-moerklagt-terror-sag-med-traade-til-hamas>

85. ELLE DK (@elledanmark), instagram post, May 24, 2023, retrieved October 14, 2024, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CsocSxMyYQr/?igsh=a3o0cDR6emt4cmhk>

86. Zainab Nasrati, "Modemagasinet Elle bekræfter den islamofobi, der stadig gennemsyner magteliten", altinget.dk, June 5, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.altinget.dk/artikel/modemagasinet-elle-har-bekraefter-den-islamofobi-der-stadig-gennemsyner-magteliten>

87. Didde Venzel, "'En vanvittig påstand': Modemagasinet Elle er endt i en shitstorm efter tørklædeopslag på Instagram", jyllands-posten.dk, May 26, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://jyllands-posten.dk/kultur/ECE15909246/en-vanvittig-paastand-modemagasinet-elle-er-endt-i-en-shitstorm-efter-toerklædeopslag-paa-instagram/>

Following the backlash, *Elle* wrote a new post, stating: Apologies to @naginarvand and all those who have been hurt, angry and offended by our recent post about women wearing headscarves. In particular, the sentence “wearing a headscarf is rarely a woman’s free choice”. It was wrong of us to word it the way we did (...) We understand that parts of the post were too unnuanced. That’s why we decided to adjust the post to more clearly support ELLE’s ambition to celebrate all women’s choices in life. An ambition that we will continue to fight for.⁸⁸

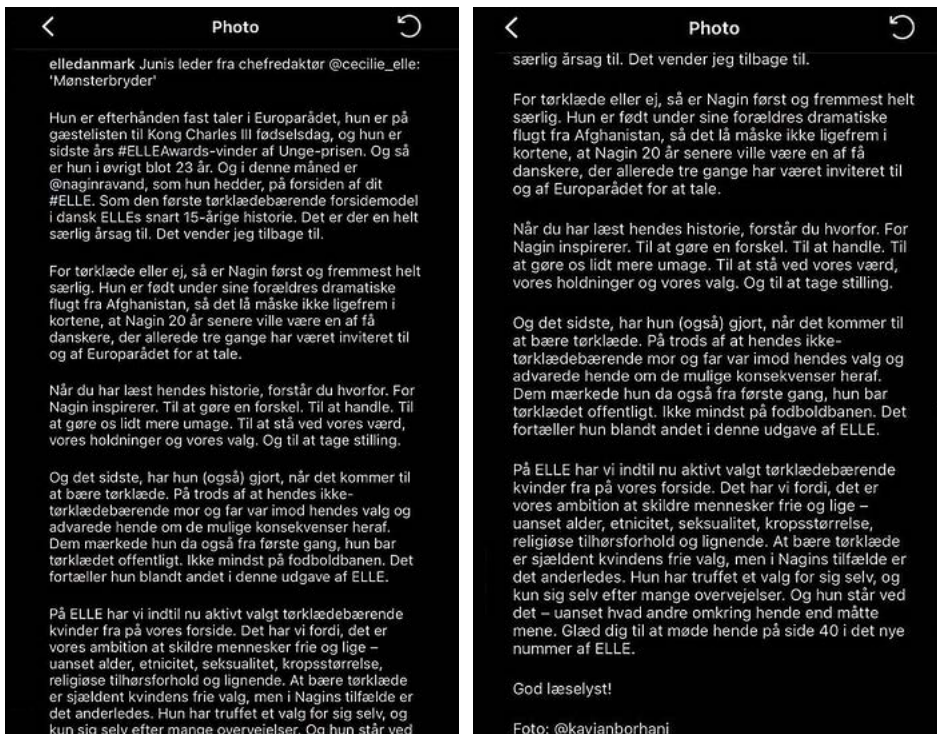


Figure 4: Elle Denmark on the hijab Source: ELLE DK (@elledanmark), instagram post, May 24, 2023, retrieved October 14, 2024, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/Csoc5xMyyQr/?igsh=a3o0cDR6emt4cmhk>

88. ELLE DK (@elledanmark), instagram post, May 26, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from https://www.instagram.com/p/CstD73nMMev/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=f3adc3f5-4b83-4c65-b6ca-1e2767e24bcd

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

One of the most central figures in promoting Islamophobia and restricting Muslims rights in Denmark has been the Danish government. A general trend in late 2023 was focusing especially on targeting pro-Palestinian protests and vilifying Muslims as anti-Semitic and extremists for their pro-Palestinian solidarity. On November 9, 2023, the Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, wrote a public letter to the Minister of Justice Peter Hummelgaard stating that she wanted him to investigate whether pro-Palestinian protests promote terrorism and whether police and prosecutors can intervene. In the letter, she noted that she had observed “disturbing behavior in Denmark fuelled by the conflict” and emphasized that “it clearly shows that there are people in Denmark who have not embraced our Danish values,”⁸⁹ insinuating that it is not ethnic Danes she was addressing, but immigrants.

She requested a report from the Ministry of Justice on how the police and prosecutors are using criminal law against incitement to and approval of terrorism in relation to recent pro-Palestinian demonstrations and public statements.⁹⁰

A week later, Hummelgaard provided a report on the authorities’ handling of terrorist conspiracy and incitement in connection with recent demonstrations and public statements. The report stated that the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) had sharpened its focus on anti-Semitic and other hate crimes, increased their attention to demonstrations and events related to the conflict, heightened awareness of statements that may be covered by the Criminal Code’s provisions on condoning terrorism, and increased security around Israeli, Jewish, and Palestinian interests and activities in Denmark.⁹¹

The link between Pro-Palestinian protests, Muslims, and terrorism/extremism was also made by the Minister for Immigration and Integration Kaare Dybvad Bek who stated, “But there is a tendency among people with a background in Muslim countries and among Western youth to a kind of extremism that we have not seen before.”⁹²

89. The Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen, letter to the the Minister of Justice, Peter Hummelgaard, Retsudvalget 2023-24, REU Alm.del - Bilag 43, Offentligt, November 9, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20231/almdel/REU/bilag/43/2777893.pdf>

90. Ritzau, “Mette Frederiksen vil have undersøgt, om Gaza-demoer opfordrer til terror”, dr.dk, November 9, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/mette-frederiksen-vil-have-undersoegt-om-gaza-demoer-opfordrer-til-terror>

91. Letter from the National Police to the Ministry of Justice, Retsudvalget 2023-24 REU Alm.del Offentligt, November 16, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20231/almdel/reu/spm/362/svar/2009033/2800311/index.htm>

92. Jens From Lyng, “Minister: Gaza-reaktioner viser, at uddannelse ikke er lig med integration”, kristeligt-dagblad.dk, December 5, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2023, from <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/danmark/minister-gaza-reaktioner-viser-uddannelse-ikke-er-lig-med-integration>

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Bilka, a Danish hypermarket chain, dedicated a whole page in their weekly supermarket leaflet to Eid, and in Bilka's party accessories department, there were balloons and decorations to celebrate Eid. In an article by TV2, several Muslims stated that it made them feel part of the community seeing decorations for Muslim holidays in the supermarkets.⁹³



Figure 5: Bilka supermarket leaflet, Source: Bilka supermarket leaflet, April 14-17, 2023

The Danish Supreme Court ordered Rasmus Paludan, leader of the right-wing Stram Kurs party, to pay DKK 15,000 (approx. 2000€) to a Danish-Somali woman for violating her honor when yelling racist and sexist slurs against her during one of his so-called demonstrations.⁹⁴

93. Jeppe Tholstrup Bach, "Kunder jubler over Eid-pynt i dansk supermarked: - Det er et kæmpestort skridt", tv2.dk, April 13, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2023-04-13-kunder-jubler-over-eid-pynt-i-dansk-supermarked-det-er-et-kaempestort-skridt>

94. Ritzau, "Paludan skal betale godtgørelse på 15.000 til kvinde", August 18, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/paludan-skal-betale-godtgoerelse-paa-15000-til-kvinde>

In an op-ed, the woman recounts how, in November 2019, Paludan live-streamed his harassment of her on YouTube, making racist remarks and gestures. Fearing further harassment from the extreme right, she obtained a secret address and remained silent while the case was publicized, fearing for her safety.⁹⁵

Despite Islamophobic efforts to turn the pro-Palestinian movement into a case of anti-Semitic and terror-prone Muslims, the movement, consisting of a broad spectrum of the Danish population, has resisted the Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian narrative and repeatedly stood in solidarity with Palestinians in daily protests. People from various sectors, including the film industry, lawyers, doctors, trade unionists, and students from different universities, the Royal Academy, the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, midwifery, music conservatories, media and journalism students, etc., signed solidarity statements in favor of Palestine.⁹⁶

In addition to the daily demonstrations and the solidarity statements, a group of citizens formulated a citizen proposal urging Denmark to condemn Israeli war crimes in Gaza, increase Danish aid to Palestine, and actively pursue a political resolution to the conflict. Once a citizen proposal garners 50,000 supporters, it earns the right to be presented as a resolution in the Danish Parliament. Within just two days, the proposal garnered 50,000 signatures, making it one of the fastest citizen proposals to reach the threshold for consideration at Christiansborg. However, despite ultimately amassing around 80,000 signatures,⁹⁷ the proposal was nevertheless rejected by politicians.⁹⁸

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The 2023 report on Islamophobia in Denmark reveals persistent anti-Muslim hate crimes and systemic discrimination. Despite a reduction in reported hate crimes, significant underreporting and inconsistent data collection highlight ongoing challenges. Political measures, such as the 37-hour work obligation, and linking pro-Palestinian protests with terror, reveal underlying Islamophobic stereotypes, further complicating the social and political landscape for Muslims in Denmark.

95. Nafisa Fiidow, "Jeg vil ikke længere gemme mig bag anonymitet": Hun blev æreskrænket af Paludan. Nu står hun frem", *politiken.dk*, September 10, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://politiken.dk/debat/debatindlaeg/art9517606/Hun-blev-%C3%A6reskr%C3%A6nket-af-Paludan.-Nu-st%C3%A5r-hun-frem>

96. Stop Annekteringen (@stopannekteringen), retrieved October 14, 2024, from <https://www.instagram.com/stopannekteringen?igsh=MWd3MW90c25oYWZjYQ==>

97. The Parliament, "Danmark skal fordømme israelske krigsforbrydelser i Gaza, øge dansk bistand til Palæstina og arbejde for en politisk løsning på konflikten", *borgerforslag.dk*, October 30, 2023-December 19, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.borgerforslag.dk/se-og-stoet-forslag/?Id=FT-16175>

98. The Parliament, "B 84 Forslag til folketingsbeslutning om, at Danmark skal fordømme israelske krigsforbrydelser i Gaza, øge dansk bistand til Palæstina og arbejde for en politisk løsning på konflikten (borgerforslag)", November 16, 2023, retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20231/beslutningsforslag/b84/index.htm>

Recommendations

- **Enhanced Data Collection:** “Implement robust data collection methods to record hate crime incidents, reports, charges, indictments and convictions accurately, ensuring that hate crime statistics reflect the true scale of the issue.
- **Mandatory Reporting:** Require law enforcement officers to record a crime as hate-motivated if the victim perceives it as such, to improve the accuracy of hate crime data.
- **Training and Education:** Provide comprehensive training for police officers, prosecutors, and judges on recognizing and handling hate crimes, emphasizing the importance of identifying hate motives in criminal cases.
- **Transparency in Sentencing:** Ensure that convictions in hate crime cases are specifically recorded and made publicly accessible to enhance transparency and accountability.
- **Public Statements and Education:** Government leaders should publicly denounce Islamophobia and make clear that it has no place in Danish society. Educational campaigns should be launched to inform the public about the harmful effects of Islamophobia and promote tolerance and understanding.
- **Citizenship:** The government should give all young people born and/or raised in Denmark the right to obtain Danish citizenship by declaration, when they turn 18 years old, and give children the right to obtain Danish citizenship before the age of 18, as recommended by the Danish Institute of Human Rights.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs aimed at combating Islamophobia, making necessary adjustments to improve outcomes.
- **Policy Review and Reform:** Conduct a thorough review of existing laws and policies to identify and eliminate any that are based on Islamophobic stereotypes or that disproportionately affect Muslim communities. Reforms should ensure that all policies are in line with human rights standards.
- **Impact Assessments:** Implement mandatory impact assessments for new policies to evaluate their potential effects on religious and ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims. This will help prevent the introduction of policies that could exacerbate Islamophobia.
- **Consultation with Muslim Communities:** Establish formal channels for consulting with Muslim community leaders and organizations when developing or revising policies. This will ensure that their perspectives and concerns are taken into account.

By implementing these recommendations, NGOs and state institutions can work together to reduce Islamophobia, address systemic discrimination, and promote a more inclusive and tolerant society in Denmark.

Chronology

- **10 May:** A proposal to make the Danish cartoon crisis a mandatory part of school curriculum was rejected.
- **18 August:** The Supreme Court ruled that Rasmus Paludan must pay DKK 15,000 (approx. 2000€) in compensation to a Somali woman whose honor he violated during one of his so-called demonstrations.
- **13 October:** A 37-hour work requirement for social benefit recipients who do not meet residency and employment criteria was implemented. The requirement targets “non-Western” immigrant women.
- **9 November:** The prime minister stated that she wanted to investigate whether pro-Palestinian protests promote terrorism.
- **7 December:** A ban on the “improper treatment” of significant religious objects, popularly known as the “Quran Law,” was voted through in the Danish Parliament.
- **15 December:** A large and coordinated anti-terror operation was conducted on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack in Denmark. The national intelligence agency of the state of Israel, Mossad, claimed involvement in the action stating they had helped prevent Hamas attacks on Israeli, Jewish, and Western targets on European soil.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ESTONIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Kokkuvõte

2023. aastal ei registreerinud politsei ega vabaühendused füüsilisi ega verbaalseid rünnakuid moslemite vastu. Siiski on oluline märkida, et vabaühenduste ja rahvusvaheliste organisatsioonide kriitika kohaselt on Eestis vaenukõne ja vaenukuritegude õiguslik regulatsioon puudulik ning see takistab vastava statistika kogumist ja vähemuste tõhusa kaitse pakkumist praktikas. Oluliseks edasiminekuks võib pidada 2023. aasta juunis algatatud seaduseelnõud, millega muudetakse karistusseadustiku vaenu õhutamise sätet, samuti lisatakse raskendava asjaoluna see, kui süütegu on toime pandud ohvri rahvuse, rassi, nahavärvi, soo, puude, keele, päritolu, usutunnistuse, seksuaalse sättumuse, poliitiliste veendumuste või varalise või sotsiaalse seisundi tunnusest tulenevalt. Samas ei ole peale esimest lugemist seaduseelnõu osas arenguid olnud.

2023. aasta valimised lõppesid võiduga võimul olnud Reformierakonnale, kes lõi koalitsiooni liberaalse Eesti 200 Erakonna ja Sotsiaaldemokraatliku Erakonnaga, jättes opositsiooni Eesti Konservatiivse Rahvaerakonna (EKRE), Keskerakonna ja Isamaa. Valimisprogrammides ega valimisreklaamides islamofobset sisu ei olnud, kuid EKRE juht Martin Helme on väljendanud intervjuudes ja taskuhäälingusaates “Räägime asjast” islamofobseid seisukohti. EKRE uudisteportaal Uued Uudised levitab endiselt regulaarselt islamofobseid stereotüüpe, mida sotsiaalmeedias jagatakse koos kommentaaridega, mis sisaldavad moslemite vastu suunatud vaenukõnet.

Sarnaselt varasematele aastatele kujutas Kaitsepolitsei ameti (KAPO) aastaülevaade Eesti moslemeid ohtlikena, hoiatades ohutegurite eest, mis islamiusuliste suurenenud kogukonnaga “paratamatult suurenevad”.

Sõda Gazas on tekitanud pingeid ka Eestis, näiteks 2023. aasta novembris sekus politsei rahumeelsesesse meeleavaldusse, eemaldades ja trahvides viit osalejat loosungi “Jõest mereni” kasutamise tõttu. Samuti on ilmunud paar Gaza sõjaga seotud islamofobse alatooniga arvamuskirjutusi ning on postitatud islamofobseid kommentaare sotsiaalmeedias.

Executive Summary

In 2023, there were no physical or verbal attacks against Muslims recorded by the police or NGOs in Estonia. However, it is important to note that Estonian hate speech and hate crime regulation is inadequate, which hinders the collecting of the appropriate statistics and providing effective protection to minorities in practice. As an important step forward, in June 2023, the government initiated a draft law amending the incitement to hatred provision in the Penal Code, as well as adding it as an aggravating circumstance if an offence is motivated by the victim's nationality, race, skin colour, gender, disability, language, origin, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, economic, or social status. There have been no developments regarding the draft law after its first reading.

The 2023 elections ended in victory for the ruling Reform Party, which formed a coalition with the liberal Estonia 200 Party and the Social Democratic Party, leaving the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE), the Centre Party, and Isamaa in opposition. While there was no Islamophobic content in the election programmes or campaign ads, the leader of EKRE, Martin Helme, expressed Islamophobic sentiments in interviews and on his podcast "Räägime asjast". EKRE news portal "Uued Uudised" still regularly spreads Islamophobic stereotypes, which are shared on social media and attract hate speech against Muslims.

As in previous years, the annual review of the Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO) portrayed Muslims in Estonia as dangerous, including general warnings about risk factors that are "inevitably linked" to a growing Muslim community.

The war in Gaza has also created tensions in Estonia. For example, in November 2023, the police intervened in a peaceful demonstration, removing and fining five participants due to the use of the slogan "From the river to the sea". The war has also led to a few opinion articles with Islamophobic undertones and Islamophobic comments in relation to the war on social media.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Estonia

Type of Regime: Democratic republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: Reform Party, Estonia 200, Social Democratic Party (coalition)

Opposition Parties: Centre Party, Conservative People's Party of Estonia, Isamaa Party

Last Elections: 2023 parliamentary elections (Reform Party: 37 seats, Conservative People's Party of Estonia: 17 seats, Centre Party: 16 seats, Estonia 200: 14 seats, Social Democratic Party: 9 seats, Isamaa: 8 seats)

Total Population: 1,366,491 (2024)

Major Language: Estonian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Orthodoxy (16%), Lutheranism (8%), No religion (58%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 0.5%, according to the last national census in 2021

Main Muslim Community Organisations: Estonian Islamic Congregation

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: NGOs that focus, amongst other things, on equal treatment of Muslims and other minorities in Estonia are the Estonian Human Rights Centre, the Estonian Refugee Council, the International House Tartu

Far-Right Parties: Conservative People's Party of Estonia

Far-Right Movements: Active Club Estonia

Far-Right Violent Organisations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No. According to the Animal Protection Act, to slaughter a farm animal for a religious purpose, a religious association must obtain the relevant permit.
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** No

Introduction

Estonian culture is generally distant from religion. According to the 2021 census, only 29% of people aged 15 and over in Estonia feel affiliated with a religion. The number of Muslims in Estonia, although still small, has increased since the last census in 2011, from 0.1% to 0.5% of the population.¹

Historically, a significant portion of Estonia's Muslim population has been composed of Tatars, who are the founders of the Estonian Islamic Congregation in Tallinn. However, recently the Muslim community has grown due to immigration and local converts.²

One notable feature of Islam in Estonia is the absence of a traditional mosque. Instead, the community gathers at the Islamic Centre in Tallinn, which serves as the primary place of worship and community activities.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

In 2023, there were eight misdemeanours registered under the incitement to hatred provision (§ 151) of the Penal Code, but Islamophobic motive was not evident in any of the cases.³ The Estonian Penal Code does not include any other provisions on hate crime or bias motivation as an aggravating circumstance.

No NGOs have reported cases of physical or verbal attacks committed against Muslims in 2023.

Employment

No cases of discrimination against Muslims in the field of employment were recorded by equality bodies⁴ or the Labour Inspectorate⁵ in 2023.

Education

There have been no reports of Islamophobic content becoming a part of educational materials. In 2023, there was growing discussion about whether to make religious

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1. Statistics Estonia, "Demographic and ethno-cultural characteristics of the population", 2021, <https://rahvaloendus.ee/et/tulemused/rahvastiku-demograafilised-ja-etno-kultuurilised-naitajad> (Access date: 9 May 2024).
 2. Ege Lepa, "The 'Tatar Way' of Understanding and Practising Islam in Estonia", *Studia Orientalia Electronica*, Vol 8(2) (2020), p. 70.
 3. Estonian Ministry of Justice, Response to request for information, 19 April 2024.
 4. Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, Response to request for information, 25 April 2024; Chancellor of Justice, Response to request for information, 15 April 2024.
 5. Labour Inspectorate of Estonia, Response to request for information, 12 April 2024.

studies compulsory in schools.⁶ Currently, religious studies is an optional subject in both basic and secondary school, and while schools are completely free to decide whether they offer religious studies, most schools do not have this subject at all.⁷ In 2023, a petition was submitted to the Estonian Parliament (*Riigikogu*) with a proposal to hold a referendum with the question: “Do you support the inclusion of non-confessional religious education among the compulsory subjects of basic school and secondary school?”. According to the proposal, it was submitted in light of the growing importance of religions “in an increasingly globalised world where the roots of the behaviour of different societies and ethnic groups, as well as conflicts and their resolution, often lie in religious beliefs and identity”. The proposal is currently being reviewed by the Parliament.⁸

Politics

During the 2023 parliamentary elections in Estonia, election campaigns were dominated by issues of national security and aid to Ukraine, prompted by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, along with socio-economic concerns and the increasing cost of living. The elections ended in victory for the ruling liberal Reform Party led by Kaja Kallas, while the Conservative People’s Party of Estonia (EKRE) became the second-largest party with 17 seats.⁹ The Reform Party formed a coalition with the liberal Estonia 200 Party and the Social Democratic Party, leaving EKRE, the Centre Party, and Isamaa in opposition.

No Islamophobic rhetoric was noticeable in the election campaigns; however, EKRE and Isamaa included an anti-immigration aspect to their campaigns, aligning with their nationalist and conservative agendas. Isamaa’s 2023 election programme supported a conservative migration policy and stressed that immigration should not threaten the Estonian identity.¹⁰

While EKRE’s election programme or campaign ads were not explicitly Islamophobic, its leader Martin Helme has expressed Islamophobic sentiments during the period under review. For example, in an interview in August 2023, he stated that only very limited and controlled immigration into Estonia should be allowed, claiming that “anyone with a cultural background that is incompatible with our way of life”

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6. ERR, “Olga Schihalejev: usundiõpetus ja referendum – hea mõte ja halb mõte”, 14 December 2023, <https://www.err.ee/1609192417/olga-schihalejev-usundiõpetus-ja-referendum-hea-mote-ja-halb-mote> (Access date: 8 May 2024).
 7. Õpetajate Leht, “Usundiõpetus Eesti koolides: Usun, ei usu – selles pole küsimus”, 26 March 2024, [https://opleht.ee/2024/03/usundiõpetus-est-i-koolides-\)-usun-ei-usu-selles-pole-kusimus/](https://opleht.ee/2024/03/usundiõpetus-est-i-koolides-)-usun-ei-usu-selles-pole-kusimus/) (Access date: 8 May 2024).
 8. Citizen Initiative Portal (Rahvaalgatus), “Ettepanek korraldada rahvahääletus usundiõpetuse lülitamiseks põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi kohustuslike õppeainete hulka”, 7 December 2023, <https://rahvaalgatus.ee/initiatives/1088-ettepanek-korraldada-rahvahääletus-usundiõpetuse-lülitamiseks-põhikooli-ja-gümnaasiumi-kohustuslike-õppeainete-hulka> (Access date: 8 May 2024).
 9. ERR, “Kuidas läiks erakondadel”, <https://www.err.ee/k/rk-valimised-2023> (Access date: 16 April 2024).
 10. Isamaa Party, Isamaa Election Programme 2023, <https://isamaa.ee/iwp/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Isamaa-PROGRAMM-RK2023-pikk-02.pdf> (Access date: 16 April 2024).

is not welcome to Estonia, including “radical Muslims”. He followed this by adding, “Well actually, can you find me a non-radical Muslim?”¹¹

Furthermore, EKRE’s podcast “Räägime asjast” is used as a platform for spreading Islamophobic stereotypes. For example, in its 15 October 2023 podcast, Martin Helme claimed that “Europe is groaning under the invasion of Islam” and that “it’s a culture of death, it’s a culture of destruction and killing, when they finish with the Jews, they will continue with us.”¹²

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia was not publicly commemorated by the Estonian government, political parties, or civil society in 2023.

Media

In April 2023, the Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO) published an annual review that received wide media coverage. In their review, KAPO stated that the number of foreigners from “high-risk Islamic countries” who have settled in Estonia is growing steadily and the growing Muslim community is “inevitably linked” to several other risk factors: increased contact with high-risk countries, the transfer of the origin countries’ problems to Estonia, and the increased likelihood of radicalisation.¹³ This is an old pattern: KAPO has warned about the growing Muslim community from “risk countries” in a similar manner also in previous years.¹⁴

In the same annual review, KAPO outlined social media posts by Estonian users who, according to KAPO, use religious beliefs “as an argument to incite antagonism between communities”. KAPO brought out a 32-year-old Islamic preacher “RR” as one example, who regularly posts his sermons and monologues on social media, claiming that although RR’s messages do not incite violence, he clearly calls on Muslims to distance themselves from Estonian culture. KAPO’s statements were accompanied by a screenshot of RR’s YouTube account with video thumbnails of the preacher’s face.¹⁵

11. Daniel Jarosak, “Martin Helme: What happens in Ukraine will have an immediate effect on us”, *New Eastern Europe*, 3 August 2023, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2023/08/03/what-happens-in-ukraine-will-have-an-immediate-effect-on-us/> (Access date: 16 April 2024).

12. Mart Helme, Martin Helme, “Räägime asjast: Valitsus maksustab inimesed jalameheks ja võtab neilt liikumisvabaduse”, 15 October 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/raagime-asjast-valitsus-maksustab-inimesed-jalameheks-ja-votab-neilt-liikumisvabaduse/> (Access date: 30 May 2024).

13. Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO), *Annual Review 2022-2023*, p. 36, https://kapo.ee/sites/default/files/content_page_attachments/Annual%20Review%202022-23_0.pdf (Access date: 16 April 2024).

14. “Ideological confrontation with Western social order, closed communities, ethnically based criminal groups, the growth of anti-immigration and right-wing extremism, radicalization of immigrants, terrorist attacks - these problems that have arisen in Central and Western European countries await Estonia as well in case of a large increase in communities from risk countries.” – Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO), *Annual Review 2021-2022*, p. 34, https://kapo.ee/sites/default/files/content_page_attachments/Annual%20Review_2021-22.pdf (Access date: 8 May 2024).

15. Estonian Internal Security Service (KAPO), *Annual Review 2022-2023*, p. 35, https://kapo.ee/sites/default/files/content_page_attachments/Annual%20Review%202022-23_0.pdf (Access date: 16 April 2024).

The newspaper *Eesti Päevaleht* interviewed RR, who found KAPO's approach to be unnecessary and disproportionate, explaining that he neither prevents nor calls on other Muslims to prevent people of other faiths from following their customs, but he does not feel that Muslims should participate in all the rituals of other religions to prove that they are full-fledged members of society. According to RR, no one from KAPO had contacted him before to discuss the videos and his inclusion in KAPO's annual review came as a surprise to him. He expressed concern at the danger posed to freedom of thought and expression when a state institution starts labelling more conservative views as dangerous simply because they do not align with the more liberal views of their own officials.¹⁶

In 2023, there have also been a few controversial opinion pieces in the media about the Israel-Gaza conflict. For example, in her opinion article, a politician from Isamaa, Riina Solman, strongly opposed accepting refugees from Gaza, claiming that if Estonia agreed to the calls to accept Gaza refugees,¹⁷ any demonstrations in support of Israel "would have to be protected from large and very angry gangs by riot police."¹⁸

Justice System

Estonian NGOs and international organisations have criticised the state for years because the current provision on incitement to hatred in the Penal Code does not effectively protect minorities from hate speech and there are no provisions on hate crimes. Incitement to hatred is prohibited in Estonia, but the incitement to hatred provision in the Penal Code (§ 151) does not provide real protection for minority groups, since the provision requires a specific consequence: a threat to life, health, or property.¹⁹ As a result, the European Commission is conducting an infringement procedure against Estonia for incorrect transposition of the Council Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia in relation to criminalising hate speech and hate crimes.²⁰

In June 2023, the government initiated a draft law amending the Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, and Code of Misdemeanour Procedure (incitement to hatred and hate-motivated crimes), which passed the first reading in the Parliament

16. Greete Palgi, Mari Eesmaa, "Halal-toit koolidesse? Piir moslemite usuvabaduse ja lõimumise vahel on hägune", *Eesti Päevaleht*, 4 June 2023, <https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/120196648/halal-toit-koolidesse-piir-moslemite-usuvabaduse-ja-loimumise-vahel-on-hagune> (Access date: 16 April 2024).

17. Postimees, "Avalik kiri Gazas sõjategevuse koheseks lõpetamiseks ja relvarahu sõlmimiseks", 25 October 2023, <https://arvamus.postimees.ee/7883569/eesti-uhiskonnategelased-avalik-kiri-gazas-sojategevuse-koheseks-lopetamiseks-ja-relvarahu-solmimiseks> (Access date: 23 July 2024).

18. *Eesti Päevaleht*, "Riina Solman: palestiinlaste toetajate nõudmiste täitmine rõõmustaks väga neid, kes soovivad Eesti hukku", 2 November 2023, <https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/120244618/riina-solman-palestiinlaste-toetajate-noudmiste-taitmine-roomustaks-vaga-neid-kes-soovivad-eesti-hukku> (Access date: 16 April 2024).

19. Kelly Grossthal, "Human Rights in Estonia 2024: Prohibition of discrimination", Estonian Human Rights Centre, <https://humanrights.ee/en/materials/inimoigused-estis-2024/diskrimineerimise-keeld/> (Access date: 16 April 2024).

20. European Commission, January Infringements package: key decisions, 26 January 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_23_142, (Access date: 16 April 2024).

on 27 September 2023. The draft law provides for the punishment of individuals who incite hatred in a manner that may endanger public order and stipulates it as an aggravating circumstance if an offence is motivated by the victim's nationality, race, skin colour, gender, disability, language, origin, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or economic or social status.²¹ There have been no developments regarding the draft law since its first reading.

In relation to the Gaza conflict, in November 2023, the Police and Border Guard Board removed five people from a demonstration in support of Palestine, initiating misdemeanour proceedings against them under the provision of supporting and justifying international crime, due to the use of the slogan "From the river to the sea", which was relatively unknown in Estonia until then. Four of the people involved appealed the decision of the Police and Border Guard Board with the help of the Estonian Human Rights Centre. The absurdity of the punishment was emphasised in the courtroom, where the police officer who issued the fine had to admit that they became aware of the expression and its prohibition on the same day as the demonstration.²²

Internet

In the framework of the SafeNet project, the Estonian Human Rights Centre monitors the occurrence of hate speech on social media and checks whether social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X) remove hate speech when it is reported through the appropriate channels. In the first monitoring period (March–April 2023), anti-Muslim hate speech amounted to 15% of all the reported posts.²³ In the following reporting periods, anti-Muslim hate speech ranged between 4% and 6% of the reported posts.²⁴

Other than social media, the main website that regularly spreads Islamophobic stereotypes is the Conservative People's Party of Estonia's (EKRE) news portal

21. Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament), Karistusseadustiku, kriminaalmenetluse seadustiku ja väärteomenetluse seadustiku muutmise seadus (vaenu õhutamine ja vaenumotiiviga kuriteod) 232 SE, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/tegevus/eelnoud/eelnou/da6b6990-df0b-460d-aa87-447d656e184f/karistusseadustiku-kriminaalmenetluse-seadustiku-ja-vaarteomenetluse-seadustiku-muutmise-seadus-vaenu-ohutamine-ja-vaenumotiiviga-kuriteod> (Access date: 16 April 2024).
22. Kelly Grossthal, "Meeleavalduselt ära viidud noori kohtus kaitses seisame väljendusvabaduse eest Eestis. Kuidas sell-est aru saada?", Estonian Human Rights Centre, 22 January 2024, https://humanrights.ee/2024/01/meeleavalduselt-ara-viidud-noori-kohtus-kaitses-seisame-valjendusvabaduse-est-estis-kuidas-sellest-aru-saada/?fbclid=IwAR-0pRzwNeOHE_K0bm_qdTN_kql4dsXXtmLin5rZnnNfDOW0xunnTLY4TheI (Access date: 16 April 2024).
23. Estonian Human Rights Centre, Project SafeNet, Monitoring results, https://humanrights.ee/teemad/vaen/sotsiaalmeedia/?fbclid=IwZxh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR3DwrVPvbDW70f7e83u33dU4yksQeFRDVCa6B11V-CE3ovzTltkK428hlTI_aem_AYhfsDC7yG-PuQDxhOGhQalwWiPTHuvXtoqiGzHYKIHrPFexgTQs33vIB-1jqYiv-7HJJgJN_JzhOy3aAhu5q5T5c (Access date: 7 May 2024).
24. Facebook posts of the Estonian Human Rights Centre on 6 March 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/humanrightscentre/posts/pfbid02emSSdfxUqfjsQAKwKGGHQAHAVxmdkS1EdpygoAQhNu7c9kREuUA-6JXjx4CiQLuXQQI>, 10 January 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/humanrightscentre/posts/pfbid0kfvWaThe4zZtY69xjEXREgiypUscyxdzS9CJpb3nLiYnQCp9qB9fmEnUCgyLkBlzI>, and 15 November 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/humanrightscentre/posts/pfbid02QwHqw5RqxuyhjHzYAVeTt3Fq8j9D2r1CXenhgH-JvneiKuEa8cwiMns9u6xVvG2twl> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

“Uued Uudised” (The New News).²⁵ In 2023, “Uued Uudised” published 24 articles in which Islamic themes were covered, with a fearmongering narrative that Islam is dangerous and taking over Europe. The headlines of these articles included “Islamic ‘Honour Killings’ Have Spread to Europe”²⁶; “Islamism Is Growing Its Influence in Estonia: a Member of the Muslim Brotherhood Took Part in a Demonstration, and Fully Covered Women Can Already Be Seen in University Lectures”²⁷; “Islamism Is Entrenched in Europe: German Police Raided Groups Linked to Hezbollah”²⁸; “The War Cry of Hamas Echoes in the Streets of Islamized Europe”²⁹; “Muslim Parents Demand Halal Food in Kindergartens”³⁰; “Violent Islamism Rears Its Head: Sweden Raised the Terror Threat Level”³¹; “Burning the Koran as an Inevitable Clash between Islamic and Western Cultures”³².

Articles published on “Uued Uudised” are not usually picked up by the mainstream media; however, they are actively shared on Facebook, accompanied by Islamophobic comments. “Uued Uudised” Facebook page has 25,000 followers.³³ In 2023, posts on its Facebook page regarding the war in Gaza, in particular, have attracted hate speech against Muslims.³⁴

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

While Soldiers of Odin have not been publicly visible in Estonia in the last few years, Active Club Estonia has emerged as another far-right movement. The Active Club Network, which started operating in Estonia in 2023, is a cell of an international neo-Nazi network that has spread to nearly 150 European and American cities in the last

25. Uued Uudised, <https://uueduudised.ee> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

26. Uued Uudised, “Islami ‘aumõrvad’ on levinud Euroopasse, 27 December 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/islami-aumõrvad-on-levinud-euroopasse/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

27. Uued Uudised, “Islamism kasvatab oma mõju Eestis: meeleavaldusel osales Moslemi Vennaskonna liige ja ülikoolide loengutes on juba näha üleni kaetud naised”, 23 November 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/islamism-kasvatab-oma-mõju-eestis-meeleavaldusel-osales-moslemi-vennaskonna-liige-ja-ulikoolide-loengutes-on-juba-naha-üleni-kaetud-naised/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

28. Uued Uudised, “Islamism on Euroopas kinnistunud: Saksa politsei tegi haarangu Hizbollah’ga seotud rühmitustele”, 16 November 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/islamism-on-euroopas-kinnistunud-saksa-politsei-tegi-haarangu-hizbollahga-seotud-ruhmitustele/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

29. Uued Uudised, “Islamiseerunud Euroopa tänavatel kajab Hamasi sõjahüüd”, 5 November 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/islamiseerunud-euroopa-tanavatel-kajab-hamasi-sojahuud/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

30. Uued Uudised, “Reformierakondlikule venestamisele lisandub islamiseerimine: moslemivanemad nõuavad lasteaeadesse halal-toitu”, 5 June 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/reformierakondlikule-venestamisele-lisandub-islamiseerimine-moslemivanemad-nõuavad-lasteaedadesse-halal-toitu/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

31. Uued Uudised, “Vägivaldne islamism tõstab pead: Rootsi tõstis terroriohu taset”, 17 August 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/vagivaldne-islamism-tostab-pead-rootsi-tostis-terroriohu-taset/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

32. Uued Uudised, “Koraani põletamine kui islami ja Lääne kultuuride paratamatu kokkupõrge”, 29 July 2023, <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/maailm/koraani-poletamine-kui-islami-ja-laane-kultuuride-paratamatu-kokkupõrge/> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

33. Uued Uudised Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/uueduudised> (Access date: 7 May 2024).

34. Comment on Uued Uudised Facebook post of 30 October 2023, https://www.facebook.com/uueduudised/posts/pfbid04tYYJKDUPjvC7JvHXqcFvDsinVZopPKBauwXpbTvpkfCpMmPQbt5LhL5yA1za62RI?comment_id=1012842256681035 (Access date: 7 May 2024).

four years.³⁵ The Internal Security Service (KAPO) sees the arrival of this movement in Estonia as a security threat. Tiit Piik, one of the founders of Active Club Estonia, claims that they are preparing (by working out and learning martial arts) for their own defence. Members see themselves as victims, because according to Piik, “in Europe, America and everywhere there are cases of black people and Muslims killing white people, raping white women and white people doing nothing”. He says he understands both Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant, because what they did (i.e., mass shootings in Norway and New Zealand) was “revenge for what Muslims are doing in Europe”.³⁶ So far there are no reports of any Islamophobic crimes committed by the group.

As for political figures, in addition to EKRE’s leader Martin Helme, another EKRE member Jaak Madison, who is also an MEP belonging to the far-right group Identity and Democracy (ID) in the European Parliament, shares Islamophobic stereotypes on his Facebook page. For example, after the 16 October 2023 shooting in Brussels, Madison commented that “the more the Muslim community grows in Europe, the more security has decreased and extremism has increased. Why? Because Islam as a religion does not match our understanding of ‘tolerance, openness’ at all. Those who are extremists, that is, those who actually commit the acts, are of course a minority of Muslims, but the majority look on (approvingly) in silence.”³⁷ His posts attract hate speech towards Muslims from his followers.³⁸

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

In 2023, there were no identified initiatives that serve as best practice examples for combatting anti-Muslim racism. National integration plans and NGO efforts primarily centred around integrating Ukrainian refugees, with less emphasis placed on addressing the issue of anti-Muslim racism.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

While in 2023, there have been no recorded cases of anti-Muslim hate crime or Islamophobic discrimination in employment in Estonia, it is important to recognise that this absence of recorded incidents does not necessarily indicate their absence in real-

35. Postimees, “Active Clubi üks loojatest: nad tahavad teha natsimaailma”, 16 April 2024, <https://www.postimees.ee/8001865/taistund-active-clubi-uks-loojatest-nad-tahavad-teha-natsimaailma> (Access date: 8 May 2024).

36. Postimees, “Active Clubi üks loojatest: nad tahavad teha natsimaailma”, 16 April 2024, <https://www.postimees.ee/8001865/taistund-active-clubi-uks-loojatest-nad-tahavad-teha-natsimaailma> (Access date: 8 May 2024).

37. Comment of Jaak Madison on his own Facebook post of 16 October 2023, https://www.facebook.com/madisonjaak/posts/pfbid02fuk1cWdbi3vXzg5cFYD7auSuCGVbvrkX8kiPe376tMnV4XYjHNwd65qwSvZygFip-l?comment_id=6973189956490908&reply_comment_id=1359866797951199 (Access date: 7 May 2024).

38. Comment on Jaak Madison’s Facebook post of 16 October 2023, https://www.facebook.com/madisonjaak/posts/pfbid02fuk1cWdbi3vXzg5cFYD7auSuCGVbvrkX8kiPe376tMnV4XYjHNwd65qwSvZygFip-l?comment_id=308813285233997 (Access date: 7 May 2024).

ity. The lack of hate crime legislation and specialised NGOs collecting data on Islamophobia may contribute to underreporting and under-recognition of such incidents.

The Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) continues to propagate Islamophobic stereotypes, which often involve fearmongering about the perceived threat of Islam to Estonian society. Furthermore, the portrayal by the Internal Security Service (KAPO) of Muslims as a societal danger and the suggestion that different customs pose a risk to Estonia reinforces harmful stereotypes and prejudices.

It is important to move forward with the amendments to the Penal Code which stipulate adding bias motive as an aggravating circumstance and amending the incitement to hatred provision, in order to ensure all minorities are provided with effective protection against hate speech and hate crimes. This would also help with collecting data on hate crime and hate speech against Muslims.

In addition, incorporating religious education into school curricula as a compulsory subject might help with fostering respect for diversity and increase knowledge about different religions, including Islam, from a young age. It is important that the educational material used to teach religious education be culturally sensitive and aimed at challenging prejudice and encouraging dialogue between different communities.

It is also essential to support NGOs in initiatives to empower and integrate Muslim communities within Estonian society, by providing funding and resources for community-led projects that promote social cohesion and civic participation.

Chronology

- **3 August 2023:** The leader of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) Martin Helme stated that “anyone with a cultural background that is incompatible with our way of life” is not welcome to Estonia, including “radical Muslims”, adding, “Well actually, can you find me a non-radical Muslim?”.
- **15 October 2023:** On EKRE's podcast “Räägime asjast”, Martin Helme claimed that “Europe is groaning under the invasion of Islam” and that “it's a culture of death, it's a culture of destruction and killing, when they finish with the Jews, they continue with us.”
- **16 October 2023:** EKRE member and MEP Jaak Madison commented on Facebook that “the more the Muslim community grows in Europe, the more security has decreased and extremism has increased. Why? Because Islam as a religion does not match our understanding of ‘tolerance, openness’ at all. Those who are extremists, that is, those who actually commit the acts, are of course a minority of Muslims, but the majority look on (approvingly) in silence.”

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
FINLAND
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Tiivistelmä

Vuoden 2023 merkittävin muutos tapahtui huhtikuun eduskuntavaalien jälkeen, jonka seurauksena muodostui oikeistolaisin hallitus sitten 1930-luvun. Kokoomus muodosti hallituksen Perussuomalaisten, Ruotsalaisen kansanpuolueen ja Kristillisdemokraattien kanssa ja lopetti maan karismaattisen pääministerin, sosiaalidemokraattien Sanna Marinin hallituksen kansanmandaatin. Uusi hallitus puhuu paradigman muutoksista maahanmuuttopolitiikassa, sosiaalihuollossa ja työlainsäädännössä, joka rajoittaa lakko-oikeutta. Muutokset vaikuttavat yleisesti maahanmuuttajiin ja erityisesti muslimeihin, koska monet ovat riippuvaisia valtiontuesta kuten asumistukea. Vaikka hallitusohjelmassa puhutaan “vahvasta ja sitoutuneesta Suomesta,” joka noudattaa “ihmisoikeuksia ja muita kansainvälisiä sopimuksia, EU:n lainsäädännöstä johtuvia velvoitteita ja oikeusvaltioperiaatetta,” joidenkin mielestä lausunto on harhaanjohtava maahanmuuttopolitiikan 180 asteen käännöksen johdosta. Hallitus ei ole kyennyt politiikallaan ja puheillaan vähentämään maahanmuuttajiin ja vähemmistöihin kohdistuvaa vihamielistä ilmapiiriä, joka ei näe toistaiseksi loppua.

Executive Summary

The most significant change in 2023 came after the April parliamentary election, which gave the country the most right-wing government since the 1930s.¹ The National Coalition Party formed a government with the Finns Party (PS), the Swedish People's Party, and the Christian Democrats, ending the popular mandate of the country's Social Democrat Prime Minister Sanna Marin. The new government talks of paradigm shifts in immigration policy, social welfare,² and labor legislation that restricts the right to strike. The changes will affect migrants in general and Muslims in particular, as many are dependent on state support such as housing and other benefits. Although the government program speaks of a "strong and committed Finland" that respects "human rights and other international conventions, obligations under EU law and the rule of law," some say the statement is misleading because of the 180-degree turn in immigration policy. The government's policies and assurances have failed to reduce the climate of hostility towards migrants and minorities, which is likely to continue to grow.

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1. Enrique Tessieri, "Why Finland is Set for its Most Right-Wing Government Since the 1930s," Middle East Eye, 25 May 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/finland-right-wing-government-1930s>, (Access date: 14 April 2024).
 2. Enrique Tessieri and Yahya Rouissi, "Lukialta: Rasismi On Vakava Yhteiskunnallinen Sairaus," Länsi-Savo, 14 August 2023, <https://www.lansi-savo.fi/paakirjoitus-mielipide/6138036>, (Access date: 24.2.2024).

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Finland

Type of Regime: Republic

Form of Government: Unitary Parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: National Coalition Party, Finns Party, Swedish People's Party, Christian Democrats

Opposition Parties in Parliament: Social Democratic Party, Greene League, Left Alliance, Liike Nyt (Movement Now), Eduskuntaryhmä Timo Vornanen

Last Elections: 2024 Presidential Elections: Alexander Stubb (National Coalition Party) 51.62% **2023 Parliamentary Elections:** National Coalition Party: 48 seats, Finns Party: 45 seats, Social Democrats: 43 seats, Center Party: 23 seats, Green League: 13 seats, Left Alliance: 11 seats, Swedish People's Party: 9 seats, Christian Democratic Party: 5 seats, Liike nyt: 1 seat, and Åland Coalition: 1 seat, Valtuustoryhmä Timo Vornanen 1 seat **2022 County Elections:** National Coalition Party 21.6%/289 seats, Social Democrats 19.3%/277 seats, Centre Party 19.2%/297 seats, Finns Party 11.1%/155 seats, Left Alliance 8.0%/100 seats, Green League 7.4%/90 seats, Swedish People's Party 4.9%/76 seats, Christian Democrats 4.2%/57 seats, Liike Nyt 1.8%/20 seats, and Valta kuuluu kansalle 1.3%/10 seats **2021 Municipal Elections:** National Coalition Party 21.4%/1,552 councilpersons, Social Democrats 17.7%/1,451 councilpersons, Centre Party 14.9%/2,445 councilpersons, Finns Party 14.5%/1,351 councilpersons, Green League 10.6%/433 councilpersons, Left Alliance 7.7%/508 councilpersons, Swedish People's Party 5%/463 councilpersons, Christian Democrats 3.6%/311 councilpersons, Liike Nyt 1.6%/49 councilpersons, and Others 2.1%/292 councilpersons

Total Population: 5,604,558 (December 2023)

Major Languages: Finnish and Swedish

Official Religion: N/A

Statistics on Islamophobia: Suspected hate crimes in 2022 rose by 21% to 1,245 compared with 1,026 in 2021, according to the latest figures of the Police University College of Finland.³ As in previous years, Muslims were the most targeted religious group, but by national group it was the Russians. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported 1,094 hate crimes in 2022, down 21.3% from 1,390 cases in the previous year; a total of 121 cases (44 in 2021) faced prosecution and 27 (30) received sentences, according to the latest OSCE ODIHR data.⁴

3. Jenita Rauta, "Poliisin tietoon tullut viharkolliuus Suomessa 2022, Poliisiammattikorkeakoulun katsauksia 35, 26 October 2023, https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/808142/POLAMK_Katsauksia_35.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, (Access date: 10 March 2023).

4. OSCE ODIHR, "Hate Crime Reporting Finland," 2023, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/finland>, (Access date: 10 March 2023).

Contrary to the Police University College, the OSCE ODIHR figures use a broader methodology where offences suspected of being hate crimes are also tabulated.

Major Religions (% of Population): Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church 3,625,007 (64.7%),⁵ Islam (est. 140,000) (2.5%),⁶ Greek Orthodox Church 58,472 (1.04%), Jehovah's Witnesses 16,193 (0.3%), Finnish Free Church 14,365 (0.26%), Roman Catholic Church 15,016 (0.27%), Pentecostals 13,242 (0.24%), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 3,125 (0.06%), Adventist 3,137 (0.6%), Baptist Church 2,362 (0.04%), Buddhism 1,854 (0.03%), United Methodist Church 1,282 (0.02%), and Judaism 1,073 (0.02%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): Estimated at 140,000 (2.5%)⁷

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta (Islamic Council of Finland), Resalat Islamilainen Yhdyskunta (Resalat Islamic Society), Suomen Islam-Seurakunta, Helsinki Islam Keskus, Suomen Muslimi Foorumi, Nuoret Muslimit, and Helsinki, Nuorten Muslimien Foorumi

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Finland's anti-Islamophobia organizations are few, lack sufficient resources, and are fragmented. Some organizations that address the social ill are the Islamic Council of Finland, the National Forum for Cooperation of Religions in Finland (USKOT-foorumi), Nuoret Muslimien Foorumi, Nuoret Muslimit, and Mahdin nuoret.

Far-Right, Hard-Right, and Radical Right Parties: The Finns Party, Sini-musta Liike (Blue-and-Black Movement was deregistered as a party in April 2024), Valtaa kuuluu kansalle (Power Belongs to the People), Suomen Kansan Ensi (Finnish People First, deregistered in April 2023), Vapauden liitto, Eduskuntaryhmä Timo Vornanen

Far-Right Movements: Kansallismielisten liittouma

Far-Right Militant Organizations: According to the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (Supo), individuals and small groups constitute the most significant threat of far-right terrorism in Finland.⁸ In November, for the first time, a Pääjät-Häme District Court sentenced a member of the far right with the intent of committing a terrorist act. The convict was a member of the PS.⁹

5. Statistics Finland, "Population 31.12 (2022) by Religious Community, Sex, Age, Year and Information," https://statfin.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin__vaerak/statfin_vaerak_pxt_11rx.px/, (Access date: March 10, 2024).

6. Email from Teemu Pauha of the University of Helsinki Religion, Conflict and Dialogue Research Centre. The present estimate compares with 120,000-130,000 in 2022.

7. Ibid. Statistics Finland estimates Islam followers at the end of 2022 to be 22,261 people.

8. Supo, "Suojelupoliisin vuosikirja 2023," 27 March 2024, <https://vuosikirja.supo.fi/etusivu>, (Access date: 20 April 2024).

9. Enrique Tessieri, "Finland's Long-Overdue Far-Right Terrorism Conviction," Migrant Tales, 1 November 2023, <https://migranttales.net/finlands-long-overdue-far-right-terrorism-conviction/>, (Access date: 20 April 2024).

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

There has been as of late a lot of talk about the negative climate in Finland towards migrants, asylum seekers, Russian speakers and especially Muslims. In light of the tightening of migration policy that has helped to normalize racism and which Finns Party (PS) Interior Minister has boasted as “a paradigm shift.” Thus if in 2023 one had the ability to pierce into the future, one would witness the clear erosion of migrant and asylum rights that are expected to hurt the economy. Finland is suffering from a chronic labor shortage due to the graying of its population. Even so, the tightening of migration policy has scared away potential labor migrants. Moreover, the government’s ineffective anti-racism campaign like “Action, not only words,”¹⁰ raise more questions than answers. Muslims and Roma, the most discriminated groups in Finland, are given too little attention in the campaign. The word ‘Muslim’ is mentioned only once in the program never mind Islamophobia, which is not even mentioned.

One of many indicators how the new migration policy will undermine migrant rights is by raising the residence requirement for citizenship from five to eight years. Even if the PS argues that tougher citizenship laws will ensure integration, others believe they will exclude people from participating as equal members of society. Without voting rights, it’s clear that it will be more difficult for migrants to take part and influence society. Under the present government, Finland is also backpedaling on its commitment to Human Rights after parliament approved in July 2024 the so-called “pushback law,” which denies people the right to apply for asylum at the Finnish-Russian border.

Some have labelled the ever-worsening atmosphere in Finland against migrants and minorities as the hostile environment, which has its roots in the UK when then Home Secretary Theresa May made it as difficult as possible for migrants to stay in the United Kingdom and would leave voluntarily.¹¹ Some other factors fueling the hostile environment is Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, which has impacted negatively Finland’s Russian-speaking community, the largest language group after Finnish and Swedish speakers. If there is one matter that is certain, the restrictive policies against migrants and minorities will make integration and adaptation more difficult.

10. Finnish Government, “Government Campaign ‘Action, Not Only Words’ Challenges Actors to Adopt Practical Measures Against Racism,” 27 August 2024, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/government-campaign-action-not-only-words-challenges-actors-to-adopt-practical-measures-against-racism>, (Access date: 2 September 2024).

11. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, “The Hostile Environment Explained,” June 2024, <https://jcwi.org.uk/reportsbriefings/the-hostile-environment-explained/>, (Access date: 3 September 2024).

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The honeymoon of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo’s new government, led by the National Coalition Party (NCP), the hard-right Finns Party (PS), the Swedish People’s Party, and the Christian Democrats, was cut short after its inauguration on 20 June 2023.¹² The first blow came with the appointment of Vilhelm Junnila as minister for economic affairs, who was forced to resign eleven days later on 30 June for his far-right, neo-Nazi, and anti-Semitic social media postings.¹³ His tenure is one of the shortest in Finnish history.

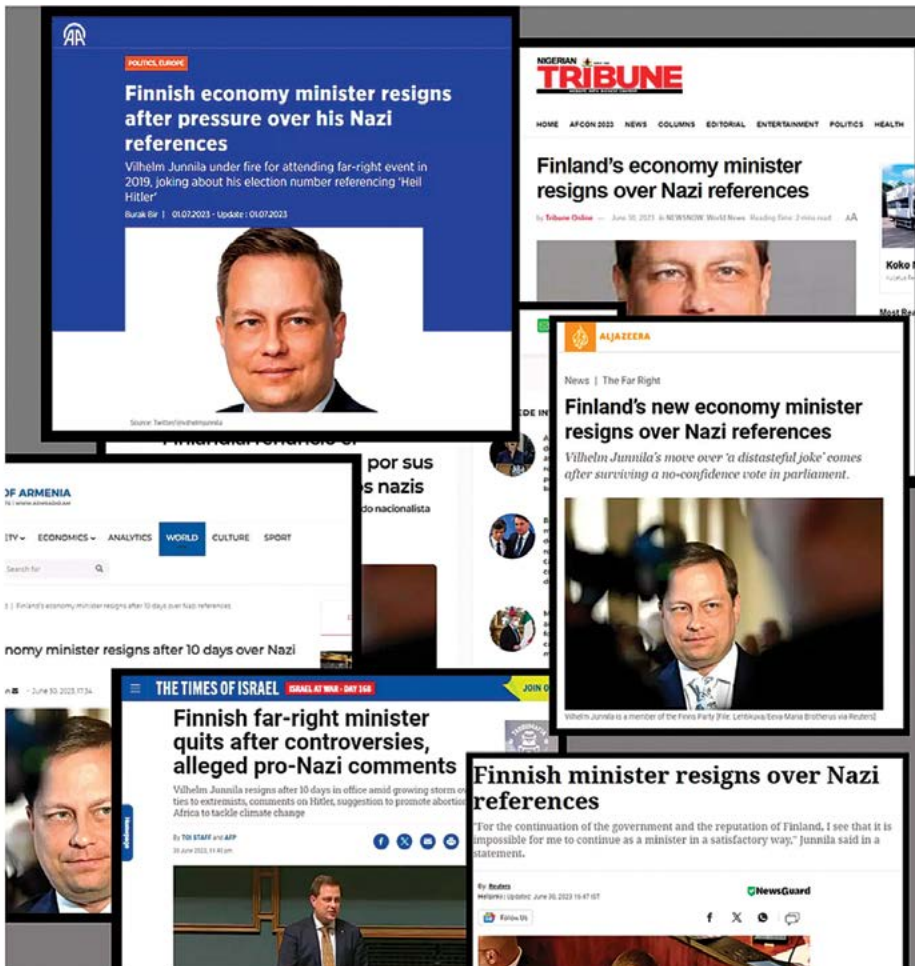


Figure 1: PS MP Vilhelm Junnila’s appointment as minister of economic affairs raised a storm and ended in the politician’s resignation eleven days (20 June-6 July 2023) later. Source: Facebook

12. Yle News, “Finland’s New Government to Take Office on Tuesday as Marin Term Officially Ends,” 20 June 2023, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20037654>, (Access date: 14 April 2024).
13. Enrique Tessieri, “Vilhelm Junnila’s resignation reveals how the radical-right PS continues to be a liability to Orpo’s government,” Migrant Tales, 30 June 2023, <https://migranttales.net/vilhelm-junnilas-resignation-reveals-how-the-radical-right-ps-continues-to-be-a-liability-to-orpos-government/>, (Access date: 13 April 2024).

After the Junnila scandal subsided, another one popped up involving PS Chairperson and Finance Minister Riikka Purra's 2008 blog posts in *Scripta*,¹⁴ a blog run by Jussi Halla-aho, the PS speaker of the house that was convicted for ethnic agitation and breaching the sanctity of religion in 2012.¹⁵ In her 185 posts, Purra commonly used the n-word, called Turks "monkeys," and even threatened to kill youths of migrant origin on a commuter train.¹⁶ Even if the posts caused a media uproar and almost caused the government to fall but was saved by Halla-aho refused to reconvene parliament from its summer break.¹⁷ Despite the posts, Purra did not resign. At first, she was defiant, but later half-heartedly apologized for her posts. The scandal forced the government to publish an anti-racism statement in September, which some believe had more to do with saving the government's skin than tackling racism.¹⁸ Also Minister of Economic Affairs Wille Rydman's 2016 posts came to public light. In one of them, he stated, "I'd still rather ban people wearing scarves than those scarves" and these "desert monkeys make me sick." Interior Minister Mari Rantanen relied a lot on spreading the Great Replacement conspiracy theory like a number of other PS ministers.¹⁹ Many other posts by Rydman referred to Muslims in a racist and demeaning manner.²⁰ He was not forced to resign and business continued "as usual" in government. If the Finnish media was starting to treat the PS with greater scrutiny, Munich-based daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, christened Orpo's government in the summer the "Chamber of Horrors," while *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* called its start "a fiasco."²¹

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14. Kreetta Karvala, "Tyly Maahanmuuttolinja: 'Tavoitteemme Nolla Turvapakanhakijat,'" *Iltalehti*, 30 March 2023, <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/6349d45a-8ac4-4227-8f67-06c10af6f391>, (Access date: 28 April 2024).
 15. *The News*, "Supreme Court Orders Halla-aho to Pay for Hate Speech," 8 June 2012, <https://yle.fi/a/3-6171739> (Access date: 28 April 2024).
 16. Enrique Tessieri, "Riikka Purra of the PS is a Charlatan, a Master at Playing the Victim," *Migrant Tales*, 13 August 2023, <https://migranttales.net/riikka-purra-of-the-ps-is-a-charlatan-a-master-at-playing-the-victim/> (Access date: 13 April 2024).
 17. Aleksi Teivainen, "Halla-aho's Refusal to Summon Parliament Draws Criticism from Experts and Opposition," *Helsinki Times*, 17 July 2023, <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/politics/23890-halla-aho-s-refusal-to-summon-parliament-draws-criticism-from-experts-and-opposition.html>, (Access date: 28 August 2024).
 18. Enrique Tessieri, "The Anti-Racism Statement has Little to do with Eradicating the Social ill in Finland but All to do with Saving the Government's Skin," *Migrant Tales*, <https://migranttales.net/the-anti-racism-statement-has-little-to-do-with-eradicating-the-social-ill-in-finland-but-all-to-do-with-saving-the-governments-skin/>, 2 September 2023 (Access date: 27 July 2024).
 19. Enrique Tessieri, "Finland's Interior Minister Mari Rantanen Gets Hammered on A-studio," *Migrant Tales*, 25 June 2024, <https://migranttales.net/finlands-interior-minister-mari-rantanen-gets-hammered-on-a-studio/>, (Access date: 28 July 2024).
 20. Paavo Teittinen, "Leviä ja Lisääntyy kuin Somali, 'Oksettaa Tää Aavikkoapina' – Mnisteri Wille Rydmanin Vanhoista Viesteistä Paljastuu Toisuvaa Rasstista Kielenkäyttöä," *Helsingin Sanomat*, 27 July 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000009742553.html>, (Access date: 25 May 2024).
 21. Enrique Tessieri, "Finland's Chamber of Horrors Government Offers a Scandal Every Week," 10 July 2023, <https://migranttales.net/finlands-chamber-of-horrors-government-offers-a-scandal-every-week/>, (Access date: 13 April 2024).



Figure 2: The government, toying with the idea of denying asylum rights, after closing the Finnish-Russian border in November, was reminded by the Ombudsman of Finland's international obligations. "The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman reminds [the government] that Finland has an obligation to ensure the right to asylum is respected in all situations – including decisions concerning the [closing of the] eastern border. The state has a duty to ensure genuine and effective access to the asylum procedure." Source: X, formerly Twitter.....

Erna Bodström, a researcher at the Migration Institute, compares the changes in the government's migration policy to East Europe rather than other Nordic countries.²² The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman wrote a scaling statement about how changes in the law will seriously curtail foreigners' rights.²³



Figure 3: The media unearthed one of the many infamous posts of PS Chairperson and Finance Minister Rikka Purra, under the pseudonym "riikka," in a 2008 blog post. She wrote, "If you gave me a weapon, [youth with migrant background] corpses would appear on a commuter train, you see." Source: Facebook 2023

22. Tuomas Rimpläinen, "Sisäministerin Mukaan Suomen Maahanmuuttopolitiikka Vertautuu Pohjoismaihin – Turkija Rinnastaisi Pikemmin Itäs-Eurooppaan," Yle, 18 April 2024, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20084462>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).
23. Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, "Foreigners' Rights are Being Seriously Curtailed with No Overall Picture of the Impact on Human Rights," 2 May 2024, <https://yhdenvertaisuusvaltuutettu.fi/en/-/foreigners-rights-are-being-seriously-curtailed-with-no-overall-picture-of-the-impact-on-human-rights>, (Access date: 4 May 2024).

Even if the PS and the government have promised to straighten out their ways with the help of an anti-racism statement, some are skeptical whether the government is, in fact, committed to the “respect for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights”²⁴ as it argues. In light of the PS’ view of racism, that it isn’t a major problem in Finland but a tool to lure voters, it explains why there are no concrete measures to tackle racism in the government’s anti-racism statement and how to improve equality of the Muslim community.²⁵ Understanding that the government does not prioritize racism and specifically anti-Muslim racism as a major problem, sheds light in part the government’s policy on Gaza. Switching from “Israel has a right to defend itself” to “there should be a ceasefire,” is a reflection of Finland’s and the general western trend of doing nothing concrete but offering empty statements in the face of the mass killings of mainly women and children in Gaza.²⁶

Employment

One of the arguments of the PS to justify the tightening of immigration laws is that non-EU citizens who move to Finland work for a short period of time, become unemployed, and live off social welfare “happily ever after.” A recent study²⁷ commissioned by the Ministry of Economic Affairs concluded that even if the PS’s think tank claims that non-EU job-seekers abandon their jobs and live off social benefits, nothing could be further from the truth.²⁸ Using Statistics Finland and the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) data from 2011 to 2021, around 80% of EU citizens were employed. That compares to 70% coming to the country on the basis of family ties and 60% receiving international protection.²⁹

Recent *European Islamophobia Reports*³⁰ have cited how labor discrimination continues to be one of the biggest factors that keeps Finland’s market segregated and ra-

24. Finnish Government, “Government Statement to Parliament on Promoting Equality, Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination in Finnish Society,” 31 August 2023, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/165112/VN_Statement_31082023_EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, (Access date: 28 April 2024).
25. Suomen Muslimifoorumi ry, “[I]ausunto valtioneuvoston toimenpideohjelmaksi rasismien torjumisesta ja yhdenvertaisuuden edistämisestä,” published in Migrant Tales, 25 August 2024, <https://migranttales.net/suomen-muslimifoorumi-ryn-lausunto-luonnoksesta-valtioneuvoston-toimenpideohjelmaksi-rasismien-torjumisesta-ja-yhdenvertaisuuden-edistamisesta/>, (Access date: 27 August 2024).
26. Helsinki Times, “Finland’s Foreign Policy: Actions Speak Louder than Words in Gaza, says SDP’s Nasima Razmyar,” 30 January 2024, <https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/24857-finland-s-foreign-policy-actions-speak-louder-than-words-in-gaza-says-sdp-s-nasima-razmyar.html>, (Access date: 3 August 2024).
27. VATT Institute for Economic Research, “Report Offers New Data On Labour Market Performance of People Who Have Moved to Finland for Different Reasons,” 4 March 2024, <https://vatt.fi/en/-/report-offers-new-data-on-labour-market-performance-of-people-who-have-moved-to-finland-for-different-reasons>, (Access date: 14 April 2024).
28. Teemu Muhonen, “Uusi Selvitys: Työn Perässä Muuttaneiden Työllisyys Ei Romahda, Kuten PS On Väittänyt,” Helsingin Sanomat, 4 March 2024, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000010269496.html>, (Access date: 14 April 2024).
29. Hannu Pesola, Matti Sarvimäki, and Tuomo Virkola, “Eri Syistä Maahan Muuttaneiden Työllistyminen Suomessa,” Työ ja Elinkeinoministeriö, 4 March 2024, https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/165475/TEM_2024_9.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, (Access date: 14 April 2024).
30. Enrique Tessieri: Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2019, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2019, Istanbul, SETA, 2020.

cialized. Due to Finland's aging population and the ever-growing number of pensioners, Finland needs foreign labor. In 2023, the private think tank ETLA Economic Research revealed that Finland needs 44,000 foreign workers annually.³¹

In December 2022, the unemployment rate in Finland of people aged 18-64 years who don't speak Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi as their mother tongue was 17.76% versus a national average of 9.72%, according to the latest Statistics Finland figures.³² The Muslim-dominant language groups that reported high unemployment were Arabic speakers 37.18%, Kurdish speakers (32.26%), Somali speakers (31.45%), Persian-Farsi speakers (25.54%), and Turkish speakers (21.9%). The unemployment rate among Muslim women was higher than for men in the same group, even if some had a broader educational background. The unemployment rate for Arabic-speaking women was 49.04% and for Somali-speaking women 33.96% while for men the corresponding figure was 32.42% and 29.39%, respectively.³³ Contrarily, the employment rate of all women who did not speak Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi as their mother tongue was 79.71%, and for men 84.29% compared with 92.85% and 89.48%, respectively.³⁴

Education

In Finland, the main book used to teach Islam to students at comprehensive schools is *Salam* authored by Sirkku Aboulfaouz and published by the Finnish National Agency for Education. Some, like Resalat Islamic Center imam Abbas Bahmanpour, are happy that there is a book for pupils to study Islam. Even if the book has been well received by some teachers, Isra Lehtinen, a lecturer of Islam at a high school and comprehensive school in Espoo, states that the book is too difficult for first and second graders but gets better - even if still difficult - for third and fourth graders. "The exercise book is good," she said. According to Lehtinen, teaching Islam at Finnish schools has improved, but the topic still faces prejudice. "Sometimes such prejudice can be found among some principals, teachers, or city officials," she said, adding that there are more qualified teachers of Islam at schools today.

Being a minority at a Finnish school can sometimes be challenging. The *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*³⁵ and the National Institute for Health and Welfare

31. Elina Niskasaari, "Suomi Tarvitsee Vuosittain 44 000 Maahanmuuttajaa, Arvioi Etlä – Maahanmuuttajien Määrän Tulisi Kolmenkertaistua, Jotta Huoltosuhde Muuttuisi Suotuisammaksi," 2 February 2023, <https://www.kaleva.fi/suomi-tarvitsee-vuosittain-44-000-maahanmuuttajaa-5294288>, (Access: 17 March 2024).

32. Statistics Finland, "115g -- Population by Main Type of Activity, Language, Occupational Status, Sex, Age and Year, 2000-2022," https://pxweb2.stat.fi/PXWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin__tyokay/statfin_tyokay_pxt_115g.px, (Access date: 16 March 2024).

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Thomas Zacheus, Mira Kalalahti, Janne Varjo, Minna Saarinen, Markku Jahnukainen, Marja-Liisa Mäkelä and Joel Kivirauma, "Discrimination, Harassment and Racism in Finnish Lower Secondary Schools," *Nordic Journal of Immigration Research*, 12 April 2016, <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/transit-okl/files/2019/03/Discrimination-Harassment-and-Racism-in-Finnish-Lower-Secondary-Schools.pdf>, (Access date: 5 May 2024).

(THL) have published a number of studies on the topic that expose the bullying and exclusion of minorities at school.³⁶

Politics

In the past thirteen years, the PS has come a long way politically. It now controls key ministerial posts like finance, interior, and justice as well as the speaker of parliament, who is second in line after the president. The 2011 parliamentary election has changed the landscape of Finnish politics, when the radical-right PS won 39 seats versus five in the previous election.³⁷

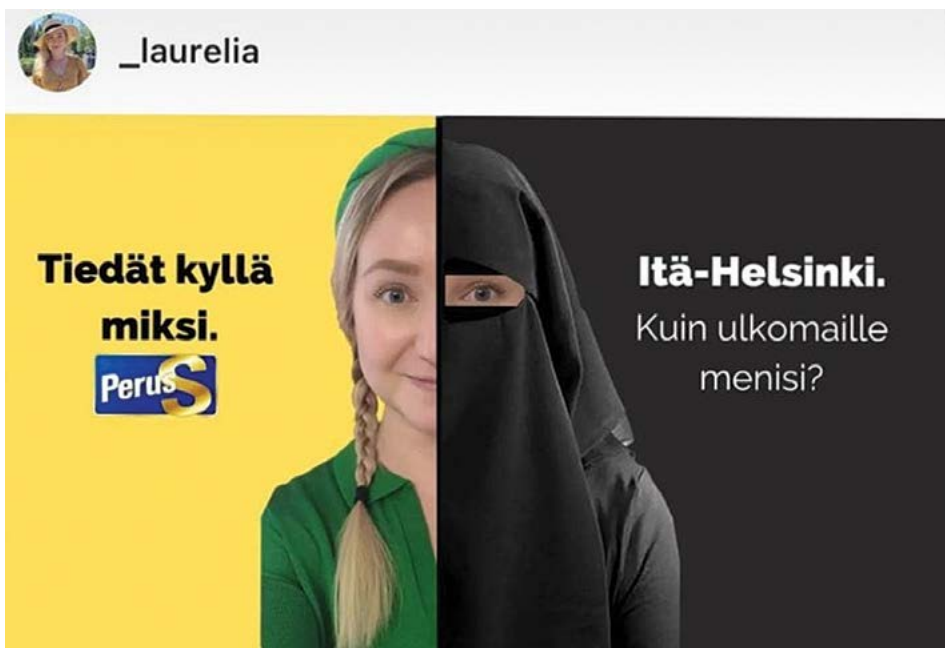


Figure 4: Laura Jokela, a candidate in last year's parliamentary election, spiked up her campaign by vilifying the Muslims of East Helsinki. On the left side the ad states, "You know why," while on the right a niqab-wearing Jokela claims that traveling to East Helsinki is like being abroad. **Source:** Facebook,

An indication that matters will get worse for Muslims was the PS's promise to "significantly" tighten migration policy.³⁸ These pledges have been written into the government's draconian migration policy. The PS has copied much of Denmark's anti-asylum policy, one of the most restrictive in the EU. Finance Minister Purra has

36. Enrique Tessieri, "THL Survey in Finland Says First-Generation Migrants More Likely to Experience Bullying, Physical and Sexual Harassment," *Migrant Tales*, 17 September 2014, <https://migranttales.net/thl-survey-in-finland-says-first-generation-migrants-more-likely-to-experience-bullying-physical-and-sexual-harassment/>, (Access date: 5 May 2024).

37. Enrique Tessieri, "Finland 2011 Election: A Perilous Watershed," *Migrant Tales*, 18 April 2011, <https://migranttales.net/finland-election-a-perilous-watershed/>, (Access date: 4 May 2024).

38. Enrique Tessieri, "Riikka Purra's Promise of 'Significantly' Tightening Immigration Policy is Nothing More than a Snow Job," *Migrant Tales*, 13 October 2021, <https://migranttales.net/riikka-purras-promise-of-significantly-tightening-immigration-policy-is-nothing-more-than-a-snow-job/>, (Access date: 28 July 2024).

said that she too would aim to have a policy of zero asylum seekers.³⁹ The changes in immigration law, referred to as “paradigm changes” by PS Interior Minister Mari Rantanen, are expected by some to make the path to inclusion more difficult and strengthen discrimination and institutional racism.⁴⁰

Some measures proposed by the government include:^{41 42 43}

- changing the period of residence for citizenship from five to eight years;
- tougher rules to get a permanent residence and citizenship;
- prohibiting asylum seekers from getting a work permit;
- residence permits granted under international protection will become temporary and their duration will be the EU minimum;
- speeding up deportations and asylum applications;
- tighter family reunification requirements;
- if laid off and cannot find new employment, a person will be forced to leave the country in three (non-specialists) or six months (specialists);
- undocumented migrants (excluding children and others in a particularly vulnerable position) only have access to emergency health care services;
- temporarily suspending asylum rights at the Finnish-Russian border;⁴⁴ and
- reviewing dual citizenship rights of Russian nationals.^{45 46}

The Finnish-Russian border has been effectively closed since November. New legislation introduced to parliament in May 2024 and passed in July will deny people the right to asylum at the border.⁴⁷ Some ask why the hundreds of people seeking asylum at the border are such a threat to national security if 32,360 asylum seekers mainly from Iraq and Afghanistan came to Finland in 2015 and tens of thou-

39. Kreetta Karvala, “Tyly Maahanmuuttolinja: “Tavoitteemme Nolla Turvapakanhakijat,” Iltalehti, 30 March 2023, <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/6349d45a-8ac4-4227-8f67-06c10af6f391>, (Access date: 28 April 2024).

40. YouTube, “Sisäministeri Mari Rantanen perussuomalaiset,” November 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4ajagLLUNQ>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

41. Finnish Government, “Government Proposes More Stringent Provisions on Migration,” 18 April 2024, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410869/government-proposes-more-stringent-provisions-on-migration>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

42. Daria Krivonos and Olivia Maury, “Orpo’s Government’s Plan on Migration – Eroding Possibilities of Making a Life in Finland?” Raster.fi, 24 august 2023, <https://raster.fi/2023/08/24/orpos-governments-plan-on-migration-eroding-possibilities-of-making-a-life-in-finland/>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

43. Finnish Government, “10.3 Migration and Integration Policy,” 20 June 2023, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/governments/government-programme#/10/3>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

44. Enrique Tessieri, “Finland’s Government is heading the Country Towards a Path of Disaster,” Migrant Tales, 3 January 2024, <https://migranttales.net/finlands-government-is-heading-the-country-towards-a-path-of-disaster/>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

45. Enrique Tessieri, “Questioning Dual Citizenship Rights is Another indication of Finland’s Path to Greater Insularity,” Migrant Tales, 6 December 2023, <https://migranttales.net/questioning-dual-citizenship-rights-is-another-indication-of-finlands-path-to-greater-insularity/>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

46. Enrique Tessieri, “Being a Russian Minority in an Ever-Hostile Finland,” Migrant Tales, 3 April 2024, <https://migranttales.net/being-a-russian-minority-in-an-ever-hostile-finland/>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

47. Enrique Tessieri, “The Pushback Law Will be Remembered as a Day of Infamy or Human Rights in Finland,” Migrant Tales, 12 July 2024, <https://migranttales.net/the-pushback-law-will-be-remembered-as-a-day-of-infamy-for-human-rights-in-finland/>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

sands of Ukrainians fleeing war. Could it be that the majority of asylum seekers at the Finnish-Russian border come from Muslim-majority countries? Since 1 August 2023 to 29 January 2024, a total of 1,271 persons sought asylum at the border with well over 90% coming from Muslim-majority countries. Most of these asylum seekers came from Syria (491 people), Somalia (360), Yemen (120), and Iraq (57).⁴⁸ Teivo Teivainen, a professor of world politics at the University of Helsinki, believes that apart from the anti-Muslim politics of the PS, other matters are at play. “Another factor is Russia’s instrumentalization of refugees but also Finland’s [historic] suspicion of Russia,” he said.⁴⁹

Media

Although I am a “Finn” on paper, the media constantly reminds me that I am not wanted here. If I didn’t feel like I were under constant attack [by the media], I could then read the papers.

Asmaa Abdi, a Somali Finn⁵⁰



Figure 5: Different headlines by the Finnish media of “youth” gangs. In many cases, the Finnish mainstream media is part of the country’s growing racism problem by labeling such youths as criminals. **Source:** Yle’s *Viimeinen sana* program

48. Enrique Tessieri, “Thousands May Be Waiting to Cross Finnish-Russian Frontier, Border Officials Says,” Yle News, 5 February 2024, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20072970>, (Access date: 1 May 2024).

49. Telephone interview (2 May 2024).

50. Media Monitoring Group of Finland, “Mitä mieltä olet Suomen lehdistöstä? “Lehdistö muistuttaa minua, etten ole haluttu tänne,” Reilumedia, 30 March 2023, <https://www.reilumedia.fi/mita-mielta-olet-suomalainen-lehdistosta-lehdisto-muistuttaa-minua-etten-ole-haluttu-tanne/>, (Access date: 15 April 2024).

A report that looked at the media before a general election and which was made possible by the Empowerment & Resilience Fund of ENAR (European Network Against Racism), poured over hundreds of stories written by the Finnish media on Muslims and minorities.⁵¹ Two matters were evident in the vast majority of stories: lack of minority voices and context. The report considered context important since it can divulge or conversely discard the facts in a story. When context is left out, it leaves the door open to bias, according to the report.



Figure 6: (Left) More sensationalist journalism on racialized youths.⁵² (Right) MTV reporter Ivan Puopolo interviewed Interior Minister Mari Rantanen about the government's plans to change migration policy.⁵³ **Source:** MTV (pictures published in 2022, 2023 and 2024).

Muslims, asylum seekers, and migration in general are hot topics in Finland, especially before an election. As in previous elections, the Finns Party has capitalized on stories about crime committed by immigrants just before the general election of 2011,⁵⁴ 2015,⁵⁵ 2019,⁵⁶ and 2022.⁵⁷ In the last election, the PS copied the

51. Media Monitoring Group of Finland, "Finnish Media Coverage of 'Youth Gangs' and the Security Guard Scandal," 17 March 2023, https://www.reilumedia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/case_study_finnish_media_coverage_of_youth_gangs_and_the_security_guards_scandal_2022-2023.pdf, (Access date: 15 April 2024).
52. Media Monitoring Group of Finland, "Finnish Media Coverage of 'Youth Gangs' and the Security Guards Scandal 2022-2023," 17 March 2023, https://www.reilumedia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/case_study_finnish_media_coverage_of_youth_gangs_and_the_security_guards_scandal_2022-2023.pdf, (Access date: 4 May 2024).
53. Enrique Tessieri, "MTV Finland: Shoddy Journalism at its Shoddiest," *Migrant Tales*, 5 April 2024, <https://migranttales.net/mtv-finland-shoddy-journalism-at-its-shoddiest/>, (Access date: 4 May 2024).
54. Enrique Tessieri, "Finland 2011 Election: A Perilous Watershed," *Migrant Tales*, 18 April 2011, <https://migranttales.net/finland-election-a-perilous-watershed/>, (Access date: 15 April 2024).
55. Enrique Tessieri, "Epic Failure of the Finnish Media in Reporting the Impact of the Tapanila Sexual Assault Case," *Migrant Tales*, 22 March 2015, <https://migranttales.net/epic-failure-of-the-finnish-media-in-reporting-the-impact-of-the-tapanila-rape-case/>, (Access date: 15 April 2024).
56. Enrique Tessieri, "From the Oulu Sexual Assault Cases to Finland's Descent Into the Islamophobic Pit," *Migrant Tales*, 27 August 2019, <https://migranttales.net/52776-2/>, (Access date: 15 April 2024).
57. Media Monitoring Group of Finland, "Finnish Media Coverage of 'Youth Gangs' and the Security Guard Scandal," 17 March 2023, https://www.reilumedia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/case_study_finnish_

so-called migrant youth crime problem after Sweden's September 2022 parliamentary election. Contrary to Sweden, where there are tens of thousands of gang members and gang violence is a serious problem and even unique in the EU, in Finland, the police reported that the country had at the time 100-200 gang members and that it was a "potential" problem.⁵⁸ Apart from the initial interest in coverage by the media and social media, interest in the topic plummeted after the parliamentary election in April.⁵⁹

Mahad Sheikh, who has worked with Helsinki youths for over twenty years, asked, "How can they help [non-white youths] if there is no compassion for children and young people because of their [ethnic] background?"⁶⁰

Justice System

A common complaint of Muslims and other minorities is the lack of trust in due process, which can take a very long time. One recent case involved two women asylum seekers who were forced to take off their hijabs for a photograph.⁶¹ The case was taken to the district court, which acquitted the policemen and security guards. Thereafter, it was sent to the Court of Appeal, which dropped the charges. The whole court ordeal took seven years.⁶² Apart from respecting religious freedom, the Finnish law allows Muslim women to take a passport picture with a hijab; however, this is not possible if the person is an asylum seeker. Another high-profile case that was turned down by the Court of Appeal was that of Fares Al-Abaidi, who alleged that white Finns had attacked him.^{63 64}

media_coverage_of_youth_gangs_and_the_security_guards_scandal_2022-2023.pdf, (Access date: 15 April 2024).

58. Enrique Tessieri & Yahya Rouissi, "The Finnish youth 'Gang' Problem is a Monster Concocted by the Radical Right," *Migrant Tales*, 28 September 2023, <https://migranttales.net/the-finnish-youth-gang-problem-is-a-monster-concocted-by-the-radical-right/>, (Access date: 15 April 2024).
59. Enrique Tessieri, "Elections are Over in Finland – media and social media interest in 'youth gangs' dives," *Migrant Tales*, 23 April 2023, <https://migranttales.net/elections-are-over-in-finland-media-and-social-media-interest-in-youth-gangs-nosedives/>, (Access date: 15 April 2024).
60. Facebook conversation (8 February 2024). See also: Mahad Sheikh Musse, "Nuorten Ääni Puuttuu," *Migrant Tales*, 8 October 2023, <https://migranttales.net/mahad-sheikh-musse-nuorten-aaeni-puuttuu/>, (Access date: 6 May 2024).
61. Enrique Tessieri, "The Police Can Remove a Hijab by Force if You are an Asylum Seeker," *Migrant Tales*, 17 April 2024, <https://migranttales.net/the-finnish-police-can-remove-a-hijab-by-force-if-you-are-an-asylum-seeker/>, (Access date: 20 April 2024).
62. Enrique Tessieri, "Should We Be Surprised that the Finnish Police Force Muslim Women to Remove their Hijabs? Not," *Migrant Tales*, 4 September 2022, <https://migranttales.net/should-we-be-surprised-that-the-finnish-police-forced-muslim-women-to-remove-their-hijabs-not/>, (Access date: 20 April 2024).
63. Enrique Tessieri, "Fares Al-Abaidi: 'I was very disappointed [with the sentence, and] it was a very, very bad decision,'" *Migrant Tales*, 12 September 2022, <https://migranttales.net/fares-al-abaidi-i-was-very-disappointed-with-the-sentence-and-it-was-a-very-very-bad-decision/>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).
64. Juhani Pajunen, "Parran Pahoinpitelyä ei Käsitellä Hovioikeudessa," 8 February 2023, *Tejukka*, <https://www.tejuka-lehti.fi/uutiset/parran-pahoinpitelya-ei-kasitella-hovioikeudessa-6.107.580801.110bc3c10e>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

One of the major criticisms levelled against the new government by NGOs like Amnesty International is that it does not combat adequately racism, hate crimes, hate speech adequately.⁶⁵ In 2019, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recommended in its fifth report on Finland twenty points to tackle hate crime, racism, and intolerance.⁶⁶ Some of these include:

- expand the right of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to take up discrimination cases in employment as well;
- increase the capacity and training of staff;
- empower the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal to deal with complaints concerning discrimination in employment on all prohibited grounds of discrimination;
- data collection of hate crime and hate speech data;
- data collection would include a system for collecting data on ethnic, religious, gender, and citizenship origin; and
- establish an independent body that will look into police discrimination, racism, and misconduct.

The ECRI's recommendations are in conflict with the PS's Criminal Policy Program 2022, which states that the penal code concerning ethnic agitation must be changed to ensure free speech and the possibility to criticize Islam.⁶⁷ The clearest indication that the government will not pursue the ECRI's recommendations was PS Justice Minister Leena Meri, who dismantled two ministerial committees that were supposed to reform the penal code and strengthen the independence of the judiciary.⁶⁸

Internet

Apart from hate speech and online harassment, the internet continues to be a platform for far-right extremists and radicalization of young people and children.⁶⁹ Two

65. Amnesty International, "Finland – Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee 140th Session, 4-28 March 2024, Follow-Up," March 2024, https://www.amnesty.fi/uploads/2024/01/tb-ccpr_finland_follow-up_dec_2023-final.pdf, (Access date: 21 April 2024).

66. Finnish Government, "Recommendations for Finland from the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance," <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/recommendations-for-finland-from-the-european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance>, (Access date: 21 April 2024).

67. Perussuomalaiset, "Perussuomalaisen Kriiminäalipoliittinen Ohjelma 2022," 20 October 2022, <https://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/KriminaaliOhjelmaIsoVerkko.pdf>, (Access date: 21 April 2024).

68. Yle News, "Justice Minister Meri Accused of Meddling in Panels on Judicial Independence and Racism," 23 April 2024, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20085250>, (Access date: 30 May 2024).

69. SUPO, "The Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism has Grown in Western Countries," 2023, <https://supo.fi/en/extreme-right-wing-terrorism#:~:text=Right%2Dwing%20extremists%20of%20interest,essential%20part%20of%20such%20operations>, (Access date: 6 May 2024).

planned terrorist attacks in Kankaanpää⁷⁰ and Lahti⁷¹ are good examples of how far-right terrorism operates in Finland, according to Supo, the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service. On 31 October, for the first time in Finland, a Päjät-Häme court sentenced and handed jail terms to two men for aggravated firearms offences committed with “terrorist intent” and training to commit a “terrorist act.”⁷² One of the charged, Viljam Lauri Antero Nyman, used to be a member of the PS Youth and a candidate of the party.



Figure 7: In 2021, the police announced Finland's first far-right terrorism case. The group is suspected of planning to plant a bomb at the Niinisalo asylum reception center, which was burned down in December 2015.^{73 74}

According to Anna Santaholma, a Supo special expert, the terrorist threat in Finland is from individuals or small groups with the internet being the main platform for radicalization. “It [the internet] is a major factor that has contributed to the spread

70. Enrique Tessieri: Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2021, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2021, Vienna: Leopold Weiss Institute, 2022.
71. MTV Uutiset, STT, “Supon Mukaan Lahden ja Kankaanpään Tapaukset ovat Hyviä Esimerkkejä Äärioikeistoterrorismin Uhkasta – ’On Mahdollista, Että Vastaavia Tulee Jatkossa,” 30 July 2023, https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/supon-mukaan-lahden-ja-kankaanpaan-tapaukset-ovat-hyvia-esimerkkeja-aarioikeistoterrorismin-uhkasta-on-mahdollista-etta-vastaavia-tulee-jatkossa/8747322?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter#gs.8ksg8z, (Access date: 9 May 2024).
72. Enrique Tessieri, “Finland’s Long-Overdue Far-Right Terrorism Conviction,” Migrant Tales, 1 November 2023, <https://migranttales.net/finlands-long-overdue-far-right-terrorism-conviction/>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).
73. Lasse Kerkelä, “Poliisi: Äärioikeistolainen Ryhmittymä Suunnitteli Räjähdeiskua Vastaanottokeskukseen – Olivat Hankkineet Dynamiittia,” Helsingin Sanomat, 30 June 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000009689084.html>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).
74. Enrique Tessieri, “A Question to the Kankaanpää Police: Was a Proper Investigation Carried Out on the Burning of an Asylum Reception Center in 2015?” Migrant Tales, 19 December 2021, <https://migranttales.net/a-question-to-the-kankaanpaa-police-was-a-proper-investigation-carried-out-on-the-burning-of-an-asylum-reception-center-in-2015/>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

of far-right terrorism,” she said. “It’s not location-specific, you just need to have an internet connection to radicalize yourself.”⁷⁵

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The PS, with the support of its coalition partners the NCP, the Swedish People’s Party, and the Christian Democrats, continues to be one of the most important facilitators of Finland’s Islamophobic, far-right network.⁷⁶ The PS’s entry in government has changed its anti-immigration strategy by toning down its openly hateful rhetoric against migrants and minorities. The PS has had close ties with hostile groups to Muslims like Suomen Sisu,⁷⁷ Soldiers of Odin, Hommaforum, Kansallismielisten liitoutuma (National Alliance), Sinimusta Liike (Black-and-Blue Movement), the banned neo-Nazi Pohjoismainen vastarintaliike, and others like Ylilauta, a popular racist imago board where the party places campaign ads.

All of the elected 39 MPs of the Finns Party based one way or another their campaign on the party’s anti-immigration theme. The main PS ministers of government, Minister of Finance Riikka Purra,⁷⁸ Interior Minister Mari Rantanen, Justice Minister Leena Meri, Minister for Development Cooperation Ville Tavio, present and former Minister of Economic Affairs Wille Rydman and Vilhelm Junnila, and Speaker of Parliament Jussi Halla-aho, have a long track record of spreading Islamophobia and conspiracy theories.⁷⁹

Other PS MPs promoting and spreading anti-Muslim rhetoric are TikTok duo Joakim Vigelius and Miko Bergbom, and Sebastian Tynkkynen, the party’s third vice-president who was convicted three times for ethnic agitation.⁸⁰ PS *Suomen Uutiset* editor, Matias Turkkila, commonly inflames stories about Muslims; PS Second Vice-President Mauri Peltokangas, MPs Juha Mäenpää and Jenni Simula are mem-

75. Jaceterina Mantsinen, “Supo: Lahden a Kankaanpään Tapaukset ovat Hyviä Esimerkkejä Äärioikeistoterrorismin Uhkasta,” Helsingin Sanomat, 30 June 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/suomi/art-2000009751301.html>, (Access date: 28 July 2024).

76. Enrique Tessieri, Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2022, in: Enes Bayrakli & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2022, Vienna: Leopold Weiss Institute, 2023. (Access date: 21 April 2024).

77. MTV Uutiset, STT, “Supon Mukaan Lahden ja Kankaanpään Tapaukset ovat Hyviä Esimerkkejä Äärioikeistoterrorismin Uhkasta – ‘On Mahdollista, Että Vastaavia Tulee Jatkossa,’” 30 July 2023, https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/supon-mukaan-lahden-ja-kankaanpaan-tapaukset-ovat-hyvia-esimerkkeja-aaioikeistoterrorismin-uhkasta-on-mahdollista-etta-vastaavia-tulee-jatkossa/8747322?utm_source=dvtr.it&utm_medium=twitter#gs.8ks8z, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

78. Pauliina Sinauer, Maija Alander, “Tällainen on Riikka Purran Oma Blogi,” Helsingin Sanomat, 14 July 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000009717257.html>, (Access date: 10 May 2024).

79. David Mac Dougall, “Racism in Finland: Government minister Embroiled in Shocking new Row,” EuroNews, 28 July 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/07/28/even-if-i-bred-with-a-pitch-black-nigerian-negro-finnish-government-minister-in-new-racism>, (Access date: 28 July 2024), and YleNews, “Finns Party MEP said ‘Hostile Cultures’ Posed ‘Deadly Threats’ to Europe in EU Parliament Speech,” 21 July 2023, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20042002>, (Access date: 28 July 2024).

80. Enrique Tessieri, “PS MP Sebastian Tynkkynen Get a Third Ethnic Agitation Conviction,” Migrant Tales, 4 October 2022, <https://migranttales.net/ps-mp-sebastian-tynkkyenen-gets-a-third-ethnic-agitation-conviction/>, (Access date: 10 May 2024).

bers of the far-right Suomen Sisu. National Coalition Party MPs like Atte Kaleva, Heikki Vestman, Jukka Kopra, and Seida Sohrabi, a Kurdish-born NCP politician, and others use familiar anti-Muslim talking points. MTV reporter Ivan Puopolo is a “friendly” journalist of the PS. One of his programs depicted the government’s new integration policy with a migrant carrying a knife.⁸¹

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessments and Initiatives

Mahad Sheikh, a Helsinki youth worker, has seen a lot during his more than twenty years working with young people.⁸² Being a voice for and helping your community can take place in many ways like writing, which he started after the radical-right PS won its parliamentary victory in 2011. “I have offered countless opinion pieces to mainstream papers without luck,” he said. “One of the issues is that the media and authorities see racialized Finns as a group, not as individuals. One person of that group carries the weight of the whole group and it’s discouraging.”

Sheikh Musse and his partner at the Jalma Project, Marine Meliksetyan, work as a team. The Jalma Project forms part of the A-Clinic Foundation, which helps youths find the right services they may need and don’t know exist.⁸³ The service involves counselling, guidance, advice, and individual support when necessary. Sheikh Musse says that the project and the needs of their customer base is “huge.” “Small baby steps and small victories mean a lot for us,” he said, adding that such projects not only help build pathways to inclusion, but help avoid social problems in the future.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The recommendations below, which have featured in the previous *European Islamophobia Reports*, are still topical and vital to promote the inclusion of Muslims and raise public awareness of Islamophobia.

- Recognition of Islamophobia as a form of racism.
- Draft new laws recommended by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) to tackle social ills like racism and hate speech.
- More studies are needed on racism and Islamophobia in particular.
- Mainstream media should use Muslims and other minorities in stories about them.
- Promote cultural and ethnic diversity in civil servant jobs, like the police, in a concerted effort to dismantle institutional racism.

81. Enrique Tessieri, “MTV Finland: Shoddy Journalism at its Shoddiest,” *Migrant Tales*, 5 April 2024, <https://migranttales.net/mtv-finland-shoddy-journalism-at-its-shoddiest/>, (Access date: 10 May 2024).

82. Telephone interview (11.5.2024) with Mahad Sheikh Musse.

83. A-Clinic Foundation, <https://a-klinikasaatio.fi/en/a-clinic-foundation/>, (Access date: 18 May 2024).

- Finns must stop referring to Muslim and racialized children as “people of foreign background” or “migrant background.”
- Anti-racism education should be mandatory, starting from comprehensive school to other sectors like businesses and the public sector.
- Each culture has its own public space in Finland, which should be promoted, protected, and respected.
- Apart from advocating gender equality, which is essential, the same enthusiasm needs to be shown for promoting equity for all minorities and vulnerable groups.
- Finland should simplify and streamline the roles of its anti-discrimination bodies and follow Denmark and Sweden where all discrimination cases are handled by one entity.
- Prohibit politicians with convictions for ethnic agitation, hate crime, and other serious crimes from ever holding office.
- Encourage and make room for Muslims and other minorities through exemplary leadership by ministers, politicians, the media, and public officials.
- Integration is a two-way process, not a one-way process as it is now.

Chronology

- **22 June 2023:** “Finland must continue to be a country that upholds the rule of law, that is egalitarian, and of course, we do not accept any extremist movements, be it Nazism, Stalinism, or any other activity that poses a danger to society and people. This is absolutely clear,” said Prime Minister Petteri Orpo after Vilhelm Junnila resigned as minister of economic affairs due to his controversial far-right and anti-Semitic postings.⁸⁴
- **3 July 2023:** Before being appointed interior minister, Mari Rantanen, had posted and hashtagged far-right conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement. After removing such posts from her social media platforms, Rantanen wrote, “Let me be clear: I do not believe in conspiracies. Nor do I believe in the Great Replacement theory.”⁸⁵
- **27 July 2023:** PS Chairperson and Finance Minister Riikka Purra’s racist, sexist, and violent writings published in 2008 were unearthed by the media in July 2024. “Contrary to what has been claimed in the media,” she said, “there is no glorification or incitement to violence in my comments. I have never supported any form of violence or extremist action. I have always opposed such behavior.”⁸⁶

84. Yle News, “Finns Party Minister Apologises Over Far-Right Comments and Connections,” 22 June 2023, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20038203>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

85. Yle News, Interior Minister Denounces Right-Wing Conspiracies, Removes Past Social Media Posts, 3 July 2023, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20039408>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

86. Yle News, “Minister Riikka Purra Defends Herself: ‘I have Never Supported Any Form of Violence or Extremist Actions,’” 27 July 2023, <https://yle.fi/a/74-20042810>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

- **27 July 2023:** PS Minister of Economic Affairs Wille Rydman's 2016 chats with his then girlfriend were published by the media. "Even if I bred with a spit-black Nigerian n-word, the child would still have a 26% change of getting green eyes." His girlfriend suggested a Hebrew name like Immanuel for their child. Rydman responded: "We Nazis don't really like that kind of Jew stuff."⁸⁷
- **8 August 2023:** Amnesty International raises questions about the government's human rights and racism record. "Your government program is weak and contradictory from a human rights perspective. It contains a number of objectives and measures that are at odds with the promotion of equality, equity and non-discrimination. The program does not directly mention anything about combating racism or discrimination experienced by sexual minorities."⁸⁸
- **31 August 2023:** "The government is committed to promoting equality on a broad front throughout the parliamentary term," said Prime Minister Petteri Orpo in a press statement upon making public its anti-racism statement.⁸⁹ "There is no room for racism in Finland. Political decision-makers must set an example in building a safe and equal society, and we need all of society to take part."
- **29 November 2023:** Finland shut the Finnish-Russian border and plans to push back people seeking asylum, a clear human rights violation of its constitution and international agreements. "Prime Minister Orpo has described the situation of people who have crossed the eastern border by saying that the asylum seekers are not in acute need and that it is an organized action [by Russia]. The Prime Minister's generalization is reckless and unjust," said Amnesty's International Finland legal expert Pargol Miraftebi.⁹⁰

87. Paavo Teittinen, "Leviä ja Lisääntyy kuin Somali,' Oksettaa Tää Aavikkoapina' – Mnisteri Wille Rydmanin Vanhoista Viesteistä Paljastuu Toisuvaa Rastista Kielenkäyttöä," Helsingin Sanomat, 27 July 2023, <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000009742553.html>, (Access date: 27 May 2024).

88. Niina Laajapuro, "Amnesty: Avoin Kirje Orpon Hallitukselle Yhdenvertaisuuden, Tasa-Arvon ja Syrjimättömyyden Edistämisestä," Amnesty international, 8 August 2023, https://www.amnesty.fi/amnesty-avoin-kirje-orpon-hallitukselle-yhdenvertaisuuden-tasa-arvon-ja-syrjimattomyyden-edistamisesta/?post_date=20230808150, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

89. Claudia Chappa, "Scandal-Ridden Finnish Government Presents Anti-Racism Agenda," Politico, 31 August 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/finland-government-adopts-anti-racism-statement-after-months-of-racism-scandals/>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

90. Kreetta Karvala, "Amnesty Asiantuntij: Orpon Rajapuheet 'piittamattomia,'" Iltalehti, 29 November 2023, <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/0b7a9ae8-cb4d-44ef-875e-0ecc8ab38e59>, (Access date: 9 May 2024).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
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Executive Summary

In 2023, France was particularly marked by three major events that undoubtedly influenced the evolution of Islamophobia: the murder of Nahel Merzouk, the implementation of the abaya ban in public schools, and the October 7 attacks by Palestinian Hamas in Israel and subsequent genocide in Gaza. The stigmatization of French Muslims was further reinforced by racist ideologies that have become the new mainstream. Far-right and even fascist political leaders appear to be more acceptable partners for the current government than far-left MPs, who are mostly demonized. With the help of the media, mainly run by billionaires who are waging a real war of civilizations (opposing the white Judeo-Christian civilization to the non-white Muslim civilization), France is today witnessing a 180-degree turnaround revealing the fascization of its hegemonic anti-Muslim policy and culture, which are even beginning to convince the average French citizen. Islamophobia is increasingly murderous in France, and the attacks and discrimination stemming from the French police and state criminalize the signs of Muslimness and French Muslims by presenting them as threatening subjects with a propensity for violence. To control, discipline, and dominate this Muslimness and the violence associated with it better, the French government has decided to pursue a policy of de-Islamization of Muslim individuals and organizations, thus defying the most egalitarian principles of its own constitution. This exceptional regime highlights a double standard against French Muslims, observable in all the sectors detailed in this report. Ultimately, this differential treatment is accompanied by a criminalization of all voices that wish to develop spaces of resistance and oppose state-run racism and Islamophobia.

Note de synthèse

En 2023, la France a été particulièrement marquée par trois événements majeurs qui ont sans aucun doute influencé l'évolution de l'islamophobie : l'assassinat de Nahel Merzouk, la mise en place de l'interdiction de l'abaya à l'école public et les attentats du 7 octobre du Hamas palestinien en Israël provoquant un génocide à Gaza. La stigmatisation des musulmans français a été encore renforcée par des idéologies racistes devenues le nouveau courant dominant. Les dirigeants politiques d'extrême droite et même fascistes apparaissent comme des partenaires plus acceptables pour le gouvernement actuel que les députés d'extrême gauche qui sont majoritairement diabolisés. Avec l'aide des médias, principalement dirigés par des milliardaires qui mènent une véritable guerre des civilisations (opposant la civilisation judéo-chrétienne blanche à la civilisation musulmane non-blanche), la France assiste donc aujourd'hui à un retournement de 180 degrés révélant la fascisation de sa politique et de sa culture hégémoniques antimusulmanes qui commencent même à convaincre le citoyen français moyen. L'islamophobie est de plus en plus meurtrière en France, et les attaques et discriminations émanant de la police et de l'État français criminalisent les signes de la musulmanité ainsi que les musulmans français en les présentant comme des sujets menaçants ayant une propension à la violence. Afin de mieux contrôler, discipliner et dominer cette musulmanité et la violence qui lui est associée, le gouvernement français a décidé de mener une politique de désislamisation des individus et organisations musulmanes, défiant ainsi les principes les plus égalitaires de sa propre constitution. Ce régime d'exception met en évidence un deux poids deux mesures contre les musulmans français, observable dans tous les secteurs détaillés dans ce rapport. Au final, ce traitement différentiel s'accompagne d'une criminalisation de toutes les voix qui souhaitent développer des espaces de résistance et s'opposer au racisme et à l'islamophobie d'État.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: French Republic

Type of Regime: Unitary constitutional republic

Form of Government: Semi-presidential system

Ruling Parties: Renaissance! (center)

Opposition Parties: La France Insoumise, Le Rassemblement National

Last Elections: French Senatorial Elections (September 24, 2023): the goal of these elections was to renew 172 of the 348 seats in the Senate of the French Fifth Republic. Les Républicains (right) emerged as the largest party with 145 seats (although they lost 12 seats compared to the last election). The second-largest party is the Socialistes, Ecologistes et Républicains (left and center-left) with 64 seat and followed by the third-largest party which is the Union Centriste (center and center-right) with 57 seats.

Total Population: 68.1 million (2023, Institut Nationale de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, INSEE, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

Major Languages: French

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: No report from the Ministry of Interior has been published, but the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme, CNCDH) published a report in March 2024 highlighting a total of 242 anti-Muslim acts in 2023 (against 188 in 2022)¹ according to the Central Territorial Intelligence Service (Service Central du Renseignement Territorial, SCRT), the General Directorate of Internal Security (Direction Général de la Sécurité Intérieure, DGSI) and the National Directorate of Territorial Intelligence (Direction Nationale du Renseignement Territorial, DNRT). The Collective Against Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE, Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Europe) has published an impressive total of 828 Islamophobic reports in 2023 (against 527 in 2022) just for the French case.²

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: The CNCDH report also emphasizes a total number of 3,139 racist acts in 2023 in France according to SCRT data. These data include anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and other racist acts, and show an impressive increase of 92% compared to 1,636 in 2022. This alarming rise is, accord-

1. CNCDH, "La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie", *La Documentation française*, 351p. https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/2024-06/CNCDH_Rapport_Racisme_2023.pdf

2. CCIE, "Annual Report on Islamophobia in Europe for the year 2023", *CCIE*, 40p. <https://ccieurope.org/report2023/>

ing to the CNCDH report, due to a surge in anti-Semitic acts, especially after October 7 (Hamas attacks in Israel).

Major Religions (% of Population): The compilation of official statistics based on religious beliefs is not permitted by French law. That said, according to a study by the INSEE (Institut Nationale de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), in 2019-2020, 51% of French people aged 18 to 59 years old claim to belong to no religion, 29% are Catholics, 10% are Muslims, and 10% claim to be affiliated with another religion.³

Muslim Population (% of Population): With 10% of the population declaring itself Muslim, Islam represents the second-largest religion in France. According to the same INSEE study, Muslims differ from Catholics by the frequency and intensity of their religious practices. For example, only 8% of Catholics regularly attend a place of worship, compared to around 20% for Muslims (with more than half of them once a week). Similarly, around 20% of Buddhists and other Christians also regularly attend a place of worship, and 34% of Jews do so.

Main Muslim Community Organizations: CFCM (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman), UMF (Union des Mosquées de France), Fondation de l'Islam de France, EMF (Étudiants Musulmans de France), UDMF (Union des Démocrates Musulmans Français), DITIB, Milli Görüş, L.E.S Musulmans, AMIF (Association Musulmane pour l'Islam de France), Musulmans de France, FORIF (Forum de l'Islam de France), SIF (Secours Islamique France)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: OCI (Observatoire Contre l'Islamophobie), ADM (Action Droits des Musulmans), ACI (Action Contre l'Islamophobie), Perspectives Musulmanes, Touche Pas À Ma Abaya, Islamophobia Watch France, CJL (Comité Justice et Libertés Pour Tous), CCIE (Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Europe), CAGE

Far-Right Parties: National Rally (Rassemblement national, RN), France Arise (Debout la France), The Patriots (Les Patriotes), Reconquest (Reconquête), Party of France (Parti de la France, PDF)

Far-Right Movements: Secular Retaliation (Riposte Laïque), Identitarian movement (Mouvance identitaire), Equality and Reconciliation (Égalité et Réconciliation), Volunteers for France (Volontaires Pour la France, VPF), French Action (Action Française)

Far-Right Militant Organizations: Némésis, The Student Cockade (la Cocarde étudiante)

3. Drouhot L., Simon P., and Tiberj V. (2023). "La diversité religieuse en France: transmissions intergénérationnelles et pratiques selon les origines", *Insee Références*, Édition 2023, Dossiers, 10p. <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6793308?sommaire=6793391>

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** Ban of religious symbols including the Muslim headscarf from primary school to high school (2004). The El Khomri law (2016) now allows each French company to introduce the “principle of neutrality” into its internal regulations. In a ruling of July 23, 2019, the Lyon Administrative Court of Appeal ruled that parents of pupils, just like teachers, are required to respect the principles of neutrality during school activities organized in the classroom. The 2021 Anti-separatism bill targets the religious symbols of members of Municipal Councils (Article 6) and employees of private companies performing public service missions (Article 1) such as public transport drivers and social housing concierges.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No (depends on local decisions)
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** Law 2010-1192 of October 11, 2010, the purpose of which is to prohibit the wearing of “clothing intended to conceal one’s face,” came into force on April 11, 2011.
- **Abaya and Qamis (Thobe) Ban:** A concrete decree has been implemented on September 7, 2023 that extends the 2004 law banning religious symbols in public schools in order to include the abaya and qamis (thobe) as religious dresses.
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

In 2023, France was particularly marked by three major incidents which undoubtedly influenced the evolution of Islamophobia. The first refers to the killing of Nahel Merzouk, a French-North African Muslim teenager, by a police officer on June 27 on Eid-al-Adha, one of the most important celebrations for Muslims around the world. The second refers to the implementation of a new decree on September 7 extending the 2004 law banning religious symbols in public schools in order to include the abaya and qamis (thobe) as ostensible manifestations of religious affiliation. Both events are French-based incidents while the third is more of an international influence stemming from the October 7 attacks by Palestinian Hamas in Israel and the subsequent Israeli genocidal response in Gaza. These three major events have increased – or at least strongly influenced – anti-Muslim acts in France in 2023 according to several reports, whether from the Consultative Commission on Human Rights (Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l’Homme, CNCDH) or the Collective Against Islamophobia in Europe (Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en Europe, CCIE).

The CNCDH report published in March 2024 uses the data from the French Ministry of Interior and highlights a total of 242 anti-Muslim acts in 2023 (against 188 in 2022) according to the General Directorate of Internal Security (Direction Général de la Sécurité Intérieure, DGSI), the Central Territorial Intelligence Service (Service Central du Renseignement Territorial, SCRT), and the National Directorate of Territorial Intelligence (Direction Nationale du Renseignement Territorial, DN-RT).⁴ This report shows a 28.7% increase between 2022 and 2023, while more than half of the violations were committed during the last three months of the year 2023 after October 7. The Minister of Interior Gérald Darmanin recognized that the situation in the Middle East “has obvious resonances on our [French] soil and that it affects French Muslims”⁵ during a meeting at the Forum on Islam of France (Forum de l’Islam de France, FORIF) which represents a new platform aimed at improving dialogue between the state and representatives of the Muslim faith.

The CCIE report, published in February 2024, for its part, records a higher total of 828 Islamophobic acts in 2023, compared to 527 in 2022 for the French case⁶ — a worrying increase of 57.1%. Such a discrepancy with the DGSI-SCRT-DNRT data can be easily explained by the fact that French Muslims are often reluctant to report an Islamophobic incident to the police because they generally do not trust French

4. CNCDH, “La lutte contre le racisme, l’antisémitisme et la xénophobie”, *La Documentation française*, 351p. https://www.cncdh.fr/sites/default/files/2024-06/CNCDH_Rapport_Racisme_2023.pdf

5. Cazaux S. “Forte Hausse des actes antimusulmans en France en 2023, surtout depuis les attaques du Hamas en Israël”, *BFMTV*, February 26, 2024. https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/les-actes-antimusulmans-ont-fortement-augmente-2023-en-particulier-depuis-les-attaques-du-hamas-en-israel_AN-202402260841.html

6. CCIE, “Annual Report on Islamophobia in Europe for the year 2023”, *CCIE*, 40p. <https://ccieurope.org/report2023/>

institutions that directly target them. Instead of targeting criminals, the French police and state have tended to stigmatize Muslimness by criminalizing and portraying French Muslims as dangerous subjects through various logics (colonial, racist, and sexist). The Islamophobic “systematic obstruction” policy, which in theory seeks to combat any radicalized and separatist individual, is used to intimidate religious, visible, vocal, and organized Muslims as well as to eliminate any independent Muslim structures protecting their rights. More specifically, the CCIE report insists on the new decree against abayas since their data correspond to more discrimination (779) and moral harassment (237) within the educational sector. These acts largely refer to the abuses generated by the formal ban on wearing the abaya at the start of the 2023 school year. Secondary schools, such as high schools (but also primary schools, higher education, or even training centers), thus represent the main spaces where Islamophobic actions are centralized in France, in connection with the anti-Muslim laws implemented these last decades.

But another important Islamophobic event occurred in France in 2023 that none of these reports highlight (or to a lesser degree, only the CNCDH report in its own way). The murder of Nahel Merzouk has a clear link to the evolution of Islamophobic thoughts and actions. Indeed, his murder was allowed precisely because this young teenager was a postcolonial “racialized” subject. Since the figure of the “Arab” or “Maghrebi” in France profoundly intersects with Muslimness, his racialized Muslim body was therefore a killable body that a police agent representing the French state could target. Current policies empowering the French police enabled this killing because of structural racism and a racial/colonial logic still present in French institutions. The legitimate revolts or protests that followed lasted for several days in June–July 2023 and were also the consequences of a series of police crimes, anti-Muslim laws, systemic poverty, and racist discrimination. These revolts were widely presented in French politics and media as riots led by problematic populations, further fueling Islamophobia in France. In response, the French government decided to deploy the impressive number of 40,000 ultra-armed police officers (armored vehicles, tear gas, flash grenades, etc.) to arrest the young protesters.⁷ Many suffered irreparable bodily harm and were arrested (including children); 1,056 were sentenced to imprisonment.⁸

For several years now, this anti-Muslim policy has continued in France, and the cumulative results in the fight against separatism until April 2024 reach a total of 31,000 controls, 1,112 closures, and more than 59 million euros seized.⁹ No inde-

7. Desmonceaux J., “Death of Nahel: 40,000 police officers and gendarmes mobilized this Thursday evening, including 5,000 in Paris”, *BFM TV*, June 29, 2023.

8. Le Figaro and AFP, “Riots: more than 1,000 convictions, 600 people imprisoned, according to Dupond-Moretti”, *Le Figaro*, July 17, 2023.

9. Gouvernement Liberté Égalité Fraternité, “Les cellules départementales de lutte contre l’islamisme et le repli communautaire (CLIR)”, *Secrétariat général du Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation*. <https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/lutte-islamisme-et-separatisme-clir/>

pendent NGO exists in France to record and monitor anti-Muslim acts. The only ones that exist do not have the capacity to record everyday Islamophobic acts nor to provide an influential response against institutional Islamophobia. Organizations, supported by the government, only use the data of the Ministry of Interior and therefore will not analyze anti-Muslim acts resulting from the “systematic obstruction” policy or denounce Islamophobia directly from the state given that this same French state is their employers or funder.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Compared to previous reports, this section highlights murderous attacks or attempted murders as well as assaults causing serious physical harm. These incidents mainly follow the killing of Nahel Merzouk and it is easy to see their Islamophobic nature. Nahel’s homicide is itself Islamophobic, given that in France North African descendants are perceived monolithically as Muslims and thus suffer from negative representations of Islam (namely, a backward religion linked to terrorism and opposed to modern civilization). Such Orientalist rhetoric necessarily fosters racist and Islamophobic actions. Police crimes have always existed in France, but this is the first time that a video shows the direct execution of a 17-year-old teenager. (Fig. 1)



Figure 1: Screenshot of the video by Blast media detailing Nahel Merzouk’s execution and contradicting the French police’s lies.¹⁰

10. BLAST, Le souffle de l’info, “Mort de Nahel: les preuves du mensonge de la police”, *YouTube*, July 12, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nU2ofk-lks>

This video contradicts the first police reports that sought to exonerate the police officer. Indeed, the police institution, but also the mainstream political class and media as well as far-right groups, have taken the police officer's side, notably through the vocabulary used and the actions carried out. Muslim postcolonial subjects living in French *banlieues* (i.e., peripheral deprived areas) are portrayed as enemies against whom the state is at war. The police union Alliance, known for supporting right-wing and far-right political parties, even issued a press release on June 30 calling the French government to act or otherwise police officers themselves will take important measures, by emphasizing that they will not lay down their weapons and that they are at war against these “nuisibles et hordes sauvages” (pests and wild hordes).¹¹ What is more, a fundraising pot that reached 1.6 million euros was created by a far-right activist to support the police officer who shot Nahel; this racist initiative was not blocked by the French state. Such language and practices clearly reveal that the social and republican contract has been broken in France. This simple car check could have had a completely different outcome as there was no violence on the part of Nahel or his two friends, aged 17 and 14, who were passengers. The violence was on the side of the police officer who was imprisoned but released a few months later. During the protests, other racialized men were also killed by the police¹² and others suffered impressive physical deformations following LBD shots.¹³ Some lost an eye, but Hedi lost part of his skull which had to be removed for his survival. (Fig. 2)



Figure 2: Video by media outlet Konbini exposing Hedi's testimony regarding his assault by the French police.¹⁴

11. Dhers L., “‘En guerre’ contre des ‘nuisibles’: ce communiqué de deux syndicats de police indigné”, *BFMTV*, June 30, 2023. https://www.bfmtv.com/police-justice/en-guerre-contre-des-nuisibles-ce-communique-de-deux-syndicats-de-police-indigne_AN-202306300742.html
12. Kazib A., “Marche silencieuse en hommage à Nahel ce samedi à Nanterre”, *X*, June 27, 2024. <https://x.com/AnasseKazib/status/1806334173168259582>
13. Mediapart, “Violences policières: trois mois après Nahel, des victimes témoignent”, *YouTube*, September 26, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQHcBQXnISQ>
14. Konbini, “Laisse pour mort par la BAC de Marseille après un tir de LBD, Hedi témoigne”, *YouTube*, July 26, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vhd7eMx4P7E>

In July 2023, this 22-year-old man accompanied by one of his friends came across some police officers and greeted them. Hedi quickly realized that the police officers had a very aggressive look and they started beating him for no reason. Following a scandal, the police officer was sent to prison, but the police unions put pressure on the French government to have him released. The perpetrator was released a few months later in September 2023.¹⁵

Islamophobic criminal motivations can also affect Islamic places of worship. During the month of Ramadan in 2023, an attempted armed attack took place in the early morning of March 30 in the Great Mosque of Échirolles (Isère) after a man with a knife entered to attack the worshippers. The attacker, claiming to “know Le Pen,”¹⁶ punched a man in the face who was opening the doors of the mosque before the first prayer of the day, then brandished his knife, but was overpowered by two other worshippers. The perpetrator fled before the police arrived, and an investigation was conducted by the Grenoble police to find him.



Figure 3: The tweet by the Collective Against Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE, Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en Europe) exposing the disemboweled wild boar carcass hung on the gate of the mosque in Vigneux-sur-Seine.¹⁷

In this sense, many mosques have been damaged, ransacked, or threatened by death threat letters or armed attacks all over France (Saint-Etienne, Pessac, Bordeaux, Lyon, Valence, Angers, Vigneux, etc.).¹⁸ In 2023, the CCIE denounced an attack on mosques every six days in France. Racist tags generally refer to topical events or far-right political

15. Fernandez-Lopez R., “Affaire Hedi: le policier mis en examen sort de prison, peut-il être condamné?”, *L’internaute*, September 1, 2023. <https://www.linternaute.com/actualite/faits-divers/3289267-policier-en-prison-a-marseille-l-homme-remis-en-liberte-que-risque-t-il-dans-l-affaire-hedi/>

16. Maillard U. “Grenoble. Un homme entre dans une mosquée avec un couteau et menace les fidèles”, *Actu.fr*, March 31, 2023. https://actu.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/echirolles_38151/grenoble-un-homme-entre-dans-une-mosquee-avec-un-couteau-et-menace-les-fideles_58571747.html

17. CCIE, “Ce samedi 23 décembre, les fidèles de la mosquée de Vigneux-sur-Seine ont découvert une carcasse de sanglier éventré accrochée sur la grille du lieu de prière”, *X*, December 25, 2023. <https://x.com/CCIEurope/status/1739375460780290512>

18. CCIE, 2023, “Une mosquée attaquée tous les 6 jours”, *YouTube*, December 29, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onmccXNWd9I>

positions stigmatizing French Muslims. Islamophobic inscriptions are exclusionary, such as “La France aux Français,” i.e., “France to the French,” or death-threatening, such as “Vos cercueils ou vos valises”, i.e., “Your coffins or your suitcases.” Some mosques receive posters with pictures of members of racist political parties (such as the Rassemblement National or Reconquête), but also Molotov cocktails or even pig carcasses. (Fig. 3) This is what happened on December 23 in a mosque in Vigneux-sur-Seine (Ile-de-France) where the disembowelled carcass of a wild boar was found at the entrance.

Employment

Islamophobia in the workplace is not detailed in existing reports such as those of the CCIE and the CNCDH. Without public data, a detailed analysis is therefore not possible. That said, when the incident is serious, we can find testimonies circulating in the press. For example, on November 17, Mourad, a 29-year-old gardener, was insulted and attacked at his workplace by a septuagenarian who tried to slit his throat by stabbing him with a box cutter. (Fig. 4) This terrible attack began after the gardener’s truck blocked the road to carry out work in the garden of the attacker’s neighbor who had hired Mourad to cut the branches of her trees. The pensioner showed his anger by calling Mourad a “bougnoule” (an anti-Arab insult) and adding, “This is my home... so, you get out... go back to your home.” Mourad almost lost his life following his 15-cm physical injury which required 76 stitches. The attacker was arrested and placed in police custody. But despite a Facebook account showing an obsession with Muslims and Islam and being a repeat offender for public insults based on race and religion, the attacker was released and not prosecuted for attempted homicide.¹⁹

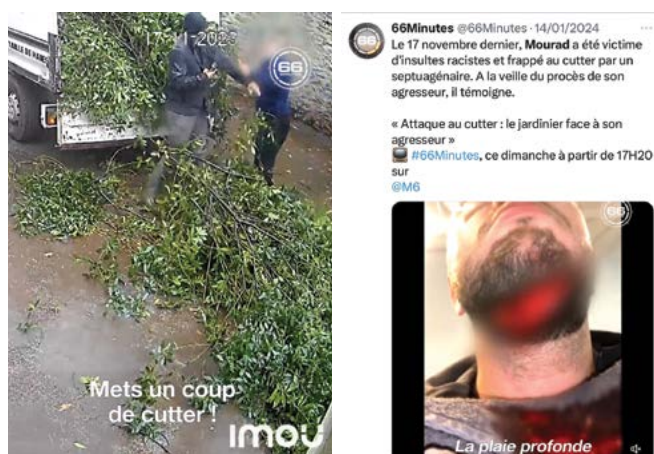


Figure 4: Tweet showing the Islamophobic attempted murder of the gardener Mourad.²⁰

19. Libération and AFP, “Insultes racistes, coup de cutter à la gorge: ce que l’on sait de l’agression d’un jardinier dans le Val-de-Marne”, *Libération*, November 21, 2023. https://www.liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/insultes-racistes-coup-de-cutter-a-la-gorge-ce-que-lon-sait-de-lagression-dun-jardinier-dans-le-val-de-marne-20231121_NAAKQ42GSFDKJPM46E5ZFECQQE/

20. 66 Minutes, “Le 17 novembre dernier, Mourad a été victime d’insultes racistes et frappe au cutter par un septuagénaire”, X, January 14, 2024. <https://x.com/66Minutes/status/1746502424787873901>



Figure 5: Speech by President of France Emmanuel Macron at a meeting of the Forum on Islam of France (Forum de l'islam de France, FORIF) on February 16, 2023.²¹

As for imams exercising their “profession” in France, many of them feel monitored by the French government which does not hesitate to interfere in the management of the Muslim faith. However, a secular state is supposed to be independent of any religion while promoting the free exercise of all religions. But since 2004, France has used *laïcité* to target part of its own population better, and for 20 years now, Muslims and particularly imams have experienced a relentless oppression. The highly publicized expulsion of imam Hassan Iquioussen to Morocco on January 13 has contributed to develop an atmosphere of suspicion towards imams in general, putting them at risk of expulsion.²² Such practices show that the French government is continuing its policy of subordination by developing an “Islam of France” instead of embracing an “Islam in France” with the full engagement of French Muslims through public debates or democratic elections of their representatives, while respecting their diversity. Muslim populations should be able to discuss and determine their religious identity on their own terms.

Yet, at a FORIF (Forum on Islam of France, Forum de l'islam de France) meeting on February 16, President Macron stressed the priority of restructuring a “French Islamology” through many measures and institutions. (Fig. 5) With the launch of the “Fourth Territorial Conference of Islam of France” (les Quatrièmes Assises Territorial de l'islam de France), the status and training of imams will be regulated according to the principles of *laïcité*, as will a center of academic excellence in training and

21. Élysée, “La réunion du forum de l'islam de France à l'Élysée”, *YouTube*, February 16, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEasut4VtPc>

22. Stroobants J-P, “Imam Iquioussen deported to Morocco after several judicial twists”, *Le Monde*, January 14, 2023. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/01/14/imam-iquioussen-deported-to-morocco-after-several-judicial-twists_6011530_7.html

research around the French Institute of Islamology (l'Institut Français d'Islamologie, IFI). Now, even a “French academic Islamology” is being considered in order to allow the creation of new positions for doctoral students and researchers who study topics related to Islam and Muslims of France. The independence of scientific work and academic freedom are fundamental and must not be controlled by a state that has already sought in the past to monitor the work of French academics and, more recently, to sanction them for their solidarity with the Palestinian cause. This system of governance risks in the long run freezing critical thinking, but also disciplining French Muslims. Here again, the secondary place granted to French Muslims in their own country is observable under Macron's increasingly exclusionary policy.

Education

Education is the major witness to Islamophobic incidents targeting young Muslim student girls whether it involves religious symbols or loose clothes or even simple greetings in Arabic as evidenced by the CCIE which reports 305 anti-Muslim incidents alone in educational spaces in 2023, especially in public high schools. This represents 41% of all their reports and an increase of 80.1% compared to 2022. This impressive rise is mainly observed after the implementation of a new clothing restriction banning the wearing of the abaya and qamis (thobe) in September 2023. The French government is again prioritizing measures against the visibility of Muslimness in the public school sphere, since this was the very first official statement by Gabriel Attal as the new minister of national education and youth at the time. The Council of State validated this new ban while considering that no illegal attack was made on fundamental freedom. The wearing of an abaya and qamis is now deemed legally contrary to *laïcité*.²³ This comes as no surprise given the existence of previous tools and plans, such as the *Laïcité* Plan or the Vademecum on *Laïcité*, that had already allowed such clothing regulation. Now, young Muslim student girls are forced not only to remove their hijab at the entrance of their high school, but also to regulate the rest of their outfit.

Thus, young girls see their freedom to dress as they wish problematized and controlled, often in a very inappropriate way. Some feel looked at and scrutinized by the school staff (including male staff) who can intimidate, humiliate, and harass them, sometimes to the point of sexual harassment. Asking young girls to undress, lift their skirts, show their female curve, or take off their dress providing they are wearing leggings underneath should alarm all associations defending the human rights of children and teenagers. Such abuse targets essentially Muslim students who wear the hijab outside of their high schools, but also non-religious girls

23. Gardien P., “Le Conseil d'Etat valide en référé l'interdiction de l'abaya à l'école”, *Village de la Justice*, September 8, 2023. <https://www.village-justice.com/articles/conseil-etat-valide-refere-interdiction-abaya-ecole,47170.html>

who can wear wide ordinary clothes for various reasons.²⁴ Moreover, what is meant by “abaya” is highly subjective and some Muslim girls have been expelled from their high schools simply for wearing a long skirt, a kimono, or baggy trousers, as shown by one of my tweets below.



Figure 6: Outfits of students expelled from school at the start of the 2023 school year.²⁵

In Figure 6, it is noticeable that none of the girls are wearing an abaya. The abaya is a long garment that covers the whole body, very often worn in the Middle East, and which is now perceived in France as a religious symbol, when, in fact, it is a cultural/traditional dress. Numerous abusive interpretations of this new regulation have portrayed young girls as not respecting the rules of *laïcité*. But what can be said about a law that does not respect the body integrity of young girls who are at an age where they are learning to accept their female body and become confident adults? The school space, or *l'École de la République*, is supposed to be a safe space for all children and teenagers in France. However, on the contrary, school today has become a dangerous space for Muslim students who should have the right to express their piety through modest clothing, but also for all other students who should have the right to express their piety through modest clothing, but also for all other students who should be protected and supported if they feel the need to hide their overweight or any other discomforts. France's Islamophobic policy follows its colonial, racist, and sexist logic by developing a clothing police that continues to target the bodies and outfits of Mus-

24. Ali R. “Removing a part of me’: France’s abaya ban revives painful memories for Muslim women”, *Anadolu Agency*, September 12, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/removing-a-part-of-me-france-s-abaya-ban-revives-painful-memories-for-muslim-women/2990031>

25. Najib K., “All the problematic outfits so far!!!”, *X*, September 7, 2023. <https://x.com/KawtarNajib/status/1699688553540678004>

lim girls. Instead, the priority should be to offer them equal access to education, or more generally to fight against the lack of teachers and the excessive number of students per class, as reminded by the general secretary of the National Union of Secondary Education, Sophie Vénétiay.²⁶

In the end, such discriminations are inevitable because (a) homeschooling for religious reasons is prohibited following the 2021 law against separatism, and (b) there are almost no private Muslim schools in France despite the promises to the Muslim community twenty years ago during the first discussions debating the 2004 law. Only two Muslim establishments are under contract (i.e., financed by the state): the Averroes High School in Lille (Nord) and the Al-Kindi High School in Décines (Lyon suburbs). This very minimal total is in contradiction with the proportional needs of the large Muslim community living in France (in comparison with the Catholic and Jewish populations who have more faith-based schools), and yet the Averroes High School almost closed its doors after the prefect of Nord decided in December 2023 to withdraw the state approval and thus cut public subsidies for reasons which turned out to be false. The high school's lawyer, Nabil Boudi, denounced the political and discriminatory decision stigmatizing Muslim schools in comparison with the other confessional high schools.²⁷ Many other private Muslim establishments without contracts are trying to develop in France, but they remain at the project stage awaiting support from the French administration. Ultimately, French Muslims have no other choice but to enroll in public schools that discriminate against them. For example, during the 2023 Eid-al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday marking the end of Ramadan, around a hundred French schools received an email from the Ministry of the Interior requesting to count all students absent that day.²⁸

Politics

In French politics, *laïcité* has become a synonym for Islamophobia since when it is applied to the Islamic faith, it is mainly to stigmatize and repress markers of Muslimness in the public sphere better. Other religions are not targeted in the same way, thus revealing an obvious double standard. For example, the French state does not remove nativity scenes from town halls during Christmas or does not refrain from lighting a candle for Hanukkah at the Élysée Palace, but it does not hesitate to develop anti-Muslim laws each year. This unequal treatment was even justified by for-

26. Duguet S. "Comment va s'appliquer l'interdiction de l'abaya à l'école voulue par Gabriel Attal?", *Public Sénat*, August 28, 2023. <https://www.publicsenat.fr/actualites/education/comment-va-sappliquer-linterdiction-de-la-baya-a-lecole-voulue-par-gabriel-attal>

27. Boudi N., "Le cabinet a déposé plainte hier contre le préfet du Nord...", *X*, April 26, 2023. <https://x.com/BoudiNabil/status/1783820869862674692>

28. Zaoui H. "C'est du fichage religieux: quand la police de Toulouse compte les élèves absents le jour de la fête musulmane de l'Aïd", *La Dépêche*, May 19, 2023. <https://www.ladepeche.fr/2023/05/19/cest-du-fichage-religieux-quand-la-police-de-toulouse-compte-les-eleves-absents-le-jour-de-la-fete-musulmane-de-laid-11204837.php>

mer minister of energy transition Agnès Pannier-Runacher who explained that the Hanukkah celebration at the Élysée Palace was an awards ceremony to recognize the fight against anti-Semitism, and added, “I remind you that it is this government that banned the wearing of the abaya at school (...) and it is very clear that we will continue to make *laïcité* a major fight for the government.”²⁹



12:10 · 08/12/2023 Depuis Earth · 17k vues

Figure 7: The explanation by the Collective Against Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE, Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en Europe) about how a Hanukkah celebration is justified by the abaya ban.³⁰

This double standard is a message sent to French Muslims: their presence and visibility are conditional. Many political statements go in this direction and justify these inequalities very often by conflating Islam, Muslims, and terrorism. This is what President Emmanuel Macron did when he gave an interview on September 4 to French YouTuber and journalist Hugo Travers for his platform “HugoDecrypte.” During discussions around the abaya and the protection of *laïcité*, President Macron drew a dangerous parallel with the murder of Samuel Paty by emphasizing: “We also live in our society with a minority of people who, by hijacking a religion, challenge the Republic and *laïcité*. And sorry, but sometimes this has led to the worst. We cannot act as if there have not been terrorist attacks and the assassination of Samuel Paty in our

29. Gouvernement Liberté Égalité Fraternité, “Interview de Mme Agnès Pannier-Runacher, ministre de la transition énergétique...”, *Vie Publique au cœur du débat public*, December 8, 2023. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/292367-agnes-pannier-runacher-08122023-politique-de-lenergie>

30. CCIE, “Hanouka à l'Élysée justifié par l'interdiction de l'abaya?”, *X*, December 8, 2023. <https://x.com/CCIEurope/status/1733096760367542507>

country.” The journalist denounced the very questionable parallel between the abaya and the murder of Samuel Paty, but Macron replied, “No, I am not making a parallel; I am just telling you that the question of *laïcité* in our schools is a profound question.” Here, the abaya appears as a national priority that emanates from the highest level of the French state, thus describing visible Muslims as the enemy-within of the French Republic. Instead of targeting the violent forms of Islamism, the French government targets and punishes Muslim high school girls and more generally ordinary Muslims. In fact, the French government did not commemorate the UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15. A few press articles talked about it in negative terms, denigrating the country that initiated this day, namely Pakistan, as well as the chosen vocabulary (“Islamophobia”) which allegedly prevents criticism and mockery of Islam.³¹ Only the X account of La France Insoumise published a tweet celebrating this fight.³²

The stigmatization of French Muslims has been further reinforced in connection with the Palestinian cause. In France, the right-wing and far-right political narratives even speak of anti-Semitism specific to Arab-Muslim populations from deprived areas and with far-left electoral tendencies. Anti-Semitism is a form of racism that must be fought everywhere, but the current government is instrumentalizing pro-Palestinian solidarity and the fight against anti-Semitism to mistreat Muslim populations even more, while forgetting the real anti-Semitic tradition of far-right parties which historically collaborated with Nazis. A march “for the Republic and against anti-Semitism” was organized on November 12 by most political parties including the far-right. For the leader of the leftist opposition, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, it was a gathering of “friends of unconditional support for the Gaza massacre,” which is why he refused to participate.³³ Pro-Palestinian solidarity is seen as supportive of terrorism and anti-Semitism by the French state, which banned the first demonstrations through ministerial instruction and sanctioned the wearing of a Palestinian *keffiyeh*, dress, flag, or a pro-Palestinian slogan with a fine of 135 euros.³⁴ Consequently, just like markers of Muslimness, the markers of Palestinian-ness are also sanctioned in France. Because their Muslim identity and their solidarity with Palestine are demonized, French Muslim no longer benefit from freedom of conscience

31. Bestandji N., “La ‘Journée internationale de lutte contre l’islamophobie’ marque le succès du lobbying islamiste”, *Marianne*, March 15, 2023. <https://www.marianne.net/agora/tribunes-libres/la-journee-internationale-de-lutte-contre-lislamophobie-marque-le-succes-du-lobbying-islamiste>

32. La France Insoumise à l’Assemblée, “Aujourd’hui est la seconde journée internationale contre l’islamophobie organisée par l’ONU”, *X*, March 15, 2023. <https://x.com/FiAssemblee/status/1768636461018919380>; CCIE

33. Le Figaro and AFP, “Marche contre l’antisémitisme: Mélenchon dénonce un ‘rendez-vous’ des ‘amis du soutien inconditionnel au massacre’, Le Pen et Ciotti présents”, *Le Figaro*, November 7, 2023. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/marche-contre-l-antisemitisme-le-pen-bardella-et-ciotti-presents-lfi-reserve-sa-reponse-sur-sa-participation-20231107>

34. Mawad D. and Brennan E., “France bans all pro-Palestinian protests”, *CNN*, October 12, 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/12/europe/france-ban-pro-palestinian-intl/index.html>

and expression. Here again, a double standard can be observed by banning pro-Palestinian demonstrations or even the march for Adama Traoré (killed by the police in 2016), while authorizing a neofascist demonstration in the heart of Paris in May 2023 which was even protected by the French police. (Fig. 8) Under Macron's presidency, there is a dual shift towards the criminalization of victims of Islamophobia, police violence, and Zionism as well as towards the de-demonization and trivialization of racist and neofascist groups is undeniable.



Figure 8: Edwy Plenel's tweet with the photo of a neofascist march in Paris protected by the French police.³⁵

Media

Islamophobia in the French media is so normalized that it is difficult actually to distinguish a particular incident. The largest media outlets – whether television, radio, or press – are run by dominant far-right figures, and the most active amongst them is the Bolloré group. Vincent Bolloré is a billionaire businessman who owns a media empire in France. He owns CNews, which is the most Islamophobic TV channel in the French broadcasting scene. Journalist Cyril Lacarrière highlights this in a tweet on December 5: “All the roads of CNews lead to Islam” (“*tous les chemins de CNews mènent à l’Islam.*”) (Fig. 9)

35. Plenel E., “Voici en vidéo la manifestation néofasciste de samedi à Paris, autorisée et protégée par la police...”, X, May 8, 2023. <https://x.com/edwyplenel/status/1655373612767952897>



Le succès de CNews ?
 Quand le téléspectateur arrive, il est en terrain
 familier, il sait qui est là et il sait surtout qu'à un
 moment, on va taper sur les musulmans...
 Tous les chemins de CNews mènent à l'islam !



Depuis radiofrance.fr

16:55 · 05/12/2023 · 5k vues

Figure 9: Cyril Lacarrière's tweet highlighting the Islamophobic obsession of the TV channel CNews.³⁶

CNews's Islamophobic obsession has been known since the time when anti-Muslim political leader Eric Zemmour was a columnist (despite his numerous court convictions for incitement to racial hatred) and when fascist writer Renaud Camus was a guest (despite his racist theory of the Great Replacement that he introduced in France in the early 2010s and which is cited in the manifestos of the most dangerous white supremacist criminals).

The fascist thinking of the French mainstream media is mainly due to the influence of a handful of billionaires who no longer hide their intention to lead a civilization struggle against Muslims and any racialized groups.³⁷ This fascization is very difficult to stop even when the majority of the editorial staff oppose it. This is the case of the weekly media *Le Journal du Dimanche* which now has a far-right editor-in-chief imposed by its owner Bolloré.³⁸ Moreover, since October 7, many media invite racist guests to expose their overt anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian views by describing the situation in the Middle East as a fight between the white Judeo-Christian civilization and the Arab-Muslim world.

36. Lacarrière C., "Le succès de CNews?...", X, December 5, 2023. https://x.com/cy_lacARRIERE/status/1732081320048656726

37. Levrier A., "La crise politique que nous vivons prouve la réussite du combat civilisationnel mené par Vincent Bolloré", *The Conversation*, June 16, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/la-crise-politique-que-nous-vivons-prouve-la-reussite-du-combat-civilisationnel-mene-par-vincent-bollore-232457>

38. Dassonville A. and Laemle B., "L'opposition de la rédaction du 'Journal du Dimanche' à l'arrivée de Geoffroy Lejeune ne faiblit pas", *Le Monde*, Juin 28, 2023. https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2023/06/28/l-opposition-de-la-redaction-du-journal-du-dimanche-a-l-arrivee-de-geoffroy-lejeune-ne-faiblit-pas_6179499_3234.html



Figure 10: Charles Ingalls Le Vrai's tweet referring to Arno Klarsfeld's comments associating Muslims with anti-Semitism.³⁹

For example, lawyer and state advisor Arno Klarsfeld explained on October 31 on CNews: “Muslims, many work at construction sites, have access to explosives, can have access to firearms, if there was an order to kill Jews, there could be an attack every day.” (Fig. 10) This essentializing statement should constitute a criminal offence, but Klarsfeld is in a friendly space allowing him to make such remarks. That same day on LCI, another TV channel which also became more and more fascist, the journalist Pascal Perri also insulted Muslims and Arabs in France by associating them with a “couscous anti-Semitism.”⁴⁰ According to Perri, this refers to a historical conflict between Muslims and Jews that goes beyond the borders of Palestine — this despite the fact that history has shown that the Muslim world welcomed Jewish refugees who were persecuted and massacred in Europe.

The Islamophobic journalist Caroline Fourest has even explicitly dehumanized the children of Gaza when on October 29, on another biased TV channel, BFMTV, she stated, “We cannot compare the fact of having killed children deliberately like Hamas, and the fact of killing them involuntarily like Israel.” This dehumanization goes so far as to criminalize the expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people. This is what footballer Karim Benzema experienced when he expressed his support for Gazans and particularly the Gazan children and women in a tweet on October 15 where he wrote: “All our prayers for the people of Gaza, victims once again of these

39. Charles Ingalls Le Vrai, “A quand la fin de cette chaîne raciste et dégueulasse CNews...”, X, October 31, 2023. <https://x.com/CharlesIngalls/status/1719373621041250402>

40. Cerfia, “FLASH – ‘Il y a un antisémitisme couscous’ selon l’éditorialiste Pascal Perri”, X, October 31, 2023. <https://x.com/CerfiaFR/status/1719254615424729418>

unjust bombings that spare neither women nor children.”⁴¹ This simple statement reaffirming the humanity of an entire Palestinian people prompted Minister of Interior Darmanin to associate Benzema with the Muslim Brotherhood and accuse him of having something to hide.⁴²

Justice system

The French judicial system continues to display an anti-Muslim bias that is easily reflected in the closure of mosques, the expulsion of imams, and the imprisonment of Muslim scholars. In light of the highly politicized imprisonment of Tariq Ramadan in 2018, another scholar was detained before even knowing whether a trial would take place or not. This is the case of Nabil Ennasri who has now been imprisoned for more than 10 months for an allegation of financial crimes linked to Qatar. It is true that these are two completely different cases and that neither the rape of women nor tax fraud are accusations to be taken lightly, but to date Ramadan is the only public figure to have been imprisoned for this type of accusation before the facts were verified⁴³ and Ennasri is also the sole detainee in his case although he is not the main suspect.⁴⁴ These two public figures used to speak out against anti-Muslim racism and, as everyone, have the right to the presumption of innocence. In this sense, Ennasri’s former PhD supervisor, François Burgat, denounces a double standard by specifying “if the criteria that led to the incarceration of Nabil Ennasri were applied to others, dozens of media and political figures should be imprisoned.”⁴⁵

The fragility of this judicial system is also noticeable through the impunity of French police officers who injured or killed Black and Brown Muslims like in the case of Hedi whose skull was deformed as a result of police violence. The sociologist Sebastian Roché exposed the lies of the police in court in a tweet on August 3. (Fig. 11) He explained that the highest-ranking officer initially claimed never to have hit anyone. Then, when confronted with the video surveillance images, he admitted to having hit Hedi.

41. Benzema, K., “Toutes nos prières pour les habitants de Gaza victimes une fois de plus de ces bombardements injustes qui n’épargnent ni femmes ni enfants”, X, October 15, 2023. <https://x.com/Benzema/status/1713584346441912495>

42. Le HuffPost and AFP, “Gérald Darmanin s’en prend de nouveau à Karim Benzema et lui reproche de ‘cacher quelque chose’”, *HuffPost*, October 16, 2023. https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/gerald-darmanin-s-en-prend-de-nouveau-a-karim-benzema-et-lui-reproche-de-cacher-quelque-chose_224949.html

43. Les Décodeurs, “Toutes les affaires qui ont touché les ministres d’Emmanuel Macron depuis 2017”, *Le Monde*, January 17, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2024/01/17/toutes-les-affaires-qui-ont-touche-les-ministres-d-emmanuel-macron-depuis-2017_6211365_4355770.html

44. Comité de soutien à Nabil ENNASRI, “Nabil Ennasri est le seul incarcéré: Pourquoi?”, X, January 3, 2024. <https://x.com/SoutienEnnasri/status/1742486088109748672>

45. Ben Mohamed F. “French political scientist detained over alleged financial crimes denounces ‘inhuman’ treatment”, *Anadolu Agency*, December 29, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/french-political-scientist-detained-over-alleged-financial-crimes-denounces-inhuman-treatment/3095380>



Figure 11: Sebastian Roché's tweet showing the lies of police officers in the Hedi case.⁴⁶

In the end, all these examples of anti-Muslim bias highlight a partial justice system in France, seriously tarnishing the principles of French democracy. This exceptional regime has concretely revealed a criminalization of all Muslims who openly speak out against structural racism. The justice system, in fact, exercises injustice not only against French Muslims, but also against foreign Muslims as seen in the case of the director of the British association CAGE, Muhammad Rabbani, who has been banned from entering and staying in France since July 2023 because of a speech he gave at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in 2022 criticizing French-style state Islamophobia and its policy of “systematic obstruction.”⁴⁷

Internet

Islamophobia on the internet is one of the most threatening anti-Muslim manifestations, typically targeting racialized Muslims or public figures who politically oppose the dangerous actions of far-right groups or the Islamophobic policies that the government openly pursues. On April 2, the collaborative platform Tajmaât published a tweet revealing the findings of their investigation against the neo-Nazi group Français DETER (The Determined French). (Fig. 12)

Tajmaât managed to infiltrate private conversations between members who call for murder, death threats, and racist attacks. These potential criminals who promise terror are, among others, members of fascist political parties (such as Reconquête) and, more worryingly, army soldiers and police officers. One of the leaders clearly explains that their enemies are currently Muslims, Arabs, and Blacks.

46. Roché, S. “Le tabassage d'Hedi R.: Le plus gradé, le major affirme d'abord ‘ne jamais avoir frappé quelqu'un qui se trouvait au sol’...”, *X*, August 3, 2023. <https://x.com/sebastianjroche/status/1686968526429384704>

47. CAGE, “Un opposant à l'islamophobie interdit d'entrée sur le territoire français”, *CAGE International Statements and Press Releases*, July 18, 2023. <https://www.cage.ngo/articles/un-opposant-a-l-islamophobie-interdit-d-entree-sur-le-territoire-francais>



Tajmaât
@Tajmaat_Service

🔴 THREAD - Une vingtaine de groupes néo-nazi infiltré, appel aux meurtres, menace de mort contre un élu, ratonnades, des centaines de personnes impliquées dont des militaires et policiers.

Notre enquête choc sur le groupuscule «FRDETER». #FRDeterGate



13:37 · 02/04/2023 · 9M vues

Figure 12: Tajmaât's tweet exposing the neo-Nazi group FRDETER.⁴⁸

More precisely, there was a conversation preparing a violent action against a mosque in the Wazemmes district of Lille (Nord) planned for April 13. (Fig. 13) About twenty individuals explained that they were ready to attack the worshipers of this mosque during the breaking of the fast during Ramadan. This terrifying project ultimately did not take place, as Tajmaât's revelations came out a few days before their attack date. In its thread, Tajmaât threatened to broadcast the real names, faces, and accounts of the members of this neo-Nazi group at the first attack against the Muslim diaspora in France. Following this major investigation made public on social networks, MP Aurélien Taché (Val-d'Oise's tenth constituency) during a speech given at the National Assembly called for a complete and targeted strategy against far-right terrorism in France in order to dismantle all such groups.⁴⁹ Very often, however, the French government and police are more passive than active when it comes to dissolving racist organizations and sanctioning their threats and crimes.

48. Tajmaât, "THREAD – Une vingtaine de groupe néo-nazi infiltre, appel aux meurtres, menace de mort contre un élu, ratonnades...", X, April 2, 2023. https://x.com/Tajmaat_Service/status/1642506496956137472

49. Tajmaât, "FLASH – Le député Aurélien Taché évoque à l'Assemblée National notre enquête concernant les groupuscules néonazis...", X, April 3, 2023. https://x.com/Tajmaat_Service/status/1642935241231810582



Outre les insultes, il y a également des actions extrêmement graves qui sont en cours de préparation.

Le 13 Avril 2023, un commando d'une vingtaine d'individu a pour projet d'attaquer une #mosquée. @PoliceNationale



13:39 · 02/04/2023 · 396k vues

Figure 13: Tajmaât's tweet exposing the preparation of an attack against a mosque in Lille.⁵⁰

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In France, the central figures contributing to the normalization and legalization of Islamophobia are still President Emmanuel Macron and his Minister of Interior Gérald Darmanin who seem to consolidate their Islamophobic policy year after year. After the intense Islamophobic presidential election campaign in 2022, extremist and fascist ideologies have become the new mainstream. Far-right political parties are now more acceptable partners for the current government than far-left MPs who are vilified because of their anti-racist and anti-capitalist positions. Thus, today in France, there is a 180-degree turnaround regarding who the enemies of the Republic are. While a few decades ago it was an absolute shame to debate with Jean-Marie Le Pen (the former president of the racist political party National Front), today Macron's government prefers to ally itself with Marine Le Pen (the president of the racist National Rally group in the National Assembly) rather than Jean-Luc Mélenchon (the former president of the LFI Group in the National Assembly) who is demonized because of his support for French Muslims and Palestinians.

50. Tajmaât, "Outre les insultes, il y a également des actions extrêmement graves qui sont en cours de préparation...", X, April 2, 2023. https://x.com/Tajmaat_Service/status/1642506996745117696

After Macron and Darmanin, there is also the former prime minister Gabriel Attal who implemented the abaya ban. At 34 years old, he became the youngest prime minister of the Fifth Republic, and it seems that in France, to benefit from a rapid promotion, it is enough to demonstrate Islamophobic talents. These three figures do not even concretely come from far-right political parties, but their Islamophobic policies follow an obvious process of fascization. *Laïcité* was a universalist value that had a rather left-wing tradition, but today it has become a liberal and racist value that the far right, the right, and the center (and even a good part of the left) misuse. Thus, it is possible to find central Islamophobic figures throughout the French political landscape with the help of the overwhelming majority of French media. Many figures in the Islamophobia network have enabled the development of a hegemonic anti-Muslim policy and culture in France which are beginning to convince the average French citizen. Indeed, a few years ago, Islamophobia was only an elite phenomenon, but after decades of brainwashing, it is beginning to reach non-Muslim French people in their daily lives.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

In France, all spaces of resistance against Islamophobia are criminalized. This is a message sent to French Muslims and non-Muslims to intimidate them and limit their public criticism, whether they are representatives of Muslim and human rights organizations defending activist actions, academics protecting scientific freedom, journalists presenting impartial facts, or politicians with a genuine dissident position. All of this is not indicative of a healthy democracy but of one that fails to guarantee all members of its society access to the political, educational, and legal tools ensuring their protection. That said, some initiatives can still be observed in 2023, both inside and outside France:

- The association Perspectives Musulmanes (Muslim Prospects) wrote a press release on August 8 to support the working-class revolts after the death of Nahel Merzouk. It exposes the racist structures of the police and the state and denounces a policy of dehumanization against French Muslims by asking the following very concrete question: “To what extent has this system dehumanized you to the point that you can compare the life of a young boy to a burned trash can or a ransacked shopping center?”⁵¹
- A few days after Nahel Merzouk’s murder, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in Geneva issued a statement calling on France to “address, as a matter of priority, the structural causes

51. Perspectives Musulmanes, “Révoltes des quartiers, un seul responsable: la France”, X, August 8, 2023. <https://x.com/CoordinationCLS/status/1689000194380005376>

of racial discrimination, including in the application of the law enforcement, in particular in the police.”⁵² This is an important statement because France has a history of shutting down or criminalizing any association or person who denounces systemic racism.

- On September 30, the collective Touche Pas À Ma Abaya (Don't Touch My Abaya) organized several demonstrations against the ban. (Fig. 14) This collective (made up of young women) and many other organizations (both Muslim and not) came together to show their solidarity, demand the repeal of the 2004 law, and shout “*Islamophobie, ça suffit*” (Islamophobia, that's enough).



Figure 14: Tweet by Touche Pas À Ma Abaya (Don't Touch My Abaya) from their protest against the abaya ban.⁵³

- On September 20, the United Nation Secretary-General António Guterres delivered a speech at the UN General Assembly in New York in support of women's rights just after the implementation of the abaya ban in France. More precisely, he stated, “In some countries, women and girls are punished for wearing too many clothes; in others, for wearing too few.”⁵⁴ Even if he did not explicitly mention France, many recognized in his message an implicit reminder addressed to France against the abaya ban since this part of his speech was in French and he mentioned all the spaces where the hijab ban is applied in France such as public schools and sport fields.

52. ONU Genève, “Le Comité CERD vient d’adopter une déclaration sur la situation en France...”, *X*, July 7, 2023. <https://x.com/ONUGeneve/status/1677328113611714561>

53. Touche Pas À Ma Abaya, “L’interdiction de la abaya s’inscrit dans une politique islamophobe répressive”, *X*, September 30, 2023. <https://x.com/toucheapasabaya/status/1708131060729417822>

54. Le Monde, “UN chief Guterres defends women’s freedom to wear what they choose”, *Le Monde*, September 21, 2023. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/videos/video/2023/09/21/un-chief-guterres-defends-women-s-freedom-to-wear-what-they-choose_6138294_108.html

- The imam of the Great Mosque of Paris, Abdelali Mamoun, discussed the lack of detailed information regarding the nature of anti-Semitic acts often attributed to Muslim populations. In the podcast “Apolline Matin” (Apolline Morning) presented by the journalist Apolline Malherbe on the private radio station RMC broadcast on November 14, the imam condemned the concept of “Muslim anti-Semitism” while bringing a nuance between anti-Semitic acts carried out by adults and those carried out by children.⁵⁵ The journalist tried to minimize this distinction by saying that they are not children but junior high school students. This process consists of referring racialized children to adults to control and repress them in more effective ways.
- On November 21, French MP Louis Boyard (Val-de-Marne’s third constituency) gave a speech at the National Assembly about the attempted murder of gardener Mourad. The MP singled out Minister Darmanin, accusing him of reacting solely based on the origin of the criminals and victims, and advised him to stop behaving like a National Front minister.⁵⁶
- The NGOs CCIE and CAGE act against Islamophobia in France and have published several reports, statements, press releases, and video interviews on the subject.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This year, the double standard of differential treatment of French Muslims was observed in all the sectors detailed in this report. This exceptional regime reveals the French government’s desire to pursue its policy of de-Islamization of Muslim people and organizations as well as its policy of voluntary re-migration pushing French Muslims to leave France. However, French Muslims are part of French society, and the French people are sovereign and decide the rules of governance. Therefore, to save French democracy, several recommendations must be implemented:

- Reject President Macron’s style of governance which consists of not listening to the French people by imposing a fascist policy against French Muslims.
- Review and repeal anti-Muslim laws, from the 2004 law banning all religious symbols in public schools to regulations combating terrorism or extremism, that promote institutionalized discrimination.
- Recognize official racial and religious data in France to combat the inequalities suffered by minority groups better. With such data, the existence of Muslim populations and the visibility of their problems will be better assessed at all levels (political, legal, societal, educational, economic, etc.).

55. RMC, “Abdelali Mamoun, imam de la Grande Mosquée de Paris était l’invité du jour dans Apolline Matin”, *YouTube*, November 14, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJsIpBlAcfo>

56. La France Insoumise – NFP à l’Assemblée nationale, “Agression islamophobe: Mourad a failli mourrir! Louis Boyard”, *YouTube*, November 21, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJV7-Wq3GEs>

- Develop anti-discrimination laws protecting religious minorities at the local, regional, and national levels, and sanction all Islamophobic speeches and actions even if they come from the highest political and media authorities.
- Oppose the promotion of a state-sponsored Islam that rejects “Muslims with Islam” and only integrates “Muslims without Islam” in order to protect the government’s postcolonial interests.
- Stop the criminalization of any space of resistance against Islamophobia in France. All voices must be free to denounce the structural nature of Islamophobia without risking any form of repression.
- Join forces with international human rights organizations because French Islamophobia is an issue that can impact other countries. The idea is to accept the fight against Islamophobia as a global struggle with a serious approach by developing an anti-racist awareness and training policy at all levels of society.

Chronology

- **16 February:** During a meeting of the Forum on Islam of France (Forum de l’Islam de France, FORIF), President Macron stressed the priority of restructuring a “French Islamology” through many measures and institutions. The status and training of imams will be regulated according to the principles of *laïcité*, as will a center of academic excellence in training and research around the French Institute of Islamology (l’Institut Français d’Islamologie, IFI).
- **30 March:** An attempted armed attack took place in the Great Mosque of Échirolles (Isère) after a man armed with a knife entered to attack the worshippers. Two worshippers managed to stop the attacker before he caused any harm or damage.
- **13 April:** A violent action against a mosque in Lille (Nord) was planned, but the public revelations of the collaborative platform Tajmaât having infiltrated private conversations between fascist criminals came out a few days before the planned date of their attack.
- **21 April:** During the 2023 Eid-al-Fitr, around a hundred French schools received an email from the Ministry of the Interior asking them to count all students absent that day.
- **6 May:** Neofascist groups were able to march with impunity in the heart of Paris. This march was authorized by the Paris Administrative Court and even protected by the French police.
- **27 June:** Nahel Merzouk, a French-North African Muslim teenager, was killed by a police officer on the day of Eid-al-Adha, one of the biggest religious celebrations for Muslims around the world.
- **30 June:** The police union Alliance, known for supporting right-wing and far-right political parties, issued a press release emphasizing that police officers

are at war against the young protesters whom they consider to be “pests and wild hordes.”

- **1 July:** Hedi, a 22-year-old French-North African man, lost part of his skull which had to be removed for his survival because police officers violently beat him.
- **4 September:** President Emmanuel Macron gave an interview for the platform “HugoDecrypte” where he drew a dangerous parallel between the abaya, the protection of *laïcité*, and the murder of Samuel Paty.
- **7 September:** Gabriel Attal, the former minister of national education and youth, implemented a new decree extending the 2004 law banning religious symbols in public schools to include the abaya and qamis (thobe) as ostensible manifestations of religious affiliation.
- **7 October:** Attacks by Palestinian Hamas in Israel were followed by a genocide in Gaza, an increase in Islamophobic acts in France, and a criminalization of pro-Palestinian solidarity.
- **October:** Several Islamophobic comments were made in French media (CNews, LCI, BFMTV, etc.) by Islamophobic public figures such as the state advisor Arno Klarsfeld who explained that French Muslims have access to explosives and could kill French Jews, or journalists Pascal Perri who insulted Muslims and Arabs in France by associating them with a “couscous anti-Semitism,” and Caroline Fourest who dehumanized the children of Gaza.
- **12 November:** A march “for the Republic and against anti-Semitism” was organized by most political parties, including far-right ones. The march conflated the fight against anti-Semitism with Zionist support for the massacres in Gaza, while calling for the protection of French *laïcité* against Islamism.
- **17 November:** Mourad, a 29-year-old gardener, was assaulted at his workplace by a septuagenarian who tried to slit his throat by stabbing him with a box cutter. The gardener’s truck was blocking the road, which prompted the Islamophobic attacker to insult him and inflict a 15-cm physical injury that required 76 stitches.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
GERMANY
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Zusammenfassung

Die Gewalt in Israel und Palästina ist eine Zäsur: auch für viele Menschen in Deutschland. Muslime und andere marginalisierte Gruppen erlebten ein in der jüngeren deutschen Geschichte unbekanntes Ausmaß an Gewalt, Diskriminierung und Anfeindungen. Polizeilich registrierte antisemitische und islamfeindliche Straftaten erreichten den höchsten Wert seit Beginn ihrer Erfassung. Letztere stiegen gegenüber dem Vorjahr um 140 Prozent auf 1.464. Die Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes meldete 10.772 Beratungsanfragen - ebenfalls mehr als je zuvor.

Die massive Zunahme antimuslimischen Rassismus in Deutschland im Jahr 2023 geht weit über offizielle Zahlen hinaus. Politik und Medien befeuerten eine beispiellose rassistische Diskursverschiebung sowie Diskriminierungen in allen Lebensbereichen: Ein Verbot palästinensischer Symbole an Schulen führte zu einem enormen Anstieg, häufig durch Lehrer*innen begangener Diskriminierungsfälle. Als Ausdruck vermeintlicher "Israel-Solidarität" wurde der Kultur- und Wissenschaftsbetrieb von einer nie gekannten Cancel-Welle erfasst. Betroffen waren neben Muslim*innen und Palästinenser*innen auch deren jüdische und israelische Allies. Ein Pauschalverbot von Palästina-Demos und Fälle von Polizeigewalt führte zur Kritik Deutschlands durch internationale Menschenrechtsorganisationen. Ziel politischer und medialer Angriffe waren auch islamische Interessenvertretungen, die pauschal in die Nähe von Hamas und Terrorismus gestellt wurden.

Islamfeindliche Diskurse prägten auch die Migrationsdebatte. Mit ihrer Zustimmung zum EU-Asylkompromiss und der Ausweitung von Abschiebungen setzte die Regierungskoalition aus SPD, Grünen und FDP eine restriktive und repressive Migrationspolitik um, wie sie lange nur die rechtspopulistische AfD gefordert hatte. Diese wiederum erreichte in Umfragen trotz oder gerade wegen des Rechtsrucks Rekordwerte und lag in einigen Bundesländern konstant auf Platz eins in den Umfragen.

Zu den wenigen positiven Ereignissen gehörte das durch das Bundesverfassungsgericht initiierte Ende des Kopftuchverbots für Lehrerinnen in Berlin ("Neutralitätsgesetz"). Nach mehrjähriger Arbeit lieferte im Juni der "Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit" zudem die bisher umfassendste Bestandsaufnahme zu antimuslimischem Rassismus in Deutschland und eine Blaupause zur Gleichberechtigung von Muslim*innen - die von der Politik allerdings vollständig ignoriert wurde.

Executive Summary

The war in Israel and Palestine has marked a turning point, also for many people in Germany. Muslims and other marginalized groups experienced a level of violence, discrimination, and hostilities unprecedented in recent German history. Police-recorded anti-Semitic and Islamophobic crimes reached the highest level since records began. The latter increased by 140% compared to the previous year, totaling 1,464. The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency reported a record number of 10,772 counseling requests.

The rise in Islamophobia in Germany in 2023 extends far beyond official numbers. Politicians and media fueled racist shifts in discourse in all areas of life: a ban on Palestinian symbols in schools led to an increase in cases of discrimination, often perpetrated by teachers. Under the guise of Germany's unconditional support for Israel, artists, authors, scientists, and journalists were hit by an unprecedented wave of cancellations. Muslims and Palestinians were affected as well as their Jewish and Israeli allies. A ban on pro-Palestinian demonstrations and numerous instances of police violence led to criticism by international human rights organizations. Major Islamic organizations were targeted, being equated with Hamas supporters and terrorists.

Racist discourses also dominated debates about migration. By passing EU's much criticized asylum reform, the ruling coalition of SPD, The Greens, and FDP implemented a restrictive and repressive migration policy, which had long been demanded only by the far-right AfD. Still, AfD achieved record poll numbers, consistently ranking first in some states.

One of the few positive developments in 2023 was a ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court, which ended the headscarf ban for teachers in Berlin ("Neutrality Law"). After several years of work, a group of independent experts published the most comprehensive survey on Islamophobia in Germany to date, which could have served as a blueprint for Muslim equality in Germany. However, the report was completely ignored by politicians.

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Country: Federal Republic of Germany

Type of Regime: Federal and representative democracy

Form of Government: Federal parliamentary republic with a chancellor as the head of government

Ruling Parties: Social Democratic Party (SPD), Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), and Free Democratic Party (FDP)

Opposition Parties: Christian Democratic Party (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU), Alternative for Germany (AfD), Left Party (Die Linke), Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht (Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht), independent candidates

Last Elections: September 2021: SPD 25.7% (206 seats), The Greens 14.8% (118 seats), FDP 11.5% (92 seats), The Left 4.9% (39 seats), CDU 18.9% (152 seats), CSU 5.2% (45 seats), AfD 10.3% (83 seats), no party affiliation (4 seats)

Total Population: 84.6 million (September 2023, Federal Statistical Office)

Major Languages: German

Official Religion: While there is no official religion in Germany, both the Evangelical and Catholic Church enjoy a range of state privileges.

Statistics on Islamophobia: Police crime statistics recorded 1,464 Islamophobic offenses, marking a 140% increase from the previous year and the highest number since records began. Civil society organizations such as CLAIM estimate a “significant number of unreported cases.” The NGO Brandeilig reported 81 attacks on mosques. The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency reported 10,772 consultation requests in 2023 - more than ever before. Inquiries regarding racist discrimination nearly tripled from 1,176 in 2019 to 3,429 in 2023.

Major Religions (% of Population): Catholic (22.3%), Protestant (21.9%), Muslim (8.5%), Judaism (0.1%), no religious affiliation (35.9%) (Religionsmonitor 2023)

Muslim Population: 5.3-5.6 million (estimated, Federal Ministry of Interior)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), Islamic Community Millî Görüş (IGMG), Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD), Muslim Coordination Council (KRM), Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat Germany (AMJ), Union of Islamic Cultural Centres (VIKZ), Islamic Community of Shia Communities in Germany (IGS), Islamic Community of Bosniaks in Germany e.V. (IGBD), Union of Islamic Albanian Centers in Germany (UIAZD)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Abrahamisches Forum, Aktionsbündnis muslimischer Frauen (AmF), AMuRa, An-Nusrat, Anlaufstelle für Diskriminierungsschutz an Schulen (ADAS), Antidiskriminierungsnetzwerk Berlin, Begegnungs-

und Fortbildungszentrum muslimischer Frauen, Bildungsstätte Anne Frank, CLAIM - Allianz gegen Islamfeindlichkeit, Deutsche Islam Akademie (DIA), Fair International, Iman, Inssan, Interkulturelles Muslimisches Forum für Frauen und Familien, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD), JUMA, Junge Islam Konferenz (JIK), Kein Generalverdacht, Kompetenznetzwerk Islam- und Muslimfeindlichkeit, Mediendienst Integration, Mosaik, Migrantifa, Multikulturelles Forum (MkF), Münchner Forum für Islam (MFI), Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland (MJD), Muslimisches Jugendwerk (MJW), Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen (NdM), Minor, NIR – Netzwerk gegen Islamfeindlichkeit und Rassismus Leipzig, RAHMA, Rat muslimischer Studierender und Akademiker (RAMSA), Salaam-Schalom Initiative, Schwarze Schafe, Stiftung gegen Rassismus, SWANS Initiative, Ufuq, YALLAH!, Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften, WoW – With or Without, ZEOK

Far-Right Parties: Alternative for Germany (AfD), Die Heimat (formerly NPD), Der III. Weg (Third Way), Die Rechte (The Right), Die Republikaner (REP)

Far-Right Movements: Anti-Antifa, Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland (IBD), Reichsbürgerbewegung, PEGIDA, Ring Nationaler Frauen, Junge Nationalisten, Der Flügel, Junge Alternative für Deutschland, Der III. Weg (Third Way), Freie Kameradschaften

Far-Right Militant Organizations: Kameradschaft Aryans, Atomwaffen Division, Combat 18

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** In several federal states, headscarf bans for police officers, judges, prosecutors, and legal trainees exist. After Germany’s Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 2015 that a blanket prohibition for teachers to wear a headscarf is unconstitutional, most states have revoked their headscarf bans for public schools. In 2023, after another decision by the Federal Constitutional Court, Berlin was the last state to allow hijab-wearing teachers in public schools. However, headscarf bans for teachers remain permissible under Federal Constitutional Court rulings if there is a “threat to school peace,” forcing headscarf-wearing applicants often to pursue lengthy legal battles.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Slaughter without stunning is prohibited in Germany; however, exemptions from this prohibition may be granted for religious reasons.
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** Women civil servants, soldiers, and judges are not allowed to wear a full-face veil. In some states, there are full-face veil bans for public schools and universities.
- **Prayer Ban:** No. Permissions for call to prayers are under the jurisdiction of local authorities. Requests have been approved only in rare instances.

Introduction

From Karl May's Oriental clichés to the racist bestsellers of Thilo Sarrazin: Islamophobia has a long tradition in Germany. While anti-Muslim discourses have shaped politics, media, and public opinion in Germany for decades, no year in recent history has dealt such a severe setback to the pursuit of equality for the Muslim community as 2023.

The radical shift in discourse following October 7, 2023, has led to discrimination and anti-Muslim rhetoric in all areas of social and political life. Anti-Muslim tropes and conspiracy theories previously associated with right-wing actors such as the AfD were spread and supported to varying degrees by all major parties, media outlets, and even the highest representatives of the state.

The consequences range from a record number of crimes and instances of discrimination to tightened laws against refugees, mosque closures, violations of basic rights for demonstrators, and the suppression of dissenting voices across all sectors of society. This has also resulted in a feeling of alienation toward the German state and society among Muslim and other marginalized communities, a sentiment that might only be matched by the period following September 11.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Attacks on Muslims and their institutions in Germany skyrocketed in 2023. Official police statistics reported 1,464 Islamophobic crimes—a 140% increase from the previous year, also marking the highest level since official recording of Islamophobic crimes began in 2017. The total numbers of politically motivated crimes, encompassing assaults on Jews and other marginalized groups, also hit a record high in 2023. With 60,028 incidents, politically motivated crimes reached their highest level since records began in 2001.¹ The increase of Islamophobic crimes is largely attributable to the extreme anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim shift in public discourse following the war in Israel and Palestine. More than half of all police-recorded crimes occurred after October 7, 2023. Figures by anti-discrimination groups confirm this trend. Berlin-based NGO CLAIM documented 187 violent anti-Muslim incidents, insults, threats, and cases of discrimination between October 9 and November 29, 2023. CLAIM also suggests that a significant amount of such incidents remains unreported.²

1. Bundeskriminalamt, "Bundesweite Fallzahlen 2023 Politisch Motivierte Kriminalität, Berlin", 21 May 2024, https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/UnsereAufgaben/Deliktbereiche/PMK/2023PMK-Fallzahlen.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&cv=3, (Access date: 1 July 2024).

2. CLAIM, "Gewaltvolle Übergriffe, Drohungen, Diskriminierungen: Zahl antimuslimischer Vorfälle bundesweit erneut gestiegen", December 4, 2023, <https://www.claim-allianz.de/aktuelles/news/pressemitteilung-gewalt->

Police-Recorded Islamophobic Offenses

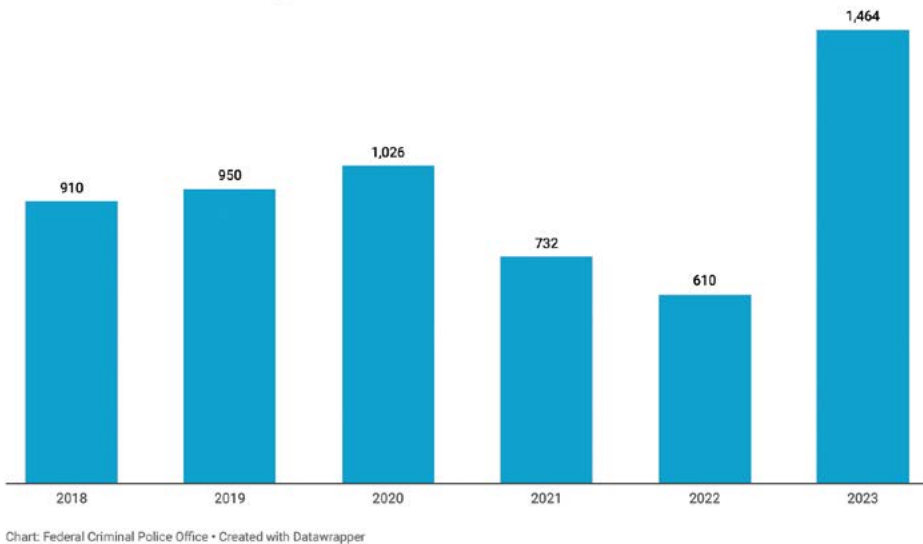


Figure 1: Police-recorded Islamophobic offenses. Chart prepared by the author.

Source: Bundeskriminalamt, "Bundesweite Fallzahlen 2023 Politisch Motivierte Kriminalität, Berlin", 21 May 2024, https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/UnsereAufgaben/Deliktsbereiche/PMK/2023PMKFallzahlen.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3.

As in previous years, women wearing hijabs were particularly targeted. For instance, on May 6, 2023, in Dessau-Roßlau, two men violently assaulted and verbally abused two Syrian girls, aged 14 and 15, tearing off their headscarves, beating, and kicking them.³ While most incidents of this nature cause no public attention, one specific incident sparked nationwide outrage: on May 7, Muslim members of a school trip were racially insulted and physically attacked, requiring police protection for their way back home.⁴

Muslim institutions also saw an increase in attacks in 2023. Brandeilig, a NGO which documents mosque attacks, recorded at least 81 such incidents, compared to 75 the previous year.⁵ Brandeilig assumes that the actual number of incidents is likely much higher. Attacks notably surged following October 7, including arson, vandalism, racist graffiti, and threats. On October 27, a mosque in Castrop-Rauxel received a package containing burnt pages of the Quran, pork meat, and feces with the message: "The cursed Quran where it belongs, in the dirt!" Several mosques in

volle-uebergrieffe-drohungen-diskriminierungen-zahl-antimuslimischer-vorfaelle-bundesweit-erneut-gestiegen/, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

3. "Kopftücher vom Kopf gerissen: zwei Mädchen angegriffen und verletzt", RedaktionsNetzwerkDeutschland, May 7, 2023, <https://www.rnd.de/panorama/sachsen-anhalt-taeter-reissen-maedchen-kopftuch-vom-kopf-und-schlagen-zu-rassistisch-motivierte-tat-ISUJU4CXS5IIDD3P4PULHNCJRQ.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
4. "Schüler sollen in Jugendherberge rassistisch beleidigt und bedroht worden sein", Der Spiegel, May 5, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/brandenburg-schueler-sollen-in-jugendherberge-rassistisch-beleidigt-und-bedroht-worden-sein-a-fee98c97-1b82-4587-a052-4832a5bd49a7>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
5. Brandeilig. Initiative gegen Moscheeangriffe, Brandeilig.org, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

Recklinghausen, Bochum, Dortmund, Cologne, Berlin, Hamburg, and other cities received similar parcels.⁶ Similar to previous years, the clearance rate for Islamophobic crimes remains extremely low. In the first half of 2023, not a single suspect was arrested.⁷ Data for the second half of 2023 was not yet available at the time of writing.

The high numbers of anti-Muslim crimes in Germany correlate with persistent high levels of anti-Muslim attitudes among the German population. According to the prestigious “Religion Monitor 2023,” 52% of Germans perceive Islam as a threat.⁸ The survey was conducted before October 7. The “Racism Monitor” released on November 7, 2023, by the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) indicates that Black people and Muslims are the groups most affected by racism in Germany.⁹ An increase in Islamophobic attitudes post-October 7 is shown by the “Berlin Monitor” with 42% of respondents strongly or somewhat agreeing that there are too many Muslims in Germany, compared to 29% in 2019.¹⁰ Nationwide representative surveys on Islamophobic attitudes in 2023 were not yet available at the time of writing.

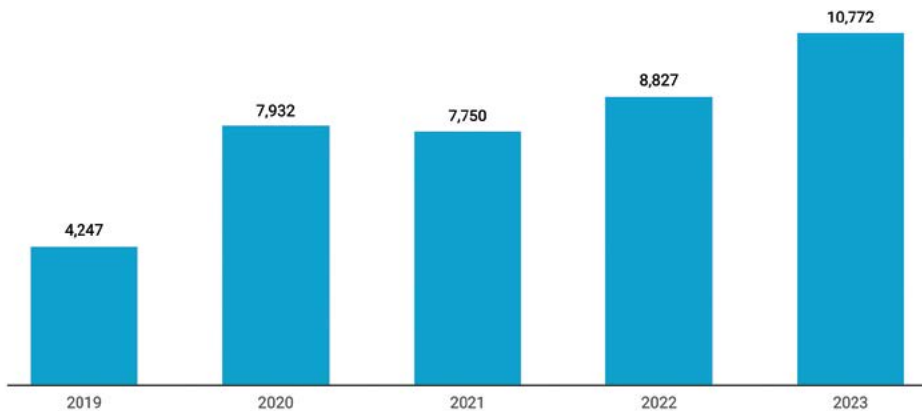
Employment

Germany’s constitution protects the fundamental rights of freedom of belief and freedom of expression. Additionally, since 2006, the Antidiskriminierungsgesetz (Anti-discrimination Law/AGG) prohibits discrimination based on origin, gender, sexual identity, religion, disability, and age in both business and daily life. In practice, Muslims and other marginalized groups experience various forms of discrimination in the labor and housing market, in the education system, and other areas of life. The

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6. Johannes Böhme, Marie Heflinger, Sina Metz, Victor Meuche, Lea Mohr, Stella Schalamon, Florentin Schumacher, “Was Muslimen in Deutschland passiert”, *Die Zeit*, May 27, 2024, <https://www.zeit.de/2024/23/muslimfeindlichkeit-moschee-oeffentlichkeit-soziale-medien-gewalt>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 7. Drucksache 20/6790, “Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Petra Pau, Nicole Gohlke, Clara Bünger, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE”, Deutscher Bundestag, May 11, 2023, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/067/2006790.pdf>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
Drucksache 20/8016, “Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Petra Pau, Nicole Gohlke, Clara Bünger, weiterer Abgeordneter und der Fraktion DIE LINKE”, Deutscher Bundestag, August 10, 2023, <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/080/2008016.pdf>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 8. Yasemin El-Menouar, “Antisemitismus, Rassismus und gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhalt. Ein Blick auf Deutschland in Zeiten der Eskalation in Nahost”, *Religionsmonitor Kompakt* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2023), https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/ORZ_BS-0302_Religionsmonitor_kompakt_web.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 9. *Rassismus und seine Symptome. Bericht des Nationalen Diskriminierungs- und Rassismusmonitors* (Berlin: Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung DeZIM, 2023), https://www.rassismusmonitor.de/fileadmin/user_upload/NaDiRa/Rassismus_Symptome/Rassismus_und_seine_Symptome.pdf (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 10. Gert Pickel, Katrin Reimer-Gordinskaya, Oliver Decker, *Der Berlin Monitor 2019. Vernetzte Solidarität – Fragmentierte Demokratie* (Berlin: Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal, Universität Leipzig 2019), <https://berlin-monitor.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Berlin-Monitor-2019-2.pdf>, (Access date: July 1, 2023).

Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency reported a record number of 10,772 consultation requests in 2023¹¹—more than ever before. Inquiries regarding racist discrimination nearly tripled from 1,176 in 2019 to 3,429 in 2023.

Counselling Requests Submitted to the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency



Source: Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency · Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2: Counselling Requests Submitted to the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency. Chart prepared by the author. Source: Jahresbericht 2023 (Berlin: Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, June 2024), <https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/Jahresberichte/2023.html?nn=305458>.

Discrimination of Women Wearing the Hijab

Women wearing headscarves face particularly severe discrimination. A much cited study by economist Doris Weichselbaum from 2016 revealed that hijab-wearing women with Turkish-sounding names had to send out more than four times as many job applications to receive a positive response compared to women with German-sounding names and no hijab.¹² A study published on November 14, 2023, by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) suggests little has changed since then. More than half of headscarf-wearing Muslims reported experiencing discrimination in school, at work, or when looking for housing.¹³

State bans and recurring political debates on headscarves fuel the exclusion of headscarf-wearing women in professional and business life. Despite the Federal Constitutional Court declaring a general headscarf ban for teachers at public

11. Jahresbericht 2023 (Berlin: Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, June 2024), <https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/Jahresberichte/2023.html?nn=305458>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

12. Doris Weichselbaumer, Discrimination against Female Migrants Wearing Headscarves, IZA DP No. 10217 Discussion Paper Series (2016), S. 22, <ftp.iza.org/dp10217.pdf>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

13. Anja Stichs, Katrin Pfündel, Diskriminierungserfahrungen von Menschen aus muslimisch geprägten Herkunftsländern (Berlin: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023), https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/fb48-muslimisches-leben2020-diskriminierung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=10, (Access date: July 1 2024).

schools unconstitutional in 2015,¹⁴ the state of Berlin maintained a headscarf ban for public sector employees under its “Neutrality Law” until 2023. After the Federal Constitutional Court ruled against Berlin’s “Neutrality Law” again in January 2023, the Berlin Senate announced plans to amend the law.¹⁵ Remarkably, the Berlin headscarf ban was supported by the then-governing coalition of the SPD, The Greens, and Left Party—parties that maintain an image of combating discrimination. Former Berlin environment minister and current Green Party leader in Berlin’s parliament, Bettina Jarasch, indicated plans to maintain the ban in the justice and police sectors.¹⁶ Many federal states maintain laws preventing women wearing headscarves from being hired as police officers or judges. Headscarf bans for teachers also remain permissible under Federal Constitutional Court rulings if there is a “threat to school peace,” forcing headscarf-wearing applicants often to pursue lengthy legal battles.

Discrimination of Pro-Palestinian Voices Following October 7

In 2023, individuals publicly criticizing Israel’s war in Gaza faced unprecedented media and political campaigns in Germany, often employing Islamophobic, racist, anti-Palestinian, and partly anti-Semitic rhetoric. Particularly affected were immigrant cultural figures, including many Jewish artists. Repercussions included loss of contracts, funding, reputation, and employment. Notable victims of cancel campaigns include Berlin’s cultural center Oyoun,¹⁷ Berlin-based artist Raphaël Malik and his photo series on Muslim life,¹⁸ the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie photography festival,¹⁹ Palestinian author Adania Shibli,²⁰ Haitian curator Anaïs Duplan,²¹ Jewish Rus-

14. Beschluss des Ersten Senats vom 27. Januar 2015 (Karlsruhe: Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2015, : https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Entscheidungen/DE/2015/01/rs20150127_1bvr047110.html;jsessionid=172FE8BB862897D0537637FBBE76F48E.1_cid393
15. “Federal Court Germany rejects headscarf ban for teacher”, CNE News, February 6, 2023, <https://cne.news/article/2510-federal-court-germany-rejects-headscarf-ban-for-teacher>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
16. Jost Müller-Neuhof, “Berliner Grünen-Spitzenkandidatin Jarasch will an Kopftuchverbot festhalten”, Tagesspiegel, February 5, 2023, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/muslimas-bei-polizei-und-justiz-berliner-grunen-spitzenkandidatin-jarasch-will-an-kopftuchverbot-festhalten-9295601.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024)
17. Philip Oltermann, “Israel-Hamas war opens up German debate over meaning of ‘Never again’”, The Guardian, November 22, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/22/israel-hamas-war-opens-up-german-debate-over-meaning-of-never-again>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
18. “Ausstellung über muslimisches Leben wegen Nahostkonflikt abgesagt”, Islamiq, November 14, 2023, <https://www.islamiq.de/2023/11/14/ausstellung-ueber-muslimisches-leben-wegen-nahostkonflikt-abgesagt/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
19. “German Biennale cancels curator’s show for pro-Palestine stance”, Al-Mayadeen, November 23, 2023, <https://english.almayadeen.net/news/Arts&Culture/german-biennale-cancels-curator-s-show-for-pro-palestine-sa>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
20. Hanno Hauenstein, “Germany must face its issues over Israel and the past. Silencing a Palestinian author won’t help”, October 20, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/20/germany-israel-palestinian-author-frankfurt-adania-shibli>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
21. Tessa Solomon, “German Museum Shatters Curator’s Contribution Over Pro-Palestine Instagram Activity, Igniting Censorship Outcry”, ARTnews, November 14, 2023, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/museum-folkwang-anais-duplan-pro-palestine-posts-1234686697/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

sian American journalist Masha Gessen,²² South African Jewish artist Candice Breitz and American Holocaust scholar Michael Rothberg's symposium on German memory culture "We Still Need to Talk,"²³ and British German author Sharon Dodua Otoo.²⁴ Commenting on the high number of Jewish individuals affected by Germany's post-October 7 cancel campaign, journalist Naomi Klein tweeted, "At this rate, Germany is going to run out of Jewish intellectuals to ban."²⁵ The *New York Times* reported, "A torrent of canceled events is threatening Germany's reputation as a haven for artistic freedom."²⁶ In "The New York Review of Books," Susan Neiman compared the events to the United States' McCarthy era.²⁷

Education

According to the findings from the latest PISA study presented on December 5, 2023, in hardly any other country does social status so heavily determine educational success as in Germany, with students from immigrant backgrounds particularly disadvantaged.²⁸ A racist bias is also evident in German textbooks and curricula. A recent analysis of 761 textbooks and 348 curricula revealed that Islam and Muslims are predominantly portrayed negatively. When Muslims are depicted, it is mostly as adversaries, with little to no discussion of Islamophobia.²⁹

No Access to Islamic Religious Education

Muslim students continue to face structural disadvantages in accessing religious education. While the German constitution provides for religious education under the responsibility of religious communities, apart from small and temporary pilot projects, Islamic religion classes are almost nowhere to be found. For instance, in North

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22. Susan Neiman, "The Gessen affair and Germany's ignorance about Jews", *The New Statesman*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/12/masha-gessen-hannah-arendt-germany-jews>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 23. Loveday Morris, Kate Brady, "In Germany's struggle against antisemitism, the arts are suffering", *The Washington Post*, December 22, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/12/22/germany-antisemitism-israel-gaza-arts-censorship/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 24. "German cultural events axed as Gaza war tensions spike", *France24*, December 19, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231219-german-cultural-events-axed-as-gaza-war-tensions-spike>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 25. Naomi Klein, X, December 14, 2023, <https://x.com/NaomiAKlein/status/1735092160066695660>, (Access date: July 1, 2023).
 26. Alex Marshall, "German Cultural Scene Navigates a Clampdown on Criticism of Israel", December 7, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/07/arts/design/germany-arts-cancellations-israel-palestinians.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 27. Susan Neiman, "Historical Reckoning Gone Haywire", *The New York Review*, October 19, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2023/10/19/historical-reckoning-gone-haywire-germany-susan-neiman/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 28. PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 29. Jan Düsterhöft, Riem Spielhaus, Radwa Shalaby, *Schulbücher und Muslimfeindlichkeit: Zur Darstellung von Musliminnen und Muslimen in aktuellen deutschen Lehrplänen und Schulbüchern* (Braunschweig: Georg-Eckert-Institut –Leibniz-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung, UEM, 2023).

Rhine-Westphalia, where the majority of Muslims in Germany live, only 6% benefit from Islamic religion classes. In most federal states, there is no such offering, despite high demand and decades of debate.³⁰ Furthermore, such debates are often accompanied by anti-Muslim propaganda such as about supposed “Islamization,” “Political Islam,” or the influence of foreign countries.

Impact of Islamophobic Debates on the Education System

Existing structural deficiencies in Germany’s education system were intensified in 2023 by racially and Islamophobic public debates. Politicians of AfD, CDU/CSU, and SPD stigmatized Muslim students, and framed normal Muslim religious practices in schools, universities, and even kindergartens as “Islamist.” The fact that Muslim students fast during Ramadan is regularly problematized in media and politics as is the establishment of prayer rooms in universities or the celebration of religious holidays in kindergartens. The mere existence of (“too many”) immigrant or Muslim students is also publicly questioned. CDU and AfD politicians repeatedly demanded that children without “sufficient German language skills” be denied enrollment in primary school.³¹

A survey by the Berlin Anti-Discrimination Office revealed that 70% of Muslim students reported exclusion based on their names and 67% experienced exclusion due to visible religious affiliation such as wearing a headscarf. In 60% of reported discrimination cases, the teachers were the perpetrators.³²

Universities saw multiple racist incidents in 2023. On March 5, an unknown assailant attacked a praying student at the University of Wuppertal.³³ In April 2023, the conference “Managing Migration, Shaping Plurality” at the University of Frankfurt gained nationwide attention for several racist incidents. Boris Palmer (then of the Green Party), mayor of the city of Tübingen and known for his anti-migration statements, used the racist N-word five times in a speech within a minute. He also compared himself to Jews persecuted under National Socialism. The overall discourse at the conference was dominated by anti-migration and Islamophobic theses. Newspaper *taz* described the participants as “a who’s who of the right-wing—disguised as the

30. Islamischer Religionsunterricht an Schulen in Deutschland (Berlin: Mediendienst Integration, July 2023), https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Factsheet_MEDIENDIENST_Islamischer_Religion_sununterricht_2023.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

31. “CDU: Kein vernünftiges Deutsch, keine Einschulung”, News4Teachers, December 13, 2023, <https://www.news4teachers.de/2023/12/cdu-kein-vernuenftiges-deutsch-keine-einschulung-nichts-in-der-grundschule-verloren/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

32. Aliyeh Yegane, Joachim Willems, Joshua Moir, Religion und Glauben an der Schule. Diskriminierungserfahrungen muslimischer Jugendlicher in Berliner Schulen (Berlin: Anlaufstelle , Diskriminierungsschutz an Schulen und LIFE – Bildung, Umwelt, Chancengleichheit. 2021), https://adas-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Studie-Religion-Diskriminierung_ADAS.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

33. “Unbekannter greift betenden Studierenden in der Uni-Bibliothek an”, IslamIQ, April 8, 2023, <https://www.islamiq.de/2023/04/08/unbekannter-greift-betenden-studierenden-in-der-uni-bibliothek-an/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

harmless bourgeois center.”³⁴ Another racist incident occurred at Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University in late May, where a professor called a Muslim student an “Islamic fascist” and compared her headscarf to a swastika.³⁵

Impact of Anti-Palestinian Debates and Policies on Germany's Education System

In 2023, students, teachers, and academics were heavily affected by anti-Palestinian policies and discourse shifts following October 7. Parts of the political, media, and educational establishment placed immigrant and Muslim students under the general suspicion of anti-Semitism and terrorism. Addressing alleged anti-Semitic remarks at Palestine demonstrations, German Teachers' Association President Stefan Düll publicly complained about “classes where almost only Muslims are present.”³⁶ He also claimed that students of Arab descent harbored entrenched anti-Semitic views taught at home or in their “countries of origin.”³⁷

In a move unprecedented in recent German history, Berlin's Education Senator Katharina Günther-Wünsch (CDU) banned students from wearing *kufiyas* and other Palestinian symbols in Berlin schools in early October, arguing they could be interpreted as support for the attacks on Israel or terrorist organizations like Hamas or Hezbollah.³⁸ Several Berlin anti-discrimination advisory centers criticized the measure, stating that it led to increased anti-Muslim racism in schools,³⁹ with a surge in consultation requests. ReachOut, a Berlin-based counseling center for victims of racist violence, reported several cases of teachers' overbearing, violent, and humiliating behavior toward students following the ban.⁴⁰

While most such incidents did not garner public attention, an act of violence at a Berlin high school in early October did. Reports indicated that a teacher forcibly took a Palestinian flag from a student, struck another student, and was then kicked by the

34. Amina Aziz, “Boomer befeuern rechte Debatten”, taz, May 2, 2023, <https://taz.de/Rassismus-bei-Konferenz-in-Frankfurt/!5928559/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

35. Marius Reichert, “Rassismuskritik gegen Hochschul-Professor”, June 12, 2023, <https://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/rheinland/rassismus-vorwuerfe-hochschule-bonn-rhein-sieg-professor-100.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

36. “Schulklassen, in denen fast nur Muslime sitzen”, BILD, October 22, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/deutschlands-ober-lehrer-klassen-in-denen-fast-nur-muslime-sitzen-85832188.bild.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

37. Dirk Flisser, “Lehrer-Chef beunruhigt: Immer mehr Schüler mit antisemitischem Weltbild”, Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung, October 13, 2023, <https://www.noz.de/deutschland-welt/politik/artikel/lehrer-chef-warnt-vor-wachsendem-antisemitismus-an-schulen-45666382>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

38. Christian Latz, “Bildungssenatorin verbietet Palästinensertücher an Berlins Schulen”, Tagesspiegel, October 13, 2023, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/stellt-gefahr-durch-des-schulfriedens-dar-bildungssenatorin-verbietet-palastinensertuecher-an-berlins-schulen-10620655.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

39. “Beratungsstelle beklagt Rassismus gegen Muslime an Schulen”, Süddeutsche Zeitung, November 23, 2023, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/konflikte-beratungsstelle-beklagt-rassismus-gegen-muslime-an-schulen-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-231123-99-47312>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

40. Susanne Memarnia, “Nicht im Sinne des Schulfriedens”, taz, November 1, 2023, <https://taz.de/Nahost-Konflikt-in-Berlin/!5967030/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

student. Despite video evidence⁴¹ and eyewitness accounts⁴² suggesting the teacher initiated the violence, only the students were suspended. At the same time, in politics and media, the students' behavior, not the teacher's, was often emphasized.⁴³ A parents' protest against violence and racism at the school was banned by Berlin police. The Koordinationsrat der Muslime (Muslim Coordination Council), comprising Germany's five largest Islamic organizations, also reported an increase in reports of "stigmatization" and "loyalty tests." Students and parents complained that Palestinian suffering was ignored in lessons and those highlighting it faced exclusion.⁴⁴

Politics

German political debates in 2023 were largely shaped by Islamophobic narratives. While AfD's anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric pushed the political discourse further right, Islamophobic narratives, such as those about "criminal refugees," "clan crime," or "Political Islam" could be found in the rhetoric of all other parties. A particularly radical anti-Muslim shift in discourse occurred after October 7.

Racist Debate following New Year's Eve Violence

Politicians from AfD, CDU/CSU, and SPD used violent incidents during New Year's Eve 2022/2023 as a pretext for racist attributions and calls for stricter laws against immigrants in and outside Germany. Bundestag member Christoph de Vries (CDU) drew criticism for making assumptions about the suspects skin color by writing on X: "phenotype: West Asian, darker skin type."⁴⁵ (Fig. 3) CDU General Secretary Mario Czaja used the violence to demand that speaking German should be mandatory in German schoolyards.⁴⁶ Hoping for foreign-sounding names, the Berlin CDU requested the suspects' first names.⁴⁷ Federal Minister of

41. Ferat Koçak, X, October 9, 2023, https://x.com/der_neukoellner/status/1711370073280032873, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

42. "Nach Gewaltvorfall an Neuköllner Schule läuft Aufarbeitung", rbb, October 11, 2023, <https://www.rbb24.de/panorama/beitrag/2023/10/berlin-gewaltvorfall-neukoelln-schule-palaestina-flagge-lehrer.html>, (Access date: 1 July, 2024).

43. *Bild*, for example, reported on a "conflict over a Palestinian flag in which the teacher was brutally kicked." They did not mention the teacher's violence. Hildeburg Bruns, "Lehrer trauen sich nicht mehr zur Arbeit!", *BILD*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/regional/berlin/berlin-aktuell/israel-hass-in-berlin-lehrer-trauen-sich-nicht-zur-arbeit-85806106.bild.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

44. "Erklärung des Koordinationsrates der Muslime zum Nahostkonflikt und den darüber herrschenden Diskurs in Deutschland", Koordinationsrat der Muslime, November 7, 2023, <https://koordinationsrat.de/erklaerung-des-koordinationsrates-der-muslime-zum-nahostkonflikt-und-den-darueber-herrschenden-diskurs-in-deutschland>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

45. Christoph de Vries, X, January 2, 2023, <https://x.com/VriesChristoph/status/1610029274614071296>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

46. Nikolaus Doll, "Geht nicht, dass auf den Schulhöfen andere Sprachen als Deutsch gesprochen werden", *Welt Online*, January 10, 2023 <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article243131545/CDU-Geht-nicht-dass-auf-den-Schulhoefen-andere-Sprachen-als-Deutsch-gesprochen-werden.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

47. "Berliner CDU fragt nach Vornamen von Verdächtigen", *Der Spiegel*, January 5, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/silvester-krawalle-cdu-in-berlin-fragt-nach-vornamen-von-verdaechtigen-a-5dee1516-5788-4cc8-80d8-82a633282e87>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

the Interior Nancy Faeser (SPD) attributed the problem to “violent integration refusers.”⁴⁸



Christoph de Vries

@VriesChristoph

...

Wenn wir Krawalle in unseren Großstädten, Verachtung gegenüber dem Staat und Übergriffe gegen #Polizisten und #Feuerwehrleute wirklich bekämpfen wollen, müssen wir auch über die Rolle von Personen, Phänotypus: westasiatisch, dunklerer Hauttyp sprechen. Um es korrekt zu sagen.

10:44 nachm. · 2. Jan. 2023 aus Hamburg, Deutschland · 1,8 Mio. Mal angezeigt



1.632



928



3.296



57



Figure 3: X post by Bundestag member Christoph de Vries (CDU). It reads, “If we really want to fight riots in our big cities, contempt for the state and attacks against #police officers and #firefighters, we also need to talk about the role of people with the phenotype: West Asian, darker skin type. To put it correctly.”

Source: Christoph de Vries, X, January 2, 2023, <https://x.com/VriesChristoph/status/1610029274614071296>.

The Green Party Is Making AfD’s Anti-Immigration Dreams Come True

While Islamophobic, xenophobic, and anti-refugee stereotypes shaped political decisions and discourses throughout, the biggest rightward shift was arguably performed by the country’s Green Party. At their June 2023 party conference, they approved the EU’s much criticized “New Pact on Migration and Asylum of the European Union.”⁴⁹ Despite harsh criticism from human rights organizations,⁵⁰ the reform, which includes detentions and faster deportations of asylum seekers, was passed on December 20, 2023, with support from the governing coalition of Social Democratic SPD, liberal FDP, and Greens.

Throughout 2023, the political discourse framed and treated asylum seekers primarily as a burden and threat. A year-long deportation debate peaked in October. A cover of Germany’s leading news magazine *Der Spiegel* featured Chancellor Olaf Scholz demanding “We must finally deport on a large scale.”⁵¹ (Fig. 4)

48. “Faeser sieht ‘große Probleme’ mit gewaltbereiten Migranten”, *Zeit Online*, January 4, 2023, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2023-01/silvesterkrawalle-nancy-faeser-gewaltbereitschaft-migranten>, (Access date: January 4, 2023).

49. Serafin Reiber, “Ganz viel Bauchschmerzen”, *Der Spiegel*, June 18, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/annalena-baerbock-beim-kleinen-parteitag-der-gruenen-ganz-viel-bauchschmerzen-a-2b84fac5-b559-4b9f-9315-f2ea9a3b36e8>, (Access date: 1 July, 2024).

50. “Keine Kompromisse auf Kosten des Flüchtlingsschutzes. Gemeinsames Statement von über 60 Organisationen”, Amnesty International, May 17, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.de/sites/default/files/2023-06/Gemeinsames-Statement-Reform-Europaeisches-Asylsystem-Juni-2023.pdf>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

51. *Der Spiegel*, No.43/2023, www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/olaf-scholz-ueber-migration-es-kommen-zu-viele-a-2d86d2ac-e55a-4b8f-9766-c7060c2dc38a, (Access Date: July 1, 2024).



Figure 4: Cover of *Der Spiegel* portraying German Chancellor (Bundeskanzler) Olaf Scholz calling for more deportations.

Source: Der Spiegel, No.43/2023, www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/olaf-scholz-ueber-migration-es-kommen-zu-viele-a-2d86d2ac-e55a-4b8f-9766-c7060c2dc38a, (Access Date: July 1, 2024).



Figure 5: X post of CDU leader Friedrich Merz: “If there are refugees from #Gaza, then they are first and foremost an issue for the neighboring countries. Germany cannot take in any more #refugees. We already have enough anti-Semitic young men in the country. (tm)” **Source:** Friedrich Merz, X, October 22, 2023, https://x.com/_FriedrichMerz/status/1716060045052383650.



Von nzz.ch

1:52 nachm. · 22. Okt. 2023 · 1,9 Mio. Mal angezeigt

The country’s former health minister Jens Spahn (CDU) called for “stopping irregular migration movements with physical force”⁵² —a stance previously only publicly held by the AfD. CDU leader Friedrich Merz publicly generalized ref-

52. “Jens Spahn will irreguläre Migration auch ‘mit physischer Gewalt aufhalten’”, *Der Spiegel*, October 24, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/cdu-jens-spahn-will-irregulaere-migration-auch-mit-physischer-gewalt-aufhalten-a-3801ec29-9821-4dc7-bbc5-9b4462442e52>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

ugees as being anti-Semitic by saying, “Germany cannot take in any more refugees. We have enough anti-Semitic young men in our country.”⁵³ (Fig. 5) On October 25, SPD, Greens, and FDP passed the so-called Rückführungsgesetz⁵⁴ (Law of Return) further restricting asylum seekers’ rights and enabling easier and faster deportations.⁵⁵

Islamophobia in Party Programs and Election Campaigns

A draft of the new CDU basic program, presented in December, caused significant outrage, for including the phrase, “Muslims who share our values belong to Germany.”⁵⁶ Islamic associations criticized the statement for implying a general suspicion towards Muslims.⁵⁷ The coalition agreement of the new Bavarian state government, formed by CDU’s Bavarian counterpart CSU and regional party Freie Wähler (Free Voters), mentioned Muslims only in the context of Islamism.⁵⁸ Political scientist Imad Mustafa’s comprehensive analysis of German party programs found that from 2015 to 2021, the AfD exhibited a “fully developed Islamophobic ideology” throughout its federal and state programs. Mustafa also identified problematic tendencies in the programs of other major parties, such as “culturalistic demarcations” by CDU/CSU, setbacks in recognizing Islam by SPD and FDP, and diminishing solidarity with the Muslim community by The Greens and Left Party.⁵⁹

This lack of solidarity with the Muslim community and awareness regarding Islamophobia was also reflected in the handling of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15, 2023. Established by the UN in 2022 on the anniversary of the Christchurch terrorist attack, this action day received little to no attention in German politics and public discourse. One of the few politicians to acknowledge the day was Green Party member of the Bundestag Lamya Kaddor, who called for the appointment of a federal commissioner for Muslim life in Germany.⁶⁰

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53. Oliver Maksan, Marc Felix Serrao, “Friedrich Merz: ‘Deutschland kann nicht noch mehr Flüchtlinge aufnehmen. Wir haben genug antisemitische junge Männer im Land’”, NZZ, October 21, 2023, <https://www.nzz.ch/international/friedrich-merz-wir-haben-genug-antisemitische-junge-maenner-im-land-ld.1761710>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 54. “Bundesregierung beschließt Gesetzentwurf zur Verbesserung der Rückführung”, Bundesministerium des Inneren, October 25, 2023, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2023/10/ge-rueckfuehrungsverbesserungsgesetz.html>, (Access date July 1, 2024).
 55. “Abschiebungen in Zeiten flüchtlingsfeindlicher Debatten – Rechtsstaatlichkeit adé?”, Pro Asyl, October 18, 2023, <https://www.proasyl.de/news/abschiebungen-in-zeiten-fluechtlingsfeindlicher-debatten-rechtsstaatlichkeit-ade>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 56. The CDU later removed the sentence.
 57. Jens Thurau, “CDU-Grundsatzprogramm: Distanz zum Islam”, Deutsche Welle, December 12, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/de/cdu-grundsatzprogramm-distanz-zum-islam/a-67701328>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
 58. https://www.csu.de/common/download/Koalitionsvertrag_2023_Freiheit_und_Stabilitaet.pdf S.58
 59. Imad Mustafa, Islam und antimuslimischer Rassismus in Parteiensystem und Bundestag: Eine diskursanalytische Studie des offiziellen Diskurses zwischen 2015-2021 (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, UEM, 2022).
 60. Lamya Kaddor, X, March 17, 2023, <https://x.com/LamyaKaddor/status/1636663857354506241>, (Access date: September 28, 2024).

AfD Leading the Polls in Germany's East

Despite or because of the cross-party rightward shift, far-right AfD gained traction in 2023. In polls for the Bundestag elections, AfD consistently exceeded 20% from the midyear onward, ranking solidly behind the CDU/CSU in second place. AfD's position is particularly strong in eastern German states, except for Berlin. In Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt, it remained the strongest party with more than 30% public support. In Thuringia, it was roughly tied with the CDU. Also in 2023, AfD politicians were elected to government offices for the first time. In midyear, AfD members were appointed mayors in Sonneberg (Thuringia) and Raguhn-Jeßnitz (Saxony-Anhalt).⁶¹

Polls On The Election Of The German Bundestag

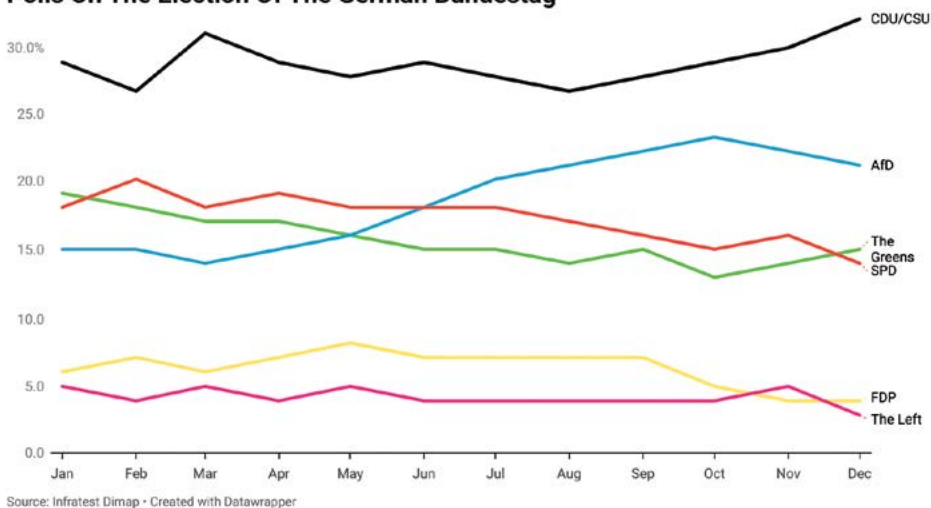


Figure 6: Polls on the election of the German Bundestag between January and December of 2023. Chart prepared by the author. Source: Infratest Dimap

Anti-Palestinian and Anti-Muslim Dehumanization and Racism amid Germany's Support for Israel's War in Gaza

Germany's uncritical and unconditional support for Israel's war in Gaza and disregard for Palestinian suffering sparked criticism worldwide. Criticisms included a lack of condemnation for Israeli war crimes, continued German arms deliveries, disregard for international law and institutions, lack of initiatives for a ceasefire, and repression of its own immigrant, Muslim, and Palestinian communities (see section "Justice System"). This policy was supported by parties across the political spectrum: AfD, CDU/CSU, FDP, SPD, Greens, and a majority of the Left Party.⁶²

61. "Erst AfD-Landrat, jetzt ein AfD-Bürgermeister", ZDF heute, July 3, 2023, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/afd-sachsen-anhalt-loth-raguhn-jessnitz-buergermeister-100.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

62. Solidarität mit Israel, Beschluss des Deutschen Bundestages (Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag, October 12, 2023), <https://www.bundestag.de/israel-solidaritaet>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

The German state policy was accompanied by a blatant increase in racist and dehumanizing rhetoric. Prominent politicians and officials broadly implicated Muslims and people with immigrant backgrounds in terrorism and anti-Semitism. In a widely noted speech, Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier linked "people with Palestinian and Arab roots" to anti-Semitism and terrorism by calling them to distance themselves from Hamas.⁶³ In mid-November, several public figures, including Health Minister Karl Lauterbach (SPD) and CDU Vice-Chairwoman Karin Prien, publicly praised an interview with British far-right publicist Douglas Murray. The left-wing newspaper *taz* described the event in the following words, "With Nazis for Israel."⁶⁴ Among other comments, during the interview, Murray suggested that Hamas was worse than the German SS during the Holocaust, since German soldiers at least felt ashamed for their crimes.⁶⁵ On October 9, 2023, former FDP General Secretary and Minister for Development Aid Dirk Niebel joked on his Facebook page that the Gaza Strip "would make a great parking lot on the Mediterranean."⁶⁶

Delegitimization of Islamic Organizations and Representatives Following October 7

For decades, Germany's Islamic organizations have been struggling for equal treatment of Muslims in Germany, facing regular attacks and campaigns by politicians, state authorities, and media outlets centering around conspiracy theories of "Political Islam" and "Islamization." Such delegitimization attempts reached a new peak after October 7. Politicians from all parties broadly associated Islamic associations with terrorism and anti-Semitism, and questioned future collaboration or even their continued existence. On October 15, without providing any evidence, CDU Vice-Chairwoman Karin Prien claimed in *Bild* that "hate is preached in German mosques today, and money is collected for terror in cafés and cultural associations."⁶⁷ On November 2, in a widely praised speech on "Israel and Anti-Semitism,"⁶⁸ Vice Chancellor and Minister for Economic Affairs Robert Habeck (Greens) claimed that Muslim representatives in Germany had not sufficiently distanced themselves

63. "Steinmeier says Arabs in Germany should distance themselves from Hamas", Al-Jazeera, November 8, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/8/german-president-says-arab-citizens-must-distance-themselves-from-hamas>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

64. Dominic Johnson, "Mit Nazis für Israel", *taz*, November 16, 2023, <https://taz.de/Douglas-Murray-und-Nahostkonflikt/15969863/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

65. "Piers Morgan vs Douglas Murray Under Fire At Israel-Gaza Border", Piers Morgan Uncensored, November 8, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoWViuG5VYs>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

66. "Gaza-Parkplatz-Post von Ex-Minister Niebel löst bei FDP Empörung aus", *Der Spiegel*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/dirk-niebel-empörung-ueber-ex-minister-nach-facebook-post-ueber-zukunft-des-gaza-streifens-a-3eee5b7b-c2de-4b81-aeba-facd31229158>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

67. Karin, Prien, "Prien: Moscheen radikaler Islamisten dichtmachen!", *BILD*, October 15, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/politik/kolumnen/kolumne/cdu-vize-prien-islamisten-moscheen-dichtmachen-85741446.bild.html> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

68. Robert Habeck zu Israel und Antisemitismus, Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz, November 2, 2023, <https://youtu.be/ZBtAtsdc0-8>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

from Hamas and anti-Semitism, warning they would “undermine their own demand for tolerance.”⁶⁹ On November 20, Minister of Agriculture Cem Özdemir (Greens) falsely claimed that Islamic associations had not condemned Hamas’s violence, accused them of a “highly problematic approach to anti-Semitism,” and called for a “policy shift on religion.”⁷⁰ Politicians from the Green Party and FDP demanded ending state cooperation with the largest Islamic Organisation DITIB.⁷¹ On November 21, Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (Central Council of Muslims in Germany) was excluded from the Ministry of the Interior’s “Deutsche Islamkonferenz” (German Islam Conference) without any explanation and despite it being intended as a dialogue forum between state and Islamic organizations. Also, no Islamic representatives were among the speakers. Instead of addressing the originally scheduled topic of Islamophobia, Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser devoted much of her opening speech to broadly associating German Muslims with Hamas and anti-Semitism.⁷²

Media

Anti-Muslim tropes are prevalent in all aspects of German media coverage, including wording, imagery as well as selection of contexts, perspectives, and topics. This results in an overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims. A recent representative analysis of more than 20,000 newspaper and TV articles reveals that 89% of German TV and 57% of print coverage focuses on negative themes like wars, terrorism, and crime.⁷³ Cultural, religious, or everyday aspects of Islam are rarely covered. This is evident across the entire spectrum of mainstream media, from the tabloid *Bild* to the public broadcaster ARD to the left-leaning newspaper *taz*.

Recurring Islamophobic themes in German media coverage include associations of Muslims and immigrants with violence, cultural backwardness, or the “Islamization” of social grievances that have little or nothing to do with Islam. Problematicization of Muslim religious practices is also common, such as frequent debates about headscarves or the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. In a debate which centered around the request for a muezzin call by a Cologne mosque and which lasted from early 2022 to early 2023, the media predominantly featured Islamo-

69. In fact, by the time of Habeck’s speech, all major Islamic organizations had already condemned the violent acts of Hamas, some of them multiple times.

70. Joshua Shultheis, “Cem Özdemir kritisiert deutsche Islamverbände”, web.de, November 20, 2023, <https://web.de/magazine/politik/schluss-cem-oezdemir-kritisiert-deutsche-islamverbaende-38878678>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

71. Patrizia Kramlicek, “Islamverband Ditib: FDP und Grüne stellen Zusammenarbeit infrage”, BR24, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/islamverband-ditib-fdp-und-gruene-stellen-zusammenarbeit-infrage,TucTVYs>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

72. Fabian Goldmann, “Faesers Islamkonferenz: Bevormunden, Belehren, Beschuldigen”, Schantall und die Scharia, November 24, 2023, <https://www.schantall-und-scharia.de/nancyfaeser/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

73. Carola Richter, Sünje Paasch-Colberg, *Analyse der Islam-Berichterstattung in deutschen Medien*. Unter Mitarbeit von Katharina Nötzold (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, UEM, 2022).

phobic voices and fueled conspiracy theories of “Islamization,” “infiltration,” and “Political Islam.”⁷⁴

Anti-immigrant and Anti-Muslim Tendencies in Crime Reporting

A significant bias has characterized German crime reporting for years. A 2019 study by media scholar Thomas Hestermann showed that foreign suspects appear in German newspaper reports far more frequently than their proportion in crime statistics would suggest.⁷⁵ In 2023, this effect was particularly evident in reporting on New Year’s Eve violence (see also section “Politics”). By presenting false and misleading information, many media outlets painted a distorted picture of crime and immigration. For example, *Bild*’s headline read, “These Riots Are Also an Immigration Problem.”⁷⁶

Racist motives and misrepresentations also marked the annual reporting on supposed violence in public swimming pools. Women’s magazine *EMMA* falsely claimed a “wave of violence... mostly caused by young men with an immigration background.”⁷⁷ Reporting about “clans” (large immigrant families) by outlets like Spiegel TV, *Bild*, and public broadcaster RBB was also characterized by stereotypical portrayals and sensationalism. By February 2023, an analysis of German media coverage from 2010 to 2020 on the subject revealed that reporting on “Arab clans” is exclusively negative and criminalizing, despite most family members never having committed any crimes.⁷⁸

Media Outlets That Negatively Shape Public Discourse on Islam

While Islamophobic tropes can be found in the coverage of all major media in Germany, some outlets are particularly prominent in their Islamophobic agitation. Axel Springer’s newspapers *Bild* and *Die Welt* play a special role. *Bild* caters to public prejudices with selective topic and perspective choices as well as sensationalist and misleading reports on immigration and Islam. Typical reporting of *Die Welt* includes campaign reporting and hit pieces against public Muslims and their institutions. Examples from 2023 include coverage against a state-funded, large-scale study on Islamophobia (see section “Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initi-

74. Fabian Goldmann, Islamdebatte: Wer antwortet, wenn der Muezzin ruft?, Übermedien, March 3, 2023, <https://uebermedien.de/81780/islamdebatte-wer-antwortet-wenn-der-muezzin-ruft/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

75. Thomas Hestermann, Wie häufig nennen Medien die Herkunft von Tatverdächtigen? (Hamburg: Hochschule Macromedia, Mediendienst Integration, December 2019, https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Expertise_Hestermann_Herkunft_von_Tatverdaechtigen_in_den_Medien.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

76. Frank Schneider, Diese Krawalle sind auch ein Migrationsproblem, BILD, January 2, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/kommentar-zur-silvester-nacht-diese-krawalle-sind-auch-ein-migrationsproblem-82420058.bild.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

77. Annika Ross, Freibäder: Welle der Gewalt, Emma, July 18, 2023, <https://www.emma.de/artikel/freibaeder-welle-der-gewalt-340457>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

78. Özgür Özvatan, Bastian Neuhauser, Gökçe Yuerdakul, The ‘Arab Clans’ Discourse: Narrating Racialization, Kinship, and Crime in the German Media (Berlin: Berlin Institute for Integration and Migration Research, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, February 2023, doi.org/10.3390/socsci12020104, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

atives”) and recurring publications against Islamic interest groups.⁷⁹ A leak published by weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* in April 2023 provided insights into the Islamophobic mindset of Springer CEO Mathias Döpfner, who wrote in internal chats and emails: “free west, fuck the intolerant muslims and all that other scum” and “[a]nd of course: Zionism above all. Israel is my country.”⁸⁰

Several alternative media outlets have an influential role in the country’s anti-Muslim discourse, regularly achieving significant reach with their scandalous reporting on Muslims and immigration. These include *Tichys Einblick*, published by former *WirtschaftsWoche* editor-in-chief Roland Tichy; *Die Achse des Guten*, published by former *Der Spiegel* columnist Henryk M. Broder; and *Nius*, led by former *Bild* editor-in-chief Julian Reichelt.

Racism and Islamophobia in the Context of the War in Israel and Palestine

While empirical studies on German media coverage related to the ongoing war in Israel and Palestine are still pending, there has already been considerable criticism from journalists, human rights organizations, and other actors both nationally and internationally. This criticism includes uncritical adoption of propaganda reports from the Israeli army,⁸¹ exclusion of Palestinian voices,⁸² ignoring Palestinian suffering and casualty figures, questioning democratic principles and universal norms,⁸³ calls for violence, and spreading false information.⁸⁴ Numerous media outlets published racist, dehumanizing, and generalizing statements about Palestinians, Arabs, and Muslims both in Germany and the Middle East. On October 11, during an appearance on a talk show on ZDF, Germany’s second-largest public broadcaster, Ahmad Mansour, a well-known supporter of anti-Muslim policies,⁸⁵ called for the “extermination” of Gaza to be “successfully executed,” leading to no objection from the moderator.⁸⁶ On November 13, *Bild* headlined with a picture of a young woman and the caption

79. For example, Till-Reimer Stoldt, “Hendrik Wüst feiert mit den falschen Muslimen”, *Die Welt*, April 3, 2023, <https://www.welt.de/regionales/nrw/article244572634/Fest-fuer-Erdoganisten-und-Isamisten-Hendrik-Wuest-feiert-mit-den-Falschen.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

80. Cathrin Gilbert, Holger Stark, “Aber das ist dennoch die einzige Chance, um den endgültigen Niedergang des Landes zu vermeiden”, *Zeit Online*, April 13, 2023, <https://www.zeit.de/2023/16/mathias-doepfner-axel-springer-interne-dokumente>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

81. Teseo La Marca, “Die deutsche Berichterstattung zum Nahostkrieg setzt meine Glaubwürdigkeit als Reporter aufs Spiel”, *Übermedien*, November 23, 2023, <https://uebermedien.de/90248/die-deutsche-berichterstattung-zum-nahostkrieg-setzt-meine-glaubwuerdigkeit-als-reporter-aufs-spiel/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

82. Julia Neumann, “Wir haben es mit Tabus zu tun”, *taz*, November 27, 2023, <https://taz.de/Palaestinerinnen-in-Deutschland!/5972938/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

83. Hannah El-Hitami, “Was ist das für eine Debatte?”, *dis:orient*, October 27, 2023, <https://www.disorient.de/magazin/was-ist-das-fuer-eine-debatte>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

84. “Critique of German media’s handling of Gaza conflict”, *Al-Jazeera*, November 16, 2023 <https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/2428>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

85. Bridge Initiative Team, Factsheet: Ahmad Mansour, October 14, 2020, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-ahmad-mansour/> (Access date: July 1, 2024).

86. “Israel: Debatte über mögliche Bodenoffensive in Gaza”, Marcus Lanz (ZDF), October 11, 2023, <https://youtu.be/pswkZhFy054>, (Access date: July 1, 2024). Mansour later claimed he had misspoken.

“Take the German Passport Away from Refugee Girl Reem!”⁸⁷ (Fig. 7) The text read, “The little girl Reem has become an anti-Semite - and a German citizen.” The campaign targeted a young woman who on Instagram shared an outline of historic Palestine and the words “From the river to the sea #freepalestine.”

Nehmt Flüchtlingsmädchen Reem den deutschen Pass weg!



Aus dem kleinen Mädchen Reem wurde eine Antisemitin - und deutsche Staatsbürgerin
Foto: Christoph Michadis

Figure 7: Bild title reads, “Take the German Passport away from Refugee Girl Reem.”
Source: Peter Tiede, “Nehmt Flüchtlingsmädchen Reem den deutschen Pass weg!”, Bild, November 13, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/merkel-vertrauter-fordert-nehmt-reem-den-deutschen-pass-weg-86086156.bild.html>.

On December 30, *Die Welt* headlined, “There Are No Innocent Civilians in Gaza.”⁸⁸ Two weeks earlier, the newspaper had also published an interview with the headline “Free Palestine Is the New Heil Hitler.”⁸⁹ (Fig. 8)



Figure 8: Die Welt headline: “Free Palestine Is the New Heil Hitler.”
Source: Die Welt, X, December 12, 2023, <https://x.com/welt/status/1734610940094566878>.

87. Peter Tiede, “Nehmt Flüchtlingsmädchen Reem den deutschen Pass weg!”, BILD, November 13, 2023, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/politik-inland/merkel-vertrauter-fordert-nehmt-reem-den-deutschen-pass-weg-86086156.bild.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
88. “Ich habe die Hölle erlebt. Es gibt keine unschuldigen Zivilisten in Gaza”, Die Welt, December 30, 2023, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article249288408/Befreite-Hamas-Geisel-Ich-habe-die-Hoelle-erlebt-Es-gibt-keine-unschuldigen-Zivilisten-in-Gaza.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).
89. “Free Palestine ist das neue Heil Hitler”, Die Welt, December 12, 2023, <https://www.welt.de/podcasts/welt-talks/article248996436/Mathias-Doepfner-im-Gespraech-mit-Rapper-Ben-Salomo-ueber-den-wachsenden-Antisemitismus.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

While anti-Palestinian statements became commonplace in many media outlets, particularly Muslim and immigrant journalists who publicly highlighted Palestinian suffering experienced an unprecedented level of often racist hostilities. Public broadcasters in particular frequently failed to support their employees and publicly distanced themselves from them. In light of previous similar cases, the Berlin-based NGO Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen, which advocates for more diversity in journalism, had already accused public broadcasters before October 7 of applying “double standards” to employees of color and of caving in to “right-wing circles.”⁹⁰ Anti-Palestinian sentiment likely also influenced the decision of ARD, the country’s biggest public broadcaster, to cancel the planned screening of the Palestinian film “Wajib” on November 13. *Der Spiegel* commented at the time that “[c]ensorship is taking place,” referencing the German constitution’s wording, “Censorship is not taking place.”⁹¹ ARD also faced criticism when new internal language guidelines regarding the war in Israel and Palestine were leaked. Among other things the staff was instructed to refer always to Israeli “counterattacks” (instead of “attacks”) which should also generally be described as “targeting Hamas military positions.”⁹²

Justice System

Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant biases are present across various German state institutions, including the judiciary and police. A study by criminologist Julia Kasselt in 2014 suggested that Muslims committing violent relationship-related crimes are given harsher sentences by German courts than non-Muslim offenders.⁹³ In 2023, a new study also found generalizations, prejudices, and ignorance toward Muslim participants in German family courts.⁹⁴ Furthermore, a 2021 study, highlighted how biases influence police interactions with individuals perceived as Arab, Turkish, or immigrants.⁹⁵

90. “Die Neuen deutschen Medienmacher*innen verurteilen die Entlassung des einzigen Schwarzen Moderators im öffentlich-rechtlichen Kinderkanal (KiKa)”, Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen, December 15, 2022, <https://neuemedienmacher.de/aktuelles/beitrag/kika-entlaesst-matondo-castlo/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

91. Arno Frank, “ARD cancelt palästinensischen Film”, *Der Spiegel*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/ard-setzt-palaestinensichen-film-wajib-ab-a-f1557c0c-8880-4015-99a8-618ae5c7d482>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

92. Albrecht Müller, “44 Seiten Sprachregelung der ARD zum Nahostkonflikt – ein unglaublicher Skandal”, <https://www.nachdenkseiten.de/?p=105894>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

93. “Ehrenmorde werden von der Justiz härter bestraft als vergleichbare Tötungsdelikte”, Max-Planck-Institut für ausländisches und internationales Strafrecht, April 2, 2014, https://static.mpicc.de/shared/data/pdf/pm_01_14_ehrenmorde_justiz.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

94. Anatol Dutta, Felix Aiwanger, *Islam und deutsche Familiengerichtsbarkeit* (München: Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, UEM, 2023).

95. Kathrin Schroth, Karim Fereidooni, “Rassismus und Polizeiarbeit. Eine qualitative Studie zur rassismuserlevanten Erklärungs- und Handlungsmustern von Polizist*innen in NRW”, *Polizei und Wissenschaft* 3, 2021, S. 39–52.

Anti-Palestinian-Motivated Restrictions on Fundamental Rights

In the days after October 7, authorities across the country imposed near-total bans on (pro-) Palestinian demonstrations. Without providing specific reasons for the necessity of such bans, politicians, authorities, and judges frequently relied on racist generalizations of Muslim, Palestinian, or Arab demonstrators being inherently anti-Semitic and terrorism supporters. On November 2, the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) also banned the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” falsely linking it to Hamas.⁹⁶ In several cases, bans also affected rallies by Jewish peace activists and interreligious events, such as a peace prayer planned by Jewish, Muslim, and Christian groups in Munich on November 6.⁹⁷

International and human rights organizations condemned Germany for restricting freedom of assembly and speech, and for police violence against demonstrators. On October 18, Amnesty International stated, “The blanket bans on pro-Palestinian demonstrations are concerning from a human rights perspective.”⁹⁸ Even before October 7, Amnesty International had criticized Germany for violating the right to assembly, citing the prohibition of Palestinian demonstrations.⁹⁹ On November 9, several members of the UN Human Rights Council criticized Germany for its restrictions on pro-Palestinian demonstrations.¹⁰⁰ On December 6, human rights organization Civicus downgraded Germany’s freedom rights rating from “open” to “narrowed” for the first time, citing repressions against climate and Palestinian activists.¹⁰¹

Raids and bans on Muslim organizations have also raised criticism. The largest such action occurred on November 16. According to the BMI, more than 800 officers targeted 54 buildings of Muslim individuals and organizations in seven states, focusing on the Islamic Center Hamburg (IZH) over alleged ties to Iran and Hezbollah. The BMI stated that the IZH was suspected of “opposing the constitutional order and the idea of international understanding” and that a ban of association was being considered.¹⁰² So far no charges have been brought against any of the accused.

96. Bekanntmachung eines Vereinsverbots gemäß § 3 des Vereinsgesetzes Verbot der Vereinigung “HAMAS (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya)”. Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, November 2, 2023, BAnz AT 02.11.2023 B10.

97. Martin Jarde, Matthias Morgenroth, Thomas Moßburger, “Bittere Erfahrung: Friedensgebet in München abgesagt”, BR24, November 6, 2023, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/bittere-erfahrung-muenchner-muslimrat-sagt-friedensgebet-ab,TupdKTs>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

98. Amnesty Deutschland, X, October 18, 2023, https://x.com/amnesty_de/status/1714612779515060270, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

99. Protect The Protest, Amnesty International, 2023, <https://viewer.mapme.com/ca3f817e-c8cb-4fd2-83f2-910f0c7fd3c1>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

100. Sarah Marsh, “Germany accused of silencing pro-Palestinian voices at U.N. rights forum”, Reuters, November 9, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/germany-accused-silencing-pro-palestinian-voices-un-rights-forum-2023-11-09/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

101. “Civicus monitor: Germany’s Human Rights Record Slips After Targeting Of Climate Activists”, CIVICUS; December 6, 2023, <https://monitor.civicus.org/presscentre/germany/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

102. Sam Jones, “Germany raids ‘anti-Israel’ Muslim organisations”, Financial Times, November 15, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/e1037d5a-296a-43a0-ad53-ff771f833aeb>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

Internet

Online hate speech and hostilities toward marginalized groups in Germany have significantly increased in recent years. This is shown by a recent study by Kompetenznetzwerk gegen Hass im Netz, a coalition of German anti-discrimination organizations.¹⁰³ The survey revealed that refugees (58%), people with migration backgrounds (52%), and Muslims (45%) are particularly frequent targets of hateful remarks online. A similar trend is seen in a recent data-mining study by researchers from the University of Mainz.¹⁰⁴ Their analysis of more than half a million posts and comments related to Islam on social media found that negative portrayals and verbal attacks are predominant.

On X, racist attacks against public individuals marked as immigrant or Muslim have become commonplace. These are often fueled and initiated by high-profile accounts, particularly those of AfD and CDU/CSU politicians and their affiliates, as well as by editors of Islamophobic media (see section “Media”). Additionally, numerous semi-anonymous accounts specialize in targeting Muslim and immigrant individuals, achieving significant reach. Notable examples include ÖRR Blog and ÖRR Antisemitismus Watch. Outside of social media, long-standing far-right blogs like Politically Incorrect, Journalistenwatch, and Mena Watch continue to thrive.

However, social media can also have a positive impact in the context of Islamophobia. A recent study by researchers from the University of Erfurt highlighted Instagram as an increasingly important platform for visibility, education, solidarity, and empowerment for Muslim communities.¹⁰⁵

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The far-right AfD remains the leading producer of Islamophobia in Germany. Via parliaments and social media the party attracts attention with racist slogans, continually pushing the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Given that the party remains taboo in large segments of the country’s society, politicians from the CDU and CSU often bridge the gap into the mainstream. One of many examples is member of the Bundestag Christoph de Vries (CDU),¹⁰⁶ who frequently slanders the role of Islamic

103. Lauter Hass – leiser Rückzug. Wie Hass im Netz den demokratischen Diskurs bedroht. Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Befragung (Berlin: Das NETTZ, Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur, HateAid und Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen, Kompetenznetzwerks gegen Hass im Netz, 2024), https://kompetenznetzwerk-hass-im-netz.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Studie_Lauter-Hass-leiser-Rueckzug.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

104. Pascal Jürgens, Begriffswelten von Islamfeindlichkeit in deutschsprachigen sozialen Medien (Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, UEM, 2022).

105. Tessa von Richthofen, Antonia Hafner, Kirsten Wünsche, Social Media-Selbst(re)präsentation von Muslim*innen in Deutschland. Akteur*innen, Themen und Positionierungen zu muslimfeindlichen Diskursen (Erfurt: Universität Erfurt, UEM, 2022).

106. Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit (UEM), Muslimfeindlichkeit. Eine deutsche Bilanz (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, June 2023), p. 253f.

organizations spreading conspiracy theories of “Islamization” and “Political Islam.” The most influential forum for such Islamophobic actors remains the media outlets of the Axel Springer group: *Bild*, *Die Welt*, and *B.Z.* (see section “Media”).

Apart from politics and media, several individuals wield considerable influence over anti-Muslim discourse in Germany. Ahmad Mansour, a popular figure for years, leverages his image as a reformed ex-Islamist to validate anti-Muslim discourse to a broad and sometimes even left-leaning audience, without risking accusations of racism. Similarly, the success of ethnologist Susanne Schröter and her research center Frankfurter Forschungszentrum Globaler Islam provides media and politicians with a veneer of academic legitimacy to propagate anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant myths.¹⁰⁷ Other notable figures include Frankfurt blogger Sigrid Herrmann-Marschall, who frequently gains attention with alleged “revelations” about supposed Islamist infiltration, attracting significant political and media multipliers.¹⁰⁸

The role of Germany’s domestic secret services and the State and Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz) in marginalizing Muslims in Germany should not be underestimated. These agencies often criminalize Muslim individuals and institutions based on questionable sources, such as the aforementioned figures. By making vague accusations and guilt-by-association claims, the Verfassungsschutz regularly destroys Muslim livelihoods (ending collaborations, cutting funding, damaging reputations) and fosters a culture of suspicion affecting the entire Muslim community.¹⁰⁹

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

In 2023, numerous local and regional initiatives across Germany actively fought against Islamophobia. Notably, everyday awareness and educational efforts by mosques, immigrant and leftist groups as well as Jewish-Muslim alliances play a crucial yet often

107. For criticism of the lack of scientific credibility of Susanne Schröter and the Frankfurter Forschungszentrum Globaler Islam see Greta Matz, Fiona Köckler, Pascal Bernhard, “Von welcher Wissenschaft ist hier die Rede?“, Zenith, Mai 25, 2023, <https://magazin.zenith.me/de/gesellschaft/islamdebatte-nach-dem-palmer-eklat>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

108. The government-funded Independent Expert Panel on Islamophobia (UEM) wrote about Herrmann-Marschall that “[h]er investigations are speculative and often fragmentary and contextless.” Allegations by Herrmann-Marschall of extremism against Muslims have been “proved to be unfounded in retrospect.” See UEM, *Muslimfeindlichkeit*, p. 99.

As a result of legal disputes and political pressure, the Federal Ministry of the Interior removed the passages against the author’s will in the second edition of the report.

109. Werner Schiffäuer, *Warum das Konzept der Kontaktschuld problematisch ist* (Berlin: Mediendienst Integration, November 2020), p. 7f, https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Expertise_Kontaktschuld.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

Expert*innenkommission antimuslimischer Rassismus in Berlin, *Handlungsempfehlungen der Expert*innenkommission antimuslimischer Rassismus Berlin* (Berlin: Senatsverwaltung für Justiz, Vielfalt und Antidiskriminierung), p. 17, <https://www.berlin.de/sen/lads/lads-antimusl-handlungs-202208-pa-barrierefrei.pdf>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

overlooked role in combating discrimination and racism. On social media especially, immigrant voices have successfully countered racist narratives with their own stories.

At the other end of the spectrum, large, publicly funded projects also contribute to this fight. A prominent example is the report “Muslimfeindlichkeit. Eine Deutsche Bilanz,” (Islamophobia — A German Balance Sheet) released on June 29. (Fig. 9) Commissioned by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and created by independent experts, this comprehensive 400-page report includes numerous studies and expert opinions on all aspects of Muslim discrimination in Germany and recommendations for paving the way to Muslim equality. Despite its thoroughness, political support is lacking.¹¹⁰ By the end of 2023, none of the report’s recommendations had been implemented.¹¹¹



Figure 9: Cover of “Muslimfeindlichkeit. Eine deutsche Bilanz,” (Islamophobia — A German Balance Sheet.) a publicly funded project to combat Islamophobia in Germany.

Source: Unabhängiger Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit (UEM), Muslimfeindlichkeit. Eine deutsche Bilanz (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, June 2023).

110. Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser (SPD) distanced herself from the report. Following political and media campaigns against the report and its authors, as well as several lawsuits from individuals mentioned in the report, the Ministry of the Interior withdrew the report in early 2024. Whether and when it will be republished remains unclear at the time of the writing this report.

111. “Umstrittener Bericht zu Muslimfeindlichkeit bald wieder online”, Der Spiegel, March 13, 2024, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/innenministerium-umstrittener-bericht-zu-muslimfeindlichkeit-bald-wieder-online-a-89d478b6-3875-485a-837e-760cfd0c8681>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

CLAIM stands out as one of the largest civil society actors against Islamophobia in Germany. This alliance, comprising 50 predominantly Muslim organizations, published several significant reports in 2023, including an overview of anti-Muslim incidents¹¹² and a study on how affected individuals cope with anti-Muslim racism.¹¹³ The Mediendienst Integration has consistently contributed to a more nuanced debate on migration and Islam in Germany, with studies and reports on topics such as youth violence,¹¹⁴ “clan crime,”¹¹⁵ and “Muslim anti-Semitism.”¹¹⁶

Following the anti-Palestinian shift after October 7, several mostly informal left-wing, immigrant, and Jewish groups and alliances combated racist policies and the restriction of fundamental rights by organizing demonstrations and other events as well as publishing on blogs and social media. On October 22, more than 100 Jewish artists, writers, and scholars living in Germany signed an open letter condemning racist campaigns against people with immigrant backgrounds and the restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly.¹¹⁷

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The year 2023 was a catastrophic year for Muslims and other minorities in Germany. While the extent of anti-Muslim agitation and discrimination was unprecedented, the roots remain the same: long-established racist structures and Islamophobic narratives within German society. Measures to overcome these would exceed the scope of this chapter; some recommendations are presented below.

- **Security:** Muslims and other vulnerable groups must be protected from acts of violence. This includes better safeguarding mosques and refugee shelters as well as measures for reaching a higher clearance of anti-Muslim crimes.

112. Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild antimuslimischer Rassismus (Berlin: CLAIM, June 2023), https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2023/06/20230719_zivilgesellschaftliches_lagebild_antimuslimischer_rassismus_2022_claim_web.pdf?x59264, (Access date: July 1, 2023).

113. Sarah Perry, Ipek Göcmen, Rima Hanano, Güzin Ceyhan, Erfahrungen und Umgangsstrategien von Betroffenen von Antimuslimischen Rassismus (Berlin: CLAIM, July 2024), https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2023/12/231205_claim_erfahrungen-und-umgangsstrategien-von-betroffenen-von-antimuslimischem-rassismus.pdf?x59264, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

114. Christian Walburg, Jugenddelinquenz in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft (Berlin: Mediendienst Integration, December 2023), https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/Expertise_MEDIENDIENST_Jugenddelinquenz.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

115. Mahmoud Jaraba, Arabisch-türkische Großfamilien: Familienstruktur und “Clankriminalität” (Berlin: Mediendienst Integration, January 2023), https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/MEDIENDIENST_INTEGRATION_Expertise_Arabisch-tuerkische_Grossfamilien_Familienstruktur_und_Clankriminalitaet.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

116. Sina Arnold, Antisemitismus unter Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund und Muslim*innen (Berlin: Mediendienst Integration, April 2023), https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Dateien/MEDIENDIENST-Expertise_Antisemitismus_unter_Menschen_mit_Migrationshintergrund_und_Muslimen.pdf, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

117. “Freedom for the One Who Thinks Differently. An open letter from a group of Jewish artists, writers, and scholars in Germany”, n+1, October 23, 2023, <https://www.nplusemag.com/online-only/online-only/freedom-for-the-one-who-thinks-differently/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

- **Discrimination:** Ending headscarf bans for all public service employees and providing better support for victims of discrimination at local, regional, and national levels.
- **Equality:** The constitutionally protected right to freedom of religion must be implemented for Muslims. This includes access to religious education, welfare, mosque construction, establishment of theological institutes, and state recognition of Muslim religious communities.
- **Public Service:** Personnel in justice, police, schools, and other public agencies should receive anti-racism training and ongoing education. The Office for the Protection of the Constitution should be abolished.
- **Media:** Public broadcasters should be required to implement quotas for employees from all backgrounds. Media funded by the entire society should also represent the entire society.
- **Politics:** Driven by the far-right AfD, German governments across the political spectrum have worsened the lives of marginalized people in recent years, both domestically and worldwide. Rather than shifting further to the right, German politicians should commit to upholding human rights and international law.
- **Identity:** Racism and discrimination can only be overcome in a society that embraces diverse backgrounds and lifestyles. Politics should promote a new German identity of diversity instead of engaging in the same old nationalist debates about “integration” and *Leitkultur* (leading or guiding culture).

Chronology

- **January 2:** While Germany experiences a racist debate over violent incidents on New Year’s Eve, Bundestag member Christoph de Vries (CDU) links the violence to the alleged suspects’ skin color by writing on X: “phenotype: West Asian, darker skin type.”¹¹⁸
- **January 10:** CDU General Secretary Mario Czaja demands that only German be spoken in schoolyards in Germany.¹¹⁹
- **March 5:** An unknown assailant attacks a praying student at the University of Wuppertal.¹²⁰

118. Christoph de Vries, X, January 2, 2023, <https://x.com/VriesChristoph/status/1610029274614071296>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

119. Nikolaus Doll, “Geht nicht, dass auf den Schulhöfen andere Sprachen als Deutsch gesprochen werden”, Welt Online, January 10, 2023 <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article243131545/CDU-Geht-nicht-dass-auf-den-Schulhoefen-andere-Sprachen-als-Deutsch-gesprochen-werden.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

120. “Unbekannter greift betenden Studierenden in der Uni-Bibliothek an”, IslamIQ, April 8, 2023, <https://www.islamiq.de/2023/04/08/unbekannter-greift-betenden-studierenden-in-der-uni-bibliothek-an/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

- **April 28:** Several racist incidents occur at an anti-immigration conference at the University of Frankfurt, including remarks using the racist N-word by Tübingen's former Green mayor Boris Palmer.¹²¹
- **May 6:** In Dessau-Roßlau, Saxony-Anhalt, two suspected right-wing extremists forcibly remove headscarves from two Syrian girls, aged 14 and 15, and assault them.¹²²
- **May 7:** In Heidesee, Brandenburg, a tenth-grade class trip is aborted under police protection after racist insults and threats against Muslim students.¹²³
- **May 11:** A person in Dortmund, North Rhine-Westphalia, attacks a 26-year-old woman wearing a headscarf with a beer bottle, causing serious injuries.¹²⁴
- **May 16:** In Meißen, Saxony, a woman verbally abuses and physically assaults a 14-year-old girl after tearing off her headscarf.¹²⁵
- **Late May:** A professor at the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University insults a Muslim student, comparing her to “Islamic fascists” and equating her headscarf to the swastika.¹²⁶
- **June 17:** At a party congress, The Green Party approves the much criticized EU reform on immigration, which includes measures for detentions and quicker deportations of asylum seekers.¹²⁷
- **October 7 onwards:** A wave of cancellations targeting Muslim, Jewish, and immigrant cultural figures, journalists, scholars, and public figures (for details and specific cases see section “Employment”)
- **October 7 onwards:** Authorities across Germany ban (pro-) Palestinian demonstrations. In many cases, these bans include gatherings by Jewish-Israeli peace activists and interreligious initiatives.

121. Amina Aziz, “Boomer befeuern rechte Debatten”, taz, May 2, 2023, <https://taz.de/Rassismus-bei-Konferenz-in-Frankfurt/!5928559/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

122. “Kopftücher vom Kopf gerissen: zwei Mädchen angegriffen und verletzt”, RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland, May 7, 2023, <https://www.rnd.de/panorama/sachsen-anhalt-taeter-reissen-maedchen-kopftuch-vom-kopf-und-schlagen-zu-rassistisch-motivierte-tat-ISUJU4CXS5IIDD3P4PULHNCJRH.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

123. Schüler sollen in Jugendherberge rassistisch beleidigt und bedroht worden sein”, Der Spiegel, May 5, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/brandenburg-schueler-sollen-in-jugendherberge-rassistisch-beleidigt-und-bedroht-worden-sein-a-fee98c97-1b82-4587-a052-4832a5bd49a7>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

124. “Unbekannte schlägt mit Bierflasche auf Frau mit Kopftuch”, IslamIQ, May 12, 2023, <https://www.islamiq.de/2023/05/12/unbekannte-schlaegt-mit-bierflasche-auf-frau-mit-kopftuch/>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

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126. Marius Reichert, “Rassismuvorwürfe gegen Hochschul-Professor”, June 12, 2023, <https://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/rheinland/rassismus-vorwuerfe-hochschule-bonn-rhein-sieg-professor-100.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

127. Serafin Reiber, “Ganz viel Bauchschmerzen”, Der Spiegel, June 18, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/annalena-baerbock-beim-kleinen-parteitag-der-gruenen-ganz-viel-bauchschmerzen-a-2b84fac5-b559-4b9f-9315-f2ea9a3b36e8>, (Access date: 1 July, 2024).

- **October 7:** Masked individuals vandalize the Selimiye Mosque in Siegburg, North Rhine-Westphalia.¹²⁸
- **October 9:** At a Berlin gymnasium, violent altercations suspected to be motivated by anti-Palestinian sentiments, between a teacher and two students take place. Despite video evidence and eyewitness accounts suggesting the teacher initiated the violence, only the students are suspended.¹²⁹ A parents' protest against violence and racism at the school is banned by Berlin police.¹³⁰
- **October 20:** The cover of *Der Spiegel* features Chancellor Olaf Scholz demanding "We must finally deport on a large scale."¹³¹
- **October 13:** Berlin's Education Senator Katharina Günther-Wünsch (CDU) bans students from wearing the Palestinian *kufiya* and other Palestinian symbols, linking them to terrorism support, leading to increased discriminatory incidents against Muslim students.¹³²
- **October 15:** Unknown individuals in Apolda, Thuringia, deface public property with about 50 swastikas and anti-Muslim graffiti.¹³³
- **October 17:** In Hamburg, a man verbally abuses two youths at a bus by shouting "Fucking Muslims" and "You Muslims are rapists and fuck children." Then, he threatens to stab them.¹³⁴
- **October 21:** CDU leader Friedrich Merz publicly equates refugees with anti-Semitism by saying, "Germany cannot take in any more refugees. We have enough anti-Semitic young men in our country."¹³⁵
- **October 25:** Germany's government coalition of SPD, Greens, and FDP passes the so-called Rückführungsgesetz (Law of Return) further limiting the rights of asylum seekers and facilitating easier and faster deportations.

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132. Christian Latz, "Bildungssenatorin verbietet Palästinensertücher an Berlins Schulen", Tagesspiegel, October 13, 2023, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/stellt-gefahr-dar-bildungssenatorin-verbietet-palastinensertucher-an-berlins-schulen-10620655.html>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

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134. Johannes Böhme, Marie Heflinger, Sina Metz, Victor Meuche, Lea Mohr, Stella Schalamon, Florentin Schumacher, "Was Muslimen in Deutschland passiert", Die Zeit, May 27, 2024, <https://www.zeit.de/2024/23/muslimfeindlichkeit-moschee-oeffentlichkeit-soziale-medien-gewalt>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

135. Oliver Maksan, Marc Felix Serrao, "Friedrich Merz: 'Deutschland kann nicht noch mehr Flüchtlinge aufnehmen. Wir haben genug antisemitische junge Männer im Land'", NZZ, October 21, 2023, <https://www.nzz.ch/international/friedrich-merz-wir-haben-genug-antisemitische-junge-maenner-im-land-ld.1761710>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

- **October 27:** A mosque in Castrop-Rauxel, North Rhine-Westphalia, receives a threatening letter containing burned Quranic pages, pork, and feces, with a note saying, “The cursed Quran where it belongs, in the dirt!” Similar incidents follow at mosques in Recklinghausen, Bochum, Dortmund, Köln, Berlin, Hamburg, and other cities.¹³⁶
- **November 2:** In a widely praised speech on “Israel and Anti-Semitism,” Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck (Greens) links Muslims and Muslim representatives in Germany to Hamas and anti-Semitism, warning they would “undermine their own demand for tolerance.”¹³⁷
- **November 3:** An arson attack on the Institute for Islamic Theology in Berlin is committed.¹³⁸
- **November 8:** Germany’s President Frank-Walter Steinmeier links “people with Palestinian and Arab roots” to anti-Semitism and terrorism by calling them to distance themselves from Hamas.¹³⁹
- **November 15:** Muslim gravestones in Magdeburg, Saxony-Anhalt, are vandalized with swastikas and Stars of David.¹⁴⁰
- **December 11:** The facade of a gymnasium in Munich, Bavaria, is defaced with the message “Kill all Palestinians.”¹⁴¹
- **December 17:** In Hamburg, a man physically and verbally assaults a 14-year-old girl wearing a niqab.¹⁴²

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142. “14-Jährige mit Nikab in Hamburg geschlagen und beleidigt”, *Der Spiegel*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/hamburg-unbekannter-schlaegt-und-beleidigt-14-jaehrige-mit-nikab-a-520bcfdd-1ba7-4603-ab1d-76f09381246d>, (Access date: July 1, 2024).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
GREECE
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Περίληψη

Σε σύγκριση με τα προηγούμενα χρόνια, η κατάσταση σχετικά με την Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα δεν άλλαξε σημαντικά το 2023 με βάση όλα τα υπάρχοντα ευρήματα. Υπό ένα ευρύτερο πλαίσιο, είναι προφανές ότι η Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα εντοπίζεται κατά κύριο λόγο σε επίπεδο λόγου, ενώ σωματικές επιθέσεις με θρησκευτικά κίνητρα, όπως στόχευση ιερών τόπων Μουσουλμάνων, π.χ. τζαμιά και νεκροταφεία, ή Μουσουλμάνων, ιδιαίτερα μεταναστών ή προσφύγων, που βρίσκονται σε αστικά κέντρα, παραμένουν λιγότερα σε σύγκριση με άλλες ευρωπαϊκές χώρες. Ωστόσο, βίαιες επιθέσεις με στόχο Μουσουλμάνους ή ισλαμικούς ιερούς χώρους καταγράφηκαν το 2023. Ορισμένοι Μουσουλμάνοι στην Αθήνα, την Κρήτη και τον Βόλο δέχθηκαν επιθέσεις λόγω της θρησκευτικής και φυλετικής τους ταυτότητας, ενώ βανδαλίστηκαν τάφοι στο ισλαμικό νεκροταφείο ενός χωριού στη Περιφέρεια της Ροδόπης. Το 2023, καταγράφηκε ένα γενικά σπάνιο φαινόμενο στην Ελλάδα που έλαβε χώρα στις Θέρμες, ένα μικρό χωριό που βρίσκεται στον νομό Ξάνθης, όταν ένας Γάλλος πολίτης καταγγέλθηκε ότι έσκισε κάποιες σελίδες του Κορανίου μέσα στο τζαμί. Επιπλέον, όπως και το 2022, είναι αξιοσημείωτο ότι δεν καταγράφηκε κανένα αντί-μουσουλμανικό περιστατικό σε σχολεία στα οποία φοιτούσαν παιδιά μουσουλμάνων, ιδιαίτερα σε σχολεία αστικών περιοχών.

Το πεδίο της πολιτικής, τα μέσα ενημέρωσης (τόσο έντυπα όσο και διαδικτυακά) και το διαδίκτυο συνέχισαν να είναι οι τρεις βασικοί τομείς που διαδραματίζουν κρίσιμο ρόλο στην αναπαραγωγή της Ισλαμοφοβίας στον ελληνικό δημόσιο χώρο το 2023. Σε σύγκριση με προηγούμενα χρόνια, είναι αξιοσημείωτο ότι καμία Ισλαμοφοβική πράξη ή δήλωση αναφέρθηκε από Έλληνες κληρικούς σε οποιοδήποτε επίπεδο. Το 2023, η Ισλαμοφοβία στην Ελλάδα εκφράστηκε κυρίως από ορισμένα πολιτικά κόμματα και ορισμένους πολιτικούς της δεξιάς και της ακροδεξιάς, ορισμένους (αυτοαποκαλούμενους) νεοφιλελεύθερους, έντυπα και ηλεκτρονικά μέσα ενημέρωσης και δημοσιογράφους συμπεριλαμβανομένων των αναρτήσεων και των σχολίων τους σε πλατφόρμες μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης. Τα κύρια θέματα που συνέβαλαν στην αναπαραγωγή της Ισλαμοφοβίας το 2023 ήταν η κοινοβουλευτική ερώτηση του κόμματος της Ελληνικής Λύσης σχετικά με τη λειτουργία των αυτοσχέδιων τζαμιών στην Αθήνα, η απόφαση του κυβερνώντος κόμματος της Νέας Δημοκρατίας να χορηγήσει άδειες εργασίας σε ορισμένους μετανάστες για να καλύψει την έλλειψη εργατικού δυναμικού, η δολοφονία μιας γυναίκας από την Πολωνία από άτομο από το Μπαγκλαντές στο νησί της Κω και ο τραγικός θάνατος περισσότερων από 500 μετανάστες, όταν το πλοίο που τους μετέφερε βυθίστηκε κοντά στην Πύλο στην Πελοπόννησο.

Executive Summary

In comparison with previous years, the situation regarding Islamophobia in Greece did not change significantly in 2023 based on all existing findings. From a wider framework, it is obvious that Islamophobia in Greece is primarily found on the discursive level while physical attacks with religious motivation such as targeting sacred places of Muslims, e.g., mosques and cemeteries, or Muslim people, particularly migrants or refugees located in urban centers, remain fewer compared to other European countries. Still, violent attacks targeting Muslim individuals or Islamic sacred places were recorded in 2023. Muslims in Athens, Crete, and Volos were beaten based on their religious and racial identity while tombstones were smashed at the Islamic cemetery of a village located in the Rhodopi Prefecture. This year, a rare incident in terms of Islamophobia in Greece occurred in Thermes, a small village located in a remote village of the Xanthi Prefecture, when a French citizen was reported to have torn pages out of the Quran inside a mosque. Meanwhile, similar to 2022, it is noteworthy that no anti-Muslim incident was recorded at schools attended by Muslim children, especially schools in urban areas.

Politics, media (both printed and online), and the internet continued to be the main three realms playing a crucial role in the reproduction of Islamophobia in the Greek public domain throughout 2023. In comparison with previous years, no Islamophobic act or statement by Greek clergymen at any level was reported. In 2023, Islamophobia in Greece was expressed primarily by certain political parties and politicians of the right and extreme right, self-proclaimed neoliberals, printed and electronic media, and journalists including their posts and comments on social media platforms. The main issues that contributed to the reproduction of Islamophobia in 2023 were the parliamentary question by the far-right Elliniki Lissi regarding the functioning of makeshift mosques in Athens; the decision of the ruling party Nea Dimokratia to grant work permits to migrants so as to cover labor shortage; the murder of a Polish woman by a Bangladeshi individual on the island of Kos; and the tragic death of more than 500 migrants when the ship carrying them sank near Pylos in the Peloponnese.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Hellenic Republic

Type of Regime: Parliamentary Republic

Form of Government: The prime minister is the head of government. The president, elected by the parliament every five years, is the head of state. The president of the republic has limited political power, as most power lies with the government.

Ruling Parties: Nea Dimocratia (New Democracy)

Opposition Parties: SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), PASOK-KINAL (Panhellenic Socialist Movement-Movement of Change), KKE (Greek Communist Party), Spartiates (Spartans), Elliniki Lissi (Hellenic Solution), Niki (Victory), Plefsi Eleftherias (Course of Freedom)

Last Elections: 2023 Parliamentary Elections: Nea Dimocratia (New Democracy) 40.56% (158 seats), SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) 17.83% (47 seats), PASOK-KINAL (Panhellenic Socialist Movement-Movement of Change) 11.84% (32 seats), KKE (Greek Communist Party) 7.69% (21 seats), Spartiates (Spartans) 4.68% (12 seats), Elliniki Lissi (Hellenic Solution) 4.44% (12 seats), Niki (Victory) 3.7% (10 seats), Plefsi Eleftherias (Course of Freedom) 3.17% (8 seats)

Total Population: 10,482,487 in 2021 (National Census)

Major Language: Greek

Official Religion: Eastern Orthodox Christianity

Statistics on Islamophobia: No statistics on Islamophobia available

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Annual data are made available only later during the following year. The Racist Violence Recording Network in 2023 reported 159 racist incidents. In 91 of the incidents, more than one victim was reported. In 2022, the network had recorded 72 incidents. In 89 incidents, the victims were migrants or refugees on grounds of ethnic origin, religion, colour, associations of third country nationals, or human rights defenders due to their connection with refugees and migrants. The Police Department against Racist Violence recorded 122 incidents with probable racist motive in 2023, while in 2022 the department had recorded 44 incidents. In 85 of the incidents reported in 2023, the alleged motive was religion, race, colour, and/or ethnic origin, but without any further details from the part of the authorities.

Major Religions (% of Population): No official data available, since religious affiliation is not included in the national census. According to the World Values Survey (WVS) (2018) Orthodox Christians comprise 91% of the population, people with no religion 3.8%, other Christians 0.6%, Muslims 2.9%, and other religions 0.8%.

Muslim Population (% of Population): No official data available, since religious affiliation is not included in the national census. Apart from the WVS men-

tioned above, a Pew Research Institute poll (2016) estimates Muslims at 5.7% of the population.

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Muslim Association of Greece, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Greece, Islam for Greeks (Salafi Community), Xanthi Turkish Union, Association of Religious Staff of Western Thrace Mosques, Association of Western Thracian Graduates of Imam Hatip High Schools, Shia Muslim Community of Greece

Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia: Greek Helsinki Monitor, Racist Violence Recording Network¹

Far-Right Parties: Elliniki Lissi (Hellenic Solution), Spartiates (Spartans), Niki (Victory),² Ethniko Metopo (National Front), Foni Logikis (Voice of Reason), Patriotes (Patriots)

Far-Right Movements: Xryssi Avgi (Golden Dawn), Elliniki Orthodoxi Neolaia-Ethniko Kinima Neon (Greek Orthodox Youth-National Movement of Youth)³

Far-Right Violent Organizations: Crypteia, Combat 18 Hellas, Anentahtoi Meadrioi Ethnikistes (Independent Maeandrioi Nationalists), Group Epsilon-EY (Order of Greek Fighters), Blood and Honour

Leading Islamophobic Figures: Kyriakos Velopoulos, Andreas Andrianopoulos, Thanos Tzimeros, Failos Kranidiotis, Ilias Kassidiaris, Konstantinos Bogdanos

Leading Islamophobic Institutions and Groups: The political parties of Elliniki Lyssi (Hellenic Solution), Spartiates (Spartans), Niki (Victory), Elliniki Orthodoxi Neolaia-Ethniko Kinima Neon (Greek Orthodox Youth-National Movement of Youth), Chryssi Avgi (Golden Dawn)

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No
- **Forcible Enforcement of Handshake:** No

1. It is important to note that there is no single NGO in Greece founded for the purpose of fighting Islamophobia in the country. All the NGOs mentioned here tackle physical and verbal Islamophobic attacks under the main principles of human rights such as equality and non-discrimination.
2. Niki is primarily a religious fundamentalist party based on Orthodox Christianity, Greek Orthodox values and tradition, and many of its members are theologians or hold lay positions in local parishes. However, the party holds clear extreme-right positions on issues like migration.
3. As with Niki, this youth movement is primarily based on Orthodox Christianity, Greek Orthodox values and tradition, but embraces extreme right-wing positions on a variety of issues such as relations with neighboring countries, migration, etc.

Introduction

The situation regarding Islamophobia in Greece in 2023 has not changed significantly compared to previous years. Islamophobia is primarily found at the discursive level, while physical attacks with religious motivation targeting mosques, cemeteries, Muslim migrants, or refugees remain fewer compared to other European countries. Politics, media, and the internet continued to play a significant role in the reproduction of Islamophobia in the public domain throughout 2023 without significant alterations. Islamophobia was expressed by political parties and politicians of the right and extreme right, self-proclaimed neoliberals, printed and electronic media, and journalists, including their posts on social media.

A regular topic of public debate that, similarly to previous years, contributed to the reproduction of Islamophobia in 2023 is the “migration/refugee problem”. Although migration and refugee flows are smaller compared to previous years due to the government’s anti-migrant policy, there were not many societal reactions reported. A related issue was the government’s decision to offer official permits to migrants to work legally in Greece to meet the country’s labour needs. Many political parties and individuals of the right and extreme right reacted against this decision inside and outside the Greek Parliament. Finally, a third issue that caused heated debates in the public sphere was the conflict in Gaza.

This report is based on data collected during 2023 and considers local, national, and international events that might have influenced the (re)appearance or rise of Islamophobia. The material was mainly collected from printed and electronic media, websites and blogs, NGO reports, international organizations and state authorities, and formal or informal contacts with members of Muslim communities.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

As in previous years, in 2023, there were no significant developments recorded regarding the statistical documentation of Islamophobic verbal and physical attacks in Greece. This indicates that despite the necessity to collect and categorise all physical and verbal attacks against individuals and places, no initiative has been taken in this direction, maintaining a significant gap in the collected data on racism and xenophobia. It is evident that a broader yet crucial issue concerning Islamophobia is the difficulty in documenting the motives behind racist attacks particularly against migrants and refugees, although such motives often underlie the attacks directly or indirectly. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while targeting Muslim migrants is not uncommon within Greek society, the religious background and motives are not always clearly stated and easily documented.

The main focus of this report has been to gather all relevant information regarding physical and verbal attacks against Muslims and Islamic places through personal contacts, media sources, NGO reports, and disclosures from Muslims themselves. Throughout the year, a number of violent attacks against Muslim migrants and refugees were recorded in major Greek cities (e.g., Athens) and elsewhere in Greece. However, the religious motive is often not recorded when reporting these attacks. According to the Racist Violence Recording Network⁴ and its latest report focusing on 2023, 89 incidents targeted migrants, refugees, or asylum-seekers based on ethnic origin, religion, and/or colour. Human rights defenders with connections to refugees and migrants, as well as accommodation sites for unaccompanied children were also targeted.

In June and July, reports emerged of attacks against migrants in two different districts of Athens. In one case, the victim had to be transferred to the hospital to treat his wounds, while in the second, the perpetrator used a bat and shouted, “F*** Pakistani, I will kill you.”⁵ In October, a series of attacks against migrants’ shops in Agios Panteleimonas, in the Athens city centre, were reported, with groups of fascists throwing eggs and water balloons.⁶ It was noted that an escalation of such incidents was observed following the recent flare-up in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Lastly, in December, another attack against two Pakistani migrants on a bus was reported. Although the driver stopped the bus and approached the perpetrators, they managed to escape, leaving the two migrants seriously injured as they had used metal objects during the attack.⁷ In April, a particularly notable case occurred when a 25-year-old woman was attacked by her own father at the local bus station in Volos, Central Greece. The attack ensued upon her return to Greece from the UK when she appeared wearing the hijab. The young woman, studying bio-medicine in the UK, had already expressed her intention to convert to Islam to her parents. According to her account, her father “would shout at home that Muslims are sick and left no room for me to explain to him that it is my right to seek, research religions, and make my own decisions.” The father was sentenced to three years imprisonment without suspension.⁸

4. The 2023 report is available online <https://rvrn.org/en/racist-violence-recording-network/> (Access date: 27 May 2024).
5. “Racist attacks in Sepolia and Peristeri have been reported by KEERFA”, Efimerida ton Syntakton, 10 July 2023, https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/397071_ratsistikes-epitheseis-se-baros-metanaston-sta-sepolia-kai-peristeri (Access date: 28 March 2024).
6. “Attacks against migrants’ shops in Agios Panteleimonas are reported by KEERFA”, Efimerida ton Syntakton, 20 October 2023, https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/408643_epitheseis-kata-magazion-metanaston-ston-ag-panteleimona-kataggellei-i (Access date: 28 March 2024).
7. “Report about a racist attack in a bus: They attacked migrants”, Efimerida ton Syntakton, 12 December 2023, <https://www.in.gr/2023/12/12/greece/kataggelia-gia-ratsistiki-epithesi-se-leoforeio-epitethikan-se-metanastes/> (Access date: 29 March 2024).
8. “Velestino Volou: He seriously bit her daughter for converting to Islamism (sic)”, flash.gr, 25 April 2023, https://www.flash.gr/greece/2096228/velestino-volou-ksylokopise-agria-tin-24xroni-kori-tou-epaidi-aspastike-ton-islamismo?fbclid=IwAR3yQZ1K6t4dEzFb2KmJrUkWGQD9WRjerSaTU88ofm7Xb_IQfSuncwXhfF0 (Access date: 28 March 2024).



Figure 1: The vandalism of the Muslim cemetery in Rodopi⁹

In addition to the aforementioned attacks against individuals, Islamic places were also targeted throughout the year. In September, following the wildfires in Thrace and the conspiracy theory that migrants were responsible, the Muslim cemetery of Polyanthos in Rodopi was vandalised. (Fig. 1)

In October, several attacks against migrants' homes on the island of Crete were reported. A farmer in the region recounted that migrants working in his fields were assaulted by a group of young people who were shouting, cursing, and hurling rocks, resulting in significant damage. (Fig. 2)

Another notable incident occurred in mid-June when a French citizen entered a mosque in Thermes, a village located in the highlands of the Xanthi Prefecture, and tore apart a copy of the Quran. His action inside the mosque was immediately reported to the local Greek police.¹⁰ Following a trial, he was extradited to France. The motive behind this attack was not fully clarified, but it stood out as one of the rare cases of Islamophobia reported in Greece in 2023. Also, the incident was swiftly condemned not only by the Muftiates and organisations of the Muslim Turkish minority, but also by the local Greek Orthodox Metropolis and the General Secretary for Religious Affairs.¹¹

9. "Attack to the Turkish cemetery in Polyanthos", *Gündem Newspaper*, 3 September 2023, <https://gundemgazetesi.com/detayh.php?id=16963>, (Access date: 4 May 2024).

10. "Attack to the Thermes Mosque, Xanthi", *Gündem Newspaper*, 15 June 2023, <https://gundemgazetesi.com/detayh.php?id=16431> (Access date: 18 June 2023).

11. "Xanthi: A 64 year old French citizen who ripped apart the Quran is transferred to the district attorney", *flash.gr*, 16 June 2023, <https://www.flash.gr/greece/2121251/ksanthi-ston-eisaggelea-odigeitai-64xronos-gallos-pou-eskise-to-korani-se-zami-ton-thermon> (Access date: 28 March 2024). The General Secretary's official announcement can be found here: <https://www.minedu.gov.gr/gepo-menu-m/2015-09-16-09-19-00/55735->



Figure 2: The attack against migrants' homes in Crete¹²

In Thrace, in late September, during the consecration of the mosque in Pilima, direct threats were made against the imam. Threatening slogans in Turkish were found written on the mosque's walls and four bullets were discovered on the gate. The Appointed Muftiate of Xanthi, along with the General Secretary of Religious Affairs, condemned the incident.¹³

Finally, Muslim groups have also reported threats against prayer houses, for example in Peristeri, Attiki. As it was mentioned, on 31 March, at 3pm a group of people gathered outside the mosque shouting that they will burn down the place and burn the people alive.¹⁴

Employment

The absence of official data on religious discrimination in the job market renders it impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of this area. Based on all available sources including media reports and personal communication, no Islamophobic incidents in the job market were officially recorded by NGOs or state authorities. How-

15-06-23-dilosi-genikoy-grammatea-giorgou-kalantzi-gia-to-symvan-se-tzami-tis-ksanthis-2 (Access date: 28 March 2024).

12. "Mesara: They trashed house where migrants live", *ekriti.gr*, 17 October 2023, <https://www.ekriti.gr/kriti/mesara-ekanan-gyalia-karfia-spitia-opoy-menoyn-metanastes-foto?fbclid=IwAR3KxevgonFiqH5U1gvp8U0EnnmQUT57JJ-Hd7NAjexLvzAkWSDRb60yg-k> (Access date: 28 March 2024).
13. "Muftiate of Xanthi: Threatening messages in the mosque of Pilima", *naftemporiki.gr*, 30 September 2023, <https://www.naftemporiki.gr/society/1519712/moyfteia-xanthis-apeilitika-minymata-sto-temenos-pilimatos/> (Access date: 1 May 2024).
14. "A mosque in Peristeri receives threats for arson attack", <https://ahmadeldin.blog/2023/03/31/apeiles-se-tzami-sto-peristeri/> (Access date 28 March 2024).

ever, there is one notable incident worth mentioning. A recent case reviewed by the Ombudsman involved a ban on the use of headscarves by nurses in public hospital. The Ombudsman concluded that this ban does not constitute direct discrimination based on religious beliefs. Rather, it is deemed to be a regulation concerning the prescribed uniform dress of nurses, applied uniformly to all nursing staff regardless of their religious beliefs. Furthermore, the Ombudsman found the headscarf ban to be sufficiently justified by hospital management within the context of infection control measures aimed at safeguarding public health. Therefore, the prohibition was not considered to constitute indirect discrimination either. It was deemed objectively justified based on a legitimate purpose - specifically, the protection of health as stipulated by Law 4443/2016 and Directive 2000/78/EC. The means of achieving this goal, namely the restriction on headscarf usage in favour of parts of the nursing uniform adhering to disinfection specifications, were deemed necessary and proportionate. It is important to note that while the use of headscarves is restricted for nursing staff, it is allowed in other specialties of the hospital that do not involve health duties.¹⁵

Education

In the field of education, no Islamophobic incidents were recorded by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Similarly, to previous years, the ministry persisted in implementing education programmes for refugee children. There were no reported reactions from parents either. As in 2022, in 2023, no significant reactions in the education sector were documented.

Politics

In politics, Elliniki Lissi (Hellenic Solution) stands out as one of the main political parties propagating Islamophobic views. On 17 November, the party posed a parliamentary question to the Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sports, and the Minister of Citizen Protection, concerning “the operation of illegal mosques in Athens”. The party, citing unspecified news reports, echoed a widespread sense of alarm regarding security and queried “whether the Ministers were prepared to either shut down these illegal establishments or legalise them.”¹⁶ A few days later, on 27 November, the party made a public announcement regarding the construction of a new

15. This case was made public in late summer 2023 and included in the Greek Ombudsman’s annual report for 2022. Due to its importance and because it was made public late in 2023 – so it was not available for inclusion in our last report – it was decided that it should be included in this year’s report. More on the case can be found in the official website of the Greek Ombudsman <https://www.synigoros.gr/el/category/diakriseis/post/h-apagoreysh-xrhshs-mantilas-kata-thn-praktikh-askhsh-noshleytikhs-se-klinikes-dhmosioy-nosokomeioy-den-stoix-eio8etei-diakrish-logw-8rhskytikwn-pepoi8hsewn> (Access date: 27 March 2024). For a comment on this decision see A. Sakellariou, “Religion –and its absence– as a discriminatory factor in public institutions and services”, in M. Stratigaki (ed.), *Discriminations in the public sector: Challenges and policies*, (Athens: Polyken-tro ADEDY, 2024), pp.104-106 (in Greek).

16. “Subject: Investigation about illegal mosques in Athens”, *elliniki-lisi.gr*, 17 November 2023, <https://elliniki-lisi.gr/thema-dierevnisi-gia-ta-paranoma-tzamia-stin-athina> (Access date: 1 April 2024).

mosque in Megara located approximately one hour from Athens. In its statement, the party highlighted its previous efforts to draw attention to the construction of this mosque to the authorities. However, it criticised the government for failing to take any measures and labeled the mosque as “a national threat”. The party further argued that “[t]he government is putting the country’s national security at enormous risk.” It went on to say, “The Hellenic Solution will once again take all necessary actions to uphold the law and preserve national and social security.”¹⁷ It is noteworthy to mention that when the vandalism of a Muslim cemetery in Thrace occurred in September, the party publicly condemned it. They argued that such acts were “shameful and constituted hubris”, emphasising the importance of respecting every religion. The party also urged the government to swiftly find and arrest the perpetrators.¹⁸

Finally, following the recent flare-up in the Israel-Palestine conflict, a video surfaced on social media showing migrants and refugees in a camp on a Greek island allegedly celebrating the Hamas attack. Though the video quality was poor, the party seized the opportunity to stoke public fears once again, arguing that the presence of these individuals in Greece posed a national threat. They contended that every Islamist should be deported immediately, asserting that “Greece is vulnerable to Islamic terrorism”.¹⁹ Furthermore, in November, during a demonstration to support Palestine in Athens, a young Palestinian was arrested for allegedly lowering the Greek flag and raising the Palestinian one in its place. The rumour began as extreme-right fake news on social media, and later, the police found the man and arrested him. In reality, he had raised both flags together on a street pole. Following reactions from left-wing political parties, he was released without being charged.²⁰

Another political party that espouses similar Islamophobic views is Niki (Victory), a religious fundamentalist party rooted in Greek Orthodox religious values and teachings. The party advocates for the promotion of the Greek Orthodox identity and perceives Islam and Muslims as a threat, expressing opposition to migrants and refugees. For instance, when the government decided in December to grant permits to migrants from Pakistan and other countries to work legally in Greece in response to the significant labour shortage, Niki reacted both in the Parliament and through public announcements. The party’s president, in a public statement, argued, “Our country is rapidly becoming

17. “Press announcement: The monster-mosque in Megara is a national threat!”, *elliniki-lisi.gr*, 27 November 2023, <https://elliniki-lisi.gr/anakoinosi-typou-ethniki-apeili-to-tzami-teras-sta-megara-pliris-dikaiosi-tis-ellinikis-lysis-kai-tou-kyriakou-velopoulou> (Access date: 1 April 2024).

18. “Press announcement about the vandalism of graves in the Muslim cemetery in Rodopi”, *elliniki-lisi.gr*, 4 September 2023, <https://elliniki-lisi.gr/anakoinosi-typou-gia-ton-vandalismo-tafon-sto-mousoulmaniko-nekrota-feio-sti-rodopi> (Accessed date: 1 April 2024).

19. “Press announcement: Greece is an open field for Islamic terrorism”, *elliniki-lisi.gr*, 8 October 2023, <https://elliniki-lisi.gr/anakoinosi-typou-xefrago-abeli-stin-islamiki-tromokratia-i-ellada> (Access date: 1 April 2024).

20. “Outcry against the government for the prosecution of the Palestinian with the flag”, *Efimerida ton Syntakton*, 7 November 2023, https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/antipoliteysi/410677_katakraygi-kata-tis-kybernisis-gia-ti-di-oxi-toy-palaistinioy-me-ti (Accessed date: 14 June 2024).

the most attractive destination for illegal migrants. This decision effectively nullifies the '21 Revolution [Greek War of Independence/Revolution against the Ottoman Empire]. The prospect of the first European emirate [Greece] is looming dangerously close.”²¹

The third political party to secure seats in the Greek Parliament in the 2023 national elections was Spartiates (Spartans), an extreme right-wing party. Spartiates has faced allegations of being a front for the convicted member of Golden Dawn, Ilias Kassiariis. The party espouses explicit Islamophobic and anti-migration views, which are evident in its official statements and parliamentary activities. In the party's declaration, it is mentioned that “[w]e stand firmly against any attempt to alter our cultural identity and resist the perceived Islamisation of Greece by the established political system.”²² Moreover, in his parliamentary speech against the governmental decision to legalise migrant workers to cover the country's labour needs the president of the party argued,

What connection does the beacon of intellect, which has emanated from Greece and illuminated the entire civilised world for 2,500 years, have with the obscurantism and hatred of fanatical Islam? What relevance do hordes of fanatical Islamists have to Christ and Orthodoxy, to the extent that if you do not adhere to their religion, you are deemed an enemy and sentenced to death? Christ teaches us to love one another, while their own religion encourages martyrdom through suicide attacks with promises of heavenly rewards. Therefore, from a religious, cultural, and social perspective, coexistence seems impossible. We witness in France, particularly in Paris, sorrowful scenes reminiscent of underdeveloped countries where human life is devalued. Undoubtedly, this entire invasion will dismantle the Greek nation, regress us by centuries, and due to the demographic challenge, there will be no chance of recovery.²³

In 2023, a new political party was founded by a former member of the ruling party Nea Dimocratia. The party was named “Fatherland” and its leader is the young female lawyer Afroditi Latinopoulou. In the party's declaration, it was asserted that illegal migration poses a significant problem and threat to the Greek nation. The party emphasised the necessity of eliminating illegal migration to counteract the ongoing replacement of the Greek population.²⁴ More particularly, the party's political manifesto includes a special section with the title “Illegal migration” where it is mentioned,

We are confronted with an organised plan of population, racial, and cultural transformation, facilitated equally by all major parties and their affiliates. Our stance is

21. “The Revolution of 1821 is canceled through the Kairidis' law” – Dimitris Natsios, [nikh.gr](https://www.nikh.gr/nea/751-tropologia-kairide), 15 December 2023, <https://www.nikh.gr/nea/751-tropologia-kairide> (Access date: 1 April 2024).

22. The founding declaration can be found here: <https://spartiates.gr/idrytiki-diakiryxi> (Accessed date: 2 April 2024).

23. “Vasilis Stigas: This legal amendment is the legalisation of thousands of illegal migrants”, Spartiates.gr, 12 December 2023, <https://spartiates.gr/vasilis-stigkas-i-epicheiroumeni-tropologia-einai-i-episimi-nomimopoiisi-chiliadon-lathrometanaston> (Accessed date: 2 April 2024).

24. The party's declaration can be found here: <https://fonilogikis.gr/organosi/idrytiki-diakiryxi/> (Access date: 1 May 2024). Due to legal issues, the party had to change its name to “Foni Logikis” (Voice of Reason).

clear: Anyone entering the country illegally, without genuine asylum grounds, has no place in Greece. Existing asylum arrangements must undergo review. Illegal migrants committing criminal offenses should be promptly arrested and transferred to secure, remote detention facilities with final deportation orders until their countries of origin accept their repatriation. Agreements allowing the importation of seasonal workers from hostile nations like Pakistan must be revoked, and NGO immunity must be revoked. NGO officials collaborating with human traffickers should be apprehended, prosecuted, and incarcerated. The burqa must be prohibited on Greek soil, and all illegal Islamic mosques must be immediately closed, without exception. All benefits for unlawfully entered foreigners must cease. No one entering Greece illegally is entitled to employment, insurance, or social security benefits.²⁵

Media

A number of media outlets persist in disseminating Islamophobic discourses and moral panics concerning Islam and Muslims. Many of these outlets belong to populist, right-wing (e.g., *Dimocratia*), and extreme right-wing (e.g., *Makeleio*, *Eleftheri Ora*) factions, although some liberal ones (e.g., *Kathimerini*) also contribute to this trend. In June, a young Polish woman working on the island of Kos was murdered by a Bangladeshi man. This tragic event provided an opportunity for certain media outlets to launch attacks against Islam and Muslims, emphasising the “monstrous character of Muslims” and the purported incompatibility of Islam with Western values. Extreme-right newspapers such as *Makeleio* (Massacre) and *Eleftheri Ora* (Free Hour) sensationalised the incident, making it headline news (Figs. 3 and 4) and amplifying statements from public figures to bolster their argument.

However, it is worth noting that self-proclaimed mainstream media outlets, such as *Kathimerini* (The Daily), and news websites like *capital.gr* and *liberal.gr*, have also been known to publish Islamophobic opinion pieces. *Kathimerini*, for instance, frequently features opinion articles by Takis Theodoropoulos, an author who has extensively covered topics related to Islam, Muslims, the so-called clash of civilisations, migration, and similar subjects in recent years.²⁶ In one such piece, Theodoropoulos implicitly criticised the government’s decision to legalise approximately 30,000 migrants for the labour market. While recognising the challenges of Europe’s aging population and economic pressures from the USA and China, Theodoropoulos concluded that “Europe is undergoing a cultural collapse in the face of an aggressive Islam that exploits its freedom to impose its own authoritarianism.”²⁷

25. For more on the party’s political program see <https://fonilogikis.gr/programmatikes-theseis/lathrometanastev-tiko/> (Access date: 1 May 2024).

26. T. Theodoropoulos, “The West against the war of civilizations”, *Kathimerini*, 22 October 2023, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/562685452/i-dysi-apananti-ston-polemo-ton-politimon/> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

27. T. Theodoropoulos, “From Foundas to Ahmed”, *Kathimerini*, 24 December 2023, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/opinion/562799077/ap-ton-foynta-ston-achmet/> (Access date: 2 April 2024).



Figure 3: Front page of *Makeleio*. At the top it writes: “The creepy reenactment of the horror with perpetrators Pakistani and Bangladeshi pigs”²⁸



Figure 4: The front page of *Eleftheri Ora* mentioning the statement of a famous Greek fashion designer who argued, “She was murdered by inhumane beasts of another religion hungry for sex”²⁹

28. Photo by A. Sakellariou.

29. Photo by A. Sakellariou.

Opinion pieces of similar content were featured on capital.gr and liberal.gr, particularly following the conflict that started in Palestine after 7 October. In one instance, it was argued that the presence of Muslim migrants in Europe and Greece could serve as a fifth column, representing an internal enemy and attention must be directed to this issue, as Europe appears to be on the brink of paralysis.³⁰ Similar pieces were published in Liberal.gr.

There are numerous instances of identifying special interest groups in Western countries, which are funded by extreme Islamic regimes in the [Persian] Gulf. Furthermore, there have been complaints regarding the influence of these groups in the acquisition of MPs, US senators, or EU MEPs. Essentially, it represents a visible-invisible army that operates behind the scenes of Western countries. These groups exploit the right to freedom of speech while simultaneously denying, persecuting, and suppressing it in their funding countries.³¹

Throughout the year, tens of such articles have been published, but a rise was observed after 7 October.

Justice System

Based on all available sources, no Islamophobic incidents within the justice system (including verbal comments and judicial decisions) were recorded in 2023. However, it is important to note that in January 2023, the Court of Appeals affirmed the initial conviction (December 2021) of the newspaper *Makeleio*, which frequently publishes Islamophobic and xenophobic news reports and opinion pieces, and its publisher for “complicity in inciting hatred”. The publisher was sentenced to six months of imprisonment and fined 5,000 euros, with parole, consistent with the ruling of the first-level court.³²

Internet

The internet and social media platforms serve as fertile grounds for the dissemination of Islamophobic discourses, where thousands of Islamophobic messages and opinion pieces can be found. For instance, on Facebook, both individuals and public figures frequently espouse Islamophobic views. Additionally, public groups, such as those operating under the name “No to the mosque” are still functioning. This last group has more than 11,000 members and according to the administrators the group’s purpose is to provide information on the issue of the mosque in Votani-

30. K. Stoupas, “Soon might be too late...”, Capital.gr, 3 November 2023, <https://www.capital.gr/o-kostas-stou-pas-grafei/3747482/suntoma-mporei-na-einai-polu-arga/> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

31. D. Triantafyllidis, “An enemy in our backyard”, Liberal.gr, 26 October 2023, <https://www.liberal.gr/d-triantafyllidis/ehthros-sta-metopisthen> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

32. For the background of this case and more details see <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2023/01/20/1-1419/> (Access date: 28 March 2024).

kos³³ or any other mosque beyond what is defined by the Treaty of Lausanne, as well as on issues of illegal migration, criminality of foreigners, and generally issues related to the above.³⁴

Apart from the aforementioned news websites, there are other platforms that are highly active in the field. For instance, *defence-point.gr* is a website focused on national issues such as Greek-Turkish relations, the Cyprus issue, etc. It regularly reiterates news and opinion pieces from various media sources on topics related to migration, Islam, and Muslims, including articles from *Kathimerini*, *liberal.gr*, *capital.gr*, and others. This contributes to the construction of a network for the dissemination of Islamophobia.³⁵

Another central website within the Islamophobia network is *meaculpa.gr*, operated by the former MP of the ruling party Nea Dimokratia Konstantinos Bogdanos. Following his expulsion from the party for extreme right-wing discourse, he shifted towards the extreme-right spectrum, attempting to establish his own party or collaborate with other groups and political entities. On his website, hundreds of articles propagate Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments, often capitalising on mass panic surrounding Islam and Muslims, particularly in the aftermath of incidents occurring in Greece or other Western countries.³⁶

It is noteworthy that Hellenic Hoaxes, a recently-formed group of journalists dedicated to debunking fake news, has made significant contributions to combating popular fake news spread through media channels and the internet. Founded in 2013, some notable national and international cases they have addressed include allegations of migrants attacking and hindering firefighters during summer wildfires in Thrace, claims of a Muslim individual in the Netherlands urinating on pork meat in a supermarket, assertions that a flag raised on a mosque in Iran symbolises the beginning of a holy war, rumors of an ISIS fighter seen fighting alongside Ukrainians in the conflict with Russia, and reports of minor girls being married to adult males in Palestine.³⁷

33. This is the official state mosque of Athens which is now open. The group originated as part of the movement of reactions to the construction of the mosque but continues to function beyond this particular scope.

34. The group's page can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/OxiTzami> (Access date 2 April 2024).

35. The website includes hundreds of Islamophobic articles the majority of which comes from other sources <https://www.defence-point.gr/news/> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

36. For more details see <https://meaculpa.gr/> (Access date: 2 April 2024).

37. For the above cases see <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2023/08/30/psevdis-o-ischyrismos-gia-epithei-si-metanaston-se-pyrosvestiko-elikoptero/>, <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2023/12/29/vinteo-pou-deichnei-mousoulmano-na-ourei-pano-apo-choirino-se-souper-market-einai-chiouristikoi/>, <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2023/10/27/eparsi-mavris-simaias-se-tzami-sto-iran-den-symvolizei-polemo-i-ekdikisi/>, <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2023/03/02/kurt-isis-ukraine-missing-context/>, <https://www.ellinikahoaxes.gr/2023/01/10/palestine-photo-group-wedding-of-young-girls-misinformation/> (Access date: 3 April 2024).

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In addition to the figures previously mentioned in politics and media, there are others who play significant roles within the Islamophobia network. One such individual is Thanos Tzimeros, a self-identified liberal who has consistently propagated anti-Muslim and anti-migrant views in both traditional media and social media platforms in recent years. Tzimeros founded the political party Dimiourgia Xana (Creation Again), which collaborated with the extreme-right party Nea Dexia (New Right) to form the coalition Ethniki Dimiourgia (National Creation). Despite his unsuccessful bid in the 2023 elections, Tzimeros has persisted in promoting his extreme-right agenda regarding Islam and migration. His Facebook page is replete with Islamophobic comments, arguing, for instance, that Islam teaches that women in general are inferior and specifically that non-Muslim women are not considered human beings, further asserting that “the rape of infidel women is encouraged by Islam”. (Fig. 5)



Figure 5: Facebook post on the public page of Thanos Tzimeros after a series of rapes in Sweden³⁸

Another former politician and minister from the right who consistently propagates similar views in the media and on social media is Andreas Andrianopoulos. Through his opinion pieces, Andrianopoulos has attempted to distance himself from the label of Islamophobia by introducing the term “Islamism” or “Islamism”. He claims that this term reflects a sense of realism about Islam and anticipates the potential consequences of the increasing presence of Muslim migrants in Greece and Europe.³⁹ Moreover, following a tragic incident in June where a ship carrying mi-

38. <https://www.facebook.com/Thanos.Tzimeros.Page> (Access date: 4 July 2024).

39. A. Andrianopoulos, “Islamism and Islamism”, *Oikonomikos Tyhromos*, 10 May 2023, <https://www.ot.gr/2023/05/10/apopseis/opinion/islamismos-kai-islamolatia/?fbclid=IwAR1pc4D7KGXZ2rHYCxdes1IP4YpPgIHdcxTl8WThHYMlr5UCOu7yYEjVAqw> (Access date: 3 April 2024).

grants sank in Pylos, South Greece, resulting in the deaths of more than 500 people, Andrianopoulos made two posts on his X account. (Figs. 6 and 7) In these posts, he questioned, “Who invited them to Greece?” and asserted that “foreign workers are not a solution” because they allegedly rely solely on social benefits and do not pay taxes due to their religion’s teachings.

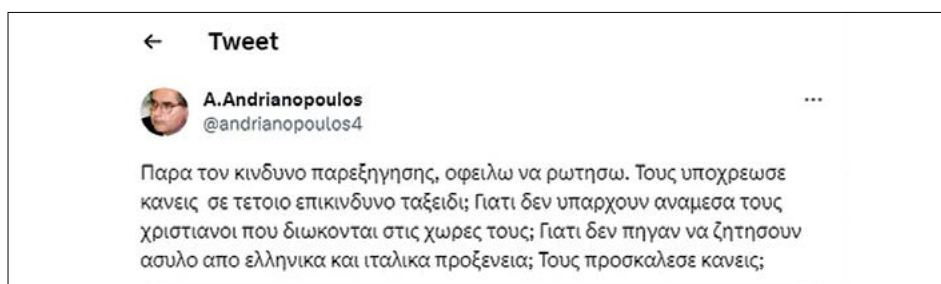


Figure 6: Andrianopoulos’s tweet wondering who invited the more than 500 migrants who died in a shipwreck outside Pylos to Greece and why they were no Christians among them fleeing prosecution in their country.⁴⁰



Figure 7: Andrianopoulos’s tweet mentioning D. Murray’s book *The Strange Death of Europe* and arguing that migrants will not save the social security system, because Islam orders them not to pay taxes.⁴¹

Finally, another figure who has occasionally espoused anti-Islamic and anti-migrant views in recent years is Anna Diamantopoulou, a former socialist MP, minister, and European commissioner. In 2023, during a public discussion about the future of Greece, she argued, “But here you see, no one is talking clearly about a huge issue. Our societies cannot integrate large Islamic communities, which have their own culture and their own theocratic approach, which does not change at all.” Later, she added that “what I hope is that in 100 years Europe will not become dark coloured by force”, causing significant backlash from left-wing parties and human rights organisations.⁴²

While it concerns a collective rather than an individual, it is crucial to highlight in this section a newly formed organisation called “Elliniki Orthodoxi Neolaia” (Greek

40. <https://x.com/andrianopoulos4/status/1668944815482871811> (Access date: 4 July 2024).

41. <https://x.com/andrianopoulos4/status/1669262250945789952> (Access date: 4 July 2024).

42. “Reactions about the controversial statement of Anna Diamantopoulou”, thetoc.gr, 8 November 2023, <https://www.thetoc.gr/politiki/best-of-internet/antidraseis-gia-ratsistiki-dilosi-tis-annas-diamantopoulou-eu-xomai-se-100-xronia-na-min-ginei-i-europi-skouroxromi/> (Accessed date 3 April 2024).

Orthodox Youth), which openly espouses anti-migrant and Islamophobic views while advocating for Orthodox Christian beliefs. The group has been actively engaged at a grassroots level, organising demonstrations against the legalisation of migrants and what they perceive as the Islamisation of Greece. (Fig. 8)



Figure 8: "Resist Islamic colonisation Elliniki Orthodoxi Neolaia Nikaias"⁴³

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

When it comes to addressing Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, there are relatively few organised reactions and initiatives to report. However, several civil society actors have responded to racist attacks against migrants and refugees. For instance, KEERFA (Movement United against Racism and Fascist Threat) has organised public discussions and demonstrations in June, October, and November following the racist attacks mentioned in the first section of the report.

In March, the Muslim Association of Greece (MAG) together with EuLeMa (European Muslim Leaders' Majlis) organised a roundtable in Athens on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia with the participation of different experts: university professors in social sciences, theology, history, anthropology, and law interacted with diplomats, politicians, civil society representatives, educators, diplomats, and community leaders.⁴⁴

43. Photo by <https://www.eoneolaia.com/eon-nikaias-antistasou-ston-islamiko-epoikismo-perna-sthn-ethnikh-antepithesh/> (Access date: 3 April 2024).

44. See MAG's Facebook page www.facebook.com/MuslimAssociationOfGreece (Access date: 3 April 2024).

Although the state has not taken any specific measures and initiatives to combat Islamophobia it is important to mention that the General Secretary of Religious Affairs has repeatedly reacted with public announcements condemning the attacks and vandalisms against mosques and Islamic cemeteries or the tearing up of the Quran in Thrace, as mentioned above.

Finally, left-wing political parties have publicly condemned attacks against Muslim migrants and Islamophobic incidents occurring in other countries. For instance, when an extreme-right winger burnt the Quran in Sweden, Mera 25 (Diem 25) publicly condemned the act, arguing that “[t]he fight against Islamophobia is a prerequisite for Europe in its efforts to prevent, rather than merely suppress, phenomena of extreme violence and cultural intolerance. Prevention at this level entails ensuring social justice as a fundamental condition for social peace and the well-being of European citizens.”⁴⁵

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Based on the above descriptive analysis it can be argued that Islamophobia in Greece in 2023 is at almost the same level as the previous year, although the lack of statistical data makes comparisons a difficult task. Islamophobia is primarily manifested in public discourse, with some groups of Greek citizens demonstrating against the “Islamisation” of the country, and the Islamophobic content in the programmes of political parties and politicians mainly of the extreme right and in different platforms of the Greek media, and particularly the internet and social media. However, it is important to underline that Islamophobia in Greece is also found among self-proclaimed political and/or economic liberals and not only in the extremes. There are, of course, political parties, politicians, and anti-racist groups mainly from the left opposing racist and Islamophobic discourses and discriminatory practices, but their impact on the reproduction of Islamophobia in Greece remains quite limited. As a consequence, what comes out at the moment is that the initiatives of civil society, academia, and media organisations through the implementation of relevant projects could actually play a more crucial role in the study and confrontation of Islamophobia, while the government should be more determined towards this direction.

Among the primary issues that need to be addressed with regard to monitoring and confronting Islamophobia are the following:

- First, a need that still hasn’t been met in the fight against Islamophobia is the establishment of an official observatory mechanism that will monitor and re-

45. Public Announcement, *mera25.gr*, 26 January 2023, <https://mera25.gr/announcement/tomeas-exoterikon-kai-amynas-katadikastea-i-islamofovia-kai-to-kapsimo-tou-koraniou-apo-tous-akrodexious-tis-souidias/?fbclid=IwAR33FhtxCKsKLOm9Zsog1qvJlE0gjHS-MtxblFL2XOhcDJy0PIYmq90hdI> (Access date: 3 April 2024).

cord Islamophobic incidents on both levels of discourse and physical attacks. Towards this direction a first step would be the collaboration of existing state mechanisms and civil society networks in order to achieve a better level of Islamophobia monitoring.

- Second, the legal mechanism in Greece is not effectively tackling Islamophobia and the Greek law is not robust enough to discourage Islamophobic actions and more specifically hate speech.
- Third, even though Islam is an old religion in Greece dating back to the Ottoman times and the 14th century, knowledge about the fundamentals of Islam and Muslims remains highly limited particularly in the realm of public education, civil service, and media, which provides enough space for Islamophobia to flourish and grow inside Greek society. For the purpose of combating this situation, training seminars should be provided particularly for those journalists, teachers, police officers, coastguards, and other civil servants who have contact with Muslims.
- Fourth, it is significant to remember that Muslims should not be excluded from decision-making mechanisms combating anti-Muslim hatred in Greece. An effective mechanism of dialogue and cooperation should immediately be established; a platform is necessary where views of Muslims will be taken fully into consideration by Greek decision-makers in Greece's fight against Islamophobia.

Chronology

- **31 March 2023:** Threats about an arson attack against a mosque in Peristeri, Athens
- **22 April 2023:** A father violently attacked his daughter for converting to Islam
- **15 June 2023:** Attack against a Pakistani migrant in Peristeri, Athens
- **15 June 2023:** A French citizen tore up a copy of the Quran inside a mosque in a remote village of Xanthi Prefecture, Thrace
- **9 July 2023:** Attack against migrants in Sepolia, Athens
- **3 September 2023:** Vandalism of graves in the Muslim cemetery of Polyanthos, Rodopi
- **29 September 2023:** Consecration and threats against the mosque and the imam in Pilima, Xanthi
- **16 October 2023:** Attack against migrants' houses in Mesara, Crete
- **16-20 October 2023:** Attack against migrants' stores in Agios Panteleimonas, Athens
- **9 December 2023:** Attack against migrants in a public bus, Athens

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
HUNGARY
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Összefoglaló

2023 ismét nyugodt év volt a magyarországi muszlimok számára. Kevés iszlamofób támadásról érkezett hír, és a muszlim vezetők interjúi is ugyanezt a dinamikát erősítik meg. Ennek ellenére a politikai légkör nem vált befogadóbbá az iszlám és a muszlimok számára. Az iszlámot még mindig idegen vallásnak tekinti a kormányzó elit. A muszlimokat továbbra is külső fenyegetésként mutatják be, amely nyugat-európai országokat fenyeget, de Magyarországot a kis muszlim lakossága miatt nem.

Az októberben kitört gázai háború a Magyarországon élő muszlimokat is érintette. Az állami hatóságok nem engedélyezték a palesztinokat, vagy a tüzszünetet támogató tiltakozásokat. Annak ellenére, hogy nem számoltak be iszlamofób támadásokról, nagy nyilvánosságot kapott egy muszlim labdarúgó elleni verbális támadás, akit a futballszurkolók Hamász-robbantónak tituláltak a Magyar Labdarúgó-bajnokság egy alsóbb osztályában rendezett mérkőzésen.

A politikai spektrum szinte minden oldalán álló politikusok nagyon szkeptikusan viszonyulnak a migrációhoz és általában a migránsokhoz. A kormánykoalíciók diskurzusnak köszönhetően a migráció összekapcsolódott a terrorizmus, a bűnözés, a társadalmi zavarok és a muszlimok fenyegetésével. A FIDESZ vezette kormánykoalícióhoz köthető médiabirodalom, a KESMA olyan cikkeket közölt, amelyek a nyugat-európai palesztin-párti tüntetéseket a migránsok által az iszlám terrorizmus támogatására szervezett tüntetésként mutatták be. Az úgynevezett "Nagy Népeességcserével" foglalkozó összeesküvés-elméletet olyan prominens politikai szereplők vették át, mint Orbán Viktor miniszterelnök, és a kormányzó elit KESMA kiadványaiban terjesztette ezt.

Annak ellenére, hogy a muszlim egyházaként elismert szervezetek bevett egyházakként élvezik a legmagasabb szintű állami elismerését, mégsem tudnak ún. átfogó együttműködési megállapodást kötni a kormánnyal. Ennek eredményeképpen nem tudnak szorosabb együttműködést folytatni az állammal, ellentétben más bevett egyházakkal, mint például a Katolikus Egyház vagy a neoprotestáns Hit Gyülekezete.

Executive Summary

The year 2023 was yet another calm year for Muslims in Hungary. Few Islamophobic attacks came to public awareness and interviews from Muslim leaders echoed the same dynamics. Still, the political climate did not become more accommodating to Islam and Muslims. Islam is still regarded as an alien religion by the governing elite and Muslims are still presented as an outside threat to Western European countries, but not to Hungary directly as a result of its small Muslim population.

The war in Gaza that started in October affected Muslims living in Hungary, as well. Protests in support of Palestinians or in support of a ceasefire were not permitted by the state authorities. Even though there were no reported incidents of Islamophobic attacks, there was a highly publicized verbal attack on a Muslim footballer who was called a “ Hamas bomber ” by football fans during a match in the lower divisions of the Hungarian football championship.

Political actors from almost all sides of the political spectrum have a very skeptical attitude towards migration and migrants in general. Thanks to the governing coalition’s discourse, migration has been interlinked with the threat of terrorism, crime, social disorder, and Muslims. The media empire KESMA that is linked to the governing FIDESZ-led coalition published articles that framed pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Western Europe as protests organized by migrants to support Islamic terrorism. The conspiracy theory dealing with the so-called Great Replacement was taken up by prominent political actors such as PM Viktor Orbán and was spread in KESMA publications.

Even though, Muslim church-recognized organizations enjoy the highest level of state recognition of established churches, they are still not able to sign a so-called Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement (CCA) with the government. As a result, they cannot have closer cooperation with the state, unlike other established churches such as the Catholic Church or the neo-Protestant Community of the Faith.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Hungary

Type of Regime: Parliamentary republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary representative democracy

Ruling Parties: FIDESZ (FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance) (governs in coalition with the micro-party KDNP [Christian Democratic People’s Party])

Opposition Parties: Democratic Coalition (DK), Jobbik – Conservatives (Jobbik – Konzervatívok or, commoly, Jobbik; previously known as “Movement for a Better Hungary” [Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom]), Momentum Movement (Momentum Mozgalom), Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt), Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk Mozgalom), Dialogue – The Party of the Greens (Párbeszéd – Zöldek Pártja), Politics Can Be Different (Lehet Más a Politika)

Last Elections: 3 April 2022

Total Population: 9,599,744 (2023)

Major Languages: Hungarian

Official Religion: No state religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Catholicism (31%), Other Christian Denominations (12%), Judaism (0.07%), Islam (0.08%), Unaffiliated (18.2%) (Central Statistical Office, 2022 Census)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 7,983 or 0.08% of the population (Central Statistical Office, 2012 Census). Sulok (2010) estimates the figure around 32,000 (0.3%).

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Hungarian Islamic Legal Aid Association, Menedék Hungarian Association for Migrants, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Subjective Values Foundation, Amnesty International Hungary

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Organization of Muslims in Hungary (Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza), Hungarian Islamic Community (Magyar Iszlám Közösség)

Far-Right Parties: FIDESZ (FIDESZ – Hungarian Civic Alliance), Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk Mozgalom)

Far-Right Movements: Army of Outlaws (Betyársereg), Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hatvannégyszéki Ifjúsági Mozgalom), Hungarian Legion (Legio Hungaria), Hungarian Self-Defense Movement (Magyar Önvédelmi Mozga-

lom), Force and Determination (Erő es Elszántság), Hungarian Principled Movement (Magyarelvű Mozgalom)

Far-Right Violent Organizations: None

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No

Introduction

2023 was a calm year for Muslims in Hungary. There were no recorded attacks against Islamic buildings in the country. Despite being sustained by senior political actors, the government-supported securitized narrative on migration and Muslims most of the time was not at the forefront. The war between Ukraine and Russia still took the limelight away from this issue.

Looking at some of the speeches of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and other members of the political elite, it becomes clear, that the topic of migration and Muslims is still present on the agenda of leading political actors. Other social and religious actors also took up this issue.

The war in Gaza resulted in the government banning related protests. As a result, no demonstrations were allowed to go ahead calling for an end to the conflict in Gaza. Still, the war in Gaza brought some anti-Muslim sentiment to the surface.

The Muslim population of Hungary is estimated between 30,000 and 40,000 individuals. The community was created by Muslims who settled down in Hungary during the 1970s and 1980s, when Hungary had strong connections with “friendly” and “progressive” socialist-leaning countries of the Middle East, such as Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan, with the help of local Hungarian converts. This small, but increasing number of converts also play a tangible role in the country. A high number of Muslim university students are also present in the country, but most of them leave Hungary after they finish their studies. Recently, an increasing number of so-called guest workers have arrived in Hungary; whether they will be able to stay for a longer term, remains to be seen.

Hungary has a long history of Muslim presence on its territory, but this presence was never continuous. Small Muslim communities living in Hungary settled down with the first Hungarian tribes in the 9th century, but disappeared by the 14th century. There was also a Muslim presence in the country during the Ottoman invasion, but again it disappeared after the eviction of the Ottomans at the end of the 17th century. Bosnia’s annexation and eventual occupation at the end of the 19th century meant the continuous presence of Muslims in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which led to the official recognition of Islam in 1916. Still, the number of Muslims living in Hungary at this time and during the interwar period was minuscule. This is the reason why in the collective memory of Hungarian society Islam is not considered as part of Hungarian heritage: Muslims and Islam are still considered as alien to Hungarian culture.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

There is no recorded data on physical attacks on Muslims in 2023. However, we need to keep in mind that there is a latency in this regard. Still, leaders of the main Muslim communities and Balázs Bakó, head of the Hungarian Islamic Legal Aid Association, did not receive any reports on attacks. There was one widely publicized verbal attack on football player Mohamed Remili during a lower league match in October when Remili was called a “ Hamas bomber ” by some fans during the match.¹

In the online space, there was also a notable incident on the Facebook page of the Hungarian Islamic Community (Magyar Iszlám Közösség, HIC). In Hungary, religious communities recognized as churches are allowed to receive 1% of the income tax of individuals. As individuals need to make this donation themselves, church-recognized communities often plea for this donation in various communication channels, including social media. Under one such post by the HIC on Facebook, the number of emojis betraying negative attitudes (laughing and angry emojis) highly outnumbered the ones with positive meaning (thumbs up and heart).² In other words, the majority of those responding with an emoji to this post expressed a negative attitude towards the HIC trying to collect donations from the public.

Employment

Employment of Muslims is not problematic in the capital city of Budapest. From online conversations on social media, it becomes clear that even though there may be cases of religious discrimination against Muslims in the capital, there are a number of employers who do not discriminate against Muslims. Still according to the head of the Organization of Muslims in Hungary Szultán Sulok there are certain jobs that are off limits to Muslims, such as becoming a member of the law enforcement agencies and the military.³ There are no explicit bans on Muslims, rather an informal negative attitude that results in almost no Muslim joining these organizations. In contrast to living in the countryside, Muslims living in Budapest find it much easier to obtain employment; however, foreign students residing in Hungary have complained that it was not possible for them to find a job or get to a job interview if they have Arabic-sounding names, whereas their non-Muslim peers do not face such discrimi-

1. Hang Magyar. “Börszine miatt ‘robbantós hamászoszták’ a magyar Remilit Csornán.” Magyar Hang, October 31, 2023. <https://hang.hu/sport/robbantos-hamaszos-migrans-kiabaltak-a-magyar-remilinek-158939>, (Accessed November 2 2023 from <https://hang.hu/sport/robbantos-hamaszos-migrans-kiabaltak-a-magyar-remilinek-158939>)
2. Post on the Facebook page of the HIC, retrieved 16 March 2023 from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/magyariszlam/permalink/6595601447136027/>
3. Presentation given Sulok on 18 April 2024.

nation. For Muslims in Hungary, living in the countryside may be more challenging. This is particularly true for female Muslims who choose to wear the veil.⁴

Education

There are a number of elementary and secondary schools that are linked to transnational Muslim organizations in Budapest. The Al Wahda Arab School⁵ is linked to the Libyan government. The recently opened Maarif School was opened with the support of the Turkish government.⁶ There are no denominational schools belonging to the Hungarian Muslim denominations that are recognized as churches as the government has chosen not to sign Comprehensive Cooperation Agreements (CAAs) with them. This means they are not entitled to state funding to create and run their own denominational schools.

However, by law, the Hungarian Islamic Community provides religious education to Muslim pupils upon the request of their parents. For this service, the government gives financial support to the Muslim churches. From interviews with the representatives of Muslim churches, Muslim parents are not always made aware of the availability of such services in their schools. The Organization of Muslims in Hungary provides weekend schools for the children belonging to their community.

In Hungarian school textbooks, Islam is not framed as a religion that belongs to Hungary. Through the Stipendium Hungaricum program,⁷ many international students, including Muslims, study at Hungarian universities with government funding. After the war in Gaza broke out and the government decided not to allow related demonstrations, foreign students with Stipendium Hungaricum scholarships received emails from the government-supported Tempus Public Foundation managing the scholarships. The email requested students to refrain from any action that fellow students or anybody around them may find offensive. The email also reminded them that their behavior will not only reflect on them but on their home country as well.⁸ Many Muslim students found the email threatening. The Tempus Public Foundation later commented on the incident, stating that in their opinion some students misinterpreted the email and that the Stipendium Hungaricum is positioned far from current political events.⁹

4. There was a lively discussion about wearing the veil and other Islamic garments for women on the Facebook page of a Hungarian Muslim vlogger Tímea Csányi called “Muslim Stories” (Muslim Mesék). Accessed September 23 2024 from <https://www.facebook.com/muszlimmesek.hu>

5. KIR Intézménykereső retrieved March 6 2023 from https://www.oktatas.hu/hivatali_ugyek/kir_intezmenykereso!/KIR_Intezmenykereso/Intezmeny/Index/201154

6. KIR Intézménykereső retrieved March 6 2023 from https://www.oktatas.hu/hivatali_ugyek/kir_intezmenykereso!/KIR_Intezmenykereso/Intezmeny/Index/203397

7. Stipendium Hungaricum. “4 must known facts about Stipendium Hungaricum from 2022/2023 - Stipendium Hungaricum,” (Accessed March 6 2023 from <https://stipendiumhungaricum.hu/news/4-must-known-facts-about-stipendium-hungaricum-from-2022-2023/>)

8. Email sent out by Tempus Public Foundation to Stipendium Hungaricum students in October 2023.

9. Email from the Tempus Public Foundation sent on 19 June 2024.

Politics

According to Balázs Bakó, head of the Hungarian Islamic Legal Aid Association, 2023 was again a relatively peaceful year for Muslims in Hungary as far as Islamophobia is concerned.¹⁰ The same sentiment was echoed by Szultán Sulok, head of the Organization of Muslims in Hungary and Ahmed Kovács, representative of the Hungarian Islamic Community.¹¹ The Muslim communities did not face extraordinary pressure from societal and political actors. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) survey that investigates hate crimes in member countries every year did not have available data for 2023 at the time of writing this paper, and Bakó, who reports for this organization, did not record any incidents.¹²

The International Day Against Islamophobia (IDAI) on March 15 was not commemorated in Hungary. March 15 is one of Hungary's most important national holidays, celebrating Hungary's uprising against the Habsburg Empire in 1848 and the IDAI would have to compete with the latter. In the current political climate, no political leaders or press organization based in Hungary reported on this matter. The only Hungarian language press outlet that reported on the IDAI was the Turkish TRT.net. However, even this news site chose to publish an article on March 16, one day after IDAI and the Hungarian national holiday.¹³

Even though the political spotlight was not on migration and Muslims, leading politicians still made some negative remarks in the topic. In a speech during the yearly Hungarian gathering in the Transylvanian Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp in July, PM Viktor Orbán seemed to embrace the Great Replacement theory, when he stated, "The European Union rejects Christian heritage, conducts population exchange through migration, and conducts an LGBTQ campaign against family-friendly European nations."¹⁴ During the EU's annual State of the Union debate in September, FIDESZ MEP Balázs Hídvégi was speaking of a "shameful ideological jihad against conservative governments" waged by the EU Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen.¹⁵ In a speech in November, PM Orbán spoke about the inability of a secularized liberal Europe to integrate Muslims. He also voiced his skepticism about integrating Muslims in Europe in general, stating that "from a spiritual point of view, at the moment, the Muslim world is stronger than the Christian one,

10. Interview with Balázs Bakó on 22.01.2024.

11. Interview with Szultán Sulok on 25.05.2024 and with Ahmed Kovács on 24.01.2024.

12. Interview with Balázs Bakó on 22.01.2024.

13. "Az iszlamofobia elleni világnapon üzent az amerikai külügyminiszter", *TRT Magyar*, March 16, 2023. (Accessed September 23 2024 from <https://www.trt.net.tr/magyar/nagyvilag/2023/03/16/az-islamofobia-elleni-vilagnapon-uzent-az-amerikai-kulugyminiszter-1960844>)

14. Orbán Viktor. "Orbán Viktor előadása a XXXII. Bálványosi Nyári Szabadegyetem és Diáktáborban.", August 14, 2023, retrieved 27 June 2024 from <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-xxxii-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban/>

15. EU Multimedia Centre. "State of the European Union 2023: MEPs debate (part 1)", retrieved September 14 2023 from https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/sk/video/_I244633

so we cannot hope that we can promote integration even with the power of the Christian religion and worldview.”¹⁶

As the employable population of Hungary is on a steady decline, the government decided to allow an increasing number of guest workers into the country. These guest workers are contracted by major companies or government-certified recruitment agencies.¹⁷ They are mainly recruited from non-EU countries, including ones with Muslims-majority populations, such as Kazakhstan, or with tangible Muslim minorities, such as India. The arrival of guest workers created tensions in the Hungarian countryside. One well-publicized incident was linked to the famous spa town of Hajdúszoboszló. The city’s mayor and many locals voiced their concerns on social media about the coming of guest workers into the city.¹⁸ In his Facebook post, the mayor of Hajdúszoboszló promised to do his utmost to prevent more guest workers from coming to the city.¹⁹ Locals were afraid of the presence of guest workers and felt betrayed by the government. This is a clear sign of how years of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim propaganda pushed by government-related outlets has backfired in these communities.

In September, the *Guardian* reported that the Hungarian authorities regularly push back immigrants from Hungarian territory into Serbia.²⁰ In one case, police pushed back an individual, who was hospitalized at the time of his arrest and was not able to move properly. It is assumed that a number of these people have a Muslim background. The harsh treatment of so-called irregular immigrants is still an ongoing issue on the borders of the country. What is more, the report of the Helsinki Committee demonstrates that Hungarian authorities use the country’s rather strict asylum policy, which requires immigrants to start their asylum applications from outside the country, to decrease the number of asylum applications to the lowest possible number.²¹ As a result, there were only four cases granted by Hungarian authorities where families were able to enter Hungary to claim asylum.

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16. Original quote: “(L)elki szempontból jelen pillanatban a muszlim világ erősebb, mint a keresztény, ezért mi csak abban sem reménykedhetünk, hogy a keresztény vallás és világlátás erejével elő tudjuk segíteni az integrációt.” Source: Orbán Viktor. “Orbán Viktor előadása a Magyar Állandó Értekezlet XXI. ülésén”, November 17, 2023, retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-magyar-allando-ertekezlet-xxi-ulesen/>
 17. Kapolyi Ügyvédi Iroda, “Magyarország új vendégmunkás törvénye: Alkalmazkodik az igényekhez, vagy elégedetlenséget szít?”, September 7, 2023, retrieved December 15 2023 from <https://kapolyi.com/magyarorszag-uj-vendegmunkas-torvenye-alkalmazkodik-az-igenyekhez-vagy-elegedetlenseget-szit/>
 18. Facebook post of Kálmán Jónás, a local councilor at Hajdúszoboszló, July 16 2023, retrieved August 16 2023 from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=692612026211975&set=a.271523238320858>
 19. The statement by mayor of Hajdúszoboszló Gyula Czeglédi on Facebook, July 27 2023, retrieved August 3 2023 from <https://www.facebook.com/groups/szoboszlonthallottam/permalink/6479512228829313/>
 20. Reporter, Guardian Staff. “How did he die and I didn’t?: Hungary’s spate of car crashes involving police and migrants.” *The Guardian*, September 28, 2023., retrieved January 15 2024 from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/26/how-did-he-die-and-i-didnt?: Hungary's spate of car crashes involving police and migrants?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR3rebHBN2J_3wPnOX6ixP4oM_UrmDLMwm-17F1GBL_p-JHK0WVAC-hk7l_g
 21. Magyar Helsinki Bizottság. “Nincs menedék.” *Tájékoztató a Nagykövetségi Rendszerről*, June 20, 2023, retrieved September 15 2023 from <https://helsinki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Nincs-menedek-2023.pdf>

Throughout the year, international courts rolled out a number of sentences condemning the Hungarian government for violating the human rights of immigrants, a large number of whom have a Muslim background. In June, the Court of the European Union condemned Hungary for its practice of allowing the claiming of asylum only at Hungarian embassies outside the country.²² Also, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) condemned Hungarian authorities for violating the rights and physically harming irregular migrants. The violations include illegal detention and physical abuse of minors, who in both cases originated from Muslim-majority countries.²³ In September, the Helsinki Committee reported another round of verdicts by the ECtHR, condemning Hungary in two cases of illegal detention of irregular migrants, both of them from Muslim-majority countries.²⁴ It is clear that in these cases the victims are from an Islamic background; however there is no evidence that they were harassed because of their religious background.

Media

In February, the tabloid *Blikk* published an article about a Muslim woman swimming in the pool of a hotel in Budapest wearing a burkini.²⁵ Other press outlets did not share this story, so the case did not receive public attention. The new regulation of the company Budapest Spas and Hot Springs issued in June explicitly allows the wearing of the burkini in the public baths of Budapest.²⁶

The Hungarian media can be divided into two parts: The first, and larger one, is controlled by forces close to the governing FIDESZ party. Media outlets that are linked to the Central European Press and Media Foundation (Közép Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány - KESMA) are closely linked to the governing elite. These outlets are likely to push anti-migrant and anti-Muslim discourse, when the governing elite requires them to do so.

Such outlets when dealing with Muslims and Islam, do not focus on Hungary, but on the outside world. Filtering the articles of one of the biggest online KESMA news portal, Origo.hu, for the keywords “Islam” and “Muslim,” one finds articles that

22. JUDGMENT OF THE COURT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (Fourth Chamber) In Case C-823/21, ACTION for failure to fulfil obligations under Article 258 TFEU, brought on 22 December 2021, retrieved August 1 2023 from <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=274870&pageIndex=0&doclang=HU&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=268610>
23. Zsolt Zádori. “Három strasbourgi ítélet is elmarasztalta a kormány gyalázatos menekültpolitikáját.” Magyar Helsinki Bizottság, May 15, 2023, retrieved September 15 2023 from <https://helsinki.hu/harom-strasbourgi-itelet-is-elmarasztalta-a-kormany-gyalazatos-menekultpolitikajat/>
24. Magyar Helsinki Bizottság. “Újabb menekültek győztek a strasbourgi bíróságon.”, October 10, 2023, retrieved October 15 2023 from <https://helsinki.hu/ujabb-menekulok-gyoztek-a-strasbourgi-birosagon/>
25. Blikk. “Burkiniben csobbant a szálló medencéjében: leesett állal nézte a protokollszakértő a vendéget a wellnessben,” February 27, 2023, retrieved February 20 2023 from https://www.blikk.hu/aktualis/belfold/burkini-budapest-szallo-vendeg-medence/zwnfml1?fbclid=IwAR3k4lp-JC4p6ioMvxLiHn9ZSMETrmILezVhLgO_jvM7SqqjvaATH5_auw8
26. Budapest Gyógyfürdői és Hévízei zRt. “Házirend”, retrieved 12 March 12 2024 from <https://www.budapestgyogyfurdoi.hu/document/hazirend-230601-2482>

depict Muslims in a mostly negative manner. There are few articles that depict Islam and Muslims as positive actors, and a lot of them depict them as alien to Europe and as a group where extremism is widespread.

In an interview with well-known pro-government figurehead Zoltán Lominci Jr., the online outlet Origo presented demonstrations against the war in Gaza as “demonstrations supporting and propagating Islamist terror.”²⁷ (Fig. 1)



Figure 1: “Migrants Supporting Muslim Terror Rampage in Western Europe” – an article from Origo, member of the KESMA group. **Source:** Flóra Fónyi-Tisóczki. “Tombolnak a muszlim terrort támogató migránsok Nyugat-Európában.” *ORIGO*, October 21, 2023, retrieved July 1 2024 from <https://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/2023/10/a-terrorizmus-egesz-europat-fenygeto-veszely-amely-egyre-csak-fokozodik>

In an op-ed for *Magyar Nemzet*, the most important KESMA-related daily newspaper, the author openly embraces the idea of the Great Replacement theory. The article “This Is No Longer Migration: Population Replacement” discusses how one may lose their job if they mention the Great Replacement theory in Western Europe.²⁸ In this light, the article presents Central Europe as a domain of common sense and free speech. (Fig. 2)

Local Hungarian Muslims are not part of the media discourse. This may be partly understood as a result of the insignificant size of the Muslim community in the country. Muslim communities also tend to keep a low profile and seldom instigate media attention. It is safe to say that Muslim communities tend to try to stay under the radar of the mainstream media and not to expose themselves in any way.

27. Flóra Fónyi-Tisóczki. “Tombolnak a muszlim terrort támogató migránsok Nyugat-Európában.” *ORIGO*, October 21, 2023, retrieved July 1 2024 from <https://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/2023/10/a-terrorizmus-egesz-europat-fenygeto-veszely-amely-egyre-csak-fokozodik>

28. Dániel Deme. “Ez Már Régen Nem Migráció: Népeségcsere”, *Magyar Nemzet* October 25 2023, retrieved July 1 2024 from <https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemeney/2023/10/ez-mar-regen-nem-migracio-nepesegcsere>



Figure 2: “This Is No Longer Migration: Population Exchange” – an op-ed in the online edition of the KESMA daily, *Magyar Nemzet*. Source: Dániel Deme. “Ez Már Régen Nem Migráció: Népeségcsere”, *Magyar Nemzet* October 25 2023, retrieved July 1 2024 from <https://magyarnemzet.hu/velemeney/2023/10/ez-mar-regen-nem-migracio-nepessegcsere>

Justice system

The current version of Hungary’s Basic Law²⁹ (Constitution) has an ambiguous relation to religion. The Basic Law declares Hungary as a secular country, where religion and the state are separated, and churches and the state function separately; this separation means that the state and churches should not interfere in the affairs of the other. The text also emphasizes freedom of religion and the freedom to change one’s religion (Art. VII).

According to the current Hungarian legislation, religious denominations either choose to work as NGOs in the form of foundations or they can have a recognized status as a church. Being recognized as a church may give religious denominations more possibilities, such as taking part in the religious education in schools or delegating prison chaplains. Currently, there are two church-recognized Muslim organizations in Hungary: the Organization of Muslims in Hungary (OMH) and the Hungarian Islamic Community (HIC).³⁰

However, as mentioned above, the state may partner with churches to provide public services. In this case, the state may sign a Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement (CCA) with a church. This requires the political intention of the government and the support of the legislative body. Until today, no Muslim church was able to sign such an agreement with the state.

29. The Basic Law of Hungary. retrieved Feb 20 2023 from <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a1100425.atv>

30. For more details see: Vékony, Dániel, “Hungary: Religion as the government’s political tool”, Triandafyllidou, Anna; Magazzini, Tina (eds.) *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity*, London, New York: Routledge, 2020) 101-110.

The preamble of the Basic Law also emphasizes Christianity and its role in preserving the Hungarian nation. It praises the first king of Hungary, St. Stephen, for “making Hungary part of Christian Europe.”³¹

The Hungarian legal system is rather neutral towards religions, but it is clear that certain church organizations enjoy a preferential treatment. On the one hand, the multitiered recognition system of churches in the “Law on Churches” creates different categories of church recognition.³² This is paired up with government’s ability to sign a CCA with churches, on the other hand. The churches that can sign a CCA with the government receive substantial additional funding for their social activities. Churches without a CCA seldom have the financial resources to fund extensive infrastructure, which puts them, Muslim churches included, in a disadvantaged position.

Even though, the Hungarian government was very vocal about its fight against so-called illegal immigration, it decided to release hundreds of foreign individuals who were sentenced to prison for human trafficking.³³ The official explanation was that due to the overcrowding of prisons, these individuals would be transferred to reintegration detention. This form of detention was seldom enforced and most of these individuals left Hungary using informal channels.

In July, the trial of a group of skinheads with no established links to any known organization started in Budapest. The district attorney requested a prison sentence for the members of the group. According to the district attorney’s office and the CCTV footage posted on their website, the group attacked the Moroccan victim and verbally abusing him before physically attacking him.³⁴ The notable issue here is that the attorney’s office accused the group of a “crime of violence against a member of a community,”³⁵ which acknowledges that the victim was attacked due to his ethnic or religious belonging. This case makes it clear that the state does not tolerate hate crime even if political leaders sometimes promote Islamophobic discourse.

Internet

KESMA and other government-related media outlets as well as far-right pages regularly depict Muslims as a threat to security and stability of Western European societies. However, Hungarian Muslims are not getting much media and online attention.

31. Ibid.

32. For more details see: Vékony, Dániel, “Hungary: Religion as the government’s political tool” , Triandafyllidou, Anna; Magazzini, Tina (eds.) *Routledge Handbook on the Governance of Religious Diversity*, London, New York: Routledge, 2020) 101-110.

33. Bernadett Nagy. “Egyáltalán nem egyszerű reintegrációs őrizetbe kerülni, ha nem vagy külföldi embercsempész.” Magyar Helsinki Bizottság, June 6, 2023, retrieved June 1 2023 from <https://helsinki.hu/egyaltalan-nem-egyszeru-reintegracios-orizetbe-kerulni-ha-nem-vagy-kulfoldi-embercsempesz/>

34. Fővárosi Főügyészség “Szarmazása miatt támadtak egy marokkói férfira – videóval - a Fővárosi Főügyészség sajtóközleménye”, July 25, 2023, retrieved 29 July 29 2023 from <https://ugyeszseg.hu/szarmazasa-miatt-tamadtak-egy-marokkoi-ferfira-videoval-a-fovarosi-fougyeszseg-sajtokozlemenye/>

35. Ibid.

When taking a look at social media, it is worth mentioning that the FIDESZ-sponsored MEGAFON Center is responsible for training and funding political influencers that amplify the governing elite's discourse. Having investigated the online content created by these political influencers, only very little content was created that is directly or indirectly related to Muslims. This may be due to the fact that Islam and Muslims received little political attention amid the ongoing Ukrainian crisis. One political influencer supporting the government posted a video in which, in line with the FIDESZ-led discourse on immigration, the author of the video supported the idea that people coming from Ukraine should be treated differently than people trying to enter into Hungary from Serbia or other countries illegally.³⁶ Still, not much similar content was published on social media channels in 2023.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

There were no new significant developments in this field. As Farid Hafez has pointed out, in Hungary, Islamophobic attitudes are mainly perpetrated by far-right parties including the governing FIDESZ-led alliance.³⁷ This leaves little room and opportunity for bottom-up organization of Islamophobic groups. As Islamophobic ideas are not taboo, but are often spread by mainstream government-related channels when the political agenda of the governing elite needs it, grassroots movements are rare and hard to observe.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Balázs Bakó, head of the Hungarian Islam Advocacy Association in Hungary (Magyar Iszlám Jogvédő Egyesület, MIJE), told me that there were not many issues and legal problems with Muslims in Hungary, as society and politics focused on other issues. The Hungarian Helsinki Committee and Amnesty International are other NGOs that are active in the field of human rights protection. Overall, however, Islamophobic issues were not in the forefront in 2023.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The year 2023 was another rather calm year as far as Islamophobia is concerned in Hungary. The war in Ukraine still stole the limelight from other issues like Islamophobia and migration.

36. Janka Sebestyén. TikTok video on the difference between migrant and refugees retrieved 2 August 2023 from <https://www.tiktok.com/@jankasebestyen/video/7074641567755078917>

37. Hafez, Farid. "Street-level and government-level Islamophobia in the Visegrád Four countries." *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 5 (October 20, 2018): 436–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322x.2018.1498440>

However, Islam and Muslims were still presented as a threat that is combined with immigration and terrorism. PM Viktor Orbán and government-related media and online channels took up the issue and ideas related to the Great Replacement theory. The discourse promoted by the governing elite is negative towards Muslims, who are presented as alien and unwilling to integrate.

Further evidence of this discourse comes from Gyula Márfi, the retired Catholic archbishop of the Veszprém diocese. In his lectures for the public, he spoke about Muslims and Islam, claiming that Islam's goal is the spiritual and demographic defeat of Europe.³⁸ Márfi does not consider himself to be Islamophobic. In his discussion of Muslims and Islam, he relies on the publications of the Center for the Study of Political Islam founded by Bill Warner.³⁹ This is a well-known and controversial “think tank” spreading negative and simplifying narratives on Islam and Muslims.

Despite its long history in Hungary, Islam is still perceived as an alien culture and religion. With the current government in power, this is not likely to change in the years ahead. It is expected that the Hungarian government will push this discourse in multilateral intergovernmental platforms in the coming years and will look for like-minded partners to form alliances against mainstream political parties.

Chronology

- **21 February 2023** and **5 September 2023:** Hungary's government extends the so-called State of Crisis Caused by Mass Immigration by six months each time; the “State of Crisis” has been in force since 2016,⁴⁰ and has been extended until 7 March 2024.
- **23 July 2023:** In a speech during the annual Hungarian gathering in the Transylvanian Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp, PM Viktor Orbán seemed to embrace the Great Replacement theory, when he stated, “The European Union rejects Christian heritage, conducts population exchange through migration, and conducts an LGBTQ campaign against family-friendly European nations.”⁴¹

38. Ágnes Őrsi. “Márfi Gyula tartott előadást Veszprémében.” *VEOL*, February 22 2023, retrieved July 1 2024 from <https://www.veol.hu/helyi-kozelet/2023/02/marfi-gyula-tartott-eloadast-veszpremben>

39. Nyugat.hu. “Az iszlám Európa csendes megszállására törekszik - Márfi Gyula az iszlám vallásról” April 29 2023, retrieved July 1 2024 from https://www.nyugat.hu/cikk/a_keresztenyseg_es_az_iszlam_mik_a_legfontosabb

40. Tamás Pál. “A kormány szeptemberig meghosszabbította ‘a tömeges bevándorlás okozta válsághelyzetet’.” *Telex*, February 21, 2023, retrieved June 27 2024 from <https://telex.hu/belfold/2023/02/21/a-kormany-szeptemberig-meghosszabbította-a-tomeges-bevandorlas-okozta-valsaghelyzetet>, and Bálint Nagy. “Fél évvel meghosszabbította a kormány ‘a tömeges bevándorlás okozta válsághelyzetet’.” *Telex*, September 5, 2023, retrieved June 27 2024 from <https://telex.hu/belfold/2023/09/05/tomeg-bevandorlas-valsaghelyzet-hosszabitas-marcius-7>

41. Orbán Viktor. “Orbán Viktor előadása a XXXII. Bálványosi Nyári Szabadegyetem és Diáktáborban.”, August 14, 2023, retrieved 27 June 2024 from: <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-xxxii-balvanyosi-nyari-szabadegyetem-es-diaktaborban/>

- **13 September 2023:** During the EU’s annual State of the Union debate, FIDESZ MEP Balázs Hídvégi spoke of a “shameful ideological jihad against conservative governments” waged by the EU Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen.⁴²
- **13 October 2023:** The Hungarian government decided to ban a protest titled “Stand with Gaza.”⁴³ No other demonstrations supporting the Palestinians and condemning Israel have been allowed.
- **17 November 2023:** In a speech, PM Viktor Orbán spoke about the inability of a secularized liberal Europe to integrate Muslims. He voiced his skepticism about integrating Muslims in Europe in general, stating that “from a spiritual point of view, at the moment, the Muslim world is stronger than the Christian one, so we cannot hope that we can promote integration even with the power of the Christian religion and worldview.”⁴⁴

42. EU Multimedia Centre. “State of the European Union 2023: MEPs debate (part 1)” , retrieved September 14 2023 from https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/sk/video/_I244633

43. Hvg.hu “Néhány ember lézengett a betiltott palesztinpárti tüntetésen, volt, aki nem tudta, hogy elmarad.” hvg.hu, October 13, 2023, (Accessed 15 October 2023 from https://hvg.hu/itthon/20231013_betiltott_palesztinpartituntetes_Bem_ter

44. Original quote: “(L)elki szempontból jelen pillanatban a muszlim világ erősebb, mint a keresztény, ezért mi csak abban sem reménykedhetünk, hogy a keresztény vallás és világlátás erejével elő tudjuk segíteni az integrációt.” Source: Orbán Viktor. “Orbán Viktor előadása a Magyar Állandó Értekezlet XXI. ülésén”, November 17, 2023, retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://miniszterelnok.hu/orban-viktor-eloadasa-a-magyar-allando-ertekezlet-xxi-ulesen/>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
IRELAND
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Executive Summary

The data presented below, derived from a range of sources and media reportage analysis, provide evidence and insights on Islamophobia in the Irish context. Previous years' Eid al-Adha celebrations in the country's largest sports stadium, Croke Park, have demonstrated the recognition of the importance of these celebrations for the Muslim community. As per concerning reports in previous years, the popularity of far-right groups continues to grow in Ireland (online and offline) with international connections. Highlighted by a report published in 2023 mapping the online ecosystem of mis- and disinformation in Ireland, problematic reporting practices continue in mainstream Irish media. This report highlights a sample of the evidence of contentious co-location of terms such as 'Muslims', 'Islamic', and 'terrorist'. These instances signify the potential to stigmatise presenting Muslim communities as a monolith with cultural norms alleged to be incompatible with Irish communities and broader democratic values. As in previous reports, the under-reporting of racist incidents remains a point of concern. However, it is notable that hate crime/incident figure on the grounds of religion based on reports made via the police online reporting system, published by An Garda Síochána, the police service in Ireland, for 2023 (42) is over double that from 2022 (20). These data are not disaggregated by religion at time of publication; as such, future releases from other national/international sources require attention.¹ The publication of a bill to strengthen responses to hate speech and hate crime ignited debate both in Ireland and internationally with legislators and policy experts keen to acknowledge the bill will not unduly restrict free speech. The report concludes by highlighting the fact that to purposefully address Islamophobia within Irish society and politics there continues to be much to be done. Improvements in the recording and reporting of Islamophobia and the continued development of initiatives among civil society led by the state are necessary. This report acknowledges the growth of the far right and highlights concerns about an increasing level of off- and online activity in the months leading to both local and EU elections in 2024. Again, the authors repeat a call for continued and ongoing review of legislative frameworks that are beneficial in tackling societal-level instances of Islamophobia in Ireland.

1. An Garda Síochána (2024) Hate Crime Online Reporting Statistics <https://garda.ie/en/information-centre/statistics/hate-crime-statistics.html> accessed: July 4th, 2024. "This report is based on provisional data, in respect of reports received through the online reporting system from 1st January 2023 – 31st December 2023 and is correct as of 18th April 2024."

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Ireland

Type of Regime: Republic

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: Coalition of Fine Gael (centre-right), Fianna Fáil – The Republican Party (centrist), Green Party (centrist Green)

Opposition Parties: Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, People Before Profit–Solidarity, Aontú, Labour

Last Elections: General Election 2020 (seats followed percentage of first preference votes): Sinn Féin 37 (24.53%), Fianna Fáil – The Republican Party 38 (22.18%), Fine Gael 35 (20.86%), Green Party 12 (7.13%), Labour 6 (4.38), Social Democrats 6 (2.90%), People Before Profit–Solidarity 5 (2.63%), Independents/Others 21 (15.39%)

Total Population: 5,149,139 (Census 2022)

Major Languages: Irish, English

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: Official police data based on reports made via their online reporting system note a figure of 42 ‘anti-religion’ hate crimes/incidents for 2023. This is an over 100% increase on previous figures for this category, which, for 2022, stood at 20. These data are not disaggregated by religious identity at time of writing.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: Reports made via the online reporting system contributing to official police data note a figure of 42 ‘anti-religion’ hate crimes/incidents for 2023. In 2022, this stood at 20. These data are not disaggregated by religious identity at time of writing. Categories on colour (61), ethnicity (54), nationality (128), and race (251) were also recorded, with same caveats noted applying. The latter was the largest category overall, 123 greater than the second largest which was nationality.

Major Religions (% of Population): Catholicism (69%), No religion (14%), Church of Ireland/England/Anglican/Episcopalian (2.4%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 81,930 (1.6%) in Census 2022

Main Muslim Community Organisations: In no specific order: Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, Islamic Centre of Ireland, Muslim Association of Ireland, Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre, Irish Sufi Foundation

Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia: Doras, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Irish Network Against Racism Ireland

Far-Right Parties: National Party, Irish Freedom Party, Ireland First, The Irish People

Far-Right Movements: Síol na hÉireann, Anti-Corruption Ireland, Identity Ireland

Far-Right Militant Organisations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No

Introduction

The “Islamophobia in Ireland: National Report 2023” again focuses on the realities of Irish anti-Muslim racism within the state. As highlighted in the previous years’ reporting, attacks online and offline against individuals foreground the 2023 report. This is followed with a presentation of insights into the Irish media landscape. From here, the report engages with evidence of online anti-Muslim hostility, before reflecting on the key figures propagating Islamophobia in Ireland. This report concludes with recommendations for combatting Islamophobia in Ireland.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

As noted above, official police data based on reports made via their online reporting system note a figure of 42 ‘anti-religion’ motivated hate crimes/incidents for 2023. This is an over 100% increase on previous figures for this category, which, for 2022, stood at 20. These data are not disaggregated by religious identity. As such it is not possible to gauge how many of these are associated with anti-Muslim hostility. Furthermore, these data are only based on online system reports, combining crime and non-crime acts. Nonetheless, this increased figure is worrying given the patterns in the Irish context as detailed below and set to trends in Europe in the post October 7 environment.²

In Ireland, the continuing housing crisis and increasing cost of living has generated a sense of anger and frustration among many people who struggle to find affordable accommodation. This anger has been exploited by far-right groups who identify and target minorities, especially refugees and migrants, as the cause of the crisis. This rhetoric powers prejudice and discrimination such as Islamophobia and diverts attention from the real causes of these societal injustices and undermines efforts to find constructive solutions.

In November 2023, following the unprovoked attack on three schoolchildren and their teacher in Dublin city centre a night of explosive protests erupted in Ireland’s capital. Four hundred police officers, including many in riot gear, were reportedly deployed to contain the unrest.³ The protests followed an immense surge in disinformation shared online across Meta platforms, TikTok, and Telegram, among others. Ireland’s media regulator published a statement expressing concern over the incitement of violence targeting minority communities and anti-immigrant rhetoric. The regulator said,

2. See for example Dokustelle (2024) Antimuslimischer Rassismus Report 2023 <https://dokustelle.at/reports/dokustelle-report-2023> accessed: July 4th 2024.

3. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/24/dublin>

We remain concerned about the spread of videos or imagery showing graphic violence, speech inciting hatred or violence, and the spread of disinformation and misinformation.⁴

Aoife Gallagher for the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (and author of the *Uisce Faoi Thalamb Report*)⁵ commented on the agitators of the protest saying, “There was a serious effort across online platforms by individuals that we would be very familiar with because we look at them all the time.” Gallagher went on, “These are people associated with anti-immigration protests and far-right ideologies.”⁶

Contemporary political discourse in Ireland features immigration and notes the growing threat of far-right and anti-immigrant activists. Capitalising on the country’s housing crisis, these actors staunchly oppose Ireland’s immigration policies and mobilise organising protests and disruption outside properties that are rumoured to be earmarked for those seeking international protection.⁷



Figure 1: Screenshot of post by Conor McGregor subsequently investigated by authorities in connection to the anti-immigration riots and protests in Dublin.⁸

Engagements with Muslim communities on the evening of the attack and in the aftermath of the riots revealed a visceral sense of fear within the communities of impending hostility and rumours of others being assaulted or abused. In response, the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council issued a statement to community members.

4. Donovan, Brian, Regulator concerned over spread of disinformation on social media, RTE, 24 November 2023, available: <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2023/1124/1418324-coimisiun-na-mean-on-dublin-riots/> accessed July 2nd 2024.

5. Aoife Gallagher, Ciarán O’Connor & Francesca Visser. *Uisce Faoi Thalamb An Investigation Into the Online Mis- and Disinformation Ecosystem in Ireland*. London Institute for Strategic Dialogue. 2023.

6. Donovan, Brian, Regulator concerned over spread of disinformation on social media, RTE, 24 November 2023, available: <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2023/1124/1418324-coimisiun-na-mean-on-dublin-riots/> accessed July 2nd 2024.

7. <http://www.ipo.gov.ie/en/ipo/pages/permissiontoremain>

8. Conor McGregor (@NortoriousMMA). “Ireland we are at war”. X, (Nov 22, 2023), retrieved 2 July, 2024 from <https://twitter.com/TheNotoriousMMA/status/1727463168283124036?> Conor Gallagher, Ronan McGreevy and Cormac McQuinn, Conor McGregor social media posts on Dublin riots being examined by gardai, 28th November 2023, The Irish Times, <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/dublin/2023/11/28/conor-mcgregor-social-media-posts-on-dublin-riots-being-examined-by-gardai/>. Accessed 5th September 2024.



Figure 2: Anti-immigration protests gather in Dublin city in January 2023.⁹

Migrants should not be made scapegoats for the failings in addressing our societal issues [...] we must collectively reject such divisive ideologies. In light of concerning online content advocating violence against migrants, *we call upon our fellow Muslims to exercise vigilance, particularly around mosques. We advise against unnecessary travel to Dublin City this weekend, especially during the evening and night, to ensure everyone's security.*¹⁰

Employment

Muslims and Islam are an integral part of contemporary Irish society. The relationship between Muslims, Islam, and Ireland is not a new phenomenon. Although the numbers of Muslims residing in the state are considerably greater than at any other time, there is a long history of interaction. The most recent Census figures today place Ireland's Muslim communities at 81,930.¹¹ The vast majority of Muslims in Ireland live in Dublin and Limerick, Galway, and Cork. Since 2016, research has underscored the intersectional character of this discrimination. Muslim women are almost twice as likely to experience anti-Muslim hatred as their male counterparts.¹² These have included experiences of discrimination in/looking for work, with the hijab being reported as a key factor for women in this regard.¹³ In the case of individuals who

9. Sarah Burns, Immigration protest and counter rally in Dublin attract hundreds. *The Irish Times*, 21 January 2023. Available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/01/21/immigration-protest-and-counter-rally-in-dublin-attract-hundreds/>. Accessed 2nd July 2024.

10. <https://irishmuslimcouncil.ie/2023/11/24/statement>. Emphasis authors' own.

11. Central Statistics Office (2024) Census 2022 Profile 5 – Diversity, Migration, Ethnicity, Irish Travellers and Religion <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp5/census2022profile5-diversitymigrationethnicityirishtravellersreligion/> accessed: 4th June 2024.

12. Carr, J. (2011). Regulating Islamophobia: The Need for Collecting Disaggregated Data on Racism in Ireland. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31(4), 574–593. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2011.630863>

13. Ibid.

do experience discrimination in a professional setting, it is noted that an individual's ethnic or religious beliefs are often assumed. Soon to be published evidence gathered for the Sustainable Alliances Against Anti-Muslim Hatred (SALAAM) project based in the University of Limerick demonstrates the difficulties experienced by Muslim women when seeking, or indeed in employment, with the wearing of the headscarf, in particular, being the focus of attention. Here, the authors note the need for more detailed examination of relevant policies and practices in Ireland to combat any such discriminatory behaviours in the workplace.

Education

Notably, World Hijab Day 2023 again saw media coverage from schools around the country. The majority of commentary from students interviewed conveyed positive messages of understanding and engagement amongst their peers. Simultaneously, other members of the Muslim community continue to face harassment and prejudice both at home and in the classroom. This was noted in the data provided to iReport for 2022. Here, students within the Irish Higher Education system reported being the recipients of discriminatory and less favourable treatment. Again, the co-location of Islam extremist or terrorist groups presents discriminatory attitudes and experiences for Muslim students in Ireland.

They are associated with extremist groups and accused of being part of those groups. In one incident, a security guard in one of the universities in Dublin explicitly named one of the terrorist groups and asked Muslim students if they were part of that group.¹⁴

Studying experiences of Muslim university students in light of the 2018 referendum on Irish abortion law saw that post-2018, their sense of belonging in Ireland had not changed.

When presented with the question in the interview: "Did the outcome of the abortion referendum change your sense of belonging to the Irish community?" most participants claimed that there was no change to their sense of belonging.

Of note a key finding of this study states,¹⁵

Although the participants largely supported the referendum's outcome, they grounded this opinion in their religious faith. This finding concurs with wider European trends on the importance of religious perspectives on moral decision-making.¹⁶

14. Lucy Micheal, Daniel Reynolds, Dr. Niloufar Omid and Peer Advisory Group, Reports of Racism in Ireland: Data from iReport.ie – Annual Report 2022. Dublin: Irish Network Against Racism, 2023.

15. David M Doyle, Joe Garrihy, Maria Cleary, Mairead Murphy, Foreign National Prisoners and Religious Practice in Irish Prisons, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 15, Issue 2, July 2023, Pages 606–612, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huad001>

16. Kashyap, R., & Lewis, V. A. (2013). British Muslim youth and religious fundamentalism: A quantitative investigation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(12), 2117–2140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.672761>

Politics

In Ireland, the use of Islamophobic discourse by politicians is often influenced by global and local socio-political contexts. Politicians may adopt such rhetoric to appeal to specific voter bases, especially those concerned about immigration and cultural integration.¹⁷ This can also be a strategy to divert attention from other critical issues such as economic policy failures, healthcare system deficiencies, or housing crises. Islamophobic discourses may serve to shift public focus. Focusing on an “other” can be a way to rally support and distract from pressing domestic issues. For Muslim communities in Ireland, this fosters a climate of hostility and fear, potentially leading to social divisions and undermining social cohesion.

The use of Islamophobic discourse can be used to legitimise discriminatory practices and policies. In Irish politics this discourse is at risk of conflation within larger anti-immigration rhetoric. In December the following remark was made in the Dáil:

Other European Union (EU) countries tighten immigration laws, while Ireland’s more attractive laws result in “asylum tourism”.¹⁸

The leader of the National Party and party members have frequently positioned themselves against what they describe as the “Islamisation” of Ireland, framing Muslim immigrants as a threat to Irish culture and security. These narratives, although not mainstream, contribute to a broader climate of Islamophobia in certain political fringes. Moreover, these do not operate in contextual isolation.

In previous reports on Ireland, the connectivity between far-right actors in Ireland has been evident. Far-right, anti-migrant discourses and activities in Ireland also feed into the broader European context. Protests by far-right groups in France have been significantly influenced by the Dublin riots on November 23, 2023. The Dublin unrest was sparked by a knife attack in Parnell Square that injured three children and a woman. French far-right activists used the events in Dublin as a rallying cry, sharing videos of the riots on Telegram and highlighting the assailant’s Algerian origin to incite anti-immigrant sentiment.¹⁹

March 15th, 2023 marked the inaugural UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia. In acknowledgement, the Irish Muslim Council released a statement that noted the growing anti-immigration and far-right presence and rhetoric spreading through the country. Likewise, the statement noted positive steps towards integration and understanding towards the Irish Muslim community. For instance, the cel-

17. <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/housing-crisis-key-catalyst-for-rising-anti-immigrant-sentiment-in-ireland-dail-committee-warns/a228169779.html>

18. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2023-12-06/8/>

19. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2023/11/29/dublin-riots-were-trigger-for-french-far-right-protests-says-policing-source/> <https://www.breakingnews.ie/world/french-far-right-protests-were-stirred-by-dublin-riots-sources-claim-1558212.html>

eburation of Eid al-Adha in Croke Park is seen as a positive and notable step towards combatting Islamophobia in the state.

This dangerous rhetoric also fuels prejudice and discrimination such as Islamophobia, and also diverts attention from the real causes of the housing crisis [...]. While the problem of Islamophobia is concerning, there have also been positive developments in recent years, such as the Eid celebration held in Croke Park in the past three years. The event sends a powerful message of inclusion and acceptance to Muslims throughout the country.²⁰

Media²¹

Previous Islamophobia reports noted evidence of problematic language use in Irish media, including the co-location of Muslim/Islam(ic) with terms such as extremist, terrorism, attack, etc., potential stigmatising an entire community.²² In 2023, media reporting in response to the growing far-right groups across the country regularly featured or mentioned minority groups such as the Muslim community. Reporting with reference to Muslim communities is routinely co-located within reports, the focus of which centres on conversations and debates on Ireland's migration policy particularly proceeding the riots in Dublin (November 2023). As such, a sample of the reports returned were analysed in attempts to deepen understanding of the lived experience of Muslim communities in Ireland. Largely, these reports documented the experiences of individuals and communities set to the backdrop of emboldened far-right actors.

A man standing nearby [...] said he was not protesting “race or religion” before adding that he was not happy with the presence of Muslim communities in Ireland: “We don't have any border security, we're wide open. The people who come here don't assimilate.”²³

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20. Islamic Centre of Ireland, UN International Day to combat Islamophobia, 15 March 2023, *islamiccentre.ie*. 15 March 2023, available: <https://www.islamiccentre.ie/15th-march-un-international-day-to-combat-islamophobia/>. Accessed 11 August 2024.
 21. In line with previous reports for Ireland in the *European Islamophobia Report*, an analysis of media in Ireland was undertaken for 2023 using the Nexis online database (<https://advance.lexis.com/bisnexishome/?pdmfid=1519360&ccrid=86790095-5897-4a20-aafc-f74a84db668e>) (Access date: 28 June 2024). The focus of this analysis was three key issues reported on by Irish media: (1) Media reports of Eid al-Adha celebrations; (2) Muslim communities in the context of the Dublin riots; (3) and Irish Muslim communities in the context of Israel-Palestine conflict. The search terms applied to the Nexis database were: Islam* or Muslim* AND Croke OR Eid from 1 July to 1 August, for experiences of Muslim communities in light of Dublin Riots for the period from 23 November to 31 December 2023; and, Islam OR Muslim AND Palestine OR Gaza OR Israel OR West Bank from 8 October to 31 December 2023. A sample of the returned articles were subject to analysis. The media publications included in the searches of the Nexis media database were *Sunday Independent* (Ireland), *RTE News* (Ireland), *The Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Examiner*, *Irish Daily Mail*, and *Irish Mirror.ie*.
 22. Louise Ryan, James Carr: Islamophobia in Ireland: National Report 2022, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2022*, Vienna: Leopold Weiss Institute, 2023.
 23. <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/11/09/anti-immigration-protest-at-leinster-house-leads-to-temporary-street-closures/>

“I have been called all the insults: ‘Bin Laden’, ‘ISIS’, ‘Taliban’, ‘Ayatollah’, you name it. He said “You can say I’ve got it from all the extreme angles.”²⁴

We are all taking about it [Dublin riots] and we are worried, the Muslim community included, said Kamel Ghamen, an Algerian man who moved to Ireland in the 1970s. But when you look at it, the relationship with the Muslim community has been very good. Irish people have stood up for Palestine... We from Algeria admire this nation.²⁵

Prior to Eid celebrations the media provided reports on the experiences of Irish Muslims.

I became a victim to racial slurs when I put on my headscarf. I became a foreigner in my own country. Society took my identity. I changed my faith, I didn’t change anything else about myself. I started to get slurs from people who didn’t know me – “go back to where you came from” - and I’d be like, “where, the northside of Dublin?” “It was funny when I came back to them with a strong Dublin accent,” she says. But of course there’s nothing funny about xenophobia.²⁶

Media reporting during the period examined, heavily featured interviews with Muslim women, focusing on their community work and fostering relationships within Irish communities.

I am a first-generation Muslim, our culture is new in Ireland, whereas if you go over to London, Piccadilly Circus is lit up with Ramadan lights and there are festivities the same as you would have in the Arab world. In Ireland we are slowly getting there. Doing little things like communal Iftars help us recreate that atmosphere too.²⁷

“People are so welcoming,” she says. “I got invited to an Eid party, a Muslim celebration, and we danced and had an amazing time. But as long as there are a few people out there who it suits to prey on people’s fears, we are going to keep having that scariness. I hope people will educate themselves and use their own minds and use their own common sense really.”²⁸

Efforts amongst civil society groups and Muslim communities across the country reflect nuanced reporting in Irish media.

24. How a devout Catholic Cork boy became a Muslim imam in Galway

25. ICTU workers rally hears of solidarity against far right; Large crowd gathers on O’Connell Street to reject anti-immigrant violence

26. Celebrating Ramadan in Ireland: ‘The fast is easy here because of the weather’; Muslim women tell Emily Hourican what it’s like to take part in the holy month in this country, their attempts to break down stereotypes and banding together to feed the homeless community

27. ‘The Luas workers are our cafe’s number one fans’; Tibrah Bazama is a baker and owner of Munch cafe in Dublin

28. I’m proud to be from East Wall but where there’s fear, people will prey on it; Used to being part of hard hitting storylines, this Fair City star says she couldn’t stand by when she saw vulnerable people being mistreated in her local area

We share our cultures as people. And celebrating together makes the communities stronger. It's important to come together and celebrate each other's cultures to build stronger communities and peace and love and happiness.²⁹

The GAA³⁰ were perfectly within their rights to permit recent Eid celebrations the use of Croke Park's facilities. In doing so, they did not endorse Muslim teachings on gay rights, apostasy, blasphemy, or other issues with which many might differ strongly.³¹

Previous reports highlighted the increased use of internet platforms as presenting possibilities for cause-effect frameworks with reference to engagement with potentially radicalising content. However, while there is yet to be official data relating to this specifically in Ireland, it is worth noting the increasing presence of Islamophobic content on social media. The publication of Islamophobic speech and online content is outlined in further detail below.

Justice System

In 2023, there have been no specific laws or regulations in Ireland that explicitly argue using Islamophobic arguments or that restrict the rights of Muslims in their religious lifestyle. Despite previous reports noting much needed legislation on hate crime coming into effect in Ireland, this is yet to materialise. However, discussions and concerns about Islamophobia persist. Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism are recognised issues in Ireland, with various reports and studies documenting discrimination against Muslims in sectors such as education, employment, and public services.³² The broader European context also highlights how anti-Muslim rhetoric can be used by politicians to gain support, often distracting from other governmental policies and issues.³³

In March of 2023, the Irish government published its latest and long overdue National Action Plan Against Racism.³⁴ The plan, which has a five-year duration is described therein as, "Ireland's national level, state-led, co-ordinated approach to eliminating racism in all its forms in Ireland. This includes, but is not limited to, racism that impacts on Travellers, as well as anti-Muslim prejudice and antisemitism."

29. 'We cannot be celebrating and happy when people are dying'

30. Abbreviation for Gaelic Athletic Association Irish international amateur sporting and cultural organisation, focused primarily on promoting indigenous Gaelic games and pastimes, which include the traditional Irish sports of hurling, camogie, Gaelic football, Gaelic handball, and rounders.

31. Street politics of the fringe must be subject to the law; Having to keep the peace and tackle disorder obliges gardai to prevent thuggish sieges

32. https://mi.grant-international.europa.eu/news/ireland-experiences-islamophobia-dublin-and-how-respond-them_en

33. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/council-of-europe-resolution-is-a-call-for-action-against-islamophobia-in-europe/>

34. Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2023) National Action Plan Against Racism - National Action Plan Against Racism (www.gov.ie) accessed: July 4th 2024.

The plan has five umbrella objectives, namely:

- Being Safe and Being Heard - Supporting people who experience racism and protecting people from racist incidents and crimes;
- Being Equal - Addressing ethnic inequalities;
- Being Seen and Taking Part - Enabling minority participation;
- Being Counted – Measuring the impacts of racism;
- Being Together –A shared journey to racial equality.³⁵

The recognition of anti-Muslim racism in this document, albeit presented as prejudice, is welcome as are the range of actions listed in the document. It is imperative that these are implemented during the life of the plan.

As previously reported, the experiences of Muslims in Irish prisons was again highlighted. An investigation looked into the extent to which Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) feel that religious expression is respected in Irish prisons. Specifically exploring the degree to which the Irish Prison Service (IPS) facilitates these prisoners' religious dietary preferences. Multiple accounts from FNPs noted the alienation and reluctance to acknowledge their religious needs and beliefs.

Only one hour is all I ask, only one small little room. We are not too many, so we are only three or four. So all what I ask is for one little [room] for us that we can go on Friday to pray altogether for few minutes, and then we can go back into our cell (T13).³⁶

I start pray[ing] ... and there was racism for that too, you know? People say “ahh you pray for Allah” ... go pray, people starting shouting “hey you guys stop praying, you pray to Allah, you're from Pakistan” and everything (T54).

Similarly, a Brazilian participant asserted that religious expression was respected for all “except the Muslim ... they call them like bomb man, terrorist, all this stuff” (T11).

Previous reports noted the provision of food in Direct Provision centres as problematic amongst Muslim communities and again this is highlighted as experienced by Muslims in Irish prisons.

Every time I walk to the servery ... say you've got glove or a utensil you use to pick up the pork, you can't use that same utensil or that same glove to touch that pork and then pick up the halal food ... there have been several times where I've mentioned it and they've still done it (T66).³⁷

35. Ibid.

36. David M Doyle, Joe Garrihy, Maria Cleary, Muiread Murphy, Foreign National Prisoners and Religious Practice in Irish Prisons, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 15, Issue 2, July 2023, Pages 606–612, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huad001> Agha, Yumna, and Keith Gaynor. “A qualitative exploration of young female Muslims' perspectives of abortion and belonging following the 2018 Irish Abortion Referendum.” *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* (2024): 1-10. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13178-023-00932-x#availability-of-data-and-material>

37. Ibid.

The implications of Islamophobic claims typically involve increased social division and marginalisation of Muslim communities, which can hinder integration efforts and contribute to a hostile environment. Efforts to challenge Islamophobia in Ireland emphasise the need for inclusive policies and the active participation of Muslim communities in public life to ensure their rights are protected and respected.

Internet



Figure 3: Screenshot of X post showing map of Ireland and 'most popular baby names'.³⁸

The run-up to both the local and European elections to be held in the following year, 2023 saw a marked increase of racist and xenophobic incidents and rhetoric across Ireland. Against the backdrop of the ongoing war and bombardment of Pales-

38. Gabhán (@OffgridIreland). "2022 baby names". X, (Feb 24, 2023), retrieved 4 July, 2024 from <https://x.com/OffgridIreland/status/1629172203903229952>.

tine, the trigger event for much of this discourse was the aforementioned attack at a primary school in Dublin, and the ensuing riots. In the latter, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) noted a “422% increase in language associated with anti-Muslim hate on X when compared to the days prior to the attack.”³⁹

Turning to the former, on Telegram,⁴⁰ speculation as to the nationality, ethnicity, and religion of the assailant in the Dublin attack fuelled calls for riotous protest.

REMEMBRE [sic] OUR HISTORY! THEM GARDA ARE SCUM, THEY KNOW IT! BUT THEM FOREIGN B*****DS, BLOOD NEEDS TO BE SPILT TONIGHT IN THE NAME OF THAT CHILD!!!

Everyone bally up, tool up. And any f***ing g**o, foreigner, anyone, just kill them. Just f***ing kill them.

The number of channels and chat groups on Telegram associated with the Irish misinformation and disinformation ecosystem increased by 326% since 2020 according to the ISD report on extremist and far-right ecosystems in Ireland.⁴¹

Social media platforms specifically continue to prove difficult to moderate for hate speech and anti-Muslim rhetoric with offline events providing a ‘trigger’ for online Islamophobia to be proliferated.⁴² Despite far-right groups and communities defecting from mainstream social media platforms following increased moderation and policy alterations in 2020, anti-Muslim discourse remains. The rebranding of Twitter to ‘X’ in July 2023 brought with it an abrupt change in content moderation policies and implementation of the ‘Freedom of Speech, Not Reach’ policy.⁴³ Far-right figures in Ireland routinely engage in anti-Muslim debates on the platform, sharing Islamophobic images and videos that are not verifiable. (Figs. 3-6)

Tracking Islamophobic content online from October 2023 is concerning as many accounts and private groups (such as Telegram) repeatedly posted anti-Muslim content, including slurs and defamatory graphics. Far-right extremists exploited the events both in Israel and Gaza, Palestine, seeing the opportunity to share racist tropes that reinforce existing dehumanising and distrustful perspectives about Muslims, typically portraying them as inherently violent.⁴⁴ Telegram, Signal, Bitchute, Gab, and other online platforms that offer users heightened data privacy are often the net-

39. <https://www.thejournal.ie/antisemitism-and-islamophobia-in-irish-anti-immigration-telegram-groups-6216029-Nov2023/>

40. <https://districtmagazine.ie/features/inside-the-telegram-groups-fuelling-anti-immigrant-sentiment/>

41. <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-in-the-news/aoife-gallagher-irish-mis-and-disinformation-telegram-channels-increased-by-326-since-2020/>

42. Wiedlitzka, S., Prati, G., Brown, R. *et al.*, “Hate in Word and Deed: The Temporal Association Between Online and Offline Islamophobia”, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2021).

43. <https://www.reuters.com/technology/musk-owned-xs-content-moderation-shift-complicated-effort-win-back-brands-former-2023-09-07/>

44. *Ibid.*

working platforms of choice for groups engaging in anti-immigrant and Islamophobic discussion.⁴⁵

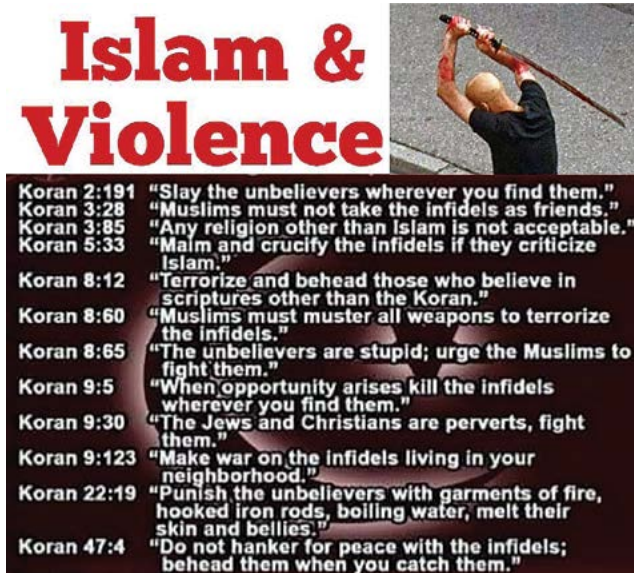


Figure 4: Screenshot of image posted on X conflating Islam and violence⁴⁶.



Figure 5: Screenshot of post from Irish Freedom Party member.⁴⁷

45. Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, “Far-Right Hate and Extremist Groups – Ireland Report”, *GlobalExtremism.org*. (21 August 2022) retrieved on 21 June 2024 from <https://globalextrremism.org/ireland/> <https://globalextrremism.org/post/fringe-platforms-online-hate/>

46. Kelly, Hermann (@hermannkelly). “Islam & violence” . X, (June 9, 2023), retrieved 6 June, 2024 from <http://x.com/hermannkelly/status/1667049329968685057>.

47. Kelly, Hermann (@hermannkelly). “Islam & violence” . X, (October 7, 2023), retrieved 4 July, 2024 from <https://x.com/hermannkelly/status/1710692731079557491>.



Figure 6: Screenshot of response to online post sharing infographic documenting rise in popularity of 'Muslim' names.⁴⁸

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Previous Islamophobia reports established what could be described as an Islamophobia network in Ireland. In 2023, this network included groups like Anti-Corruption Ireland, Identity Ireland, the Irish Freedom Party, the National Party led by Justin Barrett, and Síol na hÉireann led by Niall McConnell. Identity Ireland continue to convene as a group although they are not active within formal Irish politics.

The Irish Freedom Party regrouped with prominent figure and citizen journalist Phillip Dwyer, among others, establishing the Ireland First party.⁴⁹ Featuring in in-

48. Martin Murphy (@ruggermurph27 "Islam and practicing muslims. X, (February 23, 2023), retrieved 11 August, 2024 from <https://x.com/ruggermurph27/status/1629435798989799424>

49. <https://ireland-first.ie/principles/>

interviews with similar groups internationally, he continues to express explicitly Islamophobic rhetoric and accuses Irish government officials of leaving the country open to security threats.⁵⁰ The Irish People provide another grouping for politicians who would otherwise run as independent candidates in local and/or general elections. Their website posits that Ireland’s media and government are “pushing extreme globalist agendas.”⁵¹



Figure 7: Screenshot from website of the Irish People.⁵²

Far-right parties and movements in Ireland, though not as prominent as in some other European countries, do exist and often utilise Islamophobic rhetoric as part of their platform. These groups typically emphasise nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments, framing Muslims as a threat to Irish cultural identity and security. In addition to the National Party, other far-right groups have also propagated anti-Muslim sentiments, often linking them to broader anti-immigration and nationalist rhetoric. These groups argue that Muslim immigrants pose a threat to Irish societal values and security, a claim that lacks substantial evidence but resonates with a small segment of the population.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessments and Initiatives

Opposition to Islamophobic narratives comes from various corners, including mainstream political parties, civil society organisations, and religious leaders. Groups like Doras, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, and the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR) actively combat Islamophobia through advocacy, education, and support for affected communities. The aforementioned groups and a range of individuals and organisations within Muslim communities in Ireland have also participated in the Uni-

50. <https://rairfoundation.com/ireland-brink-journalist-philip-dwyer-exposes-countrys-battle/>

51. <https://www.irishpeople.org/>

52. Available at: <https://www.irishpeople.org/>

versity of Limerick-based, EU Commission funded, Sustainable Alliances Against Anti-Muslim Hatred (SALAAM) project which, at its core, aims to challenge anti-Muslim racism in Ireland. Mainstream political figures from parties such as Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin have also condemned Islamophobic rhetoric, emphasising the importance of diversity and inclusion in Irish society.

In terms of legislation, there have been no specific laws enacted in Ireland in 2023 that restrict the rights of Muslims based on Islamophobic narratives. Ireland's legal framework continues to protect religious freedom and ensure equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their religious beliefs, although, evidence presented above from the prison context raises concerns regarding the ability for inmates to practice their religion. The new National Action Plan Against Racism also holds potential for change in the context of challenging all racisms, including that targeting Muslims. Overall, while Islamophobic rhetoric is present in certain political discourses in Ireland, it is not dominant, and there are significant efforts to counteract such narratives and promote inclusivity.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Political developments in the Irish context are more than cause for concern. As is evident above, far-right groupings and individuals in Ireland, while small in number are becoming increasingly emboldened. Ireland in previous years could have been considered as a relatively safer space for Muslim communities in Europe; however, this may be changing. As such, the need is even more pressing for the following recommendations:

- Implement hate crime legislation urgently.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the objectives and recommendations noted in the National Action Plan Against Racism.
- Data gathering on anti-Muslim hostility and discrimination must be improved. The now annual release of hate crime/incident data from the police online reporting system is encouraging, but these data need to be refined and presented in a manner that allows for disaggregation across religious identities and between crime and non-crime acts. These data also need to be added to police recorded data gathered through other means beyond the online system.
- More must be done to police the activities of those who would sow hate and division in Irish society, targeting Muslims, migrants, and other minorities for political ends. The light-touch policing of such groups heretofore cannot be allowed to maintain.

Chronology

- **March 2023:** Irish government launches the new National Action Plan Against Racism.
- **June 2023:** Eid al-Adha celebrations take place at Croke Park for the fourth year with hundreds of Muslims in attendance.⁵³
- **23 November 2023:** Riots take place in Dublin in the aftermath of knife attack in city centre.

53. Irish Muslim Council (@IrishMuslimCoun “Thank you @gaaofficial”. X, (June 28, 2023), retrieved 11 August, 2024 from <https://x.com/IrishMuslimCoun/status/1674077975325622272>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ITALY
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Sintesi

Tra 2.5 e 2.7 milioni di Musulmani vivono in Italia, facendo dell'Islam la seconda religione del paese. Eppure, una parte sostanziale degli Italiani ha espresso ostilità nei confronti della crescita dell'Islam. Il 2023 è stato caratterizzato dalla diffusione di discorsi Islamofobici tra politici eletti, mass-media e nell'opinione pubblica. Paure e timori dei Musulmani sono emerse riguardo a questioni quali la disponibilità di spazi per le preghiere, la presenza di menu halal nelle cantine scolastiche, e i veli indossati dalle donne musulmane (come niqab, hijab e burkini). Alcuni cliché sui musulmani sono piuttosto diffusi: che l'Islam è una religione violenta, prona al terrorismo, incompatibile con i valori occidentali, incline a soggiogare le donne e ad infiltrare lentamente l'occidente, specialmente attraverso i recenti flussi migratori. Non ci sono dati specifici sui crimini d'odio commessi contro i Musulmani in Italia nel 2023. D'altronde, l'Italia non ha ancora adottato una definizione legale di crimine d'odio. Tuttavia, ricerche recenti dimostrano che il 65% dei Musulmani in Italia dichiarano di aver sofferto violenza, discriminazioni, e pregiudizi.

Questo report vuole illustrare gli eventi più significativi del 2023 che mostrano la persistenza di Islamofobia in Italia. Verranno discusse alcune aree tematiche utili a fornire dati sul razzismo antimusulmano: attacchi fisici e verbali; lavoro; educazione; politica; mass-media; sistema giudiziario; Internet. I partiti di estrema destra continuano a trattare l'Islam come una minaccia alla sicurezza italiana ed una religione incompatibile. Quindi, verranno menzionate alcune figure chiave responsabili della diffusione dell'Islamofobia, che sono per lo più associati a partiti ed ideologie di destra. Dopo aver discusse alcune iniziative da parte di associazioni ed ONG che lottano contro l'Islamofobia, il report fornirà delle considerazioni conclusive e delle raccomandazioni sulle politiche pubbliche da adottare per aumentare la consapevolezza sull'Islamofobia e combatterla sul piano istituzionale e dell'opinione pubblica.

Executive Summary

Between 2.5 and 2.7 million Muslims live in Italy, making Islam the country's second largest religion. Still, a large portion of Italians have met the constant growth of Islam with hostility. The year 2023 was marked by the circulation of Islamophobic narratives across elected officials, media, and public opinion. Fear and concerns about Muslims emerged regarding issues such as the availability of praying spaces, the presence of halal meat in school menus, and Muslim women's hijabs as well as the full-face veil and burkini. Some Islamophobic tropes are quite frequent: that Islam is a violent religion, prone to terrorism, incompatible with Western values, inclined to subjugate women, and to slowly infiltrate the West, especially through rising immigration flows. No specific data is available on hate crimes against Muslims in Italy for the year 2023. Italy, in fact, has not yet adopted a legislative definition of hate crime. However, recent research demonstrates that 65% of Muslims in Italy declare to have endured violence, discrimination, and prejudices.

This report illustrates the most significant events of 2023 in Italy showing the persistence of Islamophobia in various fields. Far-right parties continue to treat Islam as a threat to Italian security and a religion incompatible with Italian history, culture, and traditions. The report presents key figures in the Italian Islamophobia network, who are predominantly associated with right-wing political parties and ideologies, and goes on to discuss relevant initiatives launched by associations and NGOs to fight Islamophobia. Finally, it provides concluding remarks and policy recommendations to raise awareness about Islamophobia and fight it institutionally and among public opinion.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Italian Republic

Type of Regime: Democracy

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy, FdI), Lega – Salvini Premier¹, Forza Italia (FI), and Noi moderati (NM), forming a centre-right coalition (2022-on-going).

Opposition Parties: Partito Democratico - Italia Democratica e Progressista (PD-IDP), Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), Azione (Az), Italia Viva (IV), Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (AVS), +Europa (+E)

Last Elections: 25 September 2022 (Italian general election). (a) Chamber of Deputies: Right alliance (237 seats, 59.25% of total), Left alliance (85, 21.25%), Movimento 5 Stelle (52, 13%), Action - Italia Viva (21, 5.25%), Others (5, 1.25%); (b) Senate of the Republic: Right alliance (115, 57.5%), Left alliance (44, 22%), Movimento 5 Stelle (28, 14%), Action - Italia Viva (9, 4.5%), Others (4, 2%)²

Total population: 58,851,000 (1 January 2023)³

Major Languages: Italian (official language)

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: In 2023, Italy did not report the number of anti-Muslim crimes to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Regarding the number of discriminatory acts related to religion, the Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OS-CAD) registered 111 cases in 2022, while no data is available for 2023.⁴ Regarding Islamophobia online, the most recent data comes from two reports published in 2022: the first is the “Map of Intolerance” (Italian Observatory of Rights – VOX) which analysed 855 tweets about Islam posted in the previous year and reveals that “criminal”, “terrorist”, and “dirty” are among the most frequent offensive words associated with Muslims.⁵ The second is the report “Barometer of Hate” published by Amnesty International Italy, which gathered 30,000 Facebook and Twitter posts of Italian politicians in five weeks be-

1. Since the 2018 national elections, the North League has been officially rebranded as “Lega per Salvini Premier” (League for Salvini Premier).

2. <https://www.politico.eu/italy-parliamentary-election-2022/>

3. <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2023/04/indicatori-anno-2022.pdf> (retrieved 1 May 2024)

4. https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2024-03/monitoraggio_oscad_1.pdf (retrieved 1 May 2024)

5. <http://www.voxdiritti.it/mappa-dellintolleranza-7-islamofobia/>

tween August and September 2022, showing that 34% of hate speech content targets Muslim minorities.⁶

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: The Italian police recorded 1,393 hate crimes in 2022, as reported to the ODIHR, which shows a slight decrease compared to the numbers registered in 2021 (1,445).⁷ No data is available yet on 2023. The Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OS-CAD) registered 353 cases of hate crime in 2022.⁸

Major Religions (% of Population): A 2021 survey published by the Center for Studies on New Religions (Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni, CESNUR) had found that 74.5% identified as Catholics, 4.1% as Christians of other confessions, 3.7% as Muslims, 15.3% as atheist or agnostic, and 2.2% as following another religion.⁹ Other sources estimate the number of Muslims as 4.7% of the Italian population.¹⁰

Muslim Population (% of Population): 2.7 million (4.7% of total population)

Main Muslim Community Organisations: Unione delle Comunità Islamiche d'Italia (UCOII), Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana (COREIS), COREIS Italian Muslim Youth, Centro Islamico Culturale d'Italia, Confederazione Islamica Italiana (CII)

Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia: Amnesty International Italia, Lunaria, Un Ponte Per, Centro Studi Sulla Libertà di Religione Credo e Coscienza (LIREC), Progetto Aisha, Rete Nazionale per il Contrasto ai Discorsi e ai Fenomeni d'Odio, Altera

Far-Right Parties: Forza Nuova (FN), Fiamma Tricolore

Far-Right Movements: Casa Pound

Far-Right Militant Organisations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No, depends on local decisions (e.g., bans from entering public institutions with face coverings in the region of Lombardy). While it is forbidden to access public places with a covered face “without justified reason” (Law No. 152 of 1975), this does not imply a hijab ban.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No

6. <https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-dellodio-elezioni-2022/#sintesi>

7. <https://hatecrime.osce.org/italy>

8. https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2024-03/monitoraggio_oscad_1.pdf

9. <https://it.usembassy.gov/it/rapporto-sulla-liberta-di-religione-nel-mondo-2022-italia/#:-:text=Secondo%20le%20stime%20di%20uno,3%2C7%20per%20cento%20musulmano>. Similar data is provided by the Joshua Project (<https://joshuaproject.net/countries/IT>)

10. <https://www.lenius.it/musulmani-in-italia/>

- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No, depends on local decision (see above). There have been attempts to ban the burqa in the country: in 2011, the Italian Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee approved a draft law (never approved eventually) banning women from wearing full-face veils in public, including the burqa and niqab. Another draft law of 2018 (proposed by the League) proposed a fine of €2,000 for wearing the burqa and niqab in public and imprisonment for those who force women to wear full-face veils.
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

In 2023, Italy still witnessed the widespread circulation of Islamophobic narratives across elected officials, media, and public opinion. Fear and concerns about Muslims spread regarding issues such as the availability of mosques, the presence of halal meat in school menus, and Muslim women's clothes (such as the burkini). Several newspapers and TV channels often framed Islam in relation to crime, "terrorism", and domestic violence against women. No specific data is available on hate crimes against Muslims for the year 2023. Like in the past reports, it is important to stress that Italy has not yet adopted a legislative definition of hate crime.

At the political level, five regional elections and 19 administrative elections in Italian departments (*province*) took place in 2023. The right-wing coalition (whose three main parties are Brothers of Italy, the League, and Forza Italia) won in all five regions and in 10 departments, increasing the possibility of new policies aimed at restricting Muslims' religious and civil freedoms. Although its total numbers of electors decreased compared to 2022, polls revealed that Brothers of Italy was still the first Italian party if we take into account the voting intentions of Italian electors (28.8% of the interviewees would have voted for Giorgia Meloni's party at the end of 2023).¹¹

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

It is important to remember, as clarified by the website of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), that, "Italian legislation does not provide a definition of hate crime. Hate crimes are recorded by police using the same process as for other crimes. There is no instruction or policy document to guide police in identifying and recording hate crimes."¹² Despite the lack of a proper legislative framework, which is an aspect already mentioned by this report in 2022, Italian authorities still monitor crimes and discourses that can be framed as inherently discriminatory in relation to race, religion, ethnic groups, nationality, disabilities, sex, and gender. Hence, the Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OS-CAD), part of the Italian Home Office, registered 353 cases of hate crime in 2022.¹³ The numbers increase if we look at the data provided by the Italian police, which recorded 1,393 hate crimes in 2022, as reported to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). This shows a slight decrease compared

11. <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/sondaggi-politici-il-bilancio-del-2023-male-fratelli-ditalia-e-movimento-5-stelle-vola-il-pd/>

12. <https://hatecrime.osce.org/national-frameworks-italy#dataCollection>

13. https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2024-03/monitoraggio_oscad_1.pdf

to the numbers registered by the Italian police in 2021 (1,445),¹⁴ while no data is available yet on 2023.

Regarding the number of discriminatory acts and discourses against religion, the Observatory for Security Against Discriminatory Acts (OS-CAD) registered 111 cases in 2022, while no data is available for 2023.¹⁵ Additionally, as of yet, Italy has not reported the number of anti-Muslim crimes to the ODIHR regarding the year 2023.

According to the “Map on Intolerance” published by the Italian Observatory of Rights – VOX, an NGO, in 2023, 65% of Muslims in Italy declared that they have endured violence, discrimination, and prejudices. Fifty-seven per cent of Italians would not accept a Muslim person as a family member, while 35% would not like to have a Muslim person as a neighbour. Thirty-eight per cent believed that Islam is a religion that is too traditionalist and incapable of keeping up with present times, while 63% of worshipping Christians in Italy affirmed the statement that Islam is at odds with their culture and their values compared to 29% among non-religious Italians.¹⁶

Employment

Data about discrimination in the workplace collected in 2023 confirms systematic disadvantage based on the categories of gender and ethnicity. According to the research centre Osservatorio Futura, which realised a survey for the Italian General Confederation of Labour, one of the most important national trade unions in Italy, the main forms of discriminations are related to gender (enlisted in first place by 48% of those interviewed), sexual orientation (45%), and ethnic origins (44%).¹⁷ Discrimination mainly affects the lower levels of the corporate hierarchy, including precarious workers (71%) and non-managers (71%), showing an evident intersection between gender, race, and class when it comes to identifying the most oppressed social categories.

Education

Islamophobic reactions in schools are often raised by students asking to choose halal alternatives in the canteens, as shown by past research on the topic. In 2023, some relevant public controversies followed the decisions to arrange alternative halal menus for Muslim students in dozens of schools in Lodi (near Milan) and Bologna.

In January, the right-wing newspaper *Il Giornale* reported that all school canteens in Lodi were serving halal meat to students. While the halal option was at first meant to accommodate the requests of Muslim pupils, *Il Giornale* claimed that it was

14. <https://hatecrime.osce.org/italy>

15. https://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/2024-03/monitoraggio_oscad_1.pdf (retrieved 1 May 2024)

16. <http://www.voxdiritti.it/mappa-dellintolleranza-7-islamofobia/>

17. <https://www.collettiva.it/rubriche/osservatorio-futura/discriminazioni-sul-lavoro-abbiamo-un-problema-mc-noruuk>

quickly extended to all the other non-Muslims students without informing the families. Hence, this episode pointed to a discrimination of Italian citizens and other religious minorities who had asked for alternative menus in the past. Likewise, local League councillor Eleonora Ferri lamented that Italians were obliged to adopt foreign beliefs and practices.¹⁸ The deputy mayor of Lodi, Laura Tagliaferri (Democratic Party), intervened to clarify that nothing had changed for non-Muslim students. The administration reassured the Muslim communities that the chicken and turkey meat already served in school canteens was produced by one of the leading companies on the market in Italy in possession of the appropriate certifications concerning its entire production line. Tagliaferri added that the request had been accommodated without additional costs for the municipal administration and in compliance with the respect of the secular nature of schools.¹⁹

Some days after the controversy, members of Lombardia's branch of the far-right group Forza Nuova, which is close to white supremacist and ultra-Catholic positions, hung a banner on the gates of Barzaghi Elementary School (Scuola Elementare Barzaghi), near the Maggiore Hospital in Lodi. The banner displayed the slogan "Christian Italy, Never Muslim" (*Italia Cristiana, Mai Musulmana*). A press note issued by the regional coordination of Forza Nuova reported that the group would "defend national values, unlike local councils such as those in Lodi, which allow foreigners to impose their traditions, to the detriment of ours, sinking our identity and the millenary culture that belongs to us. Why serve halal meat to our children? What will be the next move? Italy is Christian, never Muslim."²⁰



Figure 1: Far-right group Forza Nuova's banner "Christian Italy, Never Muslim". Source: *Il Cittadino*

18. <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/carne-halal-tutti-i-bimbi-esplode-caso-nelle-scuole-lodi-2107942.html>

19. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2023/01/25/lodi-il-nuovo-caso-mense-scolastiche-la-lega-solo-carne-halal-agli-alunni-la-vicesindaca-pd-fake-news-e-nessun-costo-aggiuntivo/6948655/>

20. https://www.ilcittadino.it/stories/lodi/lodi-il-caso-della-carne-halal-blitz-forza-nuova-nella-notte-o_84544_96/

Starting on October 2, the city of Bologna introduced the option of halal menus upon request by Muslim families. The service is meant to be offered in 72 schools and is expected to be requested by about 600 to 800 students. The decision has been negotiated by the city council and the local Muslim communities and represents “a great opportunity for multicultural inclusion”,²¹ according to the local councillor for education. However, animal rights associations judged the way halal meat is produced to be “even more heinous than slaughter by stunning” and considered the choice, which did not take vegetarian and vegan children into account, to be far from inclusive.²²

Politics

A short glance at Italian political parties in the last decade reveals that Islamophobia has gained significant traction across the political spectrum. The three main right-wing parties (Brothers of Italy, League, Forza Italia) have for long fostered Islamophobic arguments, endorsed harsh anti-immigration policies, and supported pro-U.S. and pro-Israeli positions in international affairs. Anti-Muslim prejudice has not been absent from mainstream left parties either, such as the Partito Democratico, as it emerged specifically under the Cabinet led by Matteo Renzi (2014-16) and Paolo Gentiloni (2016-18).²³ Conversely, the populist party Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle) marks a difference from mainstream parties as it includes prominent members who have endorsed anti-imperialist and pro-Palestinian positions and declared that Islam had nothing to do with terrorism.²⁴

Regarding some specific political declarations that took place in 2023, it is important to focus on the following events: the “anti-illegal mosques” draft law proposed by Brothers of Italy; the burkini ban set by the League mayor of the north-eastern town of Monflacone, near Trieste; and the calls by some League-elected officials to cancel a hijab-friendly pool party for Muslim and non-Muslim women alike in the Northern town of Lambiate (near Milan).

The Draft Law 1018/2023, presented by Brothers of Italy’s leader in the Chamber of Deputies Tommaso Foti, aims at regulating aspects of worship related to religions that have not signed an agreement with the state.²⁵ Despite not mentioning Islam directly, it is clearly directed at Muslims because Islam is the only religion that has not signed a bilateral state-church agreement with the state. Hence, the bill is also known as “anti-illegal mosques” bill. As underlined by scholarship

21. <https://www.tecnicadellascuola.it/carne-halal-nelle-mense-scolastiche-di-bologna-integrazione-per-il-comune-violenza-inaccettabile-per-gli-animalisti>

22. <https://www.gamberorosso.it/notizie/mense-scuole-lodi-carne-maiale/>

23. <https://www.osservatorioantisemitismo.it/articoli/critiche-del-deputato-pd-emanuele-fiano-a-proposito-delle-dichiarazioni-di-sumaya-abdel-qader-alla-trasmisione-televisiva-otto-e-mezzo/>

24. <https://www.facebook.com/ManlioDiStefano/posts/963028583755268/>

25. <https://www.open.online/2023/06/10/fratelli-di-italia-legge-contro-moschee-abusive/>

on the matter,²⁶ this issue is particularly urgent because Islam is currently the second most popular religion in Italy. Yet, the bill establishes that cultural associations that use a building cannot change its usage to use it as a place of worship. In presenting the law, Foti argued that “Islamic communities, under the false guise of cultural associations, have been able to occupy basements, garages, shops, warehouses and more, turning them into places of worship” and that this strategy was a gimmick to “establish themselves on Italian territory”.²⁷

Another significant event that should be mentioned was the Islamophobic reactions generated by the “Bahja Pool Party”, a women-only and hijab-friendly pool party that sparked outraged comments by far-right politicians. The event was planned to take place in the water park Piscine del Gabbiano in Limbiate, 15 kilometres north of Milan, with the purpose of gathering women, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, who wished to spend a summer day in the pool. For hijab-wearing women, this could mean being free of worrying and indiscrete staring. Yet, the event was cancelled by the water park following the public uproar generated by European Parliament MP Isabella Tovaglieri (League), who defined the party as “celebrating segregation, in which some security measures will be lacking, with surveillance cameras being switched off”.²⁸ Tovaglieri also reckoned that the party was a sign of the gradual Islamisation of Europe and Italy.²⁹ After the water park justified the cancellation by saying that the “restrictions” imposed at the pool party (meaning the hijab) would have clashed with the water park’s ideals of “protection and emancipation of women”, League secretary Matteo Salvini praised this decision as “a victory of common sense”³⁰ in a civilisational clash with Islam. As scholars have shown,³¹ far-right leaders use the concept of “common sense” to conceal and make xenophobic ideas more acceptable to a wider public. Similarly, other party dignitaries called the event “discriminatory and sexist”³² and a demonstration that Muslims want to live segregated from the rest of society.³³ Eventually, another water park decided to welcome the Bahja Pool Party.

In August, another incident occurred in the town of Monfalcone, situated in the Gulf of Trieste, in the Italian north-east. The mayor Anna Maria Cisint (League) claimed that the town was set to ban women from bathing in a burkini or covered

26. Alicino F. (2022) The Legal Treatment of Muslims in Italy in the Age of Fear and Insecurity, *Journal of Law and Religion*, 37:3, 478-500.

27. https://www.repubblica.it/dossier/politica/la-verit-vi-prego/2024/04/04/news/fdi_moschee_divieto_garage_magazzini-422421919/

28. <https://www.laluce.news/2023/07/03/un-party-in-piscina-per-sole-donne-e-la-leghista-tovaglieri-da-di-matto/>

29. <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/la-festa-in-piscina-per-sole-donne-non-e-segregazione-femminile-cancellarla-non-garantira-piu-diritti/>

30. <https://www.laluce.news/2023/07/04/party-in-piscina-per-sole-donne-salvini-esulta-ma-levento-si-terra-lo-stesso/>

31. Newth, G. and Scopelliti, A. (2023) ‘Common sense, populism, and reactionary politics on Twitter: An analysis of populist far-right common sense narratives between 2008 and 2022’, *Party Politics*, 0(0), 1-17.

32. <https://twitter.com/SusannaCeccardi/status/1675947392091189277>

33. <https://twitter.com/AngeloCiocca/status/1676634416490192896>

with other clothes.³⁴ The declaration came days after protests sparked at a beach club in Trieste, where Muslim women wanted to bathe with their clothes on. Cisint justified her decision by saying that she was against a “return to the Middle Ages”, thus reproducing the narrative of Islam as a reactionary religion that is incompatible with the secular values promoted instead by the West – a leitmotiv of the League party ideology. Monfalcone hit the headlines again in December after the city council decided to ban Muslims from praying on premises and at facilities which are not meant to be used for worshipping purposes. This decision recalls the nationwide draft bill advanced by Brothers of Italy, as mentioned above. It sparked a series of protests by part of Monfalcone’s Muslim communities, local branches of the Democratic Party, and the Greens, as well as left-wing groups.³⁵

Finally, the summer of 2023 saw the meteoric rise in popularity of former army general Roberto Vannacci, who self-published the book *Il Mondo al contrario* (The World Upside Down) on Amazon that includes extreme views on immigration, feminism, gay rights, and environmentalism. For instance, Vannacci writes that even if “non-white Italians hold Italian citizenship, they do not reflect typical somatic features of Italianness.”³⁶ In light of his intolerant declarations released on paper and in the media, Vannacci “is being investigated for alleged incitement to racial hatred by Rome’s Prosecutor’s Office”.³⁷ The book became a best-seller and received much appreciation among the segments of Italian public opinion more receptive to a reactionary and xenophobic discourse. The book, in fact, contributed to Vannacci’s fame around Italy and boosted his live presence on several TV talk shows. Also, it earned him the sympathy of Salvini, who made him the lead candidate in the EU 2024 Parliamentary Elections for the League. Elected with more than 500,000 votes, Vannacci has been appointed as one of the vice-chairs of the recently established group Patriots for Europe in the EU Parliament, which is chaired by Jordan Bardella, the president of the French Rassemblement National (National Rally).³⁸

Media

Right-wing newspapers *Il Giornale*, *Libero*, and *La Verità* are among the media that have published articles containing anti-Muslim tropes. *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, moreover, are owned by the tycoon Antonio Angelucci, an elected MP with the League. On October 18, after two Swedes were shot in Brussels by a man of Tunisian origins in an attack described as terrorist, *Libero* used a sensationalist title (“Resources,

34. https://www.ansa.it/english/news/general_news/2023/08/14/monfalcone-set-to-ban-burkini-bathing_77f-923de-472f-4df5-ac5a-a10d276c6a8c.html

35. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/37934672/pd-corteo-moschee-abusive-protesta-monfalcone.html>

36. https://www.huffingtonpost.it/politica/2023/08/23/news/vannacci_egonu_soumahoro-13195140/

37. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/06/07/who-is-roberto-vannacci-italys-favourite-far-right-general>

38. <https://www.eunews.it/en/2024/07/12/vannacci-voted-by-mistake-french-want-to-go-back-on-patriots-vice-president/>

but for the Jihad. The Danger Arrives through the Sea”³⁹) that implicitly associated all immigrants travelling across the Mediterranean with potential future terrorists. In the same article, the author argued that either “moderate Islam does not exist” or it has no courage to speak up against Hamas and its supporters in Europe. Other articles decry the attempts to ban Islamophobic hate speech in other European countries⁴⁰ and give a platform to politicians⁴¹ and journalists⁴² who stress that Islam wants to subjugate the West.

The TV channel Rete4, operated by MediaForEurope, owned by Silvio Berlusconi’s son Pier Silvio, often airs talk shows (like “Fuori dal coro”, “Quarta Repubblica”, and “Dritto e Rovescio”) that reproduce numerous Islamophobic narratives, such as that Islam is predominantly a radical religion⁴³ and that Muslims do not want to integrate into Italian society.⁴⁴ Rete4 journalists frequently use hidden cameras to carry out interviews among Muslims living in Italy. Interviewees are seen making threatening declarations such as “We [Muslims] have already conquered Rome”⁴⁵ or that Islam prescribes women to ask formal permission to go out.⁴⁶ Videos are then published on online newspapers that frame the stories using sensationalist titles like “Islam, The Enemy Is among Us” and words describing Islam as a violent and reactionary religion. Gathering declarations from random self-declared Muslims and framing them as accurate representations of a whole community is a tactic that serves to cast all Italian Muslims as suspects and reiterate harmful stereotypes about Islam.

Justice system

On September 11, 2023, Italian media reported the case of Antonio Bassolino, the deputy prosecutor of Brescia, who requested the acquittal of a man of Bengali origin, Hasan Md Imrul, for the physical and psychological ill treatment to which he allegedly subjected his ex-wife, also Bengali, in 2019. According to Bassolino, “The acts of compression of the moral and material freedoms of the offended party were the fruit of the cultural implant and not of his will to annihilate and debase his spouse.”⁴⁷

Bassolino’s declarations were denounced and condemned by the public prosecution service of Brescia. He has hence been accused of trying to introduce “cultural

39. <https://x.com/EsteriLega/status/1714654833343639676>

40. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/37492053/sinistra-legge-vietare-critiche-islam-italia-teheran.html>

41. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/video/libero-video/37757092/silvia-sardone-libro-mai-sottomessi.html>

42. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/spettacoli/televisione/37554159/fuori-dal-coro-magdi-allam-sottomessi-islam.html>

43. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/spettacoli/televisione/37412861/dritto-e-rovescio-giuseppe-cruciani-islam-moderato-non-esiste-imam-travolto.html>

44. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/spettacoli/televisione/37751187/paolo-mieli-quarta-repubblica-islam-integrazione.html>

45. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/italia/37477640/fuori-dal-coro-islam-predicazione-armi-conquistere-mo-roma.html>

46. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/italia/37962338/fuori-dal-coro-inviata-mario-giordano-islam-divieto.html>

47. <https://www.micromegea.net/brescia-perche-uno-stato-di-diritto-non-puo-applicare-il-relativismo-giudiziario/>

relativism” in the interpretation of Italian laws and to condone cases of domestic violence under the veneer of cultural exceptionalism. While the High Council of the Judiciary has asked to open a file against him, Bassolino has received solidarity and support from the National Association of Magistrates which represents almost 90% of Italian magistrates. In October, the defendant was acquitted on the grounds that there was no case to answer.⁴⁸

The allegations against Bassolino, by no means, can be seen as a sign of structural Islamophobia in the Italian justice system. Admittedly, his line of argument is indeed problematic since he reproduced Orientalist and Islamophobic tropes, such as that being a Bengali Muslim inevitably implies socialisation in a patriarchal and violent background.⁴⁹ Notwithstanding the above, the reactions that Bassolino raised in some media reiterated other biases against Islam. The case sparked outraged comments both amongst liberal-leaning media, like Micromega, and conservative newspapers like *Il Giornale*. In particular, the latter labelled Bassolino a “pro-Islam magistrate”.⁵⁰ Not only does this label show a glaring simplification of a more complex debate, but it also responds to the purpose of right-wing populist forces to qualify members of the civil service (especially of the justice system) as members of an alleged progressive and cosmopolitan elite, detached from the interests of common Italian people, and too lenient towards criminals (usually associated to immigrants and Muslims).

Internet

Online Islamophobia keeps gaining momentum. Results from the annual “Map on Intolerance” published by the Italian Observatory of Rights - VOX in 2023 show that in 855 tweets about Islam posted in the previous year, Muslims are frequently associated with stigmatising words such as “criminal”, “terrorist”, and “dirty”.⁵¹ Moreover, as the 2022 report already mentioned, the website Vox News has continued to publish offensive posts and fake news about Muslim communities in Italy, such as the fearmongering post about the incompatibility of Islam with the Italian Constitution.⁵² Similar to Vox News, the Facebook page “No Islam Italia” (30k followers) keeps inciting racial hate and spreading fake news about immigration and Islam, similarly to X (formerly Twitter) accounts such as “CriminImmigr*ti”, which aims to provide “updates about the crimes committed by folks who are ‘diversely Italians’”,⁵³ and “RadioGenoa”, which usually shares videos with anti-Muslim content.⁵⁴

48. <https://www.agi.it/cronaca/news/2023-10-17/brescia-maltrattamenti-culturali-su-moglie-assolto-bengalese-23532316/>

49. For further reflection, see Abu-Lughod L. (2002) Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others, *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), 783-790.

50. <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/csm-fa-sul-serio-aperto-fascicolo-sul-pm-filo-islam-2210186.html>

51. <http://www.voxdiritti.it/mappa-dellintolleranza-7-islamofobia/>

52. <https://voxnews.info/2023/12/28/islam-incompatibile-con-la-nostra-costituzione/>

53. <https://twitter.com/CriminImmigrati>

54. <https://x.com/RadioGenoa/status/1740972148192387403>



Figure 2: Facebook account of the page “No Islam Italia”, whose posts often spread the Great Replacement conspiracy theory whereby Italians are being replaced by Muslim immigrants and which draws links between immigration, Islam, and crime. **Source:** Facebook Page “No Islam Italia”

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Far-right politicians belonging to the League and Brothers of Italy and to smaller groups like Forza Nuova, as well as right-wing newspapers including *Libero*, *La Verità*, and *Il Giornale*, and journalists working for Mediaset channels are among the loudest voices in spreading hostility towards Islam, as already observed in previous years’ reports.

A new prominent face of the Italian Islamophobia network is the European Parliament MP Silvia Sardone (League) who published the book *Never Subjugated: Chronicles of an Islamised Europe*, in which she accuses European institutions of denying European identity and history and becoming too prone to Islam. Sardone’s book also aims to spark fear about religious violence against Muslim women in Italy: while gender-based violence is a crucial concern, her party stresses it only when it is committed by Muslims. Sardone also argues that in France and Belgium “entire neighbourhoods are now Islamic territories and where the state does not exist”.⁵⁵ The comparison with other countries with older Muslim immigration serves to portray a bleak future for Italian cities if nothing is done to halt flows from Islamic majority countries. Sardone had already hit the headlines in 2020 when she was among the leaders of a protest in Milan against the construction of a new mosque decided by the Partito Democratico’s mayor Beppe Sala.⁵⁶

55. <https://comune.garbagnate-milanese.mi.it/vivere-il-comune/evento/presentazione-mai-sottomessi/>

56. https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/10/09/news/sala_diritto_moschea_stabilito_da_costituzione_protesta_sardone-269986702/

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Throughout 2023, a number of initiatives by political actors, civil society associations, and religious leaders took place in order to counter the numerous prejudices about Islam and foster a more sympathetic views towards Italian Muslims.

The city of Turin, led by a centre-left administration, signed an agreement (*Patto di Condivisione*, literally “a sharing agreement”) with the representatives of 21 local Muslim associations valid from 2023 to 2026. Symbolically, the agreement was sealed on March 15, namely on the first UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia. The pact aims to contribute to the better inclusion of local Islamic groups in the fabric of the city by strengthening mutual knowledge, organising joint events, and raising awareness about anti-Muslim racism. Islamophobia is still widespread in Turin, a city counting about 40,000 Muslim residents.⁵⁷ Already in 2016, the former Turin local administration had signed a joint agreement with the representatives of local Islamic communities. Such initiatives had inspired the Italian Home Office, led by a Democratic Party Minister, Marco Minniti, to sign the “National Pact for an Italian Islam” in 2017, meant to further the cooperation between the state and Muslim associations.

When it comes to religious leaders, a relevant action came from the Union of Islamic Communities and Associations in Italy (UCOII), which signed an open letter to Pier Silvio Berlusconi, CEO of MediaForEurope, to complain about the Islamophobic drift of some TV talk shows, particularly those hosted by the channel Rete4. UCOII’s President, Yassine Lafram, has stressed that certain channels “exploit the war in the Middle East to give distorted and negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims, so they contribute to creating a hostile environment for 2.5 million people living and working in Italy.”⁵⁸ Lafram’s words point to an important aspect which should be put at the forefront in the fight against Islamophobia in Italy, namely the normalisation of Islamophobic stereotypes and views by TV channels like those historically belonging to the Berlusconi family. This argument is confirmed by research examining how Italian media have used scaremongering and racist frames to discuss Islam in the last two decades.⁵⁹

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations published in past reports, which remain valid, I would add that more efforts are needed by the Italian state to reach an *Intesa*, a framework of agreement between the Italian state and religions, with the many Italian Mus-

57. <https://us3.campaign-archive.com/?u=268c065aca481784c163af973&cid=f25099bd3c>

58. <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/spettacoli/televisione/37552977/mediaset-musulmani-lettera-pier-silvio-berlusconi-islamofobia.html>

59. Bruno M. (2008) *L'Islam immaginato. Rappresentazioni e stereotipi nei media italiani*. Milano: Guerini Scientifica; Cervi L., Tejedor S., Gracia M (2021) What Kind of Islamophobia? Representation of Muslims and Islam in Italian and Spanish Media. *Religions*. 12. 427.

lim representatives. Italy seems to struggle to come to terms with its relatively recent religious pluralism. What sociologist Stefano Allievi has defined as the “Italian way to multiculturalism”⁶⁰ is marked by a traditional method of bilateral agreements between state and non-Catholic churches that has created constitutional difficulties for Muslim associations.⁶¹ Although the plurality of voices among Italian Muslims might make a uniform perspective harder to achieve, recent Italian governments have not shown enough political will to promote further negotiations with Muslims to put them on an equal footing with other legally recognised denominations. In this respect, Prime Minister Meloni planned a meeting on July 13 with the Council for the Relations with Italian Islam, a consultative body created in 2015 to facilitate the signing of such bilateral agreements and foster deeper knowledge of Islam. Yet, critics argue that such consultative bodies will not foster a significant positive impact on the situation of Muslim minorities and that, instead, they are usually summoned by Italian lawmakers in light of concerning events, such as the 2015 jihadist attacks in Europe.⁶²

Chronology

- **28 January 2023:** Forza Nuova puts up an Islamophobic banner on the Barzaghi Elementary School in Lodi.
- **15 March 2023:** The city of Turin signs a cooperation agreement (*Patto di Condivisione*) with the representatives of 21 local Muslim associations.
- **10 June 2023:** Brothers of Italy proposes a draft bill dubbed “anti-illegal mosques” bill.
- **3 July 2023:** Incident at the water park Piscina del Gabbiano in Limbiate
- **14 August 2023:** Mayor of Monfalcone bans the burkini.
- **2 October 2023:** The city of Bologna allows the option of halal menus in 72 schools.

60. Allievi S. (2014) Immigration, religious diversity and recognition of differences: the Italian way to multiculturalism. *Identities*, 21:6. 724-737.

61. Alicino F. (2022) The Legal Treatment of Muslims in Italy in the Age of Fear and Insecurity, *Journal of Law and Religion*, 37:3, 478-500.

62. <https://www.laluce.news/2023/07/12/il-governo-meloni-convoca-il-consiglio-sullislam-italiano-cosa-bolle-in-pentola/>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
KOSOVO
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Përmbledhja Ekzekutive

Islamofobia mbetet një çështje e zakonshme dhe konsistente në Kosovë, një vend me shumicë myslimane në Evropë. Në 2023 ka pas rritje shqetësuese në amplifikimin dhe përhapjen e racizmit anti-Musliman, kryesisht në platformat e mediave sociale si Facebook. Mediat sociale jo vetëm që bënë të mundur shpërndarjen e narrativave raciste, por gjithashtu shërbyen si një djep i teorive konspirative anti-muslimane, të promovuara shpesh përmes diskurseve akademike të Kosovës.

Ngritja e “Lëvizjes së Deçanit”, e cila avokonte për braktisjen vullnetare të besimit Islam, futi një dimension të ri në islamofobinë e brendshme të Kosovës. Duke instrumentalizuar mediat sociale si një mjet parësor, lëvizja mori vëmendjen duke e kornizuar refuzimin e Islamit si një rrugë jo vetem për përqaftimin e Katolicizmit, por edhe për integrimin me Evropë.

Për më tepër, Kosova vazhdon të përballet me sfida të vazhdueshme ligjore lidhur me lirinë fetare, siç shihet në incidentet në qytete si Gjakovë, Shtimë dhe Pejë, ku vajza Muslimane u përjashtuan nga shkolla për shkak të bartjes së shamisë. Shumica e tyre janë lejuara të rikthehen në shkollë me pression, që evidenton një permirësim në situatë me kalimin e kohës. Si do qoftë, këto raste zbulojnë natyrën gjinore të politikave të tilla dhe nxjerrin në pah luftën e vazhdueshme për shprehje fetare brenda mjediseve arsimore.

Peizazhi politik i Kosovës u shfaq gjithashtu dukshëm në vitin 2023, me liderët që u rreshtuan publikisht me Izraelin dhe vendet perëndimore pro-Izraelite gjatë gjenocidit të Gazës, ndërsa qëndruan të heshtur ndaj mizorive të kryera kundër civilëve Palestinezë. Ironia qëndron në faktin se populli i Kosovës e përjetoi gjenocidin e vet 25 vjet më parë, duke e bërë veçanërisht dëshpëruese këtë mungesë solidariteti nga strukturat shtetërore të Kosovës.

Executive Summary

Islamophobia remains a common and consistent issue in Kosovo, a Muslim-majority country in Europe. In 2023, there was a concerning increase in the amplification and proliferation of anti-Muslim racism, predominantly on social media platforms like Facebook. Social media has not only made the dissemination of racist narratives possible, but also serves as a breeding ground for anti-Muslim conspiracy theories, often promoted through Kosovo's academic discourses.

The rise of the “Deçan Movement,” advocating for the voluntary abandonment of the Islamic faith, introduced a new dimension to Kosovo's internalized Islamophobia. Instrumentalizing social media as a primary tool, the movement received attention by framing the rejection of Islam not only as a pathway to embracing Catholicism, but of integrating with Europe.

Furthermore, Kosovo continues to face ongoing legal challenges concerning religious freedom, as seen in the incidents in cities like Gjakova, Shtime, and Peja, where Muslim girls were removed from school for wearing the headscarf. Most of them were allowed to return to school with pressure, which evidences some improvement in the situation over time. Nevertheless, these cases reveal the gendered nature of such policies and highlight the persistent struggle for religious expression within educational settings.

Kosovo's political landscape also featured prominently in 2023, with leaders publicly aligning with Israel and pro-Israeli Western countries during the Gaza genocide, while remaining silent on the atrocities committed against Palestinian civilians. The irony lies in the fact that the people of Kosovo experienced their own genocide 25 years ago, making this lack of solidarity from Kosovo's state structures especially disheartening.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Kosovo

Type of Regime: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary government

Ruling Parties: Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (LVV, left-wing) led by Prime Minister Albin Kurti

Opposition Parties: Partia Demokratike e Kosovës (PDK, center-right), Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës (LDK, center-right), Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës (AAK, center-right), and minority parties, especially Lista Srpska (Serbian right-wing)

Last Elections: 2021 snap parliamentary elections (left-wing LVV: 58 seats; center-right party PDK: 19 seats; center-right party LDK: 15 seats; center-right AAK: 8 seats; 20 seats reserved for minorities: 10 of those seats went to Serbian right-wing party Lista Srpska)

Total Population: 1.5 million (2024 preliminary statistics)

Major Languages: Albanian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: No official state or NGO data available

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: No current statistics available

Major Religions (% of Population): Muslim 95.6%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Serbian Orthodox 1.5%

Muslim Population (% of Population): 1.6 million (95.6%) in 2011

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës (BIK, Islamic Community of Kosovo) and Bashkësia e Tarikateve të Kosovës (BTK, Union of Kosovo Tariqas)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: N/A

Far-Right Parties: N/A

Far-Right Movements: N/A

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No, but debates are ongoing regarding the wearing of hijabs in schools and public institutions.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** No, but debates are ongoing regarding the wearing of full-face veils in public institutions.

Introduction

Though located within the geographical boundaries of Europe, Kosovo's status as a European country continues to be called into question. One of the main hang-ups for its dreams of Euro-Atlantic integration is its being majority Muslim. Though this is rarely made explicit by Western actors, the efforts within multiple sectors of Kosovo society and institutions to distance themselves from Islam and other Muslims constitute evidence that many people in Kosovo understand all too well that Islam is a problem for Europe. Some of these movements involve directly leaving Islam, thus embracing Islamophobia fully. Other phenomena, such as the continued difficulty female students face in wearing the hijab, are examples of internalized Islamophobia, highlighted in previous years' reports. In these cases, there is a privileging of secular standards, even by those that may consider themselves Muslims.

Despite all of Kosovo's efforts to secure its position in Euro-Atlantic structures, perhaps no year prior to 2023 represented such direct incursions into its sovereignty. This came in the form of Serbia's attack on Banjska in September.¹ The ensuing Western response was not nearly as staunchly pro-Kosovo as Kosovo is pro-West, illustrating the country's difficult geopolitical position. For all the Western fears of Kosovo's potential to be involved with terrorism, the Banjska attack by Serbian paramilitaries constituted an actual terrorist attack within Kosovo. Yet, its being unrelated to Islamic extremism, made it largely illegible as terrorism for Western actors. The European Commission Report, for example, discussed the extent to which Kosovo's anti-terrorism laws are "aligned" with the EU, as one of Kosovo's prerequisites for its ascension. However, it did not directly term the Banjska attack as such. Therefore, the attack was comparatively made into a lesser priority, and the term "terror/ism" was left amorphous and implicitly reserved for Islamic threats and actors.

One especially salient element of Islamophobia is the insinuation that Muslims are foreign agents in their respective countries.² This insinuation is both internalized within Kosovo and its inverse is also applied to it from the outside, i.e., that Kosovo does not belong in Western international bodies because it is majority-Muslim—irrespective of how secular much of the population considers itself. Thus, it is evident that Islam in Islamophobic constructions is seen as inherently political and this is framed as an intrinsic problem for national identity, as well as international belonging. It also calls into question how effective the strategies of embracing and internal-

1. In this attack, Serbian paramilitary forces crossed over into Kosovo via its northern border with Serbia, and attempted to take the Monastery, holding hostage its pilgrims. The Kosovo police responded, and in the end four Serb militants and one Kosovo police officer were killed. The Western response included condemnation of the attack, but also criticisms of measures Kosovo introduced in response.

2. For example, Piro Rexhepi states "Serbian history and propaganda . . . has sought to present Albanians as non-native to the Balkans to justify their expulsion and alignment of its colonial objectives with the European ones." *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2023), p. 105.

izing Islamophobia will be, if Kosovo is seen as suspect anyway, and if they cause further divisions in society.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Previous reports on Kosovo have highlighted the discrepancies in the collection of statistics on Islamophobia. For 2023, statistics from the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council appear to indicate that there were thirty cases of hate and/or national or religious intolerance in the country in 2023.³ However, as in previous years, neither the religion of the perpetrators nor the victims is specified, nor is the type of intolerance that motivated it. Furthermore, as Adem Ferizaj argues in his 2019 report, the mere fact that statistics on Islamophobia are not collected, is itself possibly indicative of the internalization of Islamophobic logics. This is because it appears not to take the issue seriously.⁴



Figure 1: Patrik Kurti on TikTok live threatening to bomb the Great Mosque of Mitrovica, September 2023.

3. Statistics obtained via email directly from the agency.

4. Adem Ferizaj; Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2019, in: Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2019, Istanbul, SETA, 2020. 463

In terms of threats of physical attacks, in September 2023, Patrik Kurti, a Christian Albanian from Kosovo posted a video on his TikTok explaining that he would take three bombs to the Great Mosque of Mitrovica to kill as many Muslims as possible.⁵ In a video, he referred to Muslim Albanians in a derogatory manner, even calling them “Taliban” and “Muslimut,” which combines the word “Muslim” with the Albanian word “mut,” meaning “feces” or “excrement.” (Fig. 1) Kurti was arrested and pled guilty to the crime of publicly spreading hatred against a religious group.⁶ This case highlights the existence of extremist Christian elements within Kosovar Albanian society. This is significant because the term “extremist” is usually associated exclusively with practicing Muslims.

Earlier that year, in May, six people were arrested for disturbing the Friday prayer in a village in Podujeva.⁷ While this may not be as extreme a case as that in Mitrovica, the fact that multiple people were involved shows that there was an organized effort to disrupt the practice of the Islamic faith.

Employment

Previous reports highlighted employment issues faced by Muslim women who cover their head. There continues to be a lack of clarity on the “legality” of wearing a hijab in public sector jobs both in terms of explicit prohibitions and legal protections. At the same time, there is little to no discussion of discrimination against men who have beards or wear religious clothing. The limited “visibility” of Muslims in the public sector, according to one anonymous respondent, might be attributed to their hesitance to apply for public sector jobs under the assumption that “visible Muslims” will not be hired or treated fairly in those jobs. Therefore, one possible response could be a sort of self-isolation in response to expectations of discrimination.

In recent years, and as previous reports have discussed, there have been various examples of women with headscarves being suspended or fired from their jobs. However, in an interview about discrimination against hijab-wearing women, Rovena Tujani Klinaku, a lawyer, highlights an optimistic point. She states, “Until today, all of the court decisions having to do with hijab-wearing women, the hijab-wearing women won the cases. In each case, the courts have ruled that their suspension from work was a violation of the law.”⁸ This is a sign that, despite the anti-Muslim discrimina-

5. “Photo + video - Muslims are threatened with mass murder/ The young man from Kosovo hangs out with Nikola Xhufka.” *CNA*, September 9, 2023, accessed May 22, 2024. <https://www.cna.al/english/aktualiteti/fo-to-video-kercenon-me--masive-muslimanet-i-riu-nga-kosova-shoq-i375703>

6. “Mitrovicasi që kërcënoi për sulm terrorist në një Xhami në Mitrovicë, denohet nga gjykata.” *Vezhguesi*, October 28, 2023, accessed May 22, 2024. <https://vezhguesi.com/mitrovicasi-qe-kercenoi-per-sulm-terror-ist-ne-nje-xhami-ne-mitrovice-denohet-nga-gjykata/>

7. Xheneta Murtezaj, “Penguan faljen e namazit, arrestohen gjashtë persona në Podujevë.” *Kallxo*, May 27, 2023, accessed May 22, 2024. https://kallxo.com/lajm/penguan-faljen-e-namazit-arrestohen-gjashte-persona-ne-podujeve/?fbclid=IwAR33KZFZozW_CfrEVkL-Ro7s8KLCXKUfSszWb40xIk2k6P07KdDDI11OOI4

8. Gazeta InFokus. “Çikat n’Fokus - Diskriminimi ndaj grave e sidomos atyre me mbulesë, si qëndron shoqëria kosovare?” *Youtube*, August 11, 2023. Interview 18:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7XNFwr3P8U>

tion that many covered women face, Kosovo's judicial system seems to be upholding their right to work.

A case that was unrelated to discrimination based on dress was the issuing, and subsequent retraction, by the Municipality of Kamenicë of an email shortening the working hours during Ramadan. The municipality claimed on Facebook, after receiving significant backlash, that it had never sent the email and that standard working hours would remain the same even during the month of Ramadan.⁹ The portal Kallzo.com, however, obtained proof that the email was indeed sent. That the municipality not only retracted its accommodation but attempted to pretend it never offered it, gives the impression that recognizing and accommodating the challenges of fasting is shameful and that Muslims are getting unfair privileges. In the end, Muslims in this municipality were left with no reduction in working hours. The situation was different in the Municipality of Gjilan, where the mayor agreed to reduce the working hours for fasting employees.¹⁰

Education

In March 2023, the well-known Kosovar-Albanian historian Frashër Demaj was invited to the popular interview show “Oxygen” for an interview in which he made controversial statements which provoked many Muslims throughout the country. During their discussion, Demaj stated, “There has been an effort that we can see in almost every strategy from Serbia ... to immerse [Albanians] into illiteracy and religion [Islam].”¹¹ Despite the lack of evidence for this claim, Demaj insisted on promoting this Islamophobic narrative, which suggests that Serbs, the historical oppressors of Albanians, benefit from a secret plan to make Albanians more Muslim [religious]. Without historical evidence, it can be assumed that Demaj uses this narrative because he believes it will encourage Muslims to reject Islam, by associating it with their enemies.¹²

The historian continued his unfounded narrative by telling the show's host, Besim Dina, that Russian imams were once present in Kosovo's mosques.¹³ When asked if this information is verified, Demaj replied, “This is a fact. This is oral history.”¹⁴ A few days later, a journalist asked Demaj for specifics about these Russian imams or

9. Komuna e Kamenicës - Faqja Zyrtare. 2023. “REAGIM/NJOFTIM.” *Facebook*, March 29, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/KomunaKamenice/posts/591836956311974>

10. Valon Fana, “Punëtorët e komunës së Kamenicës kishin pranuar njoftimin për shkurtim të orarit gjatë Ramazanit.” *Kallxo*, April, 6, 2023. <https://kallxo.com/krypometer/punetoret-e-komunes-se-kamenices-kishin-pranuar-njoftimin-per-shkurtim-te-orarit-gjate-ramazanit/>

11. Oxygen. “OXYGEN Pjesa 1 - Frashër Demaj 11.03.2023.” *Youtube*, March 11, 2023. Interview 1:34:00 to 1:38:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sSZG6zsvmM>

12. It is important to note that Fetiu also discusses a similar dynamic in Kosovo in 2015: connecting Islamic radicalism to Serbia, with no evidence (306).

13. Demaj claimed: “Russian imams were sent to Kosovo to convince Muslim Albanians not to send their children to school, to keep them in mosques because if they become educated they will become Serbs.”

14. Oxygen. “OXYGEN Pjesa 1 - Frashër Demaj 11.03.2023.” *Youtube*, March 11, 2023. Interview 1:34:00 to 1:38:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sSZG6zsvmM>

the mosques they were in. Demaj, frustrated, said, “There are plenty. You can find them yourself.” The journalist noted they couldn’t find any evidence, to which Demaj responded, “They are findable. Just check Google or ask one of the elders in your house,” showing an inability and disinterest in providing evidence for his own claims, despite being a historian.¹⁵ Shortly after the interview, the Grand Imam of Peja Enes Goga released a 20-minute response video systematically debunking Demaj’s claims and propaganda.¹⁶ (Fig. 2)

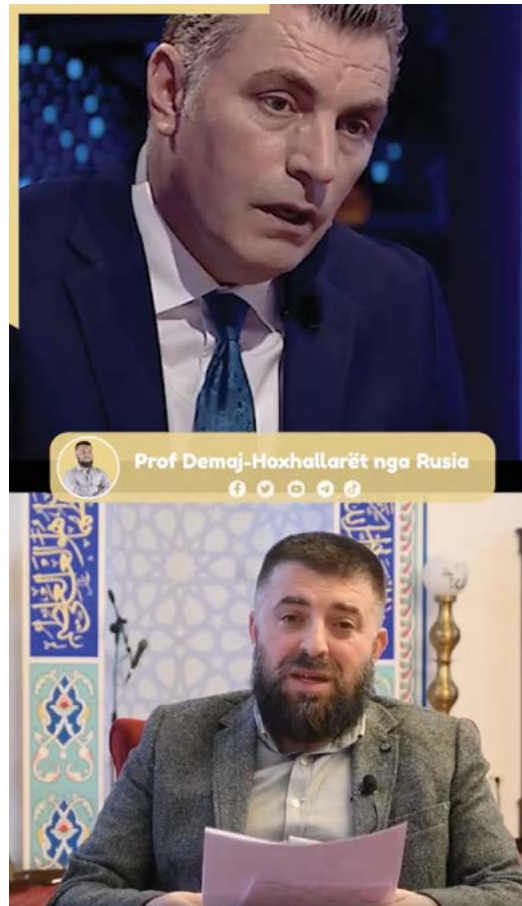


Figure 2: A screenshot from Grand Imam Enes Goga’s Facebook video response to Frashër Demaj’s anti-Muslim comments, March 14, 2023.

Demaj is not the only historian in Kosovo invested in claiming connections between Serbia and Muslims in Kosovo, despite the absence of historical facts. Another historian, Belisar Jezerci, makes similar arguments – such as that the “800 mosques

15. Nacionale Videos. 2023. “‘Pyesni pleqtë’, ‘Kërko falje’ — Hoxhallarët ‘rusë’ në Kosovë.” *Facebook*, March 16, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&cv=618638520082512>

16. Hoxhe Enes Goga. 2023. “Prof Demaj - Hoxhallarët nga Rusia - Hoxhë Enes Goga.” *Facebook*, March 14, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/hoxheenesgoga/videos/249072050795049>

in Kosovo are financed by Serbia.”¹⁷ By associating Islam to Serbia, not only is the religion portrayed as a foreign instrument, but also as the downfall of the Albanian nation. In this imaginary, the mosque serves as a sort of “Trojan Horse” for the Albanian people. It then follows that practicing Muslims are internal enemies and perhaps even agents of Serbia. This highly deceitful and pernicious maneuvering encourages the justification of Islamophobia among Albanians because doing so is rehashed as resistance to Serbia. The irony of this narrative is in its parallels to the narrative used by Serbia to enact its genocides in Bosnia and Kosovo during the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Other than the explicit Islamophobia used by Serbs against Bosnian and Albanian Muslims in the genocides of the 1990s, the ascribing of mosques to Serbia also ignores the undeniable fact that Serbian forces destroyed 40 percent of Kosovo’s mosques and other Islamic heritage sites.¹⁸ A country that wanted to use mosques to control its neighbor would not have systematically destroyed them. Therefore, the illogical nature of this contention, as well as Demaj’s refusal to provide evidence, shows how long the legs of Islamophobia in Kosovo can be, even in the absence of logic and evidence. Finally, this narrative completely dismisses the role Islam played in the preservation of Albanian culture, language, and identity.¹⁹ None of these factors are recognized by Albanian Islamophobes, who prefer a historical revisionism which places Serbia on the same side as a racialized “Islam,” in order to place themselves on the same side as Europeanness/Whiteness—at all costs.

In an example of an effort made to accommodate Muslim students, the Council of the Islamic Community of Peja released a statement in November that, in the Tahtali Mosque, the Friday prayers would be moved to 13:00, allowing students of the morning shift to make the prayer without missing any school lessons.²⁰ The significance of this adjustment is that the Friday prayers at the rest of the mosques in Peja are held at 12:00, making Tahtali Mosque a unique exception that accommodates students and others who need a later prayer time. However, when this news was posted on the popular Facebook page “Peja në Fokus” (Peja in Focus), numerous Islamophobic comments were made. One person commented, “This is Islamic fascism. They should be imprisoned because they are against the Albanian nation and the constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.” Another individual made a comment saying that the students “do not need God” and instead need to “pick up books to become a doctor or a judge

17. “800 xhami në Kosovë financohen nga Serbia”, flet historiani që u kthye në Katolik – Shqipëria Live - Top Channel (top-channel.tv) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHzcQVAKbEQ>

18. Sabri Bajgora, *Destruction of Islamic Heritage in the Kosovo War 1998-1999*. (Prishtina: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, 2014). 6.

19. Kaleshi, Hasan. “Depërtimi Turk Në Ballkan Dhe Islamizmi: Faktorët E Ruajtjes Së Qenësisë Etnike Dhe Kom-bëtare Të Popullit Shqiptar.” *Perpjekja* 36–37 (season-03 2018): 275–86. https://www.revistaperpjekja.org/images/stories/botimet/perpjekja_36-37.pdf.

20. Peja në Fokus. 2023. “Pejë: Nxënësit e shkollave të ndërrimit të paraditës në qytetin e Pejës do të kenë mundësi që namazin e xhomasë ta falin në xhami, pa menduar që të braktisin mësimin.” *Facebook*, November 2, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100063638080030/search/?q=namazin%20xhami>

or a professor or an engineer” urging them to abandon the “fairy tales” of mosques. While the first comment implies that Islam is inherently fascist and diametrically opposed to the Albanian nation, the second comment suggests that one cannot be both a practicing Muslim and educated. The ease with which these narratives can emerge in Kosovo illustrates the widespread salience of Islamophobic thinking.

Politics

The year 2023 was a very politically significant year for Kosovo. Internationally, Kosovo faced significant pressure from the European Union and United States to ratify the agreement for the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities.²¹ Within its territory, the Banjska attack by Serbian paramilitaries ended with several of them being killed by Kosovar police, and one Kosovar police officer being killed. A month later, the genocide in Gaza provided Kosovar politicians with a chance to publicly align their politics further with the politics of pro-Israeli Western countries, by not recognizing Israeli attacks against civilians as genocide. Quite tellingly, in each of these cases, Kosovo attempted to present itself as a staunch denouncer of terrorism. The European Union, however, did not frame the Banjska attack as terrorism, and instead punished Kosovo for measures it took against Serbia before and after the attack.

Ferizaj emphasized in four consecutive reports the existence of Islamophobia within Kosovo, but also toward Kosovo.²² This was evident, even when not explicit, in the EU-ascension requirements made toward Kosovo, especially vis-à-vis Serbia.²³ The 2023 European Commission’s report highlighted no less than fifty times the need for Kosovo to take action on terrorism.²⁴ However, despite denouncing the “violence” in the north in the Banjska attack and naming forces connected to Serbia as the perpetrators, the report does not refer to that attack as terrorism. Its use of the term “terror/ism” is instead left amorphous and implicitly connected to “Islamic” terrorism, rather than at any point to the Serbian attack, which in fact took several Serbian Orthodox Christian pilgrims hostage. This is an example of implicit Islamophobia on the part of the EU because it over-exaggerates the risk of an imagined Islamic terror threat, while downplaying an actual one that was anti-Albanian and arguably anti-Muslim in character. The report furthermore seems to equate the sever-

21. The Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities (ASM) in Kosovo is a proposed association for the self-governing of Kosovo’s Serb population, with the goal of providing a certain level of autonomy to the Serb-majority areas within Kosovo. The ASM was first agreed upon in 2013 during the Brussels Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, but it still has not been implemented.

22. Adem Ferizaj: *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022*, in: Enes Bayraktı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022*

23. Admirim (@Admirim). “When Kosovo seated its democratically-elected mayors, the US, France, Italy, Germany & the UK issued the following statement, calling on X ‘to immediately step back & de-escalate.’ Today, terrorists killed one Kosovo police officer and injured 3, but there is no statement yet.” X, Sept. 24, 2023.

24. Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. 2023. *Kosovo Report 2023*. European Commission. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2023_en.

ity of the Banjska attack to the Kosovo government's installing Albanian mayors in the north – thus effectively equating the validity of the sovereignty claims of Srpska Lista and the Kosovo government.²⁵

Additionally, criticisms of issues of “organized crime”²⁶ in the north of Kosovo are framed in the report as problems of Kosovo rather than Serbian parallel structures.²⁷ This gives the impression that responsibility falls on the government of Kosovo for the actions of Serbian autonomous entities, but also will be rebuked if it tries to assert its sovereignty by taking any action against them. In fact, the report's linking of crime with terrorism, is in line with a trope commonly articulated by the EU when it comes to Muslim populations in the Balkans: that of the Balkan Crime-Terror nexus.²⁸ This narrative, discussed by Piro Rexhepi, encapsulates fears that Kosovo's Muslim religious makeup and Balkan nature make it a risk of being a hub of *both* mafia activity *and* terrorism, and that the two will feed off each other.²⁹ Ironically, the factors of crime and terror did converge in the Banjska attack, but since Islam played no part in it, the report does not recognize it as such.

Before the Banjska attack, there were two Congressional Hearings in the U.S. which discussed Balkan politics, especially the need for Kosovo's ratification of the Association of Serb Municipalities. The first was a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing in May and the second a House Foreign Affairs Committee in July. The majority of congresspeople who spoke placed greater responsibility on Kosovo to adhere to Serbia's demands than on Serbia's need to denounce and move away from its anti-Albanian positioning. Though these hearings did not constitute a case of explicit Islamophobia, the insinuation that Muslim-majority Kosovo needs to make more concessions to Serbia can be understood as in part a product of the tendency to blame Kosovo for its own oppression at the hands of the Serbs, who largely continue to subscribe to Islamophobic narratives such as the Great Replacement theory (for example, the claim that Albanians used their higher birth rate to displace Serbs) and that Kosovo is the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In the face of ever-increasing Serbian threats of invasion of Kosovo – to finish the job it couldn't in 1999 – the Kosovo government refuses to see the parallels between itself and Palestine. In the aftermath of October 7 and the genocide against Palestini-

25. Ibid, 82.

26. Ibid, 49.

27. Ibid, 5, 42.

28. *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2023), p. 99-100; “Mainstreaming Islamophobia: The politics of European enlargement and the Balkan crime-terror nexus.” *East European Quarterly* 43, no. 2-3 (2015): 189-214.

29. “The criminalization of “Albanians” in Western Europe, the US, and the Balkans as notorious mafia cartels became a prominent feature of Euro American security structures. Repeatedly issued warnings to the EU and NATO that Albanian organized crime penetrating the EU and the Balkans was also becoming involved in racial Islamism turned into a serious threat to the Euro Atlantic border in the Balkans.” Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route* (Duke University Press, 2023), p. 99-100.

ans, several Kosovar politicians did not hesitate to side strongly with Israel, including Prime Minister Albin Kurti. (Fig. 3) While this stance cannot be in itself be considered outright Islamophobia, it does illustrate the political necessity of Kosovo's distancing itself from anything perceived to be quintessentially Muslim, violent, etc. There is a palatable fear that Kosovo's survival depends on this dissociation.

The pro-Israel position of the current administration represents a change in the ruling party Vetëvendosje's platform from before their coming to power. Previously, they had held a strongly critical position against the Western neocolonialism of Kosovo, which included sympathies with the Palestinian struggle.³⁰ However, it is essential to note that the public statements of Kosovar politicians are not necessarily representative of the populace's sympathies. Though the Kosovo government maintains a pro-Israel line, much of the population has sympathy for Palestinian suffering, and sees parallels between it and their own experiences of genocide.³¹



Figure 3: Prime Minister Albin Kurti's tweet expressing solidarity with Israel, X, October 9, 2023.

One explanation for this stance could be internalized Islamophobia, which Ferizaj emphasized in his 2022 report. As he discusses, internalized Islamophobia is when people who are Muslim – however marginally – take actions to distance themselves from Islam and Muslims, because they have accepted and “internalized” the idea that Islam and Muslims are inferior, dangerous, etc., and thus being associated with them is risky. In the context of Kosovo's continued political hurdles in its quest for Euro-Atlantic integration, it appears that the government officials routinely distance themselves from Islam in order to curry the favor of Western countries. This

30. User @Erggini noted the irony of this shift in platform. ERGO (@Erggini). “Tjera fjale ke pas.” [Your words used to be different]. X, Oct. 9, 2023. <https://x.com/Erggini/status/1711369304610922612>

31. This can be observed in personal conversations with citizens, but also in the multiple, anonymous pro-Palestinian graffiti that have appeared around Kosovo. It can also be evidenced in social media posts and activism. However, there is also a decided pro-Israel social media effort, usually coming from accounts which promote Islamophobia.

in the face of existential threats from their neighbor Serbia, which is ironically itself motivated in large part by Islamophobia in its hopes of re-colonizing Kosovo and removing the Albanian “Turks.”³²

On November 12, 2023, a few hours before the Kosovo-Israel football match, the Collective for Feminist Thought and Action unveiled a massive Palestinian flag with the words “Free Palestine” on it.³³ The flag was draped over one of the walls of the Grand Hotel, right next to a massive, government-sponsored Ukrainian flag with the words “Free Ukraine” on it. (Fig. 4) Ironically, the Palestinian flag was immediately removed by the Kosovar authorities. The fact that the Ukrainian flag has remained in place for almost two years (and is, in fact, still up) reveals a prime example of a double standard. Both countries are experiencing a brutal war of aggression from a foreign occupier. The argument can be made that Israel’s genocidal attack on Gaza is even more brutal, given the higher number of civilian casualties in a much shorter period. Therefore, a plausible explanation for Kosovo’s double standard might be rooted in anti-Muslim racism. Kosovo’s lack of solidarity with Palestine might be driven by its geopolitical reliance on the U.S. and the need to align with U.S. allies. However, this rationale does not fully take into account that the United States’ double standard towards Palestine and Ukraine also stems from anti-Muslim racism and Eurocentrism. In fact, as highlighted above, the double standard the U.S. presents to Kosovo (known by some as the most pro-American country on Earth) and Serbia (which is more closely aligned with Russia and is ambivalent about joining the EU), could also be motivated by anti-Muslim racism—no matter the level of religiosity of the majority of Kosovar Muslims.

Finally, in terms of a recognition of Islamophobia in Kosovo on the national or international stage, neither the government, nor any political party, nor civil society actor in Kosovo commemorated the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15, with no posts, press releases, or news coverage marking the occasion. The European Commission report discussed above had a section on “freedom of thought, conscience[,] and religion,” but, quite tellingly, made no mention of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism, instead, assuming that ethnic/religious minorities (Serb Orthodox and Jews) would be the ones in need of protection by the state. It lamented the “poor” “relations between the government and Serbian Orthodox Church” stated that “efforts need to be made to promote Holocaust remembrance, education and research.”³⁴

32. A closer analysis of Kosovo’s policies on Israel-Palestine can be found here: Jegić, Denijal. “Kosovo’s path to Jerusalem: Orientalist political communication and the free world discourse.” *Media, War & Conflict* (2024).

33. Gazeta Demos. 2023. “Flamuri i Palestinës ka qëndruar për disa minuta në qendër të Prishtinës.” *YouTube*, November 12, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9vIYJzSOFg>

34. Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. 2023. *Kosovo Report 2023*. European Commission. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2023_en_, 31.

Yet, the report noted Kosovo's adherence to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism: a highly controversial definition because, in part, it equates criticism of Israel to anti-Semitism. As Rexhepi discusses, this definition has been in force in Kosovo since 2020, as part of a deal with the United States that involved Israel's recognition of Kosovo.³⁵ Therefore, its adoption was a direct product of Kosovo trying to ensure its survival vis-à-vis its neighbor, by seeking inclusion into Euro-Atlantic structures.

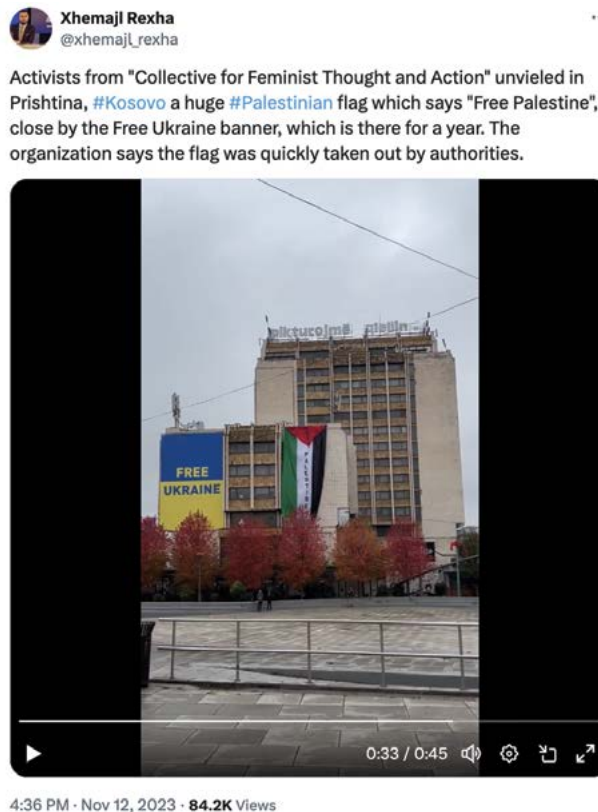


Figure 4: In this tweet, the unveiling of the Palestinian flag can be seen just moments before it was forcefully removed by the authorities.³⁶

Media

Previous national reports on Kosovo in *European Islamophobia Reports* all highlight the key role of media in Kosovo as one of the foremost areas in which Islamophobia is perpetuated in the society. Fetiù in the 2015 report suggests the dire necessity

35. "In turn, Kosovo committed to opening an embassy in Jerusalem and adopting the controversial definition of anti-Semitism promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which considers critique of the settler colonial state of Israel as an act of anti-Semitism." Rexhepi 104

36. Agim Sulaj, "Vendoset pastaj largohet flamuri i Palestinës në qendër të Prishtinës." *AA*, November 12, 2023. <https://www.aa.com.tr/sq/balkani/vendoset-pastaj-largohet-flamuri-i-palestin%c3%abs-n%c3%ab-qend%c3%abrt%c3%ab-prishtin%c3%abs/3051970>

for “ethical principles of journalism with regards to reporting the issues of religion in general, and Islam in particular.”³⁷ However, in the nearly ten years since that recommendation has been made, the media in Kosovo has only become more sensationalized and less ethical, and this is not limited only to Islam. The continued salience of such narratives in media representations of Islam provide a useful – though disturbing – window into the internalization of a Muslim-majority society of the politics of the war on terror and the continued purchase of Communist anti-religious and especially anti-Muslim ideas. The following section will discuss some examples.

In August 2023, the International Seminar on Language, Literature, and Albanian Culture was held in Prishtina. The well-known Swiss historian Oliver Jens Schmitt who gained popularity for his biography of Skanderbeg, delivered a lecture at the seminar titled “Kosovo and Albania: Two Paths of Albanian History 1912-2023.” After the seminar, Kosovo’s largest newspaper published an article covering the lecture titled “Schmitt: With Ottomanism and Islamism against Albanian National Identity.”³⁸ The title of this article implies that Islam and Ottomanism are inherently at odds with, and a threat to, Albanian national identity. Mustafë Bajrami, a theologian from Kosovo, responded to the article by stating, “Here is a form of Islamophobia of pathological proportions. Look how they express their fascist hostility against Islam. How they target Islam and us Muslims by distorting everything related to the Ottoman Empire and Turkey...”³⁹ According to the media outlet, *Gazeta Mejdani*, the title better reflects Islamophobia than it does the content of Schmitt’s lecture.⁴⁰ Therefore, the argument can be made that certain media in Kosovo are unable or unwilling to handle academic nuance, preferring instead to diminish complex historical issues into simplistic, black-and-white narratives, which are sensationalist and politically expedient.

In April 2023, one of Kosovo’s major media outlets, Kohavision, televised an interview with Hamdi Thaqi, a resident of Llapushnik, a village in the municipality of Drenas. A short clip from the interview was uploaded to Kohavision’s social media pages and gained significant traction due to Thaqi’s statements. (Fig. 5) In the video, Thaqi explains that the Catholic church in Llapushnik accepts Albanians who wear the *plis*, the traditional Albanian white woolen skullcap, but that mosques would not

37. Arber Fetiu (2016): *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2015*, in: Enes Bayraktı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2015*, Istanbul, SETA, 2016. 307.

38. Col. Mehmeti, “Schmitt: With Ottomanism and Islamism against Albanian national identity. *Koha*, August 19, 2023, accessed May 23, 2024. <https://www.koha.net/en/culture/389037/Schmitt-with-Ottomanism-and-Islamism-against-the-Albanian-national-identity/>

39. Mustafë Bajrami. 2023. “Ja një format i islamofobisë në përmasa patologjike.” *Facebook*, August 20, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/profile/10003717744724/search/?q=Ja%20nj%C3%AB%20format%20i%20islamofobis%C3%AB%20n%C3%AB%20p%C3%ABrmasa%20patologjike>

40. “Reagon ashpër Mustafë Bajrami: Këta janë islamofobë në përmasa patologjike!” *Gazeta Mejdani*, August 20, 2023. <https://mejdani.com/reagon-ashper-mustafe-bajrami-keta-jane-islamofobe-ne-permasa-patologjike/>

accept such a national symbol.⁴¹ In other words, Thaqi is again promoting the ahistorical myth that Islam, unlike Christianity, is uniquely hostile and intolerant towards Albanianness.

A few days later, the Council of the Islamic Community in Drenas took to Facebook to respond to the statements that Thaqi made on Kohavision. (Fig. 6) Among other detailed critiques, the council emphasized that “the grandparents of our great-grandfathers were not only present in the mosque with the white *plis*, which is not discussed, but they were in the first row, and many of them were precious, honored, and respected imams.”⁴² This, again is an example of a religious leader having to respond to Islamophobic statements. Thaqi was able to make a claim with no evidence, while the Islamic Community of Drenas was effectively forced to provide photographic evidence that his claims were not accurate. This illustrates a clear power differential between those making Islamophobic claims and the Muslims seemingly forced to respond and assure the public that they are not, in fact, inherent traitors. Overall, it seems that though the majority of Kosovo’s population identifies as Muslim, they remain almost constantly on the defensive, discursively.

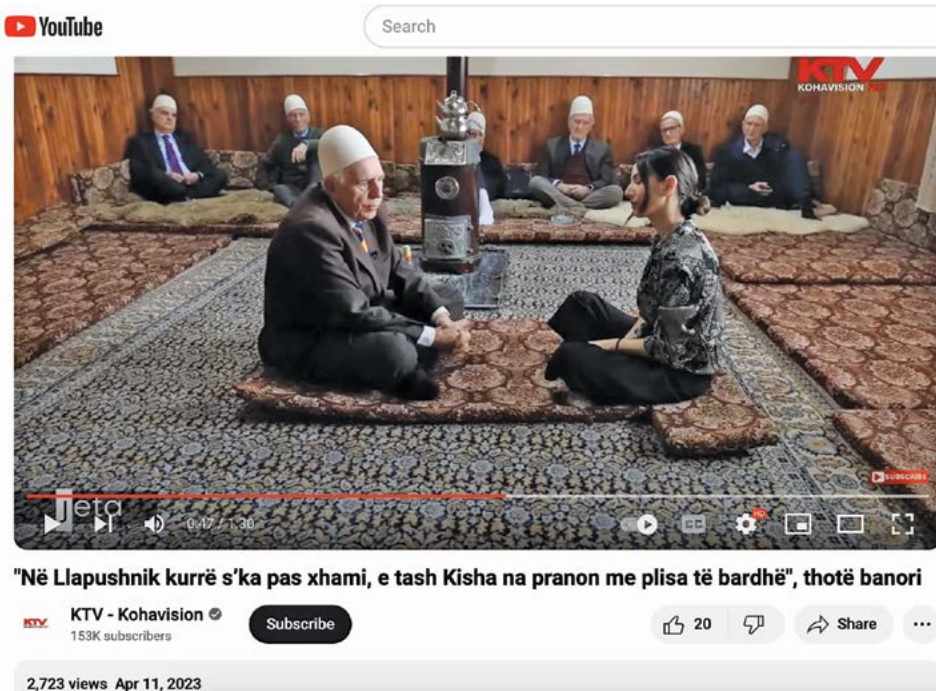


Figure 5: In this video uploaded by Kohavision, Hamdi Thaqi sits and chats with a journalist, claiming that Albanians were never allowed to enter mosques with a *plis* the traditional Albanian white woolen skullcap.

41. KTV - Kohavision. ““Në Llapushnik kurrë s’ka pas xhami, e tash Kisha na pranon me plisa të bardhë”, thotë banori.” *YouTube*, April 11, 2023, accessed May 24, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4q9yIFceo_o

42. Këshilli i Bashkësisë Islame–Drenas. 2023. “Reagim.” *Facebook*, April 9, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/search/posts?q=Llapushnik%20xhami%20plis>

Këshilli i Bashkësisë Islame-Drenas
 April 9, 2023 · 🌐

Reagim

Në një kronikë televizive, të realizuar në një odë të fshatit Llapushnik, i moshuari "Prof" Hamdi Thaqi pa fije turpi ngritë një të pavërtetë duke pohuar se nuk u është lejuar hyjra në xhami me plis të bardh, e gjoja një veprim i tillë po u mundësohet tash në kishën e Llapushnikut. Një konstatim i tillë jo që është i pavërtetë e i paqëndrueshëm, por është antihistorik madje edhe ofendues për besimtarët myslimanë drenicas që ndër shekuj e bartën me krenari e dinjitet plisin si simbol kombëtar në drekë e dekë, në odë e xhami, në luftë e liri, në gëzime e hidhërimi.

Dihet botërisht se me drenicasit nuk ka mundur askush gjatë historisë të manipulojë, madje as në kohërat e thyerjeve të mëdha me të cilat jemi përballur.

Nëse individ të caktuar kanë jetuar me identitet të rrejshëm, drenicasit gjatë gjithë historisë kanë lindur, jetuar e vepruar me nder, krenari e dinjitet.

Gjyshërit e stërgjyshit tanë jo vetëm që ishin prezen në xhami me plis të bardh gjë që nuk diskutohet, por ata ishin në saf të parë, e shumë prej tyre edhe imam të çmuar, të nderuar e të respektuar.

Ftojme bashkëfshatarët e tij në Llapushnik që ti tregojnë atij dhe bashkëmendimtarëve të tij se ajo që ka deklaruar është e pavërtetë - gënjeshtër e kulluar.

Harmoninë tonë fetare askush mos t'a shfrytëzoj për agjendat e tyre përqarëse.

Paqe dhe selam për të gjithë.



Figure 6: The Council of the Islamic Community in Drenas posted their response to Thaqi's comments on Facebook. Alongside a text debunking Thaqi's claims, the council included multiple pictures, both historical and contemporary, showing Albanians wearing the traditional *plis* in mosques, even during prayer.

Justice System

One of the spheres in Kosovo in which Muslims, specifically school-age girls, continue to face legal difficulties is when it comes to wearing the headscarf in schools. Two common lines of reasoning for the bans appear to be: (1) insinuations that the girls are being forced by their families, and (2) the preservation of secular uniforms. These “problems” are “solved” by removing the girls from school, thus directly impeding on their right to education and punishing them for differing from the standard.

On September 1, 2023, the first day of the school year, a girl with a headscarf at the Hajdar Dushi High School in Gjakovë was sent home by the school directorate. She was told that because of her hijab, she was not allowed to continue her

studies.⁴³ A few days later, the mayor of Gjakovë promised that the student would be allowed to return to school to continue her education.⁴⁴ Similarly, in the town of Shtimë, fifteen-year-old Sara Bungu was forced to leave school for wearing a headscarf. The school's director, Rexhep Hasani, demanded she remove the headscarf or face expulsion, which Sara refused. The mayor of Shtimë, Qemajl Aliu, however, argued that no student could be expelled for wearing a headscarf.⁴⁵

In the city of Peja, an eighth-grade student was also expelled from school for wearing a headscarf. Agime Lajqi, the school principal, informed her on the first day that she could not attend classes with a hijab. According to the Director of Education, Naser Gega, the law prohibits religious uniforms in school settings.⁴⁶ Many of the students' classmates protested the decision, a sign that the younger generations are opposed to the discriminatory policies of the Kosovar government. (Fig. 7) Despite the challenges faced by these girls, there is a sense in Kosovo that things have improved in terms of the possibilities of girls being allowed to wear the hijab in school if they choose to do so.



Figure 7: Classmates of the expelled student in Peja staged a protest in solidarity with their hijab-wearing classmate, demonstrating against the school's decision and advocating for religious freedom, September 11, 2023.

43. "Në Gjimnazin "Hajdar Dushi" në Gjakovë vajza me shami nuk lejohet të hyj në shkollë qysh në ditën e parë." *rri*, January 9, 2023. <https://rri.tv/ne-gjimnazin-hajdar-dush-ne-gjakove-vajza-me-shami-nuk-lejohet-te-hyj-ne-shkolle-qysh-ne-diten-e-pare/>
44. "Ardian Gjini: Vajza me shami të Enjten i kthehet shkollës." RTI, May 9, 2023, accessed May 22, 2024. https://rri.tv/ardian-gjini-vajza-me-shami-do-te-kthehet-ne-shkolle/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR-0MOM5dMB-4EXfkukE5qbIqOiwnfYkmZtvp3G45r-JwfgQ13eyZovpx6pk_aem_AXXBpct80rU-aJN-qBSr4Zrp_E-jjLLwKC5WnoB-SxCtNG8dxnR2nYOXbp5Sc9CRmvKXkAtYVF_RUIw47F__aj49
45. Muslimania.al. 2023. "Përrjashtohet nxënësja në Kosovë për shkak të shamisë, shumë pak javë para përfundimit të vitit shkollor, duke rrezikuar të humbasë gjithë vitin." *Facebook*, April 10, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=709055971219841&set=pb.100063463330054.-2207520000>
46. "Naser Gega, drejtori i arsimit në Pejë , për rastin e përjashtimit të nxënës me mbulesë: Ligji ndalon bartjen e uniformës fetare në shkollë." *Drini.us*, September 11, 2023. <https://www.drini.us/naser-gega-drejtori-i-arsimit-ne-peje-per-rastin-e-perjashtimit-te-nxeneses-me-mbulese-ligji-ndalon-bartjen-e-uniformes-fetare-ne-shkolla/>

Internet

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram serve as breeding grounds for Islamophobic rhetoric and anti-Muslim propaganda – across the world, but also in Kosovo. On Facebook alone, there are numerous Albanian nationalist pages,⁴⁷ alongside explicitly anti-Muslim pages,⁴⁸ that actively promote Islamophobia among Kosovo-Albanian users. For instance, a popular page titled “Allahu” makes daily posts that mock and dehumanize Muslims and the Islamic faith. In one video reel, an Albanian imam giving a lecture is shown side-by-side with a pig eating sloppily.⁴⁹ (Fig. 8) The imam has foamy spit from a dry mouth at the corner of his lips, while the pig has a white liquid running down its mouth. This side-by-side comparison is intended to dehumanize the imam, with the analogy to a pig adding a blatant element of Islamophobia and one that is acutely offensive. This offense is further compounded by the page’s pretending that it is speaking from the perspective of God Himself. Pages such as this serve to humiliate and alienate Muslim members of Albanian society and ridicule their beliefs.

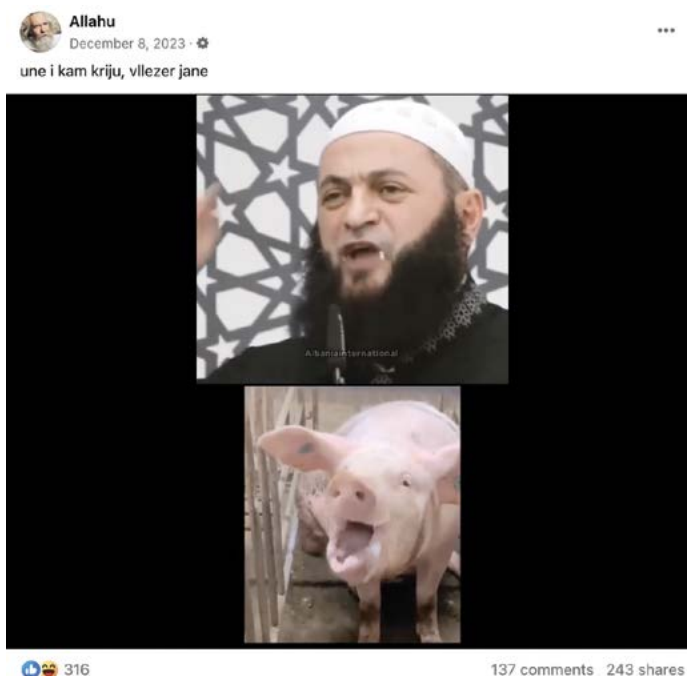


Figure 8: The Facebook page “Allahu” posted this video reel with the caption: “I created them, they are brothers.” The video compares an imam to a pig, an animal considered impermissible to consume in Islam.

47. Autochthonous. “Autokton.AL Facebook Page,” Facebook, accessed May 28, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/Autokton.AL>.

48. Allahu, “Allahu00007 Facebook Page,” Facebook, accessed May 28, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/allahu00007>.

49. Allahu. 2023. “une i kam krijju, vllezer jane.” Facebook, December 8, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/reel/364401386103665>

On October 10, 2023, a group of citizens led by a Vetëvendosje activist, Pajazit Jashari, gathered in the city of Deçan to form the “Movement for the Voluntary Abandonment of the Islamic Faith,” which is known more colloquially as the “Deçan Movement.” As the name suggests, the goal of the Deçan Movement is to encourage Albanians to reject their Muslim identity and Islamic beliefs/practices. (Fig. 9) Since the initial gathering, the movement has attracted a significant amount of attention throughout the country, gaining a handful of followers and supporters.



Figure 9: The Facebook page for the Deçan Movement has uploaded the movement’s declaration as their cover photo. Among others, the declaration states: “The unanimous declaration was that ‘From now on we are not Muslim.’ This statement was given unanimously by this group of about 70 participants. From the beginning, the declaration was made with personal names and surnames. There were ideas that the religion of an Albanian is Albanianism, that Albanians are Illyrians, etc. There were supportive messages from the Albanians in the diaspora (of those who were present) and there was a will to support the initiative, to go directly to Catholicism, to the early roots, respectively in European identity and culture.” October 20, 2023.

In the first-ever publicly broadcasted video of the movement, one member stated, “We must distance ourselves now and forever from this religion that is anti-human.” Another member emphasized that the movement will “combat that which attacks our national values.”⁵⁰ Thus, not only does this movement claim that Islam is a religion against humanity, but it also considers the Islamic faith to be a direct threat to Albanian national identity. This movement and its members instrumentalize Facebook and other social media platforms to spread propaganda against Islam and Muslims.

50. RTV Fontana, “Në Deçan u formua Këshilli inicues për formimin e Lëvizjës Braktisja vullnetare e Fesë Islame.” *Youtube*, October 21, 2023. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L4OgDbkh_g&t=26s

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

As Ferizaj highlighted in the previous reports on Kosovo, the Islamophobia network in Kosovo is decentralized and not unified, due to the varying forms of and motivations for anti-Muslim racism that exist in the country.⁵¹ Nonetheless, there are quite a few figures whose voices and rhetoric remain consistently Islamophobic.

In the world of academia, a persistently anti-Muslim voice is that of Blerim Latifi, a professor at the University of Prishtina, who is known for his problematic Facebook posts. In one post, he indirectly argues in favor of the destruction of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. “On the West Wall of the Second Temple. Here one understands and experiences what it means to never forget the land of the ancestors and the hope that one day you will return to rebuild what they bequeathed you, but the storms of history destroyed.”⁵² In another post, he refers to pro-Palestinian protestors in Prishtina as “Wahhabists” who are with Serbia and Russia, and against the West, the state of Kosovo, and the Albanian nation.⁵³ Given his influential position, it becomes evident that Latifi aims not only to propagate Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian sentiments, but he also seeks to disrupt the natural solidarity between Albanians and Palestinians.

In the sphere of journalism, one major name that can be connected to anti-Muslim racism is Valon Sylja, the CEO of Gazeta Metro, which has a significant online presence with 162,000 Facebook likes and is known for attracting and disseminating divisive narratives through its large audience. His Facebook is littered with Islamophobic posts, including one that mocks the Prophet Muhammad.⁵⁴

Moreover, with the emergence of the Deçan Movement, a more visible and organized web of individuals has surfaced. Although these individuals do not have the popular status of Latifi and Sylja, they are nonetheless influential, especially in the realm of Facebook. Two of the leading voices of the Deçan Movement, Pajazit Jashari and Arbër Gashi, use social media as a weapon to promote Islamophobia⁵⁵ and an

51. Adem Ferizaj; *Islamophobia in Kosovo: National Report 2020*, in: Enes Bayraktı & Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2020*, Vienna, Leopold Weiss Institute, 2021.

52. Enes Neza. 2023. “Më datë 7 tetor, ditën kur entiteti kriminel i Izraelit vendosi të derdhë të gjithë furinë e tij shkatërruese psikopatikë mbi popullin palestinez në Gaza.” *Facebook*, November 13, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1899442393785956&set=a.729996490730558>

53. Blerim Latifi. 2023. “Vahabistat paskan protestu sot në Prishtinë.” *Facebook*, October 21, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/blerim.latifi.739/posts/pfbid02taQgBW5w13is1wyTFHkNXa9pmApabKEK8aW1GLumySx-3zUB3d2k4yr5TeayMJFMFI>

54. Valon A. Sylja. 2023. “Nje batutë për BIK, hoxhallarë dhe marakli të kerreve.” *Facebook*, April 11, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/valon.a.sylja.9/posts/pfbid02E4dEJ8ji8Qdnu4diR3GjLS8vd2cStDjpGYdDUG-daPgW1vQAY3udTwH6SdbdKPULI>

55. Pajazit Jashari. 2023. “Femër, ti nuk duhet të dukesh në këtë botë.” *Facebook*, October 24, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/pajazitjashari/posts/pfbid0BLvkRwSQqMfmVLHna1GNyQW6vA1adYhnDqypeMJzvrwbsydbMHjr6peERrsytKFGI>

ti-Muslim myths.⁵⁶ In general, even though there might not be a consolidated Islamophobia network, the anti-Muslim voices remain loud and consistent.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

There have been increasing efforts to support girls suspended from schools for wearing the hijab, including organizing networks of lawyers who argue on their behalf, helping their chances to return to school after their suspensions.⁵⁷ Politically, organizations such as the Collective for Feminist Thinking and Action (Kolektivi për Mendim dhe Veprim Feminist) organized several protests for Palestine, including the flag drop discussed above.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In Kosovo, numbers are not everything. Its Muslim-majority status on paper does not translate to Islam being privileged to a position of real and/or discursive power in society. In fact, in almost all of the facets highlighted above – media, government, employment, etc. – practicing Muslims in Kosovo find themselves on the defensive. Islamophobic arguments can be made with ease, as they align with the coveted Euro-Atlantic aspirations and the inheritance of Yugoslav Communist ideologies. These form the default position in many spheres of society, organizations, and institutions. In the private sphere, however, many may identify strongly with Islam, and participate in rich, centuries-old traditions, in which it is sometimes hard to tell where one's culture ends and where one's religion begins – countering ideas that Islam is inherently foreign to Kosovo, and by extension, to Europe.

In terms of policy recommendations, previous reports emphasized the need for better collection of statistics and the enacting of legal measures to ensure religious freedom, especially of Muslim women and girls to dress in a way they feel reflective of their beliefs. This report agrees, emphasizing that it has been fifteen years since Kosovo's independence, and yet little to no action has been taken by the government on either of these points. There are, however, increased efforts to resist the bans and return the girls to school – with little help from the government, however. A further recommendation is that Kosovar politicians should seriously rethink their unequivocal support for Israel and its genocidal policies, or they will risk turning Kosovo's own experiences of genocide into little more than a geopolitical talking point. Over-

56. Arber Gashi. 2023. "Shqiptarët në Siudhesën Ilirike i shpëton vetëm largimi nga islamosllavizmi dhe bashkimi me Kishën Katolike." *Facebook*, December 26, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/arber.gashi.9809/posts/pfbid0PFGfMbAFJLbjS9eM2fj62KrVwSbPxdXSs4LkjXEsZw8EzWuKLzxFpxgfeeJ3SELvI>

57. "Një vajzë në Pejë s'u lejua të shkojë në shkollë me mbulesë, reagon Imami Maliqi: Ne s'jemi Kina, as Koreja Veriore." *Indeks Online*, September 11, 2023, accessed July 17, 2024. <https://indeksonline.net/nje-vajze-ne-peje-su-lejua-te-shkoje-ne-shkollë-me-mbulesë-reagon-imami-maliqi-ne-sjemi-kina-as-koreja-veriore/>

all, it remains to be seen what directions the Kosovar government and sectors of society will take regarding Islam, in the face of Kosovo's increasingly precarious international position.

Chronology

- **9 January 2023:** On the first day of the school year, a girl with a headscarf at Hajdar Dushi High School in Gjakova was sent home due to her hijab. The mayor of Gjakova later promised she would be allowed to return to school.
- **11 March 2023:** The well-known Kosovar Albanian historian Frashër Demaj was invited to the “Oxygen” show for an interview where he made controversial comments that provoked many Muslims throughout the country. Demaj claimed that Serbs had a secret plan to immerse Albanians into illiteracy and Islam, promoting an Islamophobic narrative without evidence.
- **10 April 2023:** In Shtimë, a student was forced to leave school for wearing a headscarf, but the mayor argued against the expulsion.
- **11 April 2023:** Kosovo's major media outlet, Kohavision, televised an interview with Hamdi Thaqi, a resident of Llapushnik, who claimed that mosques do not accept Albanians wearing the traditional *plis*, promoting the myth that Islam is hostile to Albanian national symbols.
- **27 May 2023:** Six people were arrested for disturbing the Friday prayer in a village in Podujeva.
- **19 August 2023:** The International Seminar on Language, Literature, and Albanian Culture was held in Prishtina. Swiss historian Oliver Jens Schmitt delivered a lecture, which was later covered by Kosovo's largest newspaper with the headline “Schmitt: With Ottomanism and Islamism against Albanian National Identity,” implying that Islam and Ottomanism are threats to Albanian identity.
- **28 September 2023:** Patrik Kurti, a Christian Albanian from Kosovo, posted a video on TikTok threatening to bomb the Great Mosque of Mitrovica and kill Muslims. He referred to Muslim Albanians in a derogatory manner, calling them “Taliban” and “Muslimut.” Kurti was arrested and pled guilty to spreading hatred against a religious group.
- **11 September 2023:** In Peja, an eighth-grade student was expelled for wearing a hijab. The Director of Education cited a law prohibiting religious school uniforms, but many classmates protested the discriminatory policies.
- **10 October 2023:** A group of citizens led by Pajazit Jashari gathered in Deçan to form the “Movement for the Voluntary Abandonment of the Islamic Faith,” also known as the “Deçan Movement.” The movement encourages Albanians to reject Islam and has gained attention and followers throughout the country.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
NORTH MACEDONIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Извршно резиме

2023-та година е година во која се распишуваат изборите и државата се подготвува за парламентарни и претседателски избори. Политичката сцена почнува да се дели. Додека власта, водена од социјалдемократите на граѓаните им нуди продолжување кон патот на промените и ЕУ интеграциите, здружената опозиција им ветува на граѓаните враќање на старото уставно име, Македонија, враќање на достоинството на Македонците користејќи реторика која ги подгрева чувствата на патриотизам, но, притоа создавајќи меѓуетнички тензии.

Executive Summary

The year 2023 saw the announcement of elections in North Macedonia, and the country subsequently preparing for parliamentary and presidential elections. The political scene began to divide. While the government, led by the social democrats, offered citizens a continuation towards the path of change and EU integration, the united opposition promised citizens the return of the old constitutional name “Macedonia” and the return of the “dignity of the Macedonians” using rhetoric that fostered feelings of patriotism, but at the same time creating inter-ethnic tensions.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of North Macedonia

Type of Regime: Representative democracy

Form of Government: Parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: Coalition led by SDSM “Možeme” (Social Democratic Party of Macedonia) and DUI (Democratic Union for Integration – central-left) and DPA (Democratic Party of Albanians)

Opposition Parties: VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) and Coalition “For Better Macedonia” (Za podobra Makedonija – central-right), AA (Alliance for Albanians), BESA, Alternativa (Alternative), and Levica (Left)

Last Elections: 2020 Parliamentary Elections: SDSM and BESA in the coalition “Možeme”: 46 seats (38.4%); VMRO-DPMNE: 44 seats (36.6%); DUI: 15 seats (12.5%); Alliance for Albanians and Alternativa: 12 seats (10%); Levica: 2 seats (1.6%); DPA: 1 seat (0.9%). The current government coalition is central-left.

Total Population: 1,836,713 (2021 Census)

Major Languages: Macedonian and Albanian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism), but the constitution lists five legally recognized religious groups: Macedonian Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia, Catholic Church, Evangelical Methodist Church, and Jewish Community.

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Macedonian Orthodox Church 46.14%, Islam 32.17%, Catholic Church 0.37%, others (2021 est.)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 590,878 or 32.17% (2021 Census)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Religious Community of Macedonia

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: NGO Legis, Liberal Alternative Institute, CIVIL, Balkan Studies Foundation

Far-Right Parties: N/A

Far-Right Movements: Macedonian Concept (Makedonski Koncept)

Far-Right Violent Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** In place in state-owned swimming pools
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No

Introduction

The year 2023 was a year of great tragedies in the Muslim world. It started with the earthquake in Turkiye and Syria, then the earthquake in Morocco and Libya, and ended with the aggression against Gaza. These events were also the focus of the Macedonian public. The news started with reports about these incidents and was accompanied by acts of solidarity in social networks. Still, hate speech towards Muslims and Islamophobia were not absent either. The most significant of the aforementioned events in relation to Islamophobia was the aggression against Gaza, where all the politicians in Macedonia from the ruling structure supported Israel and the media in the Macedonian language were completely within the framework of support for the propaganda coming from Israel.

The mandate of the previous government, led by Dimitar Kovacevski, is nearing its end, which for the citizens meant that according to the agreed coalition, six months before the start of the elections, the prime minister of North Macedonia will be an Albanian. The impending appointment of an Albanian prime minister from the ruling coalition appears to have sparked significant controversy and discontent among a segment of the Macedonian population. Ethnic tensions in North Macedonia have been historically sensitive due to the country's diverse population, comprising Macedonians, Albanians, and other ethnic groups. The decision to appoint an Albanian prime minister in a predominantly Macedonian context seems to have exacerbated these tensions, particularly against the backdrop of existing political polarization and societal divisions. It's crucial to acknowledge that such appointments can be perceived differently by different groups within the country. For some, it may symbolize progress towards inclusivity and representation, especially in a multi-ethnic society like North Macedonia. For others, it may provoke fears or resentments linked to historical grievances or identity concerns.

For a society to be able to eradicate Islamophobia and all the other forms of discrimination, it must first eliminate such phenomena from the educational system. However, the books used in primary and secondary education are permeated with prejudices and stereotypes of Muslims. The long-announced reforms in education and the new concept that should eliminate hate speech and prejudice are moving too slowly.

The current report is based on extensive research on reported cases and incidents related to Islamophobia, with particular attention to the reports of the office of the Ombudsman, media reports, and reports by NGOs. Furthermore, the report has relied on contacts at NGOs and discussions with religious institutions, and organizations and individuals that have helped in finding cases with subtle nuances of discrimination based on religious belief. The information has been gathered in the local languages spoken by the Muslim communities in the country.¹

1. All translations from local languages (Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Bosnian) to English in the current report are by the author.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

During the reported year, there was frequent discussion on social networks and among the public about the call to prayer in the capital Skopje. In some municipalities in the city, citizens submitted a petition and protested demanding the abolition of the call to prayer or the reduction of the volume of the call to prayer.² Residents in Taftalidze, Karposh 4, and Nerezi, as well as the literary critic and essayist Jovica Tatsevski, submitted an initiative to the Municipality of Karposh to take appropriate measures and issue a decision to dismantle the loudspeakers of the mosque in Dolno Nerezi, due to the loud volume of the call to prayer. The councilors from the Left (Levica) in the Council of Karposh Municipality also joined this initiative. The caption entitled “To dismantle the loudspeakers from the mosque in Dolno Nerezi, the loud noises from the minaret drive them out of their minds” started a kind of campaign on social networks where public figures also joined.

The president of the political party Dostoinstvo and director of the Center for Crisis Management, Stojanche Angelov, in an interview with the local newspaper *Lokalno* stated, “On the other hand, in several of my public appearances, I pointed out that most of the citizens dislike loud singing from mosques. I have nothing against Albanians and all Muslims cultivating their religious feelings, but it should be in a way that does not bother others. We have other situations that irritate the Orthodox population.”³

Zoran Jovanchev, president of the right-wing movement “The Presidency of the Motherland” wrote on his Facebook profile: “A typical day in Gjorce (Municipality in Skopje). The imam wakes you up first, 4 to 4:30 am from the mosque in Krushopek, where the speakers on the minaret face the 95% Orthodox population of Gjorce.”⁴

In “Malina Popivanova” primary school in Kočani, a girl wearing a headscarf was thrown out of class.⁵ “You can wear a headscarf in the mosque, but it is forbidden in school” – these were the words of the class teacher, and later the pedagogue and psy-

2. “Да се демонтираат звучниците од џамијата во Долно Нерези, гласните звуци од минарето ги вадат од памет”, Вечер Пресс, online version, 6 June 2023, <https://www.vecer.press/>. (Access date, 30 March 2024)
3. Интервју со Ангелов: Влезот на Курти преку Самоопределување на нашата политичка сцена е директно вмешување во внатрешните работи на Македонија, *Lokalno*, 23 of December 2023, <https://lokalno.mk/intervju-so-angelov> (Access date, 30 March 2024)
4. Facebook status of Zoran Jovanchev, 27 September 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/Slavjanski/posts/>, (Access date, 30 March 2024)
5. “Девојче дискриминирано во училиште во Кочани: ‘Шамија во џамија, а не во училиште’”, *zoom.mk*, 28 March 2023, <https://zoom.mk/video-devo%d1%98che-diskriminirano-vo-uchilishte-vo-kochani>, (Access date, 30 March 2024)

chologist of the sixth grader who decided to wear a headscarf. The girl's father said that when he went to the school to ask for an explanation as to why his girl was not allowed to wear a headscarf, he was kicked out by the teacher with the words: "Get out and if the girl comes to school tomorrow with a headscarf, we will not accept her. You will not bring me scarves here... this is not Skopje or Tetovo." After threats that the girl will not be allowed to attend classes if she continues to wear a headscarf, the Deputy Minister of Justice Agim Nuhiu and the State Secretary in the Ministry of Justice Muhammed Tochi visited "Malina Popivanova" and spoke with the director of the school. It was concluded that the student will continue to attend classes with a headscarf.

Employment

The report's author received a complaint from a law graduate who was not admitted to a law office for an internship because of the apparent dress code in the Macedonian courts, which states: "It is mandatory for persons entering the court to be properly dressed. Clothing considered provocative, disturbing, or clothing with offensive signs or images is prohibited."⁶ Although the code does not specify wearing a headscarf or any other religious garment, there is still an individual practice of the judges, which is why there is still no female lawyer working in a classic legal practice in North Macedonia.

Although no complaint has been officially filed for discrimination based on the headscarf, the absence of women with headscarves in stores of major telecommunications companies in North Macedonia and banks may indicate informal policies that discourage or prevent their presence in customer-facing roles. The author of the report received information that when applying for a job for major telecommunications networks, a picture is required in the CV, and not calling women with headscarves for interviews suggests a form of discrimination in employment practices. This practice could potentially exclude qualified candidates based on their religious attire rather than their skills and qualifications.

Education

The Faculty of Philosophy of the state-funded Ss. Cyril and Methodius University has included the subject "Islamophobia and Otherness" in its program "International and Intercultural Studies." The curriculum taught in this subject is extremely contradictory and aims to encourage Islamophobia. The curriculum includes the following: Islamic fundamentalism and jihad; conceptual definition of fundamentalism; the place and role of holy war in the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism; the holy

6. "13-ТЕ ПРАВИЛА ЗА ОДНЕСУВАЊЕ ВО КРИВИЧНИОТ СУД" published on web page АКАДЕМИК, <https://akademik.mk/13-te-pravila-za-odnesuvanje-vo-krivichniot-sud-zabrani-za-nosene-na-provokativna-obleka-i-zabrani-za-jadene-i-piene-vo-sudskata-zgrada/>, (Access date, 30 March 2024)

war against Christians and Jews, new tendencies in Islamic fundamentalist movement, perspectives of Islamic fundamentalism; Al-Qaeda's roots; Jihad in contemporary international relations; Islamization as a factor of Albanization of the Western Balkan region; European Islam or Islamic Europe; the renaissance of the idea of Jihad in the unique state for all Albanian population; global Jihad and the World Islamic League; global jihad and the Islamic Council; joint action of Islamic organizations in preparation for jihad; neo-ecumenism versus pan-Islamism; the influence of religion on the unification of the Old Continent; the Arabization of non-Arab Muslims and the anthropological change of the Arabs; the impact of modern Turkiyeon reducing Islamophobia in Europe; Islamophobia and democratization of the countries in the Western Balkans region.

In the reports on Islamophobia for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia for 2019, Professor Miroljub Jevtić is singled out as one of the central figures who contributed to the spread of Islamophobia in these two countries, and studying his books at the University of North Macedonia has contributed to the spread of fake perceptions of Islam on the academic level.

In the digital edition of the official dictionary of the Macedonian language, you can find the word “Mohammedans,” where it is explained that this is a member of the “Mohammedan religion” and is synonymous with the word “Muslim.”⁷

Politics

A member of the party VMRO DPMNE and of the Council of the City of Skopje Stefan Andonovski⁸ published a scientific paper titled “The Influence of Wahabist Learning in Development on the Legal-Political System of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Radical Islamic Movements,” where he declared the following in the introduction:

When, unfortunately, security is the main topic in Europe, fragile social systems like those in the Balkans must not underestimate chronic instabilities such as terrorism inspired by religion. It is important in the region to scientifically talk about the foundations, characteristics, transposition, and distortion of Wahhabism, to understand it. They are perceived in these spaces as a lurking, brutal group with the misguided goals of destroying mainstream Islam and separating Balkan societies from the “Western way.” The evolutionary path of Wahhabism, according to this paper, can be considered in two directions - an accommodative legal-political direction and an ideological-militaristic one. The first is seen in the creation of Saudi Arabia as a state entity and the development of its legal system, while the second is seen in the inspiration for radical Islamist militant groups.

7. “Македонски дигитален речник”, <http://drmj.eu/search/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

8. Andonovski is not known to the public as an expert on religious issues but as a member of the largest opposition party.

These two directions were intertwined in their historical development. However, one direction resulted in the formation of a state-legal system that is recognized in the world, and the other represents the ideological substrate of certain modern terrorist organizations. In our view, the original school of theology provided some inspiration for the militarist movements of the 20th and 21st centuries, but the essence of “modern” fundamentalists is based on distortions of al-Wahhab’s teachings. These alterations first started from domestic politics in search of power during the development of Saudi Arabia as a state, directly through the politicization of religion, and then was brutalized by the militaristic fundamentalists in the person of Osama bin Laden and his followers in the Islamic State. Therefore, it is rightly stated that at the dawn of the 21st century, it is clear that there is more than one type of Wahhabi Islam.⁹

On October 9, the Macedonian government “painted” itself with the flag of Israel¹⁰ in support of the already-started aggression against Gaza. The prime minister announced on his Facebook profile: “Support for Israel in these difficult times. We strongly and unequivocally condemn Hamas’ terrorist attacks on Israel. Our thoughts are with the Israeli people, with whom we sympathize. We appeal for solutions through dialogue, the world needs peace.” The prime minister’s post completely lacked solidarity with the Palestinian people, who he did not even mention..¹¹

The far-right political party Macedonian Concept (Makedonski Koncept) sent an appeal on its website to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bujar Osmani entitled “BUJAR OSMANI as Chairman of the OSCE to initiate the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.”¹² Further in the statement, it writes, “The Macedonian Concept Party regarding the latest symptomatic and pro-jihadist behavior of MFA Bujar Osmani, who refused to name the attacks of Hamas on Israel as terrorist by a terrorist organization, requires him as chairman of the OSCE to initiate the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.”

The president of the Council of the City of Skopje, Trajko Slavevski, a university professor of economics and also a member of the opposition party VMRO-DP-MNE, wrote on his X profile,

9. Scientific magazine “POLITICAL THOUGHT” published by Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Republic of North Macedonia; Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis”, Skopje, June 2023 in Skopje, <https://www.kas.de/documents/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)
10. “ВЛАДАТА СВЕТНА ВО БОИТЕ НА ИЗРАЕЛСКОТО ЗНАМЕ Недвосмислена осуда на терористичките напади”, PlusInfo, 9 October 2023, <https://plusinfo.mk/vladata-svetna-vo-boite-na-izraelskoto-zname-nedvosmislena-osuda-na-teroristichkite-napadi/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)
11. “Ковачевски: Нашите мисли се со израелскиот народ”, Makfaks news agency, 09 October 2023, <https://makfax.com.mk/makedonija>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)
12. “БУЈАР ОСМАНИ како претседавач со ОБСЕ да иницира признавање на Ерусалим за главен град на Израел”, Makedonski Koncept, 11 October 2023: <https://www.makedonskikoncept.mk/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

...especially in the morning and evening, we see black-haired young men, who came from abroad, in yellow vests, going to and from the construction sites in the capital in groups. For now, they are silent and inaudible. It will not remain so in the future. The first, i.e. ours, received social assistance from the state of the Republic of Macedonia and said that it was “unprofitable” for them to work. The second one, probably refugees or immigrants from their own countries, came in search of a piece of bread and a better life. Just like thousands of our young men and women, who because of the wrong policies leave their own country for a piece of bread and a better life in a foreign country. This must change!¹³

Media

Regarding the aggression in Gaza that started intensively in October, the media in the Macedonian language repeated the propaganda of the Israeli authorities, minimizing coverage of the victims or not mentioning them at all. Furthermore, the protests in support of Gaza in Macedonia were portrayed as supporting terrorists.

The most-read Macedonian newspaper *Nova Makedonija*, in its reporting on the aggression against Gaza, fully uses credibility to justify the attacks by Israel, devoting an entire page to the alleged tunnels under Gaza. In the article “What the ‘Metro in Gaza’ Hides,” *Nova Makedonija* stated,

The countless tunnels under Gaza are best known as passages used for smuggling goods from Egypt and for attacks in Israel. However, there is a second underground network that the Israel Defense Forces colloquially refer to as the “Gaza Metro.” It is a vast labyrinth of tunnels several kilometers underground, used to transport people and goods, to store rockets and ammunition, and to house Hamas’s command and control centers, away from the prying eyes of planes and drones.¹⁴

Vreme newspaper ran a headline with a picture: “ Hamas Releases Video of Three Israeli Hostages Shaved Like Muslims.”¹⁵

The renowned newspaper *Sloboden Pечат* published a news story titled “ Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad Welcomed South Africa’s Lawsuit against Israel.”¹⁶ The caption does not highlight parts of the lawsuit but quotes Israeli authorities: “South Africa cooperates with a terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Hayait wrote to X.”

13. Status on X platform, 23 November 2023, <https://x.com/TSlaveski/status/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

14. “Што крие ‘метрот’ во Газа”, *Nova Makedonija*, 21 October 2023, <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/prilozi/izbor/shto-krie-metroto-vo-gaza/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

15. “Хамас објави видео со тројца израелски заложници, ги избричиле како муслимани.” *VREME*, 23 December 2023, <https://vreme.mk/svet/khamas-objavi-video>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

16. “Хамас и палестински Исламски джихад ја поздравиле тужбата на Јужна Африка против Израел”, *Sloboden pecat*, 23 December, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/hamas-i-palestinski-islamski-dzihad-ja-pozdravija-tuzhbata-na-juzhna-afrika-protiv-izrael/>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

Justice System

In 2022, at the council session of the Municipality of Centar, which is publicly available on the YouTube channel of the Municipality,¹⁷ the group in the council “Šansa za Centar” in the Municipality of Centar, Skopje, proposed the author of the report as a council representative in one of Skopje’s primary schools. When reading biographical the Levica councilor Marija Srebrova stated, “I want to comment on your proposal... a series of criminal charges and through her organization she [Smailović] has organized the recruitment of people for radical Islamism. She [Smailović] and her husband have been banned from several European countries for the same thing, and you want to get her into a school board where elementary school kids are decided. You couldn’t have a more controversial proposal. You want to bring Al Qaeda into their school.”

The author of the report and the victim of Islamophobia submitted a complaint to the Discrimination Commission, a state body, which published an official document on February 1, 2023, that a decision was made “for repeated harassment based on ethnic, religious and religious affiliation in the area of action of the municipal councils.” Recommendations have been given according to which Maria Srebrova should act.¹⁸

Internet

The internet is becoming a major incubator of misinformation, hate speech, and fake news. Twitter and Facebook stand out in particular, where through fake profiles various citizens incite hatred and hostility towards Muslims.

The news about the girl in elementary school who was expelled because of the hijab caused great reactions on social networks. One such comment read, “The principal did well, this is not a Muslim country, there is no place for the headscarf in school.”

The web portal “Женски Магазин” (Women’s Magazine) published an interview with Professor of economyzeneta Talaq Durmishi, titled “Hijab Is a Crown That Puts You One Step ahead of All Other Ambitious Women Who Know What They Want.”¹⁹ Many people argued in the comments that in the 21st century, covering oneself was a step “backward” and that an academic should show “advanced” understanding.

On the Facebook page “Macedonia of the Macedonians,” the following text was published

17. 14th Session of the Council of the Municipality of Centar, YouTube channel of Municipality of Centar <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL5c2rMXDpA>, September 28, 2022. (Access date 5 March 2023).

18. Opinion of the commission adopted on 1 February, 2023, available online at. <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/08>, (Access date 5 March 2023).

19. Интервју со интервју со професорката Ценета Талак Дурмиши, Zenski Magazin, 7 July 2023, <https://zenskimagazin.mk/dzeneta-telak-durmishi-hizabot-e-moja-odluka-i-sloboda>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)



Figure 1:...Girl discriminated in school in Kočani: Headscarf in mosque not in school. Source: <https://zoom.mk/video-devoh>

THE HOLY FATHERS ABOUT ISLAM

Islam is a “dark and impure faith” (St. Marko Hioski June 5/18),
a “false and repulsive superstition”

(St. Theodore November/February 17/March 2),
“terrible pernicious delusion”

(St. David of Argyet (October 2/15).

Muhammad is “a deceiver and a devil in the flesh”
(priest-martyr Nikita April 4/17)

“enemy of Christ Our God and our faith. No man has angered God as much as Muhammad. The one who hopes in him and considers him a prophet, he has perished”
(Holy Martyr Jacob 1/13 November).²⁰

On his personal Facebook profile, Dr. Risto Ivanovski, a historian, published a long text, where he stated,

In 2001, the Orthodox were killed, massacred ... and expelled. The expelled have not yet returned home. And then the Macedonians run away from the Albanians... and in the municipalities that are Albanian, people are enslaved. For the Albanians,

20. Facebook page: Makedonija na Makedoncite, 25 March 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=601681528664898&set=a.561964075969977>, (Access date: 30 March 2024)

the Macedonians were Christians, and they were Muslims. Albanians only claim that about the censuses and elections. Well, Albanians are known as fighters for Islam in Asia, and they die for it, etc.²¹

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Politicians are the central figures in the spread of Islamophobia due to their status of power. That same power is manifested through imposing laws and practices both at the local and central level. The president of the far-right party Macedonian Concept is central in the dissemination of Islamophobia in the political field. For this, he uses his official Facebook page and his X platform. He is also often a guest on various TV shows, where he regularly spreads hate speech towards Islam, Muslims and Albanians.

On his Facebook page, Petar Bogojeski (Петар Боројески)²² shares information that he publishes on his web page, MKDdenes.²³ On his Facebook page, Bogojeski has posted,

WHEN will the OSCE funeral be? We know where and when the commemoration is! Pop will sing or imam will roar? Or both?

A CITY with 0% Albanians and Muslims... and with 60% Albanian and Muslim police officers!!! Oliver Spasovski/Dimitar Kovachevski²⁴ according to which Framework Agreement is this?!!

Aloooooo you crossed all the lines guys!!! MACEDONIAN CONCEPT WILL CLEAN IT QUICKLY!!!”

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

The identity problems faced by North Macedonia overshadow all other forms of discrimination that occur in our society. Like all the previous years, there have not been many cases of Islamophobia documented or prosecuted in 2023 in North Macedonia. The announcement of elections in 2024 saw the opposition come together to which a large part of the politicians mentioned in this report belong and which according to all estimates has a chance of winning a large majority and forming a government. For successfully deal with Islamophobia is to create trust in the system among the Muslim community so that members feel confident to report instances when they have become victims of Islamophobia.

Meanwhile, several initiatives and processes started in 2023, and performed outstandingly well in combating fake news, prejudice, and Islamophobia.

21. Risto Ivanovski, facebook profile, access to link: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/puTvcwHv5FJhhBR5/>

22. Petar Bogojeski, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100044618371017>

23. <https://mkddenes.mk/>

24. Oliver Spasovski is Minister for Interior and Dimitar Kovachevski as prime minister of North Macedonia.

The NGO Legis and the Liberal Alternative Institute are organizing training sessions for young people in several cities in North Macedonia. The training covers discrimination, Islamophobia, and xenophobia as phenomena in our society and has urged young people to fight against all forms of discrimination through various online campaigns as well as encouraging the community to report such instances.

The official Macedonian digital dictionary incorporated the word “Islamophobia,” explaining it as “prejudice and fear of the Islamic religion.”

The Balkan Studies Foundation, during the reporting year, organized school sessions in the field of human rights with a focus on Islamophobia and freedom of religion and belief.

In the last years, the NGO Civil, an advocate of free speech and fighting against discrimination, has proved to be a platform that has been active in calling out cases that, in one way or another, contributed to inciting Islamophobia, especially in the context of the media.

TRT Balkan has started to broadcast consistently educational content through its web platform, in the Macedonian and Albanian languages.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia is a phenomenon that must be constantly monitored and documented. It is necessary to develop an overall strategy for its eradication in multireligious countries. Failure to report Islamophobia and impunity for instigators of Islamophobia has been a long-standing problem. Of particular concern are the growing emergence of Islamophobia, on the one hand, and the silence of the relevant Muslim institutions and Muslim organizations, on the other. To fight Islamophobia in North Macedonia, the following policies are recommended:

- **Promoting Islamic Values:** Encouraging Muslims to actively promote Islamic values and educate others about Islam can foster better understanding and reduce misconceptions.
- **Training for Media Outlets and Journalists:** Organizing training sessions and providing a guidebook for reporters on Islam and its principles can help improve the accuracy and sensitivity of media coverage related to Islam, thereby reducing bias and promoting fair reporting.
- **Including Islamophobia in Hate Speech Training:** Incorporating Islamophobia as a distinct topic in hate speech training curricula can increase awareness among professionals and the public about the specific challenges faced by Muslims due to prejudice and discrimination.
- **Creating Reporting Platforms for Hate Crimes:** Establishing specific reporting platforms for anti-Muslim hate crimes within NGOs can provide victims

with a dedicated avenue to report incidents and seek support, while also enabling better data collection and advocacy.

- **Educating Muslim Youth and Community:** Muslim NGOs focusing on educating youth and the broader community about Islamophobia, its signs, and how to respond can empower individuals to recognize and address discrimination effectively.
- **Initiatives by the Islamic Community:** Taking proactive initiatives to advocate for the rights of Muslims and create platforms to address Islamophobia within the Islamic community can strengthen community resilience and support.

Implementing these suggestions requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, NGOs, media outlets, and religious organizations. By raising awareness, providing education, and creating supportive platforms, North Macedonia can work towards fostering a more inclusive society where all individuals, regardless of their religious background, can live free from discrimination and prejudice.

Chronology

- **1 February:** For the first time, a petition for discrimination based on religion was adopted by the Commission for the Protection and Prevention of Discrimination.
- **23 March:** A girl at “Malina Popivanova” primary school in Kočani was removed from classes because of wearing a headscarf.
- **6 June:** Protests and petitions started in Skopje to reduce the volume of the call to prayer.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
NORWAY
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

CORA ALEXA DØVING

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Sammendrag

Utbredelsen av negative holdninger til muslimer er utbredt i Norge: 31,3 % av befolkningen har utpregede fordommer mot muslimer, og etter terrorangrepet fra Hamas 7. oktober svarer 34,7% at dette har gjort dem mer kritiske til muslimer generelt. En av de mest utbredte fordommene er at muslimer utgjør en trussel overfor norsk kultur og at de er voldelige enn ikke-muslimer. Når det gjelder hatkriminalitet ble det i løpet av året anmeldt 81 hendelser der islam/muslim utgjorde en direkte referanse. Innrapporter hatkriminalitet basert på hudfarge eller etnisitet er langt mer (46% av 1090 anmeldelser), og de aller fleste ofrene for dette er muslimer. Årsrapporten til Likestillings og diskrimineringsombudet viser at 16 saker direkte knyttet til islam ble meldt inn til dem. Anti-muslimsk aktivisme på gateplan er lite utbredt i Norge, men SIAN har vært svært aktive med flere demonstrasjoner og forsøk på å brenne koranen. På nettet er det stor sirkulasjon av islamofobi og de velkjente nettbaserte alternative nyhetsformene har gjennom året vært like aktive som tidligere år. Politiets etterretningstjeneste har meldt om en økning i trusler på netter mot moskeer. Den største moskeen i Bergen har meldt om økte tilfeller av hets og trusler gjennom året, særlig rettet mot unge jenter med hijab. Islamofobi er gjenkjent som samfunnsproblem blant politikere i Norge, og regjeringen etablerte en nasjonal handlingsplan mot islamofobi i 2020, denne ble i 2023 bestemt forlenget til ut 2025.

Executive Summary

The prevalence of negative attitudes towards Muslims is widespread in Norway: 31.3% of the population has pronounced prejudices against Muslims, and after the terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023, 34.7% respond that this has made them more critical towards Muslims in general. One of the most widespread prejudices is that Muslims pose a threat to Norwegian culture and that they are more violent than non-Muslims. In terms of hate crime that is openly against Muslims, 81 incidents were reported. Reports of hate crimes based on skin color or ethnicity are far more prevalent (46% of 1,090 reports), and it is reasonable to assume that the majority of victims of this category of crime are Muslims. Sixteen cases of discrimination against Muslims were reported to the Equality and Discrimination Ombudsman. Anti-Muslim activism at street level is not widespread in Norway, but one organization, Stop Islamization of Norway (SIAN), has been very active with several demonstrations and attempts to burn the Koran. There is a large circulation of Islamophobia online and the well-known online milieus have been as active throughout the year as in previous years. The police intelligence service has reported an increase in threats against mosques on 4chan. The largest mosque in Bergen has reported increased cases of assaults throughout the year, particularly aimed at young girls wearing the hijab. Islamophobia in Norway is, however, recognized as a social problem among politicians in the country and the government established a national action plan against Islamophobia in 2020, which in 2023 was extended until the end of 2025.

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Type of Regime: Democracy

Form of Government: Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government

Ruling Parties: A center-left coalition. The main parties in this coalition are the Labour Party (Arbeiderpartiet) and the Centre Party (Senterpartiet).

Opposition Parties: Progress Party (Frp), Conservative Party (Høyre), Socialist Left Party (SV)

Last Elections: Parliamentary Elections 2021: Labour Party with seats: 48, percentage: 26.3%. Conservative Party (Høyre - H) with seats: 36, percentage: 20,4%. Centre Party with seats: 28, percentage: 13,5%. Socialist Left Party (Sosialistisk Venstreparti - SV) with seats: 13, percentage: 7,6%. Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet - FrP) with seats: 21, percentage: 11,7%. These results led to the formation of a center-left government, with the Labour Party taking the lead in coalition talks.

Total Population: 5.51 million

Major Language: Norwegian

Official Religion: Christianity

Statistics on Islamophobia: No official statistics for the whole country

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: A total of 1,090 reports coded as hate crime were registered by the police in Norway in 2023. This includes hate crime towards several different groups.

Major Religions: Approximately 70% of Norwegians identify as Christians. The largest denomination is the Church of Norway (Evangelical Lutheran Church).

Muslim Population: 5% of population

Main Muslim Community Organizations: There are several organizations connected to congregations; however, the central community organization is the Islamic Cultural Center and Central Jamaat -e Ahl-e Sunnat in the center of the capital Oslo.

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: (1) Islamic Council Norway (Islamsk Råd Norge) is an umbrella organization representing several Muslim associations and mosques in Norway; (2) Muslims Dialognettverk (Muslim Dialogue Network) focuses on fostering dialogue and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims in Norway; (3) Muslim Student Organization.

Far-Right Parties: Partiet Norgesdemokratene, Alliansen – et alternativ for Norge (The Alliance – Alternative for Norway)

Far-Right Movements: Stop Islamization of Norway (SIAN), Nordic Resistance Movement

Far-Right Violent Organizations: Nordic Resistance Movement

Limitations to Islamic Practices: Norway generally allows Muslims to practice their faith freely within the framework of the law. There are no specific laws in Norway regarding Islamic dress, such as the hijab or niqab.

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** Prohibited in certain institutions and areas of society, but not in public spaces

Introduction

Negative stereotypes of Muslims are widespread in Norway. The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies has measured attitudes towards Muslims in three different years: 2017, 2022, and 2024. Since the figures for 2024 were identical to the figures for 2022, it is reasonable to claim that they also apply to the year 2023: 30.7% of the population displays marked prejudices against Muslims,¹ 15.3% of the population is negative towards social contact with Muslims, and 23.7% expresses dislike towards Muslims. Despite the fact that negative stereotypes are widespread, there is a relatively low incidence of violent hate crime in Norway.

Islamophobia is documented in various ways: through reports to the police, documentation by various Muslim organizations, and periodically through research and journalistic work. These various sources form the basis of this report.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

One of the statements tested out in the population survey mentioned in the introduction, which has been met with widespread support, puts the blame for increasing anti-Muslim harassment on Muslims themselves (44%). One-third (33%) of the population sample supports the statement “Muslims pose a threat to Norwegian culture,” 39% supports the statement “Muslims do not fit into modern Western society”, and 26% supports the statement “Muslims are more violent than others.” The survey also shows that 10% of the population sample supports the statement “Considering recent terrorist attacks, harassment and violence against Muslims are justifiable.” However, a solid majority (62%) of the population sample supports the statement “Muslims are good Norwegian citizens.” The following statement from our latest survey is relevant to the end of the year 2023: 34.7% fully or partially agree with the statement “Hamas’s terrorist attack on October 7, 2023 has made me more negative towards Muslims in general.”²

Negative attitudes towards Muslims are more prevalent among men, older people, and people with a low level of education than they are among women, youth, and people with a high level of education.

Experiences from everyday life are another important source: a survey from 2022, with more than 1,000 Muslim respondents, showed that encounters with negative attitudes are a widespread experience among Muslims in Norway.³ Twenty-five per-

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1. For the two reports see: *Attitudes-towards-jews-and-muslims-in-norway-2022.pdf* (hlsenteret.no), *HL-senterets holdningsundersøkelse 2024 - HL-senteret* (hlsenteret.no)
 2. *HL-senterets holdningsundersøkelse 2024 - HL-senteret* (hlsenteret.no)
 3. Moe & Døving (2022): *Diskrimineringsferinger blant muslimer i Norge*, rapport HL-senteret, oppdrag for IMDI, *Diskrimineringsferinger blant muslimer i Norge* (imdi.no)

cent has experienced harassment in the last twelve months. Based on the informants' own descriptions, this primarily takes place in the public space. Forty-three percent of the respondents have been given "the feeling of not belonging in Norwegian society" often or sometimes during the last twelve months, and a third (33%) answered that they sometimes hide their religious identity for fear of negative attitudes. In-depth analyses of the respondents' narratives show that exclusion from the "Norwegian community" constitutes a basic motive in negative experiences among Muslims.

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Reported Hate Crimes: The main source for documentation of anti-Muslim hate crime is the annual report on hate crime from the Norwegian police. It is important to clarify that the report deals with reported hate crime and not the actual extent of hate crime in Norway. The largest category of hate speech is categorized as "hate motivated by skin color or ethnicity," and makes up 46% of a total of 1,090 reported incidents. It is more than likely that many of these are motivated by anti-Muslim attitudes as skin color and having a Muslim identity often overlap. Eighty-one incidents were categorized as clearly motivated by hatred towards Islam/Muslims. The number of offenses with hate motive of religion rose by 28.8% from 2022 to 2023. The offense categories include violent offences, reckless conduct, and discrimination. Meanwhile 60.4% of the cases registered on the basis of religion/view of life are hate crimes against Muslims.⁴ The most common form of hate crime against Muslims is hate speech (44%), while bodily harm makes up 13%.

Reported hate crime varies in form and expression, but some examples follow below.⁵ In connection with a pro-Palestinian demonstration a man was hit twice in the face with a clenched fist. Another man was told "You don't know Norwegian," "Go back to your home country," "Your flag is a terrorist flag," and "Your mother and sister are whores." Another example is the harassment of a Muslim policeman when taking a man into custody ("F*** you f***ing Muslims," "I hate Muslims," "You are a Muslim like him," "I don't want a Muslim driving me," "Don't touch me f***ing Muslim," "Muslim don't touch me motherf***ing bitch, I don't want f***ing bacteria on me," etc.). Women wearing the hijab make up a category of victims of hate speech. For example, a couple were reported for staring at a woman and when asked why, they answered, "Because of the damn hijab." A woman in a niqab was told that she does not belong in Norway and should go home. Her daughter was told not to hold her mother's hand. Another category is hate crime directed at mosques or people working in a mosque. A woman received a call with someone saying, "I'm going to kill you and your son, I'm going to blow you and your whole family up. You

4. Hatkriminalitet I Norge 2023, Politidirektoratet og Oslo politidistrikt, rapport.

5. Sent to me by the police and authors of the report on hate crime, "Hatkriminalitet I Norge 2023", Politidirektoratet og Oslo politidistrikt, rapport.

f***ing Muslim, I'm going to come to your religious community where you work and blow you up." A mosque in Oslo was threatened on TikTok: the threat "Won't stand for much longer now" was followed by a smiling face with hearts emoji, a Kaaba emoji, and a gun emoji.

In the summer of 2023, the police security service notified one of Oslo's largest mosques of a violent threat against it. According to the police, there has been an increase in threats of attack online from young boys.

Information from Islamic Institutions: There has been an increase in insults and vandalism directed at Muslims in Bergen and the surrounding area.⁶ News on regulations regarding a mosque in Bergen, caused many negative reactions including expressions of hatred towards Muslims. A female representative for *Bergen Moske* (Mosque of Bergen) reports on having received several complaints from young Muslim girls who have experienced harassment and hatred in various situations such as at training, at school, at work, and in shopping centers. They have shared documentation of the episodes with the mosque such as screenshots and videos of friends with their hijabs being pulled off. Many are afraid of walking alone after dark. The female informant from the mosque sums up: "It is heartbreaking to hear their stories and to know that they feel helpless and alone." A Muslim organization in Oslo (Muslim Dialogue Network) reports three incidents from the months after October 7: three Muslim girls wearing a hijab during a pro-Palestine demonstration in November in Oslo received negative comments by two Norwegian men. A passing elderly man harassed a Muslim student wearing a hijab at the University of Oslo: "Get these damn Muslims out of the country." A woman wearing a hijab in the center of Oslo was almost hit by a car and strongly felt that it was intentional due to her being a Muslim.

Anti-Muslim Activism: Demonstrations against Islam, with the threat of burning the Koran, have taken place several times during the year. The organization Stop Islamization of Norway (SIAN) is behind these threats and occasional burnings. Although several politicians recognize that Koran burning is a form of hate speech, the debates in Norway are mostly about preserving freedom of expression.⁷ The burning of the Koran seems to have little support among the population and SIAN has been stopped by the police several times.

Reported Discrimination: The annual report by the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud shows 16 cases regarding Islam and 99 cases regarding ethnicity for 2023.⁸ Most of their cases are dealt with by their advisors. An example of a case taken

6. Information from *Islamsk Råd Norge*

7. Meninger: Politikere bruker koranbrenning i valgkampen (vg.no)

8. Diskrimineringsretten 2023 : rettsutvikling på likestillings- og diskrimineringsfeltet, med gjennomgang av relevante lovendringer, forvaltnings- og rettspraksis (ldo.no)

to court involved a Somali girl, barely 17 at the time, who was told to “go back to Somalia and you’ll be much better off, because there you won’t get any Nav [social services].”

Employment

No statistics for 2023 are available on labor market discrimination targeting Muslims in particular. Previous research has shown that applicants with Pakistani- or Muslim-sounding names are 25% less likely than “ethnic” Norwegian applicants with similar qualifications and work experience to be called in for interviews by Norwegian employers.⁹

A study based on interviews with Muslims conducted in 2022 showed that negative experiences with social interaction at work included, among others, harassment related to wearing the hijab, confrontations about Islam (especially related to the position of women), and discussions about alcohol and food rules. In connection with employment processes, several informants had experiences of being asked in-depth questions related to their Muslim identity or personal questions that were irrelevant to the work to be carried out. Some informants also had experience of job refusals being directly justified by the use of the hijab or other aspects of Islam.¹⁰

Education

According to the latest curriculum, all religions must be presented with an emphasis on respect and nuances. The framing of Islam has improved since the introduction of comparative religions as a subject in public elementary schools in 1997. Norwegian public schools are well aware of former years of ignorance (and sometimes antagonism) towards Islam.

In June, a headmistress was video filmed while insisting on shaking hands with some of her Muslim male students during a graduation ceremony. In the video, the rector shouts to the assembly: “Folks, we live in Norway, and we can’t have it like this. Parents, we live in Norway!” and “You must work with Norwegian women, otherwise you will not succeed in Norway.”¹¹ The episode led to a rise in online hate speech.

Politics

None of the established political parties has a direct Islamophobic policy as part of their political platform. Still, individual politicians, especially from the Progress Party, occasionally make prejudiced statements.

9. <https://forskning.no/arbeid-ledelse-og-organisasjon/2012/01/vanskeligere-fa-jobbintervju-med-utenlandsk-navn>

10. Moe & Døving (2022): *Diskrimineringsferfaringer blant muslimer I Norge*, rapport HL-senteret, oppdrag for IMDI, Diskrimineringsferfaringer blant muslimer i Norge (imdi.no)

11. Varsel mot rektor etter håndhilse-sak (vg.no)

The Norwegian government has recognized anti-Muslim sentiments as an important issue and in 2020, they implemented an action plan to combat discrimination against Muslims. This plan involves collaboration with Muslim organizations, police, schools, and civil society to foster greater understanding and reduce prejudices and hatred of Muslims.¹² In 2023, the action plan was extended to 2025.

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was commemorated by different religious, human rights, and anti-racist organizations. The day was also reported in different newspapers,¹³ but neither the government nor political parties had an official marking of the day.

International politics affect the lives of Muslims in Norway. A recent follow-up survey on attitudes towards Muslims shows that the Hamas attack and the following war on Gaza have not changed the broad picture, but identifies some disturbing connections: 34.7% fully or partially agree with the statement “Hamas’s terrorist attack on October 7 has made me more negative towards Muslims in general.”¹⁴ Support for the statement “Muslims are more violent than others” stands out with an increase of 6% from 26% to 32%. Here we may see an effect of the attack by Hamas.

Media

On a general level, Norwegian media is critical of Islamophobic statements and what for many years seemed to be an unlimited “interest” in Muslims and Islam has decreased. Still, a quantitative survey from 2022 targeting Muslim respondents showed that 83% of them believed that Islam often or sometimes is portrayed in a prejudiced manner in the media and define media as the main cause of negative attitudes towards Muslims.

Nettavisen, a Norwegian online newspaper without an open agenda, runs what could be described as a campaign against a central mosque in Norway. The Rabita Mosque was accused, through several articles and without good documentation, of posing a security threat to Norway and operating a form of hidden economy.¹⁵

Right.no is the official website of Human Rights Service (HRS). HRS was established in 2001 and is known for its criticism of Islam and migration. Rita Karlsen and Hege Storhaug, the website’s founder, manage the site. The content on Rights.no typically includes articles and reports that highlight problems related to immigra-

12. Handlingsplan mot diskriminering av og hat mot muslimer 2020-2023 - regjeringen.no <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/b2a6fd21c6a94bae83d5a3425593da30/handlingsplan-mot-diskriminering-av-og-hat-mot-muslimer-2020-2023.pdf>

13. For example, I dag, på den internasjonale dagen mot islamofobi, ønsker ICC Alna-moskeen naboene velkommen inn for å bli kjent med oss (vartoslo.no)

14. HL-senterets holdningsundersøkelse 2022 - HL-senteret (hlsenteret.no)

15. Rabita-moskeen, Rabita | Svertetekampanjen overgår anstendighetens grenser (nettavisen.no)

tion, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, and often promotes the view that Islam poses a threat to Western values and societies. HRS has defined itself as an organization working for better integration of immigrants and received public funding in the years 2001-2021. They lost their funding due to their anti-Muslim rhetoric.

Document.no is an online news and opinion website known for its conservative and critical stance on issues related to immigration, multiculturalism, and Islam. It often addresses issues related to Islam and Muslim communities, and has been criticized for promoting Islamophobic views. Document.no was established in 2003 by Hans Rustad as a blog; Rustad is still the responsible editor. Today, the website is a company funded by private supporters and in addition to their online news page, is also publishes books and broadcasts.

Justice system

Norway has implemented laws to address hate speech, including provisions in its penal code that prohibit the incitement to hatred based on religion. Additionally, there are ongoing efforts to monitor and counteract hate speech through initiatives involving the police and civil society organizations.

No cases involving hate speech or discrimination against Muslims were heard in Norwegian courts of law in 2023.

Internet

A report from 2022 shows a general increase in anti-Muslim hate speech online.¹⁶ No such report exists for 2023, but the issue of hate speech is regularly a theme in the press.

Established anti-Muslim/Islam organizations have used social media for many years, but 2023 has not seen an increase in the number of openly nationalist Facebook groups with or without a parent organization.

Conspiracy theories constitute an important element of Islamophobia on the internet. Typical claims selected from anti-Muslim Facebook groups include Muslims having a built-in desire for occupation; Muslims conducting a modern form of warfare by multiplying and using their networks; Muslims pretending to be modern, but hating liberal Norway; Muslims being violent; and incidents of rape becoming an everyday experience.¹⁷

Muslim organizations have witnessed an increase in hate speech relating to the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. This is coming especially from pro-Israel organ-

16. ODA Open Digital Archive: Kartlegging av omfanget av hatefulle ytringer og diskriminerende ytringer mot muslimer (oslomet.no)

17. Døving and Emberland: Bringing the Enemy Closer to Home: "Conspiracy Talk" and the Norwegian Far Right, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 55, 2021, issue 4.

izations.¹⁸ An example is Rights.no which in December 2023 wrote several pieces on Holocaust denial amongst Muslims and how Muslims are a threat to Jewish life in Norway.¹⁹

The prevalence of anti-Muslim verbal attacks on the internet is well known amongst Muslims and seems to have a negative effect on the feeling of belonging in Norwegian society. In an analysis of experiences of hate speech on social media, the sociologist Marja Nadine found that many described fear and frustration as a result of “being online.”²⁰

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Central hubs for circulating negative images of Muslims are websites like document.no, rights.no, operated by Human Rights Service; sian.no, operated by Stop Islamization of Norway; and Pegida Norge, which is part of the German Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (PEGIDA). The Nordic Resistance Movement that has its main network in Sweden distributes a number of Islamophobic and antisemitic narratives. Norgesdemokratene (The Norwegian Democrats) is registered as a political party and is very explicitly anti-Muslim and anti-immigration.

In addition to these organizations, several Facebook groups function as active Islamophobia networks.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Organizations that counter Islamophobia include Minotenk, a minority political think tank; Antirasistisk senter (Anti-racist Center) Muslim Dialogue Network; and Islamsk Råd Norge (The Islamic Council Norway), an umbrella organization for mosques in Norway. The Norwegian Directorate for Integration and Diversity (IMDi) also works to promote dialogue and understanding between different communities. In civil society, counter-demonstrations are usually organized whenever Islamophobic organizations set up public stands and demos.

The government has prolonged its national strategy against hate speech and discrimination against Muslims,²¹ and continues to finance a center for research on right-wing extremism and research on Islamophobia conducted at the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies.

18. This claim is based on telephone interviews with four different Muslim organizations

19. December 2023 | Human Rights Service

20. Nadime, M (2022): “Eksplisitt rasisme til hverdags: Unge muslimers opplevelser av rasisme på nettet” i Døving, C. A. (eds): *Rasisme. Fenomenet, forskningen, erfaringene*, (red.) Oslo: Universitetsforlaget

21. Forlenger handlingsplan mot muslimhat – Siste nytt – NRK

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

- Continue with the current national action plan against Islamophobia.
- Improve methods for monitoring hate crime/discrimination against Muslims.
- Improve routines for handling experiences with discrimination in different institutions.
- Highlight diversity in public portrayals of Islam and Muslims.
- Policy measures for less segregation in cities

Chronology

- **January:** A Norwegian court dismissed the report of harassment directed at a Somali active social debater and author. This leads to an increase in hate speech on the internet.

A woman reported a couple for harassment on the street. She claimed the couple told her that they did not like her “because of the damn hijab.”

- **February:** SIAN (Stop Islamization of Norway) protests against the police prohibiting them from burning the Koran in front of the Turkish embassy.
- **April:** A Library in Arendal had to close for security reasons as SIAN demonstrated close by and had announced that they would be burning the Koran. A man too drunk to be served at a bar responded by yelling, “You are a terrorist Muslim, go back to Syria.”
- **May:** The police security service notified one of Oslo’s largest mosques of a terrorist threat against it.
- **June:** The so-called handshake debate (starting with a headmistress who insisted on shaking the hands of Muslim male pupils on their graduation day) sparked an increase in anti-Muslim sentiments on social media.

A woman in niqab was harassed on the street. She was with her three-year-old daughter and a baby, when she was told: “This is a free country, you cannot only show your eyes, you should not look like that, we do not want you here, go home.” The perpetrator also addressed the daughter and said she should not hold her mother’s hand and was asked if she was allowed to go to school. A Muslim woman received a phone call and was told: “I’m going to kill you and your son, I’m going to blow you and your whole family up. You f***ing Muslim, I’m going to come to your religious community where you work and blow you up.”

A mosque in Oslo was threatened on TikTok with the comment “Won’t stand for much longer now,” followed by a smiling face with hearts emoji, a Kaaba emoji, and a gun emoji.

- **October:** Following the Hamas attack on October 7, there has been an escalation of anti-Muslim rhetoric on some of the anti-Muslim social media platforms.

- **November:** In connection with a pro-Palestinian demonstration outside the Parliament, a man was hit twice on the face with a clenched fist. As a result, the victim suffered a wound above the bridge of the nose, a wound on the back of the upper lip, blurred vision, and dizziness.
In connection with a police officer bringing a man into custody, a man screamed “F*** you f***ing Muslim,” “I hate Muslims,” “You are a Muslim like him,” “F***ing Muslim, go home to your country,” “I don’t want a Muslim driving me,” “Don’t touch me f***ing Muslim,” “Muslim don’t touch me motherf***ing bitch, I don’t want f***ing bacteria on me,” etc.
- **December:** The online media news site Nettavisens started a journalism campaign against the Rabita Mosque.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
POLAND
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Streszczenie

W 2023 r. islamofobia w Polsce w dużej mierze przeplatała się z retoryką antyimigrancką, dominującą w mediach i polityce. Politycy rządzącej partii PiS i głównej partii opozycji, Koalicji Obywatelskiej, używali takich narracji, starając się przyciągnąć poparcie wyborców przed wyborami parlamentarnymi 15 października. Instytucje państwowe i organizacje pozarządowe nie opublikowały żadnych konkretnych danych na temat ataków islamofobicznych, co podkreśla brak regularnego i reprezentatywnego monitorowania islamofobii w Polsce. Policja wszczęła 893 postępowania w sprawach o przestępstwa z nienawiści, z czego tylko 4 zostały zaklasyfikowane jako antymuzułmańskie. Nie wprowadzono żadnych przepisów antymuzułmańskich, jednak w referendum zorganizowanym przez PiS równocześnie z wyborami parlamentarnymi pojawiło się pytanie antyimigranckie. Doniesienia medialne na temat islamu były często tendencyjne i koncentrowały się na migracji do Europy i wydarzeniach międzynarodowych, które często służyły do stereotypowego przedstawiania islamu jako zagrożenia. Analiza oparta na raportach z monitoringu 345 artykułów internetowych na temat islamu wykazała, że 51% z nich dotyczyło bieżących wydarzeń, 28% łączyło islam z terroryzmem lub zagrożeniami dla bezpieczeństwa, a 26% odnosiło się do religii i kultury w szerszym ujęciu. Około 33% z tych źródeł zostało uznanych przez wolontariuszy prowadzących monitoring za mogące negatywnie wpłynąć na nastawienie czytelników do islamu. Głównym islamofobicznym incydentem, który spotkał się z powszechną krytyką, były policyjne ćwiczenia antyterrorystyczne 17-19 kwietnia, podczas których aktorka grająca terrorystkę była przebrana za muzułmankę. Godne uwagi inicjatywy przeciwdziałające islamofobii obejmowały projekt "EMPATHY", prowadzony w latach 2022-2023 przez konsorcjum dwóch uniwersytetów i trzech organizacji pozarządowych, oraz działania międzywyznaniowe w Poznaniu.

Executive Summary

In 2023, Islamophobia in Poland was largely intertwined with anti-immigrant rhetoric dominating the media and politics. Politicians from the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and the main opposition party, Civic Coalition, used such narratives to attract voter support ahead of the October 15 parliamentary elections. No specific data on Islamophobic attacks has been published by state institutions or NGOs, highlighting the lack of regular and representative monitoring of Islamophobia in Poland. Police opened 893 hate crime cases, of which only four were classified as anti-Muslim. No anti-Muslim legislation has been introduced, but an anti-immigrant question appeared in a referendum organized by the Law and Justice party simultaneously with the parliamentary elections.

Media reports on Islam were often biased, focusing on migration to Europe and international events, which often served to stereotype Islam as a threat. An analysis based on monitoring reports of 345 online articles on Islam found that 51% of them dealt with current events, 28% linked Islam to terrorism or security threats, and 26% referred to religion and culture more generally. Approximately 33% of these sources were considered by monitoring volunteers to have the potential to influence readers' attitudes toward Islam negatively.

The main Islamophobic incident that received widespread criticism was the April 17-19 police anti-terrorism drill, during which an actress playing a terrorist was dressed up as a Muslim woman. Notable initiatives to counter Islamophobia included the "EMPATHY" project, run in 2022-2023 by a consortium of two universities and three NGOs, and interfaith activities in Poznan.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Poland

Type of Regime: Democratic republic

Form of Government: Unitary parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS, right-wing, national-conservative, Christian democratic) until December 12, 2023

Opposition Parties: Civic Coalition (Koalicja Obywatelska, KO, centrist), Third Way (Trzecia Droga, center-right) and New Left (Nowa Lewica) until the October 15 election, when they won the majority of parliamentary seats.

Last Elections: 2020 Presidential Election (Andrzej Duda, the PiS candidate, won 51.03% of the vote against the PO candidate Rafał Trzaskowski 48,97%); 2023 Legislative Election (PiS: 194 seats, KO: 157 seats, Third Way: 65, New Left: 26, Confederation [Konfederacja, nationalist, far-right]: 18).

Total Population: 37.77 million (GUS 2022)

Major Language: Polish

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: There are no general statistics on Islamophobia in Poland for 2023. According to police data, only 4 out of 893 hate crime cases initiated were categorized as anti-Muslim.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: In 2023, the police initiated 893 hate crime cases. In courts, a total of 402 hate crime cases ended with final verdicts in the first instance. Out of these, 296 proceedings resulted in convictions. Among the convicted perpetrators were 260 men and 36 women. The total number of victims in these cases was 376, including 16 minors.

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (93.2%), Non-believers (3.1%), Jehovah's Witnesses (0.2%), Other (0.2%) (data for 2018 based on information from Statistics Poland [GUS] 2018).

Muslim Population (% of Population): Depending on sources, between 40,000 and 75,000 (0.1%-0.2%).

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Muslim Religious Union in the Republic of Poland (Muzułmański Związek Religijny w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) and Muslim League in the Republic of Poland (Liga Muzułmańska w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: NEVER AGAIN Association (Stowarzyszenie NIGDY WIĘCEJ), Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviors (Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i Ksenofobicznych),

Salam Lab, NOMADA Association, Association Against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia Open Republic (Stowarzyszenie przeciw Antysemityzmowi i Ksenofobii Otwarta Rzeczpospolita)

Far-Right Parties: Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość), which is an alliance of New Hope (Nowa Nadzieja), National Movement (Ruch Narodowy) and Confederation of the Polish Crown (Konfederacja Polskiej Korony); National Revival of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski); PolExit; Compatriots Comrades (Rodacy Kamraci, registered on June 30, 2023)

Far-Right Movements: National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR), All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska), Independence March Association (Stowarzyszenie Marsz Niepodległości), National Guard Association (Stowarzyszenie Straż Narodowa)

Far-Right Violent Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** No

Introduction

In 2023, as in previous years, Islamophobic rhetoric in Poland was closely tied to anti-immigration discourse. Since 2015, Polish authorities have leveraged the so-called migration crisis in Europe to gain political advantage. Migration policies targeting individuals from the Global South have increasingly been framed around issues of security,¹ often portraying migrants as threats through narratives of terrorism, demographic change, and crime.

Throughout the year, the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border continued, with migrants from the Global South attempting to cross outside designated points. The harsh treatment of these migrants and the anti-refugee sentiment are central to the populist discourse of the Law and Justice (PiS) party, which governed Poland from 2014 until December 2023. In 2015, such xenophobic narratives helped PiS secure electoral victory.² By 2023, this trend had permeated across the political spectrum, including the opposition Civic Coalition, indicating the entrenched nature of these biases and fears associated with Islam and Muslim communities in Polish society. The widespread use of xenophobic rhetoric in politics underscores its effectiveness and reflects deep-seated societal prejudices. This political success may lead authorities to neglect efforts to counter stereotypes and combat racism and xenophobia through education. As a result, the public, influenced by such messages, tends to accept these views in public discourse. Additionally, Catholic media often propagate anti-Muslim narratives, with some religious institutions viewing Islam as a competing faith.

Due to the significant lack of reliable statistics on Islamophobic attacks in Poland, the most visible indicators of anti-Muslim sentiment come from media coverage and political statements. Consequently, this report is primarily based on the analysis of media monitoring reports and political discourse.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

There is a lack of significant data from official sources, NGOs, or media about Islamophobic attacks in 2023. This highlights the main problem that Islamophobia in Poland has not been monitored on a regular and representative basis this year.

The information from official authorities is limited. According to police data, in 2023, 893 hate crime cases were initiated, but only four were categorized as anti-Mus-

1. Aleksandra Tołczyk, Joanna Sozańska, *Shūzby mundurowe a islam i muzułmanie w Polsce* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2023).

2. Paweł Cywiński, Filip Katner, Jarosław Ziółkowski, *Zarządzanie strachem: jak prawica wygrywa debatę publiczną w Polsce* (Warszawa: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2019).

lim.³ At the court level, 402 hate crime cases were concluded, with 296 resulting in convictions. These crimes involved a total of 376 victims, including 16 minors;⁴ there is no specific data on how many of these cases may have been related to Muslims.

It should be noted that perpetrators of hate crimes often express hatred towards multiple groups simultaneously. When crimes are reported, and police officers receive these reports, not all the circumstances of an incident are always recorded. Additionally, prosecution does not necessarily have to determine the perpetrator's specific motivation. Recent research suggests that up to 20% of hate crime cases adjudicated in Polish courts between 2015 and 2020 may have been related to Islamophobia.⁵

NGOs primarily reported on anti-Semitic and anti-Ukrainian attacks in 2023.⁶ Nevertheless, it seems very likely that Islamophobic attacks have not been reported or publicized.

Employment

Research and discussion on job market discrimination in Poland are scarce, leading to unreliable data. In 2023, a significant number of work permits were issued to immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, totaling 132,753.⁷ Uzbekistan (27,959), Bangladesh (27,896), and Turkey (25,934) were the largest national groups represented. However, this data excludes other legal avenues for employment and does not guarantee that all individuals arrived in Poland. As of March 2023, the Social Insurance Agency reported 45,527 insured individuals from Muslim-majority countries (excluding Muslims with Polish citizenship).⁸ While indicating some opportunities in the labor market, these figures do not address potential discrimination faced by these workers.

Education

Polish school textbooks often depict Muslims and Islam in a simplistic, stereotypical, and misleading manner.⁹ They commonly misinterpret terms like “jihad” and portray Islamic countries as less developed. Historical Polish literary works also per-

3. Department of Security, Ministry of the Interior and Administration, email response to a request for access to public information, retrieved June 13, 2024.
4. Department of Strategy and European Funds, Ministry of Justice, email response to a request for access to public information, retrieved May 31, 2024.
5. Ewa Górńska, Anna Juzaszek, *Islam w polskim sądzie* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2023), p. 98.
6. The ‘Brown Book’ by ‘NEVER AGAIN’ Association registered 20 racist, xenophobic and homophobic statements between January and March 2023, but only one was related to Islam.
7. Ministry of Family, Work, and Social Policy, “Zezwolenia na pracę cudzoziemców,” (2023), retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/documents/10828/8179604/Zezwolenia%20na%20prac%C4%99%20-%202023.xlsx/bc91ef46-76e5-44a3-a7f4-f4230367d6ce?t=1706878736000>.
8. “Imigranci z krajów muzułmańskich w Polsce. Co mówią liczby?,” Demagog.pl, (July 5, 2023), retrieved May 10, 2024, from https://demagog.org.pl/analizy_i_raporty/imigranci-z-krajow-muzulmańskich-w-polsce-co-mowia-liczby/.
9. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, Joanna Modrzejewska-Leśniewska, Aleksandra Tołczyk, *Islam i muzułmanie w podręcznikach szkolnych* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, 2023).

petuate colonial and racist stereotypes of the Muslim world. Furthermore, there are instances of outright erroneous content, including quoting non-existent Quranic verses.¹⁰ The 2022 revision of the core curriculum for secondary schools further marginalized non-European cultures, including Islam.¹¹ The new textbooks approved in 2023 largely continued these trends. One textbook in particular, by Professor Wojciech Roszkowski, an economist and historian from the Polish Academy of Sciences, stirred controversies, and included negative portrayal of Muslims. Approved for use in high schools, it was criticized for depicting Islam as seeking to dominate the Western world through migration and mentioning alleged attacks on Catholic processions.¹²

Politics

As PiS prepared for the October parliamentary election in 2023, the party used public media, primarily Poland's public broadcaster TVP, to promote fearmongering, anti-migrant, and Islamophobic rhetoric.¹³ PiS also organized a referendum to coincide with the parliamentary elections on October 15, which included the question "Do you support the admission of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, according to the forced relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?"¹⁴ Following public campaigns, despite record voter turnout in the elections, citizens did not engage in the referendum, rendering it invalid.

However, the outcry among human rights observers in 2023 was sparked by comments from then-opposition leader, Donald Tusk. On July 1, Tusk, former prime minister, former president of the European Council, and leader of the Civic Coalition, posted a video on social media, commenting, "We are watching shocking scenes of violent riots in France. And right now, Kaczyński [leader of PiS – E.G.] is preparing a document that will bring even more citizens from countries such as, and I quote, Saudi Arabia, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qatar, the Arab Emirates, Nigeria, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Poland."¹⁵ Tusk referred to the draft of regulations prepared by PiS which would introduce a simplified procedure for obtaining

10. Ibid. p. 10.

11. Adam Balcer, *Na Wschodzie bez zmian? Orientalizacja we współczesnej Polsce* (Warszawa: KEW, 2023), p. 28

12. "«Hodowanie wyborców.» Politycy komentują nowy podręcznik do HiT," TVN24 (Aug 2, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from <https://tvn24.pl/polska/drugi-podrecznik-do-hit-wojciecha-rozkowskiego-trafi-do-szkol-komentarze-politykow-st7275548>.

13. Dominika Bulska, Mikołaj Winiewski, "Media publiczne powinny... Treści nienawistne na antenie telewizji publicznej. Raport z monitoringu mediów publicznych w trakcie kampanii parlamentarnej w 2023 r.," *Otwarta Rzeczpospolita* (2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://otwarta.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Media-publiczne-powinny...-raport-koncowy.pdf>.

14. Kate Conolly, "Polish prime minister to hold referendum on EU's immigration plan," *The Guardian*, (Aug 13, 2023), retrieved Apr 21, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/13/polish-prime-minister-to-hold-referendum-on-eus-immigration-plan>.

15. Donald Tusk, Twitter, (July 2, 2023), retrieved May 30, 2024, from <https://x.com/donaldtusk/status/1675381156513038336>.

work visas for citizens of 21 countries, including several Muslim-majority nations. The message was that PiS's policies threaten Poland's borders and that the arrival of Muslim workers in Poland could lead to riots similar to those in France, referring to the late June protests following the police killing of a 17-year-old.¹⁶ A few days later, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs withdrew the draft of the new visa regulations.¹⁷

These were not the only such statements by the opposition. On July 2, Roman Giertych, an MP candidate from Civic Coalition and formerly the leader of the far-right All-Polish Youth party, posted a video of police chasing a group of men, commenting, "Twenty years from now, due to having allowed hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Muslim countries into Poland, we may witness such scenes on the streets of Warsaw."¹⁸

In September, the so-called visa scandal erupted. One of the major newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, revealed that employees of the Foreign Ministry had facilitated a widespread influx of immigrants to Poland in exchange for bribes. Two hundred thousand people, including 130,000 from Muslim countries, obtained visas in this way.¹⁹ This corruption affair was connected to the aforementioned draft of visa regulations and provoked another wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric from the opposition, attempting to attract supporters before the elections.²⁰

Toward the end of the year, anti-Muslim sentiment was fueled by events in Israel and the Gaza Strip. The attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7 coincided with the final week of the Polish election campaign and was used by PiS. On October 11, Mateusz Morawiecki, then prime minister and PiS MP candidate, during an electoral meeting, stated,

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will cause tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Muslim immigrants to head for Europe just as they did a few years ago. You will see these marches of young Muslim men who have no regard for women's rights. [...] Among these illegal immigrants will be, ladies and gentlemen, people like Islamic militants, the kind that came there this time, Islamic terrorists. [...] The

16. Jan Cienski, Wojciech Kość, "Polish politicians attack migrants for electoral gain," Politico, (Jul 7, 2023), retrieved May 6, 2024 from <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-politicians-donald-tusk-attack-migrants-for-electoral-gain/>.

17. Grażyna J. Leśniak, "Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych oficjalnie wycofało się z outsourcingu wizowego," Prawo.pl (Jul 7, 2023), retrieved on May 10, 2024 from <https://www.prawo.pl/kadry/outsourcing-wizowy-msz-wycofuje-sie-z-prac-nad-rozporzadzeniem,522045.html>.

18. "'Shoot them.' Hate speech in the election campaign in Poland", NEVER AGAIN' Association, (2023), retrieved on May 20, 2024, from https://www.nigdywiecej.org/docstation/com_docstation/172/shoot_them_report.pdf, p. 6.

19. Wojciech Czuchnowski, Angelina Kosiek, Paweł Wroński, "Polski MSZ mógł sprowadzić do Europy setki tysięcy migrantów. Trwa międzynarodowe śledztwo," Wyborcza, (Sept 5, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024 from <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,30157205,w-tle-sledztwo-w-sprawie-gigantycznego-przerzutu-migrantow-do.html>.

20. Karen Hargrave, Sarian Jarosz, "Is anti-migrant rhetoric still a vote-winner?," Konsorcjum Migracyjne, (Oct 19, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from <https://odi.org/en/insights/is-anti-migrant-rhetoric-still-a-vote-winner-unpacking-narratives-in-polands-election/>.

great waves of illegal immigration that are flooding into Sweden, France, and Germany are destroying the peace of those cities. Let us not allow this!²¹

A similar comment was made by PiS Member of European Parliament Kosma Złotowski: “Not only emigrants from Palestine, but also from other Middle Eastern countries, wish the Jewish state ill and condone violence that nothing in our cultural circle justifies.”²²

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 was not publicly commemorated by the government, public institutions, politicians, or the media. Only Salam Lab, a pro-diversity NGO, acknowledged the day with a blog post on its website and social media.²³

Media

In 2023, the Institute of Discourse and Dialogue (INDID) conducted media monitoring of representations of Muslims as part of the “EMPATHY” project. Below is a summary of nine reports presenting a total of 345 articles.

Analysis shows that in only 62% of articles Islam was featured as the main subject. Among these, 51% covered current events, 28% addressed Islam in relation to terrorism, and 26% focused on religion and culture broadly. Approximately 33% of the sources were deemed potentially negative in their impact on readers. Negative press often fixated on migrants in Europe, relationships between European women and Muslim newcomers, or alleged persecution of Christians in Muslim-majority countries. Early in the year, much attention was drawn to protests in Iran. Throughout the year, there were reports on Quran burnings in Sweden and related Muslim protests. In October, the media coverage of events in Israel and Gaza was only seldomly framed in the context of Islam, and Islamophobic texts continued to spotlight Muslim demonstrations in Sweden and Germany.

State-owned media portals frequently reproducing Islamophobic stereotypes included polskieradio24.pl, owned by Polish Radio, and tvpi.info,²⁴ the internet portal of the state-funded news TV channel. Both published anti-Islam content mainly in the context of the perceived threat from Muslim migration, reflecting the populist discourse of the PIS government, which controlled these outlets at the time.

21. “Mateusz Morawiecki: Spotkanie w Kaliszu,” Janusz Jaskółka channel on YouTube, (Oct 11, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtN-S0Futsg&ab_channel=Janusz-Jask%C3%B3%C5%82ka.

22. Artur Ciechanowicz, “Złotowski: muzułmanie na Zachodzie z entuzjazmem zareagowali na krowy atak Hamasu na Izrael. Tęgo konfliktu wartości nie pokona integracja,” PAP, (Nov 10, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024 from <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/zlotowski-muzulmanie-na-zachodzie-z-entuzjazmem-zareagowali-na-krowy-atak-hamasu-na>.

23. “Islamofobia w kalendarzu,” Salam Lab, (Mar 18, 2023), retrieved July 23, 2024, from <https://salamlab.pl/pl/islamofobia-w-kalendarzu/>

24. At the time of writing of this report, most of the analyzed articles were no longer available on tvpi.info website.

Polskie Radio 24.pl Polska Świat Gospodarka Sport Antena Podcasty

#ŚWIAT #Europa #kryzys migracyjny 2023 ...

Europa zмага się z falą migracji i eskalacją przestępczości. A wystarczyło posłuchać Jarosława Kaczyńskiego w 2015 roku

2023-09-29, 11:03 Udostępnij



Niekontrolowany napływ migrantów przekłada się na wzrost przestępczości Foto: shutterstock/Lumiereist

Figure 1: “Europe is struggling with a wave of migration and escalating crime. All it took [to avoid this – E.G.] was listening to Jarosław Kaczyński in 2015.”²⁵

Islamophobic rhetoric was also present in Catholic online media such as the Polish edition of the international portal *aleteia.org* and *pch24.pl*, run by Father Piotr Skarga for Christian Culture Association. For example, *pch24.pl* published an article titled “Celebration of Persecutors of Christians: The Day of Islam in the Polish Church Is Approaching.”²⁶

Other sources of anti-Muslim content included *Salon24* (*salon24.pl*, e.g. “Kwiatkowski: Relocations? It Was Law and Justice That Let in 130,000 Muslims”²⁷); *Deutsche Welle’s* Polish version (*dw.com*, e.g. “‘Hate Demonstrations’. Press after Is-

25. “Europa zмага się z falą migracji i eskalacją przestępczości. A wystarczyło posłuchać Jarosława Kaczyńskiego w 2015 roku,” *Polskie Radio 24*, (Sept 29, 2023), retrieved May 30, 2024, from: <https://polskieradio24.pl/artykul/3251239,europa-zmaga-sie-z-fala-migracji-i-eskalacja-przestepczosci-a-wystarczylo-posluchac-jaroslaw-kaczynskiego-w-2015-roku>.
26. “Święto prześladowców chrześcijan. Zbliża się dzień islamu w polskim Kościele,” *PCh.24.pl*, (Jan 9, 2023), retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://pch24.pl/swieto-przesladowcow-chrzescijan-zbliza-sie-dzien-islam-u-w-polskim-kosciele/>.
27. Sławomir Jastrzębowski, “Kwiatkowski: Relokacje? To PiS wpuściło 130 tysięcy muzułmanów,” *Salon 24*, (June 16, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.salon24.pl/newsroom/1308330,kwiatkowski-relokacje-to-pis-wpuscilo-130-tysiecy-muzulmanow>.

lamist Marches”²⁸); right-wing conservative TV Republika (tvrepublika.pl, e.g. “German Press Review: Tusk Is Merkel’s Version - Islamization and Africanization Guaranteed [video]”²⁹); the nationalist Magna Polonia portal (magnapolonia.pl, e.g. “Extreme Leftist-Islamist Wanted to Murder Independence March Participants”³⁰); and the explicitly anti-Islamic Euroislam website (euroislam.pl, e.g. “Muslims’ Anger Stifles Freedom of Speech”³¹).

Conservative opinion portals like Do Rzeczy (dorzeczy.pl, featuring columns by known Islamophobic journalists like Rafał Ziemkiewicz and Wojciech Cejrowski, e.g. “Rebellion in France. Lisicki: Suicide of the West. Cejrowski: It Is Impossible to Coexist with Islam”³²); wPolityce (wpolityce.pl, e.g. “Murder of Polish Woman on Kos: Muslims Coming to Europe ‘for Their Own,’ Including White Women”³³); and wGospodarce (wgospodarce.pl, e.g. “Islamic Migrants Seize Lampedusa!”³⁴) also contributed significantly.

In October and November, these portals featured biased commentaries of Hamas attacks (i.e. wGospodarce: “Did Hamas Strike the Hospital Itself? There’s an Expert’s Assessment!”³⁵). Polish media also echoed reports of rapes allegedly committed by Hamas militants. By mid-November, the popular women’s magazine *Wysokie Obcasy* published an article titled “Hamas Used Rape as a Weapon of War. ‘The Terrorists Got a Dispensation from Their Imams.’”³⁶ Written by Natalia Waloch and based on a piece from *Times of Israel* and a webinar by Harvard’s Jewish organizations, the article lacked additional fact-checking or critical commentary on the lack of evidence at the time, also giving an Islamophobic slant in the title.

28. “‘Demonstracje nienawiści’. Prasa po islamistycznych marszach,” DW, (Nov 6, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.dw.com/pl/demonstracje-nienawi%C5%9Bci-prasa-wyzwa-do-dzia%C5%82a%C5%84-po-islamistycznych-manifestacjach/a-67311579>.
29. “Przegląd Prasy Niemieckiej: Tusk to wersja Merkel - islamizacja i afrykanizacja gwarantowana [wideo],” TV Republika, (Oct 21, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://tvrepublika.pl/Przegl%C4%85d-Prasy-Niemieckiej-Tusk-to-wersja-Merkel-islamizacja-i-afrykanizacja-gwarantowana-wideo,151878.html>.
30. “Skrajna lewaczka-islamistka chciała wymordować uczestników Marszu Niepodległości,” Magna Polonia, (Nov 22, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://www.magnapolonia.org/skrajna-lewaczka-islamistka-chciala-wymordowac-uczestnikow-marszu-niepodleglosci/>.
31. Piotr Ślusarczyk (ed.), “Gniew muzułmanów dławi wolność słowa,” Euroislam, (Mar 20, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://euroislam.pl/gniew-muzulmanow-dlawi-wolnosc-slowa/>.
32. “Rebelia we Francji. Lisicki: Samobójstwo Zachodu. Cejrowski: Nie da się koegzystować z islamem,” Do Rzeczy, (July 5, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://dorzeczy.pl/plus/antysystem/457770/zamieszki-we-francji-lisicki-samobojstwo-zachodu-cejrowski-odpowiada.html>.
33. “Zabójstwo Polki na Kos. Pawlicki w ‘Salonie Dziennikarskim’: Muzułmanie przychodzą do Europy ‘po swoje’, także po białe kobiety,” wPolityce.pl, (June 24, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/651985-pawlicki-muzulmanie-przychodza-do-europy-po-swoje>.
34. “Islamscy migranci zajmują Lampedusę!,” wGospodarce, (Oct 16, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/134105-islamscy-migranci-zajmuja-lampeduse>.
35. “Hamas sam uderzył w szpital? Jest ocena eksperta!,” wGospodarce (Nov 3, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/134874-hamas-sam-uderzyl-w-szpital-jest-ocena-eksperta>.
36. Natalia Waloch, “Hamas użył gwałtów jako broni wojennej. ‘Terrorysty dostali dyspensę od swoich imamów,’” (Nov 13, 2023), retrieved May 25, 2024, from <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,163229,30399705,hamas-uzyl-gwaltow-jako-broni-wojennej-terrorysty-dostali.html>.

The monthly reports by the Institute of Discourse and Dialogue (INDID) also frequently cited articles from Onet (onet.pl), one of Poland's largest and most popular portals controlled by the media company Ringier Axel Springer Polska. Anti-Muslim rhetoric appeared on the main site and on subpages focused on news (wiadomosci.onet.pl), sports (przegladSPORTOWY.onet.pl), and travel (podroze.onet.pl). A notably biased article in Onet news was titled "L'abaya: Republic (Still) Defends Itself. Islam Is Not Losing Its Vigor [COMMENTARY]"³⁷ by journalist Roman Graczyk, portraying Muslim students and parents in France as extremely violent.

Despite this, Onet subpages also published positive stories about Islam. Examples include interviews with a Polish football coach who worked in Saudi Arabia³⁸; a Polish female convert to Islam³⁹; and Mahbub Siddique-Olesiejuk, a Muslim candidate for the Polish parliament on the Civic Coalition list.⁴⁰ The last article was written by Piotr Ibrahim Kalwas, a convert to Islam and regular writer of Islam-themed articles.

Fact-based coverage about Islam was generally found in *National Geographic*, the Outriders journalism group, and left-oriented portals like Oko.press and Krytyka Polityczna. Reliable journalists included Miłka Fijałkowska (TVN24), Wojciech Jagielski (*Tygodnik Powszechny*), Marta Urzędowska (*Gazeta Wyborcza*), and freelancers Jagoda Grondecka, Dalia Mikulska, and Bartosz Rumieńczyk.

Justice System

Poland lacks specific laws directly addressing Muslim rights. However, discussions surrounding the Polish-Belarusian border events and the EU's migrant relocation, including a PiS-organized referendum, often carried Islamophobic undertones.

A significant Islamophobic event in 2023 involved police training. On April 17-19, Polish police in cooperation with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), conducted the "Wolf-Ram-23" counterterrorism exercise.⁴¹ During a drill in Poznań, an actress playing a terrorist was dressed as a Muslim woman. Photos of her in a headscarf holding an explosives detonator circulated online, sparking criticism

37. Roman Graczyk, "L'abaya: Republika (jeszcze) się broni. Islam nie traci wigoru [KOMENTARZ]," wiadomości.onet.pl, (Sept 10, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/opinie/republika-jeszcze-sie-broni-islam-nie-traci-wigoru-francuski-spor-o-abaje/qksecz>.

38. Dariusz Dobek, "Islam jest tu bardzo dosłownie rozumiany. To tam trafił Czesław Michniewicz," przegladSPORTOWY.onet.pl, (June 13, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://przegladSPORTOWY.onet.pl/pilka-nozna/islam-jest-tu-bardzo-doslownie-rozumiany-to-tam-trafil-czeslaw-michniewicz/097ckse>.

39. Marta Abramczyk, "Hidżab jest częścią mojej tożsamości – wyznaje Basia, polska muzułmanka," podróże.onet.pl, (Feb 2, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://podroze.onet.pl/polka-z-poznania-przesla-na-islam-jakie-sa-reakcje-na-hidzab/7scqd2e>.

40. Piotr Ibrahim Kalwas, "Marzył o byciu pilotem. Na rosyjskiej ulicy spotkał grupę nastolatków. Jego kolega tego spotkania nie przeżył. Teraz startuje do Sejmu," Onet Wiadomości, (Sept 2, 2023), retrieved May 25, 2024, from <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/jestem-polakiem-i-bengalczykiem-mahbub-siddique-olesiejuk-startuje-do-sejmu/xfw26lf>.

41. "Police embark on massive anti-terrorist training exercise," PAP, (April 18, 2023), retrieved May 7, 2024, from <https://www.pap.pl/en/news/news%2C1562540%2Cpolice-embark-massive-anti-terrorist-training-exercise.html>.

from local media,⁴² women’s press,⁴³ and Polish Muslim women.⁴⁴ Mamed Khalidow, a well-known Polish MMA Fighter of Chechen origin, was quoted in sporting media, saying, “This is Islamophobia in Poland.”⁴⁵ The Police Headquarters defended the exercise, stating it mirrored real events and faithfully reproduced a Turkish attack scenario.⁴⁶

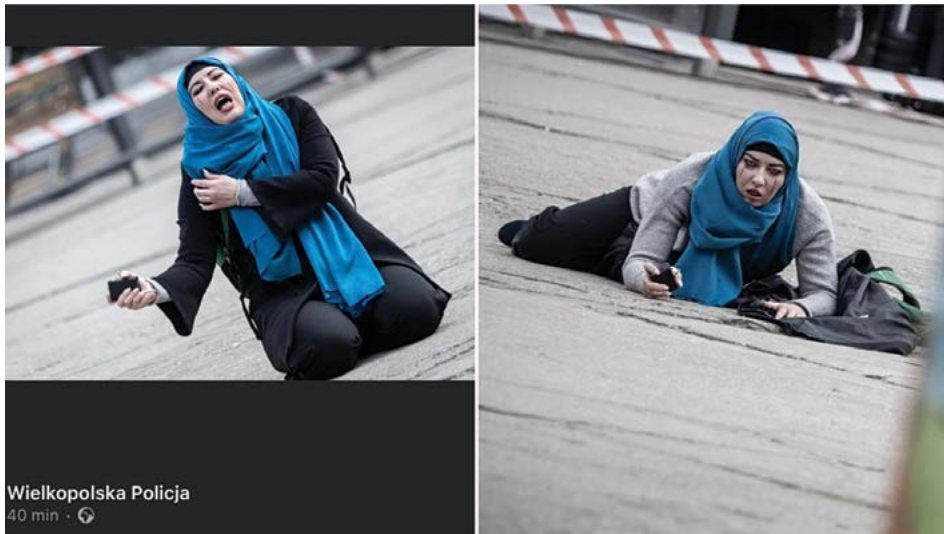


Figure 2: Photos from the “Wolf-Ram-23” anti-terrorism training (April 17-19, 2023), posted on the social media of the Wielkopolska Police Department. The photos were later removed. **Source:** Author’s personal archive.

Internet

The main website for Islamophobic content in Poland is Euroislam – Europe of the Future Association (euroislam.pl), established in 2008-2009. Its mission is “to stop the growth of Islamism in Europe and Poland in particular,”⁴⁷ and is funded by donations. The website actively posted new stories in 2023. A similar Islamophobic source is the Polish version of MEMRI – the Middle East Media Research Institute

42. Justyna Piasecka, “Muzułmanka w hidżabie ‘terrorystką’ podczas policyjnych ćwiczeń w Poznaniu. Polscy muzułmanie oburzeni,” *Głos Wielkopolski*, (Apr 20, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from <https://gloswielkopolski.pl/muzulmanka-w-hidzabie-terrorystka-podczas-policyjnych-cwiczen-w-poznaniu-polscy-muzulmanie-oburzeni/ar/c1-17475647>.

43. Anna J. Dudek, “Znowu to samo. Policja wygrywa islamofobiczne melodie,” *Wysokie Obcasy*, (Apr 20, 2023), retrieved May 10, 2024, from <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,100865,29680987,znowu-to-samo-policja-wygrywa-islamofobiczne-melodie.html?disableRedirects=true>.

44. Aleksander Sławiński, “‘Byłam atakowana za to, że noszę chustę’. Kobiety z Warszawy bronią hidżabu po ćwiczeniach antyterrorystów,” *Wyborcza.pl Warszawa*, (April 20, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from <https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,29683473,bylam-atakowana-za-to-ze-nosze-chuste-kobiety-z-warszawy.html>

45. Łukasz Witczyk, “Chalidow nie wytrzymał. ‘To jest islamofobia w Polsce’,” *Sportowe Fakty*, (Apr 21, 2023), retrieved May 15, 2024, from <https://sportowefakty.wp.pl/mma/1056394/chalidow-nie-wytrzymał-to-jest-islamofobia-w-polsce>.

46. Justyna Piasecka, op.cit.

47. “Mission,” Euroislam, (n.d.), retrieved May 26, 2024, from <https://euroislam.pl/stowarzyszenie/o-nas/>.

(www2.memri.org/polish/), which functions as a disguised news outlet, promoting anti-Islamic narratives and is “playing a significant role in the Islamophobic network” in the United States.⁴⁸

While internet hate speech mostly proliferates on social media, comments under press articles, and in pathostreaming, identifying specific accounts spreading such narratives proves challenging. In 2023, some prominent Islamophobic Facebook pages saw decreased activity. For instance, “No to Islamization of Europe” (Nie dla Islamizacji Europy, 252.000 followers) reposted various news articles, not only xenophobic ones, from *Tygodnik Solidarność* weekly. Two Facebook groups named “No to Islamization of Poland” (Nie dla Islamizacji Polski) appeared inactive. “Islam not in Poland” (Islam nie w Polsce) posted anti-migrant content, occasionally Islamophobic, but had limited followers.

The monitoring of internet posts is carried out by civil society organizations such as the Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behavior and the Association Against Anti-Semitism and Xenophobia Open Republic. These groups have successfully initiated numerous court cases on hate speech in previous years.⁴⁹

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In recent years, the primary proponents of Islamophobia have been far-right movements and political parties employing stringent immigration policies and xenophobic rhetoric to garner public favor. Xenophobic content is promoted by leaders of far-right organizations, some of whom attempted to run for parliament in 2023. Notable figures include Robert Bąkiewicz, former president of the Independence March Association,⁵⁰ and Wojciech Olszanski and Marcin Osadowski, both nationalist activists, pathostreamers, and leaders of the Compatriots Comrades party.⁵¹ Among mainstream politicians, Dariusz Matecki, a PiS MP with right-wing and ultra-Catholic views, was accused of hate speech in 2023.⁵² However, the majority of these individuals espouse anti-Semitic and homophobic views, with Islam being seldomly addressed.

48. “Middle East Media Research Institute,” Monitoring And Combating Islamophobia, (Aug 14, 2023), retrieved July 24, 2024, from <https://islamophobia.org/islamophobic-organizations/middle-east-media-research-institute/>.

49. Ewa Górńska, Anna Juzaszek, op.cit, p. 104.

50. Wiktor Ferdecki, “Nowe kłopoty Roberta Bąkiewicza. Zajmie się nim prokuratura,” Rzeczpospolita, (Aug 8, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art38915771-nowe-klopoty-roberta-bakiewicza-zajmie-sie-nim-prokuratura>.

51. Daniel Flis, “Marcin Osadowski vel Ludwiczek. Jak bezrobotny lider kamratów zarobił na srebrnego leksusa,” Oko Press, (Apr 13, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from: <https://oko.press/marcin-osadowski-ludwiczek-rodacy-kamraci-wojciech-olszanski>.

52. Iga Dzieciuchowicz, “Hejter idzie po mandat. Kim jest polityk, którego boją się nawet na prawicy?,” TVN24, (Oct 13, 2023), retrieved May 5, 2024, from <https://tvn24.pl/premium/dariusz-matecki-kim-jest-czlowiek-ktory-planowal-odkazac-ulice-po-ideologii-lgbt-a-teraz-moze-zostac-poslem-st7388963>.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

A noteworthy endeavor in countering Islamophobia was the “EMPATHY” project (2022-2023), funded by the European Commission under the Citizens, Equality, Rights, and Values program.⁵³ It employed a comprehensive, intersectional approach to combat Islamophobia in Poland, targeting negative stereotypes through academic research, awareness-raising, and educational activities. The project was led by a consortium of two universities, the Warsaw School of Economics and the Academy of Social Pedagogy, along with three NGOs, namely the Institute for Security and International Development, the Institute for Discourse and Dialogue, and Wandering Women. The Union of Polish Metropolises, Salam Lab, and the Reorient.pl podcast also collaborated. The coordinator was Prof. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, an expert on Islamophobia. The project produced academic publications, teacher handouts, and training programs. Spearheaded by non-Muslims, it also established a Muslim Board of Experts to ensure representation of Muslim perspectives.

At the local level, the city of Poznan has long been engaged in anti-hate initiatives, such as the publication of the “Calendar of the Three Religions” for the seventh consecutive year. This collaborative effort, led by leaders of the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities, integrates religious holidays and observances, fostering interfaith understanding.⁵⁴

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Polish Islamophobia in 2023 was mostly combined with anti-immigrant rhetoric, used widely on all sides of the political spectrum. The reporting on Islam in the media was often biased and focused on events in the world that were described in an anti-Muslim way. To tackle anti-Muslim racism in Poland effectively, there should be more detailed reporting mechanisms for hate crimes and hate speech against Muslims, comprehensive training programs for law enforcement and judicial personnel, awareness campaigns in schools and communities to promote mutual understanding, and better internet monitoring tools to detect and remove online hate speech. To achieve these goals, collaboration between NGOs, state institutions, and religious organizations would be necessary.

53. <https://salamlab.pl/pl/empathy-project/>

54. “Kalendarz Trzech Religii,” Poznań, (December 18, 2023), retrieved May 20, 2024, from <https://www.poznan.pl/mim/info/news/kalendarz-trzech-religii,219090.html>.

Chronology

- **17-19 April 2023:** Nationwide counterterrorism exercise “Wolf-Ram-23” organized by the Polish police and the FBI, where the actress playing the terrorist was dressed as a Muslim woman.
- **1 July 2023:** Donald Tusk, leader of the Civic Coalition, posts a video on social media suggesting that the PiS party will bring Muslim immigrants to Poland, leading to violent riots like in France.
- **2 July 2023:** Roman Giertych, an MP candidate from the Civic Coalition, posts a video of police chasing a group of men, commenting that this is what Warsaw will be like in the future, after allowing in hundreds of thousands of Muslims.
- **11 August 2023:** MP Krzysztof Bosak (Confederation) claims that migrants in Europe pose a sexual and criminal threat to Europeans and impose their rules on others, such as banning dogs in their districts because they consider them haram (forbidden by Islamic law).
- **5 September 2023:** “Visa scandal” erupts: top employees at the Foreign Ministry are discovered to have sold visas in exchange for bribes.
- **11 October 2023:** Mateusz Morawiecki, prime minister and PiS MP candidate, says that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will result in “Islamic young men,” militants, and terrorists marching to Europe.
- **15 November 2023:** Parliamentary elections and a referendum organized by PiS with a question about accepting “illegal” immigrants.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
PORTUGAL
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Sumário Executivo

A islamofobia tem aumentado na Europa, especialmente devido ao apogeu dos partidos políticos de extrema-direita, mas também devido às actividades e discursos de ódio de organizações civis. Neste contexto, Portugal tem sido reconhecido como um país muito pacífico e tolerante. No entanto, não está imune à islamofobia e, por isso, é relevante saber qual é a situação neste país.

Na verdade, os crimes de ódio aumentaram 451% desde 2018, enquanto pelo menos 16,1% da população sofreu discriminação. Mesmo que em 2023 não tenha havido ataques violentos, a percepção geral é que a islamofobia está presente no país mas de forma silenciosa, ou seja, é invisibilizada. No entanto, a legislação não sofreu alterações relevantes e os crimes de ódio não podem ser desagregados, pelo que é impossível saber exactamente quantos dos 347 casos de crimes de ódio correspondem a ataques muçulmanos. Com a chegada do Chega à Assembleia Nacional, os discursos anti-Islão e anti-imigração serão acolhidos no principal poder legislativo de Portugal, transformando o cenário político do país e pressionando os partidos moderados e de esquerda para acabarem com os discursos de ódio e posturas.

No meio desta nova realidade, alguns partidos políticos ou políticos transformaram-se em líderes proeminentes dos discursos anti-islamofóbicos, mas foram confrontados por membros importantes dos partidos Chega e Ergue-Te. Então, os meios de comunicação desempenharam e desempenharão um papel importante nesta questão, pois têm desenvolvido uma postura neutra e profissional, mas há excepções.

Executive Summary

Islamophobia has been rising in Europe, especially due to the surge of far-right political parties, but also because of the activities and hate discourse of civil organizations. In this context, Portugal has been recognized as a very peaceful and tolerant country. Nevertheless, it is not immune to Islamophobia.

As a matter of fact, hate crimes have risen by 451% since 2018, while at least 16.1% of the population has suffered discrimination. Even if in 2023 there were no violent attacks, the general perception is that Islamophobia is present in the country but in a silent way; that is, Islamophobia is invisible. However, legislation has seen no relevant changes and hate crimes cannot be disaggregated, so it is impossible to know exactly how many of the 347 hate crime cases correspond to anti-Muslim hate crimes. With the arrival of the political party Chega to the National Assembly, anti-Islam and anti-immigration rhetoric will be heard in the main Portuguese legislative body, transforming the political scene of the country and putting pressure to center-right and leftist parties in order to contain hate speech.

In the midst of this new reality, some political parties or politicians have transformed into prominent leaders of anti-Islamophobic discourse. However, this is counterbalanced by the Islamophobic and anti-migrant stances and rhetoric of the Chega and Ergue-Te parties. The media have played and will play an important role, as they have been largely developing a neutral and professional stance. Still, there are exceptions.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Portuguese Republic

Type of Regime: Democracy

Form of Government: Semi-presidential republic

Ruling Parties: Social Democratic Party (PSD), People's Party (CDS-PP), and People's Monarchist Party (PPM)

Opposition Parties: Socialist Party (PS), Liberal Initiative, Bloque Esquerda, Portuguese Communist Party, LIVRE, People–Animals–Nature (PAN).

Last Elections: March 10, 2024

Total Population: 10,218,413

Major Language: Portuguese

Official Religion: Christianity (Catholicism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: Not available

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: 347 hate crimes (2023)

Major Religions (% of Population): Christians (90.49%), Agnostics (6.48%), Atheists (1.48%), Buddhists, (0.56%), Muslims (0.44%), Hindus (0.22%), Others (0.21%), Sikhs (0.04%), espiritistas (0.04%), Baha'is (0.02%), Traditional Religions (0.02%) (Portugal Report 2023, ACN International).

Muslim Population (% of Population): 0.44%

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa, Comunidade Islâmica de Porto, The Ismaili Centre, Instituto Halal de Portugal, Centro Cultural Islâmico do Porto, Comunidade Islâmica de Odivelas, Fundacao Aga Khan, Fundação Islâmica de Palmela, Centro Cultural das Colinas do Cruzeiro, Centro Islâmico do Bangladesh

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: SOS Racismo, Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima (APAV), Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados

Far-Right Parties: Chega, Ergue-Te, Alternativa Democrática Nacional

Far-Right Movements: Active Club Portugal, Associação Portugueses Primeiro, Blood and Honour, Clube Étnico Portuguez, Habeas Corpus, Escudo Identitário, Força Nova, Movimento Social Nacionalista, Hammerskins, Proud Boys, Reconquista, 1143

Far-Right Violent Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** No

Introduction¹

The Muslim community in Portugal represents only 0.44% of the total population of the country. However, this figure has been increasing, mainly due to migrants who have come to Portugal from Africa -especially from the former colonies- and Asia. Until now, there has been a peaceful integration and that is why Portugal has been categorized as a country with no Islamophobia.

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis shows that there are some trends that need to be monitored, as there are far-right political parties and social groups (who normally follow extreme ideologies such as white supremacy, homophobia, and xenophobia, among others) that during 2023 expressed ideas or stances that could be labelled as Islamophobic.

In this context, there were no registered Islamophobic attacks in Portugal in 2023, nor any publication of anti-Islam laws in the Portuguese Congress. This shows that the country is still safe for the Muslim community. In addition, some interesting initiatives, which tend to integrate the diverse religions, have taken place. Some of them were organized by the Portuguese government while relevant political figures participated in others.

Finally, social media were very active and numerous accounts were detected that spread hate speech against immigrants, including Muslims. This should be taken into account and closely monitored in order to establish whether they are xenophobic stances or linked to accounts or groups that hold Islamophobic views.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

According to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), hate crimes have been rising during the period 2018-2023. Nevertheless, as the Portuguese law does not differentiate between the diverse motivations of the attackers, there is no data on anti-Muslim hate crimes. In fact, the Guarda Nacional Republicana (GNR, National Republican Guard) has stated that there is no legal definition

1. I would like to thank all the people and institutions that helped with information, contacts or even interviews: Comissão de Protecção às Vítimas de Crimes, Conselho Português para os Refugiados, Fabrizio Boscaglia (Universidade Lusófona), Guarda Nacional Republicana, Jaime Soares (Centro Cultural Islâmico do Porto), Joana Menezes (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima), João Henriques (Observatório do Mundo Islâmico), José Falcão (SOS Racismo Portugal), Marta Araújo (Universidade de Coimbra), Nuno Silva (SOS Racismo Portugal), Observatório das Migrações, Office of the Minister of Internal Administration, Patrícia Jerónimo (Universidade do Minho), Pedro Sousa Almeida (Instituto Universitário de Lisboa), Platform for International Co-operation on Undocumented Migrants, Polícia de Segurança Pública and Sílvia Rodrigues (Universidade de Coimbra).

of hate crimes.² However, Article 240 of the Penal Code penalizes discrimination and incitement of hatred and violence, even with effective imprisonment. In brief, the existing figures help us to have a bird's-eye view, but they do not allow us to know exactly how many cases of violence against Muslims have occurred in Portugal.

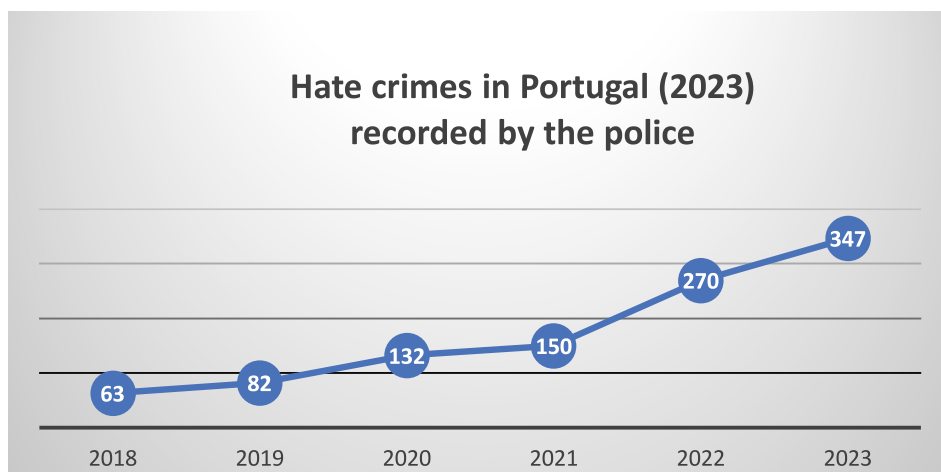


Figure 1: Hate crimes recorded by the police. **Source:** OSCE, with data given by Portugal

Even if hate crimes have risen, only a small part of them results in a formal accusation.³

As a matter of fact, the Public Ministry stated that between 2020 and 2023, 792 hate crime investigations were opened, but only 14 of them continued as indictment orders.⁴

Complaints due to racial discrimination rose by 20.3% in 2022 and in 51.7% of them the victim's nationality was the reason for the discriminatory act.⁵

The Instituto Nacional de Estatística (National Institute of Statistics) announced that 1.2 million people (16.1% of the country's population) have already suffered discrimination. The groups that have suffered most are Gypsies (51.3%), Black people (44.2%), mixed race people (40.4%), unemployed (24.9%), youth (18.9%), school

2. After asking for figures on Islamophobic attacks, the Guarda Nacional Republicana replied saying that "in these criminal typologies, it is particularly complex to determine the targets of the crimes, as well as which crimes are effectively motivated by hate, and there is no specific computer processing for these typologies. Finally, we inform you that, under data protection legislation, the specific statistical processing of certain personal data, such as racial or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, is not permitted."
3. SIC Notícias, "Crimes de ódio aumentam, mas só uma minoria resulta em acusação", *SIC Notícias*, 05-07-2023, retrieved 05-18-2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2024-05-07-video-crimes-de-odio-aumentam-mas-so-uma-minoria-resulta-em-acusacao-01edd391>
4. Porto Canal, "Ministério Público abriu 792 inquéritos por crimes de ódio e apenas deduziu 14 acusações desde 2020", *Porto Canal*, 06-04-2024, retrieved 05-24-2024, from <https://portocanal.sapo.pt/noticia/350519>
5. Wicke, Leonor & Rugeroni Saldanha, Rita, "SOS Racismo: 'Em Portugal, as pessoas imigrantes são vítimas de ódio e de crimes violentos'", *Lider Magazine*, 03-25-2024, retrieved 04-14-2024, from <https://lidermagazine.sapo.pt/sos-racismo-em-portugal-as-pessoas-imigrantes-sao-vitimas-de-odio-e-de-crimes-violentos/>

students (18.3%), and women (17.5%). As can be seen, the category “Muslims” does not appear as it was not included in the study.⁶

In conversations with scholars, journalists, NGO workers, and leaders of the Muslim community, nearly all said that Islamophobic discrimination occurs on a daily basis, but in a very soft way. In fact, they stated that they could not remember a single case in 2023.

When researching online, especially in the Portuguese media, one incident was detected. On September 8, Carlos Xavier, commentator on Sporting TV, made xenophobic and Islamophobic comments during a match between Sporting Lisboa and FC Porto. His remarks, directed to the Iranian football player Mehdi Taremi, were the following:

The VAR is here to help. The referee just had to have courage, not to say something else, and give two yellow cards to the Muslim, who did not know how to swim when he came to Portugal and now knows how to dive.

After an investigation of the Disciplinary Council of the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF), Sporting Lisboa was fined 15,000 euros for violating Article 112 of the League’s Disciplinary Regulations, on “injury to the honor and reputation of the bodies of the sporting structure and its members.”⁷

Regarding the war in Gaza, there were no registered Islamophobic incidents and according to the experts interviewed, there has been no relevant change in the country’s trends. The only impact has been a polarization of the public’s stances (against and in favor of Palestine).

Finally, even if there have not been attacks officially registered, SOS Racismo representatives have stated that there is the perception that complaints about discrimination, including Islamophobia, have not only increased, but have also extended beyond the capital.

Employment

There is discrimination, which goes under the radar, in the employment sector. Muslims who suffer discrimination prefer to keep silent in order to avoid losing their jobs or avoid being deported. Some Muslims prefer to avoid certain situations so they do not get into trouble with their bosses. For example, some women take off their veil or avoid Islamic clothing at work, or Muslims do not use their right to take a break for prayer in their working day and, even if they have the legal authorization, they do not go to the mosque for the Friday prayer.

6. The full study can be read in the following link: https://www.ine.pt/xportal/xmain?xpid=INE&xpgid=ine_destaques&DESTAQUESdest_boui=625453018&DESTAQUESmodo=2

7. Pedrosa Costa, Eduardo, “Declarações de Carlos Xavier valem multa de 15 mil euros ao Sporting”, *Jornal do Notícias*, 10-10-2023, retrieved 05-28-2024, from <https://www.jn.pt/2776914127/declaracoes-de-carlos-xavier-valem-multa-de-15-mil-euros-ao-sporting/>

It should be emphasized that most of the Muslims living in Portugal are Portuguese citizens and enjoy a good economic status. Therefore, the perception of Muslims in workplaces is very positive and they are not viewed via the typical Islamophobic paradigms, according to which Muslims “invade” the country and take the jobs from natives, as is the narrative in many other Western European countries.

Regarding testimonies, on August 30, the cable news channel SIC Notícias published the case of Aisha Akif, a 19-year-old Portuguese woman, who stated, “I am working in a store and they told me that [the *abaya*] is not part of the uniform, but as I don’t wear a scarf or *abaya* every day, it ended up being my own choice and not an imposition, even though it was.”⁸

Education

There was no news about changes in the educational manuals on history or other subjects that are part of the curriculum in 2023. In 2022, the Câmara Municipal de Odivelas (Odivelas Municipal Chamber) and the Instituto Halal de Portugal (Halal Institute of Portugal) established a partnership to include a halal menu for the lunch of public schools, but the initiative was not picked up by other educational facilities.

However, there have been some interesting projects or activities organized by universities, which have made it possible to diffuse information about Islam and the Muslims. For example, the Seminário Permanente de Estudos Islâmicos – 2023 (Permanent Seminar of Islamic Studies – 2023)⁹; Islão, património e gentrificação - Palestra com José Mapril (Islam, heritage and gentrification – Lecture with José Mapril)¹⁰; and 1ª. Conferência Lusobrasileira sobre Liberdade Religiosa (First Luso-Brazilian Conference on Religious Freedom)¹¹.

Politics

An analysis of the Portuguese political parties registered in the National Commission of Elections shows that the majority have moderate stances and that they do not

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8. Lemos, Ana, ““Não posso expressar o que sou”: o desabafo de quem usa abaya, o vestido proibido em França”, *SIC Notícias*, 08-30-2023, retrieved 05-25-2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-08-30-Nao-posso-expressar-o-que-sou-o-desabafo-de-quem-usa-abaya-o-vestido-proibido-em-Franca-8fe73dca>
 9. Ciência das Religiões, “Seminário Permanente de Estudos Islâmicos – 2023”, *Ciência das Religiões*, 05-16-2023, retrieved 04-04-2024, from https://cienciasdasreligoes.ulusofoa.pt/noticias/seminario-permanente-de-estudos-islamicos-2023/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR3nmCPMCRrwdzGuY6TW-HeW3LX_OK-1WE680IsL4GQZm14_0laySXnxYAf_g_aem_Aaa5y6VJU16iOFUAqIR5C7jwHj3guoB09uFCTh16FejuA04HhBM_t_rrd-NZo_uhZsZixaxQ55M0nCch2KiVJr1fe
 10. Ciência das Religiões, “Islão, património e gentrificação - Palestra com José Mapril (30 nov. ‘23)”, *Ciência das Religiões*, 11-23-2023, retrieved 04-04-2024, from <https://cienciasdasreligoes.ulusofoa.pt/noticias/islao-patrimonio-e-gentrificacao-palestra-com-jose-mapril-30-nov-23/>
 11. Aliança Evangélica Portuguesa, “1ª. Conferência Lusobrasileira sobre Liberdade Religiosa”, *Aliança Evangélica Portuguesa*, retrieved 04-21-2024, from <https://aliancaevangelica.pt/site/eventos/1a-conferencia-lusobrasileira-sobre-liberdade-religiosa/>

promote extreme positions about Islam or migrants. Nevertheless, anti-immigration (14%) and anti-Islam (4%) parties sum up 18%, of the total number of political parties currently registered in the Electoral National Commission, so these figures should be taken into account.

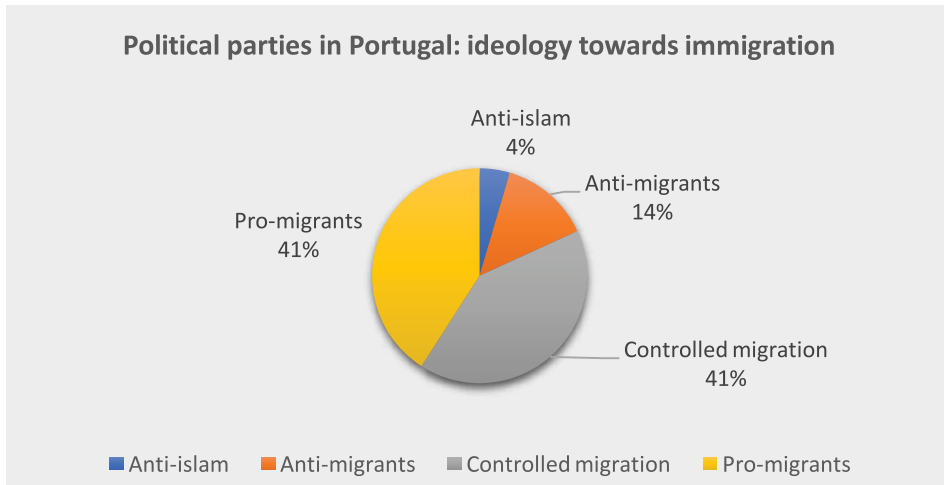


Figure 2: Political parties in Portugal on the basis of their ideology towards immigration.
Source: Author's own analysis

In relation to Islamophobia, there are two parties that have to be named: Chega (Enough) and Ergue-Te (Rise Up).

Chega supports a racist and anti-immigration discourse. It rejects the accusations of being a far-right party, defining itself as populist. However, even if they do not define themselves as anti-Islam, they frequently talk about Muslims or Islam.

Concerning their stance on Islam, on July 30, Chega's X account posted a video of what could be understood as a demonstration of migrants in Lisbon with the message: "If we do not put a hindrance to illegal immigration, one of these days we will wake up and perceive that we are living in a completely different culture. We say no to Islamic extremism, that disrespects women so much!"¹²

On October 18, Chega shared a video of Muslims praying (apparently in the United Kingdom) and the text, "No, this is not an Islamic country in the Middle East, actually it is the United Kingdom in Europe. The population replacement is already ongoing; it is time for us to stop it! We say no to Europe's Islamization."¹³

On October 29, another video was posted on X (formerly Twitter), about Muslims in a street in Germany, with the following text:

12. <https://x.com/PartidoCHEGA/status/1685673115521536000>

13. <https://x.com/PartidoCHEGA/status/1714594075679068416> The video they shared was from @RadioGenoa, an Islamophobic account on X (Twitter).

No, it is not any Islamic country, it is actually Germany, in our Europe. Flags of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda in the middle of Europe, where has this been seen before? How is it possible that we allowed these people to enter our territory?¹⁴

In between the two previously mentioned messages, there was another one related to the Israel-Palestine conflict that started in October 2023. Chega posted a video, once again from @RadioGenoa, with the message:

In all Europe, we see demonstrations for the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas. It is time to open our eyes and stop this madness of the massive Islamic immigration coming from Middle East countries. We are still on time!¹⁵

On December 8, 2023, Chega shared the front page of *Folha Nacional* (National Sheet), Chega's newspaper, and, in a typical case of "indirect" or "soft" Islamophobia, they did not mention Islam¹⁶, allowing people to write comments against migrants, Muslims, etc.¹⁷ (Fig. 3)



Figure 3: Front page of *Folha Nacional*, the Chega's official newspaper (December 7, 2023).
Source: Chega's official X account, posted on December 8, 2023.

Finally, about the Lisbon attack on March 28, diverse political parties criticized Chega for their stance, as the party conflated security issues with migrants.¹⁸

14. <https://x.com/PartidoCHEGA/status/1718594607229931623>

15. <https://x.com/PartidoCHEGA/status/1716406738725851371>

16. The text says the following: "Portugal at risk: Migration without control. For he 55% of the Portuguese people, migration is uncontrolled".

17. <https://x.com/PartidoCHEGA/status/1733187769613103509/photo/1>

18. SIC Notícias & Lusa, "Chega acusado (por todos os partidos) de oportunismo e discurso de ódio em debate na AR", *SIC Notícias & Lusa*, 04-05-2023, retrieved 04-18-2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/especiais/ataque-no>

As can be seen, Chega promotes a negative image of Islam, and conflates immigration issues and the Muslim community. Their anti-Islam pattern seems to be evident.

The main leader of Chega is André Ventura, who promotes a racist, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-migrant, and anti-Gypsy rhetoric. It is useful to analyze some of his public interventions in social media. On February 18, Ventura defended a consensus in the right-wing political parties to make changes to the migration policy and, for example, emphasized the need to pay special attention to the entrance of citizens coming from areas of “Islamic extremism.”¹⁹ Once again, Ventura’s rhetoric on Islam is negative and relates Muslims or countries with Muslim population with terrorism.

On April 21, 2023, Ventura published a video in which Muslims appeared during a prayer that took place just after the end of Ramadan. He did not state anything outwardly violent, but this is an example of “passive” or “light” Islamophobia. He wrote, “This happened today in Martim Moniz, in Lisbon, Portugal.”²⁰

On June 8, 2023, Ventura associated the murder of two adults and four children in France with Muslims and Islam. He wrote, “We need a new migration policy, with more control of the frontiers and being careful with Europe’s Islamization.”²¹ On June 16, 2023, he stated, “We do not want to see that churches in Europe are replaced by mosques in all the cities and countries.”²² Later, Ventura mentioned the alleged “Islamization of Europe.”²³

Bruno Nunes is another relevant actor in Chega. On October 22, he used a photo of a demonstration that did not take place in Portugal to make a generalization about Muslims and Islam. Nunes wrote, “When the Islamic State is an ideological presence in demonstrations...freedom and democracy are at risk! Freedom to demonstrate, yes, support and fostering of terrorism...no!”²⁴ The flag seen in the image, in fact, is not the so-called Islamic State’s flag.

João Martins Leitão, former vice-president of the Concelhia do Chega Maia, is also well known for his hate speech. On October 26, in the midst of the war in Gaza, he shared a video of an Israeli woman’s account in X. Regardless of whether the content is fake or not, the issue is what he said about Islam.

centro-ismaili/2023-04-05-Chega-acusado--por-todos-os-partidos--de-oportunismo-e-discurso-de-odio-em-debate-na-AR-c0befe52

19. LUSA, “Líder do Chega quer consenso à direita na imigração e cuidados com “extremismo islâmico”, *LUSA*, 02-18-2023, retrieved 05-11-2024, from <https://www.lusa.pt/national/article/2023-02-18/40329644/1%C3%ADder-do-chega-quer-consenso-%C3%A0-direita-na-imigra%C3%A7%C3%A3o-e-cuidados-com-extremismo-isl%C3%A2mico>

20. <https://x.com/AndreCVentura/status/1649370887378837504?lang=en>

21. <https://x.com/AndreCVentura/status/1666833243813937152>

22. <https://youtube.com/watch?v=pkjrQj8EkKA> (minute 6:23)

23. *Ibid*, minute 12:13.

24. <https://x.com/BrunoMNunes/status/1716225923853267265/photo/1>

It [Islam] is a death cult, as Sam Harris says, which results, it should be noted, from possible interpretations of Islam's sacred books. It is a monumental clash of values, fostered by Putin and extremists from here [Portugal], especially leftists. There is no doubt, we are at war.²⁵

On October 31, he posted the declarations against Islam by Julia Gillard, former prime minister of Australia, which were, in fact, fake.²⁶ (Fig. 4) Despite this, he never later acknowledged this fact or apologized for sharing fake news.



Figure 4: João Martins Leitão tweet spreading fake information about Julia Gillard, former prime minister of Australia. **Source:** João Martins Leitão's X account. Published on October 31, 2023.

Pedro dos Santos Frazão, current vice-president of Chega and deputy, should not be forgotten, as he also provided important material for this analysis. On June 25, he posted a photo of a child receiving communion and after some people complained about this, he warned and answered, sarcastically, that “when Islam and sharia law are imposed in Europe, they will cry.”²⁷

On July 21, a 19-year-old woman was brutally attacked by four minors in Toulouse, France. On July 23, Frazão posted a message on X, where he said that the attackers were immigrants and North Africans, despite the fact that the French media did not say anything at all about their nationalities or status in France. Furthermore, Frazão insinuated that they were Muslims.²⁸

Some months later, on October 16, he published a video in which there is a supposed Islamist terrorist vindicating the killing of three people in Brussels, Belgium. Part of his tweet stated, “There is terror and violent deaths due to Islamic religious hatred, in the streets of our capitals. Europe is on its knees! It is time to close the bor-

25. <https://x.com/acaojoanina/status/1717441276767817935>

26. Simpson-Wise, Blair, “‘Get out of Australia’ speech falsely attributed to former PM”, *Australian Associated Press*, 04-12-2024, retrieved 06-01-2024, from <https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/get-out-of-australia-speech-false-ly-attributed-to-former-pm/>;

27. https://x.com/Pedro_Frazaao_/status/1672985573802364933

28. https://x.com/Pedro_Frazaao_/status/1682850901290098689

ders and start deportations of anyone who poses a danger.”²⁹ On December 23, he made comments about the possibility that the so-called Islamic State will attack Europe. He blamed multiculturalism for this possibility.

Wonders of multiculturalism: Cologne, Vienna and Madrid in danger of an Islamic terrorist attack against Christmas masses. Poor Europe, poor Europeans, so many centuries later in the arms of the barbarians, because of weak and corrupt politicians.³⁰

On April 9, Chega published in *Folha Nacional*, an opinion piece written by Augusto Louro de Miranda, Chega’s municipal deputy of the Mira Municipal Assembly, (“Comprender o Islão, “Understanding Islam”) where he wrote, “The root of Islam is based on an extremely reductionist, totalitarian and universalist vision of a tribal group from Medieval Arabia, which intends to impose its customs and laws, codified in the Quran, over all the people across the globe.”³¹

The political party Ergue-Te (originally Partido Nacional Renovador/National Renewal Party) also published Islamophobic articles on its website,³² but all of them correspond to years previous to 2019. Nevertheless, José Pinto-Coelho, the party’s president, has been very active on social media. For example, on March 30, just after an Afghan killed two women, he stated that “in this moment, the social communication wants to transform the Afghan murderer, Muslim, into a pitiful victim.”³³ Thus, he co-related “murderer” with “Muslim” and, at the same time, criticized social media for converting a murderer into a “pitiful victim.”



Figure 5: José Pinto-Coelho on Canal Sérgio Tavares.

On November 24, Pinto-Coelho participated on a broadcast of the YouTube channel Canal Sérgio Tavares (Fig. 5), where he stated, “No to the bloodletting of

29. https://x.com/Pedro_Frazao_/status/1714025542435922061

30. https://x.com/Pedro_Frazao_/status/1738711389655404786

31. <https://folhanacional.pt/2023/04/09/comprender-o-islao/>

32. According to the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE) report, it is the only Portuguese political party that is directly against Islam. The complete report can be found at <https://globalextrémism.org/portugal/>

33. <https://x.com/jpintocoelho60/status/1641417301177106434>

Portuguese going to live abroad! No to invasive immigration! No to culturally different immigrants! Islam, not here!³⁴

Vitor Ramalho, member of Ergue-Te's National Political Commission and Head of the party in the northern region of the country, expressed Islamophobic views on October 15, diffusing a sarcastic and fake image (Fig. 6). In it, appears a mixed flag with the colors of Portugal and the typical moon and star found in Muslim countries' flags.³⁵



Figure 6:
Fake image shared
by Vitor Ramalho.
Source: Visão. Published on
August 5, 2023.

Lastly, on December 5, before the beginning of the legislative elections' campaign, Ramalho posted a message by Pinto-Coelho on Facebook: "We have been warning you for twenty years! Do you still doubt this scenario? And do you think things can change without Ergue-te? On March 10, 2024, Rise Up!" (Fig. 7)

On the other hand, several politicians have challenged Islamophobic discourse. On April 15, President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa visited the Central Mosque of Lisbon (Mesquita Central de Lisboa) where he participated in the "ftur" (*iftar*).³⁶ Following the event, he declared, "There was no Portugal yet and there was already an Islamic community in Portugal, there was an Islamic community in Lisbon...this community is an example of peace, fraternity, donation and service for others."³⁷

34. <https://x.com/jpintocoelho60/status/1728714398045184473>

35. <https://x.com/vitormramalho/status/1713538855398167002>

36. "Ftur" comes from Arabic and it means breakfast, but during Ramadan is the moment in which Muslims end their fast.

37. Agência Lusa, "Marcelo e Moedas partilham quebra de jejum no Ramadão e deixam mensagens de incluso", *Diário de Notícias*, 04-15-2023, retrieved 04-08-2024, from <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2023/4/15/356173-marcelo-e-moedas-partilham-quebra-de-jejum-no-ramadao-e-deixam-mensagens-de-inclusao>



Figure 7: José Pinto-Coelho's post on X, shared by Vítor Ramalho.

President de Sousa stated, “The President of Portugal is your president and you are one of the loved/dear compatriots that always are in the thoughts of the president.”

Carlos Moedas, member of the Social Democratic Party, current Lisbon Mayor and former Deputy Secretary of State of the Primer Minister, accompanied de Sousa at the *iftar* celebrated at the mosque and, while talking to the media, he stated,

We are all here together, to celebrate together, we show that the Islamic community does not “close” over itself but that is part of the city that is Lisbon, a city where the Islamic presence is part of its nature. This is the most ancient Islamic community of the Iberian Peninsula and this makes me feel very proud.³⁸

Augusto Santos Silva, president of the Republic's Assembly, is another example of “soft” counter Islamophobia, as he did not say anything in particular about Islam, but on September 20 defended religious freedom and highlighted Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's work in the field.³⁹

On December 14, Santos Silvaparticipated in the inauguration of the exhibition “Caminhos da Liberdade Religiosa em Portugal” (Paths of Religious Freedom in Por-

38. Agência Lusa, “Marcelo e Moedas partilham quebra de jejum no Ramadão e deixam mensagens de inclusão”, *Diário de Notícias*, 04-15-2023, retrieved 04-08-2024, from <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2023/4/15/356173-marcelo-e-moedas-partilham-quebra-de-jejum-no-ramadao-e-deixam-mensagens-de-inclusao>

39. Agência Lusa, “Santos Silva considera Portugal exemplo na liberdade religiosa e elogia Marcelo”, *Observador*, 09-20-2023, retrieved 04-07-2024, from <https://observador.pt/2023/09/20/santos-silva-considera-portugal-ex-emplo-na-liberdade-religiosa-e-elogia-marcelo/>

tugal)⁴⁰ and some days later, on December 19, he took part in an activity of the Dialogue Journalism Fellowship Program, organized by the International Dialogue Centre (Centro de Diálogo Internacional) KAICIID.⁴¹ In the photo, he can be seen with members of the Muslim community. (Fig. 8)

On February 7, Catarina Sarmento e Castro, justice minister, said that the minority religious groups “have and will keep the freedom to express their religion or faith.”⁴²



Figure 8: President Rebelo de Sousa during an activity of the Dialogue Journalism Fellowship Program.
Source: Augusto Santos Silva's X account.

Overall, Islamophobic politicians or political parties have used Islamophobia to fight against migration and to “safeguard” the national identity of the country. While doing so, they seem to avoid talking about other important issues for the country, such as employment, woman’s rights, and the situation of diverse minorities.

On March 15, 2023, the International Day to Combat Islamophobia was celebrated for the first time.⁴³ It is an initiative sponsored by the United Nations (UN) whose goal is to promote dialogue and a culture of tolerance and peace. In the case of Portugal, there were no official statements registered in the media or on the Portuguese government website. The same is true for the Portuguese political parties and NGOs.

40. <https://x.com/ASantosSilvaPAR/status/1735249243068055883>

41. <https://x.com/ASantosSilvaPAR/status/1737149241527570523>

42. Portugal.gov.pt, “Minister of Justice highlights Portugal’s role in protecting religious minorities”, *Portugal.gov.pt*, 02-07-2023, retrieved 04-17-2024, from <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/en/gc23/communication/news-item?i=minister-of-justice-highlights-portugals-role-in-protecting-religious-minorities>

43. The resolution that created this day was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN, on March 15, 2022. For more details, visit UN’s documents section: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/288/70/pdf/n2228870.pdf>

Media

In general, mass media does not give space to extremists that promote hate-based stances and, therefore, it is very difficult to find cases of an Islamophobic bias in the Portuguese digital press. In fact, it is more usual to see neutral or positive coverage of Muslims or Islam-related issues. Which journalists are regularly reproducing Islamophobic stereotypes?

In 2023, the media covered the month of Ramadan, violent conflicts such as the Lisbon attack, the war in Gaza, the women's rebellion in Iran, the violence of the so-called Islamic State, the construction of a mosque, and official activities of the Portuguese government.

In relation to the 2023 media coverage, the Lisbon attack⁴⁴ was the main violent incident registered in a mosque or Islamic center in Portugal. After an exhaustive revision of the Portuguese digital media, it can be concluded that the attack was covered with a neutral stance, as the media did not mention words such as “Muslim,” “Islamist,” “Islamic,” and “Afghan.” However, there were differences in the way the story was presented as can be witnessed by the front pages of several newspapers. (Fig. 9)

Correio de Manhã used a sensationalist title, *Jornal do Notícias* included the word “refugee” and, along the same lines, *Diário de Notícias* included the words “terrorism” and “Chega.” On the other hand, *Publico* emphasized the unexpectedness of the attack. Nevertheless, no direct or indirect messages against Islam or the Muslim community were made on the front pages. On the other hand, the following CNN Portugal's title demonstrates a defensive stance by the Muslim community, as it stands against stereotypes: “Our borders are safe and the attack does not represent the Afghan community and even less the Muslim community.”⁴⁵

In the following section, some positive, neutral, and negative stances in the digital media will be highlighted.

During Ramadan, the cable news channel SIC Notícias emphasized the generosity of the Muslim community, covering the empathic stance of Muslims.⁴⁶

44. On March 28, 2023, an Afghan refugee living in Portugal stabbed to death two women (49 and 24 years old) and injured one more person at the Ismaili Centre in Lisbon. The perpetrator lived with his three children in Odivelas, Portugal, and the Ismaili Centre rented him a flat. During the investigations, the attack was not considered as a terrorist one and the thesis of a “psychotic outbreak” was established as the main reason of the attack.

45. CNN Portugal, “As nossas fronteiras estão seguras” e ataque “não representa a comunidade afegã, muito menos a comunidade muçulmana”, *CNN Portugal*, 04-01-2023, retrieved 05-11-2024, from <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/videos/as-nossas-fronteiras-estao-seguras-e-ataque-nao-representa-a-comunidade-afega-muito-menos-a-comunidade-muculmana/642806300cf2dce741b28908>

46. SIC Notícias, “Ramadão cumpre-se no Porto com iniciativas solidárias”, *SIC Notícias*, 03-26-2023, retrieved, 05-02-2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-03-26-Ramadao-cumpre-se-no-Porto-com-iniciativas-solidarias-a3161d9b>; Mouzino, Patrícia, “Ceia solidária: organizações ajudam sem-abrigo de norte a sul”, *SIC Notícias*, 12-25-2023, retrieved 05-02, 2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-12-25-Ceia-solidaria-organizacoes-ajudam-sem-abrigo-de-norte-a-sul-811c5c45>



Figure 9: Portuguese newspapers' coverage of the Lisbon attack. Sources: Front page of Correio da Manhã (March 29, 2023), Diário de Notícias (March 29, 2023), Jornal de Notícias (March 29, 2023) and Público (March 29, 2023).

A good example of how to confront Islamophobia is the fact-check made by SIC Notícias on May 22. This occurred after a video of Muslims praying in the street was diffused in social media in a negative context. SIC Notícias fact-checked the background and stated that the video was taken in Spain and taken out of context.⁴⁷

47. SIC Notícias, “Muçulmanos param o trânsito em Portugal?”, *SIC Notícias*, 05-22-2023, retrieved 05-30-2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/programas/poligrafo/2023-05-22-Muculmanos-param-o-transito-em-Portugal-fad9832d>

On July 20, *Diário de Notícias*, a weekly newspaper published in Lisbon, published information about the World Youth Day. Taking a positive approach, its title read, “Islamic Community of Lisbon Will Host/Welcome Nearly 50 Pilgrims on the World Youth Day.”⁴⁸ In the text, the newspaper included a quote of Mahomed Iqbal, imam of the Central Mosque of Lisbon, who explained that the aim of opening the doors of the mosque on World Youth Day was to “make known a sister religion.”

During the Women’s Football World Cup, Nouhaila Benzina became the first player in football’s history to wear a veil during a World Cup match. On July 30, *Publico* highlighted this fact.⁴⁹

On August 23, *Diario de Notícias* published an article about David Munir, imam of the Central Mosque of Lisbon, and the headline: “Lisbon’s Imam States That Meeting with the Pope Is Useful to ‘Build a Bridge.’”⁵⁰



Figure 10: Example of a positive coverage of an interfaith marriage.
Source: SIC Notícias, August 25, 2023

Another example is an article published by SIC Notícias on August 25 (Fig. 10), in which the marriage of a Portuguese Catholic man and a Tunisian Muslim woman was highlighted. The title read, “Catholic Man and Muslim Woman Married in Fátima to Demonstrate That It Is Possible.”⁵¹

48. Agência Lusa, “Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa vai acolher cerca de 50 peregrinos da Jornada Mundial da Juventude”, *Diário de Notícias*, 07-20-2023, retrieved 05-06-2024, from <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2023/7/20/368699-comunidade-islamica-de-lisboa-vai-acolher-cerca-de-50-peregrinos-da-jornada-mundial-da-juventude>

49. Costa, Fernando, “Jogadora marroquina é a primeira a usar hijab num Campeonato Mundial de Futebol”, *Publico*, 07-30-2023, retrieved 05-18-2024, from https://www.publico.pt/2023/07/30/desporto/noticia/jogadora-marroquina-primeira-usar-hijab-campeonato-mundial-futebol-2058625#google_vignette

50. Agência Lusa, “Imã de Lisboa afirma que encontro com Papa serviu para “construir a ponte”, *Diário de Notícias*, 08-04-2023, retrieved 05-22-2024, from <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2023/8/4/370510-ima-de-lisboa-afirma-que-encontro-com-papa-serviu-para-construir-a-ponte>

51. SIC Notícias & Lusa, “Católico e muçulmana casam em Fátima para “mostrar que é possível”, *SIC Notícias*, 08-25-2023, retrieved, 05-02-2024, from <https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2023-08-25-Catolico-e-muculmana-casam-em-Fatima-para-mostrar-que-e-possivel-c248aa7c>

On October 26, Alexandre Parafita published an opinion piece (“Quem são, afinal, os mouros?”, “Who are the Moors after all?”), where he emphasized the cultural legacy of the Moors and, finally, alluding to the North-South rivalry in Portugal, he stated that “we are all Moors.”⁵²

Sete Margens, a digital media platform that publishes information and news about religion and spirituality, counteracts Islamophobic or sensationalist coverage. For example, it published the following articles “Reflexões sobre a concepção do direito no islão” (“Thoughts about the Law Concept in Islam”)⁵³ (April 29); “Uma khutbah da Festa do Sacrifício” (“A Khutbah in the Sacrifice Ceremony”)⁵⁴ (July 3); “Grupos religiosos e correntes no Islão” (“Religious Groups and Currents in Islam”)⁵⁵ (April 26); and “Começou o Ramadão: tempo de jejum, solidariedade, alegria... e tensões” (Ramadan Has Begun: Time of Fast, Solidarity, Joy... and Tensions)⁵⁶ (March 23). All articles were informative and showcased a positive image of Islam.

Finally, two journalists need to be highlighted for their work. First, Daniel Oliveira, who is known for his anti-Islamophobia stance which he expressed in a podcast⁵⁷ and in several opinion pieces published in *Expresso*. Second, Sara de Melo Rocha, who made an excellent and informative feature about women’s Islamic clothes.⁵⁸

Some media outlets publish neutral coverage. On August 20, *Diário de Notícias* published an article about the increased alert of violent threats. This was as a result of the conflict between Hamas and Israel.⁵⁹ The analysis of the text exposes a focus that was neutral, avoiding to use terms such as “Muslim,” “Islam,” “Quran,” “Islami-

52. Parafita, Alexandre, “Quem são, afinal, os mouros?”, *Jornal do Notícias*, 10-26-2023, retrieved 05-10-2024, from <https://www.jn.pt/2492263186/quem-sao-afinal-os-mouros/>

53. Pinto de Abreu, Carlos & Verdelho, José, “Reflexões sobre a concepção do direito no islão”, *7 Margens*, 04-29-2023, retrieved 04-20-2024, from https://setemargens.com/reflexoes-sobre-a-concepcao-do-direito-no-islao/?doing_wp_cron=1717167396.4431350231170654296875

54. Podcast 7 Céus, “Uma khutbah da Festa do Sacrifício”, *7 Margens*, 07-03-2023, retrieved 05-16-2024, from https://setemargens.com/uma-khutbah-da-festa-do-sacrificio/?doing_wp_cron=1717167367.5286478996276855468750

55. Pinto de Abreu, Carlos & Verdelho, José, “Grupos religiosos e correntes no Islão”, *7 Margens*, 03-26-2023, retrieved 05-16-2024, from <https://setemargens.com/grupos-religiosos-e-correntes-no-islao/>

56. Raimundo, Clara, “Começou o Ramadão: tempo de jejum, solidariedade, alegria” e tensões”, *7 Margens*, 03-23-2023, retrieved 05-07-2024, from <https://setemargens.com/comecou-o-ramadao-tempo-de-jejum-solidariedade-alegria-e-tensoes/>

57. Oliveira, Daniel, “Antissemitismo e islamofobia navegam no mesmo esgoto moral”, *TSF - A Opinião de Daniel Oliveira - Podcast*, 11-07-2023, retrieved 05-21-2024, from <https://podcasts.apple.com/fr/podcast/antissemitismo-e-islamofobia-navegam-no-mesmo-esgoto/id1490242482?i=1000634001819>

58. de Melo Rocha, Sara, “Hijab, chador, niqab, burqa: quais as diferenças entre os véus utilizados pelas mulheres muçulmanas?”, *CNN Portugal*, 08-29-2023, retrieved 04-20-2024, from <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/videos/hijab-chador-niqab-burqa-quais-as-diferencas-entre-os-veus-utilizados-pelas-mulheres-muculmanas/64ee1b940cf2ebafa99c4ba6>

59. Agência Lusa, “Grau de ameaça terrorista em Portugal passa de moderado para significativo”, *Diário de Notícias*, 10-20-2023, retrieved 05-12-2024, from <https://www.dn.pt/2023/10/20/379981-grau-de-ameaca-terrorista-em-portugal-passa-de-moderado-para-significativo>

zation,” etc. In fact, the only related word was “Islamist” and it was used in a correct way, as they avoided to relate “Islamist” with “Muslim,” and, in fact, linked it with a radicalized interpretation of the Quran.⁶⁰

An example of negative coverage is an interview by the weekly national newspaper *Sol* with Khalid Jamal, a member of the Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa (CIL, Islamic Community of Lisbon) directory, despite the fact that they gave Jamal the space to express his thoughts. The questions by the newspaper suggest a biased approach.

Então acha que não corremos o risco de termos o que se passa em França e no Reino Unido, em que há zonas onde a Polícia praticamente não entra e onde as mulheres não têm direitos nenhuns? - So, you think that we do not risk to experience what is happening in France and the United Kingdom, where there are areas in which the police practically don't enter and where women have no rights at all?⁶¹

This is a statement given without any arguments and is based on a biased or stereotyped view.

In other question, the newspaper asked:

Acha então que não há este perigo de haver uma guerra religiosa na Europa com os novos imigrantes? - So, you think that there is no risk of having a religious war in Europe with the new immigrants?

Here, the expression “religious war” is used instead of “religious conflict,” “clash between religions,” or “religious dispute.” Once again, it seems that *Sol* prefers to use a sensationalist and biased/stereotyped vocabulary.

On June 25, CNN Portugal published news about an interview by the Lusa News Agency with Sheikh David Munir, imam of the Central Mosque of Lisbon. Even if the content was factually correct and objective, the title has sensationalist undertones: “Sheik Munir. It Is Very Difficult For Me to See an Exemplary Muslim Country in Human Rights.”⁶²

There is also another case that could be categorized as “soft” or “indirect Islamophobia.” On August 15, two men stole a bus and damaged other vehicles in Faro. While covering this news, the daily *Correio da Manhã* had the following headline:

60. The concept “Islamist” can be used with two main meanings: (1) to describe a person that merges Islam and politics and (2) to refer to someone that has a radicalized view of Islam and the Quran. This latter was the definition used by the article.

61. Peres Pinto, Sónia & Rainho, Vítor, “A Europa não se vai converter ao Islão”, *Sol*, 09-02-2023, retrieved 04-29-2024, from <https://sol.sapo.pt/2023/09/02/a-europa-nao-se-vai-converter-ao-islao/>

62. Agência Lusa & AM, Sheik Munir. “Tenho muita dificuldade em ver um país muçulmano exemplar nos direitos humanos”, *CNN Portugal*, 06-25-2023, retrieved, 05-02-2024, from <https://cnportugal.iol.pt/sheik/sheik-david-munir/sheik-munir-tenho-muita-dificuldade-em-ver-um-pais-muculmano-exemplar-nos-direitos-humanos/20230625/6498089fd34ea91b0aade09d>

“Tunisians Steal a Bus in Faro and Damage Vehicles.” Instead of writing “two men” or “two thieves,” the newspaper emphasized the nationality of the criminals, knowing that people immediately associate Tunisians with Islam.⁶³

Justice System

During 2023, there were debates about the legal framework of immigrants and minorities which included religious minorities such as the Muslim community. Debates also took place on hate crime legislation, with no modifications to the current framework being made.

However, there was one important change that even though not directly related with legislation to combat Islamophobia, may be relevant: the abolishment of the Immigration and Borders Service (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras, SEF) and the creation of the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA), both brought forth on June 2 with the enactments of the Decree Law 40/2023⁶⁴ and Decree Law 41/2023.⁶⁵ With this change, the competences of the SEF were transferred to seven bodies. While the police functions will be under the care of the Public Security Police, the National Republican Guard, and the Judicial Police, the administrative functions regarding foreigners will be managed by the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo, AIMA) and the Institute of Registries and Notaries (IRN).

Internet

Reconquista is a movement defined, in its own words, as “a nationalist and traditionalist Portuguese political movement that assembles hundreds of young people in all the country.”⁶⁶ While their focus is on immigrants, they also spread hatred of Muslims and Islam as can be seen on their website. Reconquista’s main leaders are Alexander Gazur and Alfonso Gonçalves. They use different tactics to disseminate hate speech, including merchandising, national congresses and manifestations.⁶⁷

In relation to their main leaders, on August 26, Alexander Gazur expressed his hate towards Islam using a report on an interfaith marriage between a Portuguese Catholic man and a Tunisian Muslim woman. He wrote, “Quran: kill all the non-believers. Bible: convert all the non-believers to my faith. Hippies of XXI century: our religions are so open, ha ha ha.”⁶⁸ (Fig. 11)

63. Correio da Manhã, “Tunisinos roubam autocarro em Faro e danificam viaturas”, *Correio da Manhã*, 08-15-2023, retrieved 05-18-2024, from <https://www.cmjornal.pt/portugal/detalhe/tunisinos-roubam-autocarro-em-faro>

64. For the complete text, visit the following link: <https://files.dre.pt/1s/2023/06/10700/0000200019.pdf>

65. For the complete text, visit the following link: <https://files.dre.pt/1s/2023/06/10700/0002000106.pdf>

66. <https://www.recon.pt/> | X account: https://x.com/recon_pt

67. <https://loja.recon.pt/>

68. https://x.com/TotalVitoria_/status/1695465733055004728



Figure 11: Alexander Gazur comments on an interfaith marriage between a Muslim and a Christian.
Source: Alexander Gazur's X account. Published on August 25, 2023.



Figure 12: @Antunes1's post on X retweeted by Alexander Gazur. **Source:** @Antunes1's X account.

On August 31, Gazur reposted a message from the account @Antunes1, well known for its aggressive position against Islam. The post included an image with a short but powerful message: "If you want to use these clothes, return to your country."⁶⁹ (Fig. 12) Alfonso Gonçalves seems to focus on political Islam. On August 11, he stated in a post that "Islam is not our enemy. Politicized and invasive Islam is."⁷⁰ At the same time, he uses his Islamophobic reading of Islam as misogynistic to support his claims against women: "But choosing between the role that Western modernity and the Islamic faith attribute to women, I would prefer the Islamic option a thousand times... Europe was founded under the sign of patriarchy and Islam is much closer to this ideal than modern Europe."⁷¹

On October 12, he expressed an aggressive anti-Islam vision, as he wrote the following message on X: "The prohibition of pro-Palestine demonstrations is symptomatic of one thing: in the short, medium and long term, Europe's Islamization is unbearable. They stay or we stay. There is only one solution for this problem: → mass deportations."⁷² (Fig. 13)

Vanguarda is another initiative focusing on national identity and anti-immigration.⁷³ It also spreads Islamophobic messages such as one published on March 30, in

69. <https://x.com/Antunes1/status/1697304215629021600/photo/1>

70. <https://x.com/AfonsoJFG/status/1689983628875366400>

71. <https://x.com/AfonsoJFG/status/1736788866932031580>

72. <https://x.com/AfonsoJFG/status/1712617658770759842>

73. X account: Vanguarda_PT | Telegram channel: <https://t.me/s/VanguardaPT>

which it criticized the refugee status of two Iraqis and insinuated that, in fact, they are terrorists. (Fig. 14)

Figure 13: Alfonso Gonçalves tweet about the prohibition of pro-Palestine demonstrations in France. Source: Alfonso Gonçalves' X account. Published on October 12, 2023.

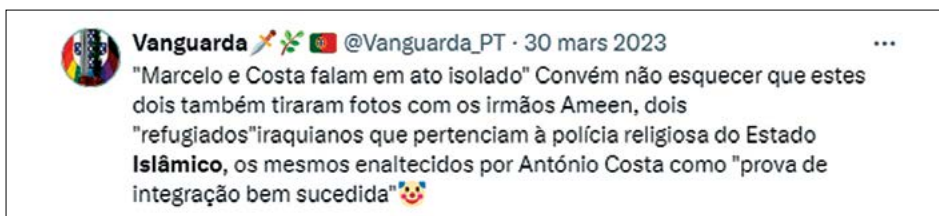


Figure 14: Vanguarda message on its X account, on March 30, 2023.

Racismo contra Europeus have X accounts and Telegram channels,⁷⁴ where they spread Islamophobia. An example of this is a post from November 28, in which, in relation to the murder of a teenager in France, they wrote, “French patriots in Lyon, in a demonstration of revolt against the murder of the young French Thomas by Muslims who left home with the objective of killing white people. Islam out of Europe.”⁷⁵ (Fig. 15)

The group 1143, “frozen” since 2015, revived in 2023, but now with an evident anti-immigration and anti-Muslim tendency. They have an X account and a Telegram channel,⁷⁶ where they disseminate their hatred towards Muslims. An example of this is the post on December 25 discussing their preparation for an anti-Europe’s Islamization demonstration. (Fig. 16 Algot Mínima is a website where Orlando Braga (defined as nationalist, conservative, and Christian) wrote an essay about Islam, claiming that it is a globalist ideology.⁷⁷

74. Twitter account: <https://x.com/racismocontrapt> | Telegram channel: <https://t.me/s/racismocontraeuropeus>

75. <https://x.com/racismocontrapt/status/1729396632481865776>

76. Twitter account: <https://x.com/Grupo1143> | Telegram channel: <https://t.me/Grupo1143>

77. Algot Mínima, “A construção do ‘fascismo democrático’ (II)”, *Algot Mínima*, 12-20-2023, retrieved 05-24-2024, from <https://algotminima.blogspot.com/2023/12/a-construcao-do-fascismo-democratico-ii.html>



Figure 15: Racismo contra Europeus message on its X account, November 28, 2023.



Figure 16: Grupo 1143 message on its X account, December 25, 2023.

Gonçalo Sousa's YouTube channel is another platform where Islamophobic ideas are diffused.⁷⁸ On August 22, Sousa analyzed an interview given by André Ventura to SIC Notícias.⁷⁹ Another Islamophobic YouTube channel is the one of Rui Fonseca e Castro, which published an interview with José Pinto-Coelho on October 23.⁸⁰

Associação Portugueses Primeiro (Portuguese First Association, APP), which is the cultural wing of the PNR (Ergue-Te), also spreads hatred of Islam. On March 28, it stated the following:

78. <https://www.youtube.com/c/Gon%C3%A7aloSousaYT/featured>

79. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbWR_lkrbuw

80. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0DnJ8DkMfY>

Last year, a university student with evident psychological perturbations was quickly accused of terrorism by the media even if he did not make a criminal act. In Lisbon, an Afghan refugee killed two women and the same media, without any doubt, assured that it was not a terrorist attack and that the Afghan has mental troubles. Multiculturalist farce.⁸¹

On October 13, the APP posted information about a French teacher murdered in France by someone that, supposedly, shouted “Allahu akbar.” Then, they published a video of a street in Lisbon where many Muslims and foreigners are visible. They accompanied the video with this message: “Here is a video that tragically illustrates what is happening in Lisbon. Complete streets where Portuguese is not spoken anymore as there are no longer any Portuguese people.”⁸²

Similarly, on October 16, due to a supposed terrorist attack in Brussels, the APP wrote,

Islamic attack in Brussels, Belgium. Remember that those who perpetrate these attacks are “engineers, doctors and scientists” that we have to receive in Europe because, as they tell us, they represent an enrichment for our countries. Since 2015 the APP has denounced this massacre of innocent Europeans, having hundreds of them losing their lives in the hands of immigrant murderers and multiculturalism that has been imposed.⁸³

As can be seen, they make a generalization about Muslims and make ironic comments about their contribution to society.

On November 28, 2023, the APP criticized the list of the Portuguese cricket team, saying that there were “fake Portuguese”.⁸⁴ They did not mention Islam, despite the family names being clearly Pakistani. This might not be considered an Islamophobic post per se, but could be categorized as an “indirect” case of Islamophobia nonetheless.

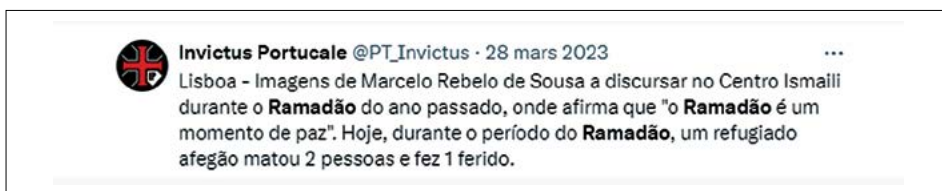


Figure 17: Invictus Portucale message on its X account, March 28, 2023.

81. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=600003395501752&set=a.555079283327497>

82. Associação Portugueses Primeiro, 10-13-2023, retrieved 05-01-2024, from <https://fb.watch/sokB7a9QzY/>

83. Associação Portugueses Primeiro, retrieved 05-01-2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=730056519163105&set=a.555079266660832>

84. Associação Portugueses Primeiro, 11-28-2023, retrieved 05-01-2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=755758543259569&set=a.555079283327497>

Invictus Portucale also spreads messages against immigrants and Muslims.⁸⁵ An example can be seen in the following tweet which reads, “Lisbon - Images of Rebelo de Sousa speaking in last year’s Ramadan at the Ismaili Center, where he stated that Ramadan is a time of peace. Today, during Ramadan, an Afghan refugee killed 2 people and injured 1.....” (Fig. 17)

Other groups that disseminate hatred on the internet are Proud Boys (white supremacists), Hammerskins (neo-Nazis), Active Club Portugal (neo-Nazis), Blood and Honour (neo-Nazis), Força Nova (white supremacists), Movimento Social Nacionalista (white supremacists), and Habeas Corpus (consp iracists, led by Rui da Fonseca e Castro). Finally, there are some X accounts that express themselves in violent terms against Islam and Muslims such as PortugalNews (@PortugalActus)⁸⁶ and Resistência Lusitana (@resist_lusitana).⁸⁷ (Figs. 18 and 19)



Figure 18: Portugal News account on X. The Islamophobic message reads, “Like the example of the Portuguese deputy Ricardo Leite, committed, like many other Portuguese politicians, to the phenomenon of the islamization of Portugal. Here, the element used is “Islamic charity” as a vector of muslim promotion and visibility”, August 23, 2023.



Figure 19: Resistência Lusitana account on X. The post writes, “In Spain, women from the conservative movement (@HacerNacion) record a video against the country’s Islamization and come out in defense of women’s freedom. “If they come after us, we will stand. Ready to fight!, September 10, 2023.

85. X account: https://x.com/PT_Invictus | Telegram channel: https://t.me/invictus_portucale

86. X account: <https://x.com/PortugalActus>

87. Official platforms: https://bio.link/resist_lusitana

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Chega and Egue-Te are the main political parties that promote Islamophobia, but they are not alone, as they rely on far-right or extremist groups. Individually, important leaders are André Ventura, Gonçalo Sousa, and Afonso Gonçalves.

A special case is Mário Machado, who is not active online, as nearly all of his accounts have been banned. However, he is always behind the curtains and has links with the group 1143.

There is no official information concerning the financing of these initiatives.

The aim of these initiatives is to harm the Muslim community as well as immigrants and other minorities. Until now, they have just spread hatred on social and other media, but it seems that they are organizing anti-Islamization demonstrations for 2024.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

To effectively combat Islamophobia or anti-Muslim sentiment, it is important to elaborate a strategy that unifies all the efforts that are currently being developed. This includes politics, education institutions, religious communities, and even enterprises that should collaborate in order to strengthen all the projects and initiatives whose goal is to foster religious fraternity and fight against hate crimes, and especially hate crimes that target Muslims and Islamic symbols such as, among others, mosques, Quran, and Islamic clothes.

Below diverse initiatives that are being developed will be presented in order to understand better how they work, to ascertain their aim, and how they could be a starting point for new projects or initiatives.

On October 29, 2023, the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) started its operations.⁸⁸ This is an interesting new organization as it emerged following the closing down of the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF) and the restructuring of the border control. Also, it integrated the High Commissioner for Migrations (Alto-Comissariado para as Migrações) demonstrating that a modernization of the state's structure is important. This could be the basis for a section dealing with Islamophobia in the AIMA or in the Interior Ministry.

Demonstrations may not be led by decision makers but they are very useful to disseminate positive messages and bring important themes to the table. Therefore,

88. Portugal.gov.pt, "Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo (AIMA) inicia funções", *Portugal.gov.pt*, 10-31-2023, retrieved 03-28-2024, from <https://eportugal.gov.pt/noticias/agencia-para-a-integracao-migracoes-e-asilo-aima-inicia-funcoes>

non-governmental organization (NGO) (like SOS Racismo⁸⁹) and other associations should organize frequent and regular peaceful demonstrations, taking to the streets and fighting against Islamophobia. The demonstration that took place in Lisbon, on June 6,⁹⁰ should be a platform for new social movements.

Along the same lines, Mamadou Ba's confrontation of extremists and racists⁹¹ is an example of the loss of fear, something that is very important in order to counter hate speech or stances. At the same time, it is important to create strategies that avoid a direct confrontation and, on the contrary, build bridges that can prepare the field for dialogue and mutual understanding with those who seek meaningful change.

On June 22, Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa published a positive message on the National Day of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Dialogue. He stated, "To celebrate the religious freedom is to celebrate democracy and human rights... It is to celebrate the creation of bridges between different states, peoples and civilizations. It is to celebrate the diversity and richness that it entails."⁹²

On the same occasion, the National Assembly prepared activities both for the day and the following weeks or months. For example, they included a greeting for the National Day of Religious Freedom and Interreligious Dialogue, a meeting at KAI-CIID (International Dialogue Centre), and the organization of three conversations about religious freedom, among others.⁹³

Complementing this initiative, the establishment of the unprecedented International Day to Combat Islamophobia should be used in the future as a perfect instance to promote religious freedom, multiculturalism, and interreligious fraternity.

Finally, on April 15, 2023, Portugal's President de Sousa visited the Central Mosque of Lisbon and respectfully participated in the *ifrar* and the moment of the prayer. (Fig. 20)

89. SOS Racismo is an ONG that works since 1990. According to its own definition, it "proposes a more just, egalitarian and intercultural society where everyone, nationals and foreigners with any skin color, can enjoy the same citizenship rights. We are a non-profit association, having been granted public utility status in 1996. We strive to collaborate with other anti-racist and immigrant associations at national level".

90. Agência Lusa, "Centenas de manifestantes em Lisboa contra o racismo e a xenofobia", *Observador*, 06-10-2023, retrieved 05-13-2024, from <https://observador.pt/2023/06/10/centenas-de-manifestantes-em-lisboa-contra-o-racismo-e-a-xenofobia/>

91. Mamadou Ba is a Senegalese citizen that lives in Portugal since 1997, who received the Portuguese citizenship. He is a fervent anti-racist activist and member of SOS Racismo Portugal, where he has been one of the visible leaders and spokesperson. In 2020, Mário Machado, a Portuguese neonazi known for his racist and violent stances, accused Mamadou Ba of blaming him for the murderer of Alcindo Monteiro, a young black Portuguese, born in Cape Verde, killed in 1995 by skinheads. Finally, on October 2023, a Lisbon court sentenced Ba to pay a 2,400 euros fine, after he was declared guilty of defaming Machado.

92. Notícias ao Minuto, "Celebrar a liberdade religiosa é celebrar a democracia", *Notícias ao Minuto*, 06-22-2023, retrieved 05-07, 2024, from <https://www.noticiasao minuto.com/pais/2346525/celebrar-a-liberdade-religiosa-e-celebrar-a-democracia>

93. Agência Lusa, "Parlamento vai assinalar Dia Nacional da Liberdade Religiosa com várias iniciativas", *Observador*, 06-19-2023, retrieved 04-11-2024, from <https://observador.pt/2023/06/19/parlamento-vai-assinalar-dia-nacional-da-liberdade-religiosa-com-varias-iniciativas/>



Figure 20: President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa during his visit to the Central Mosque of Lisbon, on April 15, 2023.

Source: Lusa News Agency

Some relevant initiatives against Islamophobia were the Encontro Nacional da Rede de Escolas para a Educação Intercultural (National Meeting of the Schools for Intercultural Education Network, REEI),⁹⁴ Seminário Permanente de Estudos Islâmicos (Permanent Seminar of Islamic Studies),⁹⁵ the colloquiums in the National Assembly about religious freedom,⁹⁶ the Festival Islâmico de Mertola (Islamic Festival of Mertola), and a campaign about employment prejudices (“Algumas desculpas escondem um preconceito”, “Some apologies hide a prejudice”)⁹⁷

In this aspect, it is important to highlight the Conferência Integração e Desafios das Novas Comunidades Muçulmanas (Conference on Integration and Challenges of the New Muslim Communities),⁹⁸ the exhibition “Os Caminhos da Liberdade Religiosa em Portugal” (The paths of religious freedom in Portugal), the Conferência Internacional Consciência e Liberdade 2023 sobre Religião e Liberdade de Expressão (International Conference Conscience and Freedom 2023 on Religion and Freedom

94. The Ismaili Portugal, “Encontro Nacional da Rede de Escolas para a Educação Intercultural (REEI)”, *The Ismaili Portugal*, 08-17-2023, retrieved 03-24-2024, from <https://the.ismaili/portugal/encontro-nacional-da-rede-de-escolas-para-educa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-intercultural-reei>

95. Universidade Lusófona, “Seminário Permanente de Estudos Islâmicos”, *Universidade Lusófona*, 2023, retrieved 03-26-2024, from <https://www.ulusofona.pt/evento/seminario-permanente-de-estudos-islamicos>

96. Assembleia da República, “Colóquio “A Liberdade Religiosa e a Liberdade de Expressão”, *Asssembleia da República*, 09-21-2023, retrieved 05-02-2024, from <https://www.parlamento.pt/Paginas/2023/setembro/Coloquio-a-liberdade-religiosa-liberdade-expressao.aspx?n=50>; <https://www.parlamento.pt/Paginas/2023/junho/Coloquio-a-democracia-e-a-liberdade-religiosa.aspx?n=40>

97. Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados, “Algumas desculpas escondem um preconceito”, *Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados*, 09-28-2023, retrieved 05-13-2024, from <https://www.jrsportugal.pt/emprego-digno/>

98. Observatório do Mundo Islâmico, “Responder aos desafios de integração das novas comunidades muçulmanas”, *Observatório do Mundo Islâmico*, 12-07-2023, retrieved 05-10-2024, from <https://observatoriodomundoislamico.pt/responder-aos-desafios-de-integracao-das-novas-comunidades-muculmanas/>

of Expression), the Jornada Mundial da Juventude – Diálogo inter-religioso (World Day of Youth – Inter-religious Dialogue),⁹⁹ the Interreligious Calendar,¹⁰⁰ and various meetings between religious leaders.¹⁰¹

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

In general, there are no official or visible Islamophobic attacks or Islamophobic parties or groups in Portugal. The only exception is Ergue-Te, which has been categorized as anti-Islam according to the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE). This can be confirmed, particularly, when examining the party's social media accounts and the accounts of some of its members. The case of Chega needs further analysis and monitoring: even if they do not present themselves as an anti-Islam political party, Islamophobic stances were observed on the party's social media accounts or in those of some of its members. Thus, it could be labelled as an anti-Islam or Islamophobic party.

The evidence demonstrates that Islamophobic tendencies are present in the speeches of far-right parties and extremist groups, which tend to be anti-immigrant, racist, anti-LGBTQ+, anti-globalization, and misogynistic. Hate crimes have risen - a sign that should be taken into account and preventive measures should be analyzed and created.

- The situation of the illegal mosques should be solved, as it may be used to spread Islamophobia.
- Promote mosques as social spaces rather than exclusively religious places.
- The Commission for the Equality and against Discrimination does not function since 2023. This matter should be solved as soon as possible.
- There is a legal void in discrimination and hate crimes. There has to be a disaggregation of hate crimes into different categories: Islamophobic, racist, xenophobic, etc.
- Islamophobia is a special and growing phenomenon. It needs to be approached with a specific focus by the government, the National Assembly, politicians, security forces, religious leaders, media, and civil society.

99. Agência Lusa, “Comunidade Islâmica de Lisboa vai acolher cerca de 50 peregrinos da Jornada Mundial da Juventude”, *Diário de Notícias*, 07-20-2023, retrieved 05-21-2024, from <https://www.dnoticias.pt/2023/7/20/368699-comunidade-islamica-de-lisboa-vai-acolher-cerca-de-50-peregrinos-da-jornada-mundial-da-juventude>

100. Alto Comissariado para as Migrações, “Cerimónia de Lançamento do Calendário Inter-religioso “Celebração do Tempo 2023”, *Alto Comissariado para as Migrações*, 2023, retrieved 04-28-2024, from <https://www.acm.gov.pt/-/cerimonia-de-lancamento-do-calendario-inter-religioso-celebracao-do-tempo-2023->

101. Voz Portucalense, “Bispo do Porto reuniu com líderes religiosos reafirmando amizade e vontade de paz no Médio Oriente”, *Voz Portucalense*, 10-12-2023, retrieved 05-17-2024, from <https://www.vozportucalense.pt/2023/10/12/lideres-religiosos-reafirmam-amizade-mutua-e-vontade-de-paz-para-o-medio-oriente/>

- The quality of life of certain Muslim communities should be improved, as it can be a trampoline towards radicalization.
- In order to avoid the spreading of Islamophobia, measures related to education should be taken such as new school manuals, religious classes, and optional halal menus.
- The promotion of Islamic tourism could be very useful in order to educate people on Islam, Muslim history and civilization, European Muslim history, etc.
- The “Plano Nacional de Combate ao Racismo e à Discriminação 2021-2025” (National Plan to Combat Racism and Discrimination 2021-2025) should be strengthened and a section dedicated to Islamophobia should be added.
- It could be useful to revive the “Counter-Islamophobia Kit” (CIK)¹⁰² project or create a Portuguese version.
- The link between religious freedom and laicism must be fostered.

Chronology

- **8 September 2023:** Islamophobic and racist comments during a football match broadcast on Sporting TV.

102. More information in the following link: <https://www.sacc.org.uk/articles/2018/counter-islamophobia-kit>

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
ROMANIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Sumar

Chiar dacă în anul 2023 nu s-au înregistrat violențe și incidente motivate rasial, în dreptate împotriva musulmanilor, cercetarea empirică arată că izbucnirea conflictului din Gaza în octombrie 2023 a dus, în lunile următoare, la o creștere a nivelului de ură și islamofobie, reflectată în special în mesajele urbane. De asemenea, o tendință în presa românească, după izbucnirea conflictului din Gaza, a fost o creștere a raportării acțiunilor antisemite în țările vest-europene în urma conflictului. Deși unele ziare au relatat în paralel și fenomenul de creștere a incidentelor islamofobe, cele mai multe dintre ele s-au concentrat exclusiv pe cele antisemite. În martie-aprilie 2023, un episod care a atras atenția presei a fost construirea unei moschei la Timișoara de către un om de afaceri egiptean, stabilit în România din 1991. Cu această ocazie, Muftiul Cultului Musulman din România a ridicat problema funcționării unor lăcașuri de cult musulmane din marile orașe, care nu au statutul legal de moschei autorizate. Episodul a atras atenția asupra articulării, de pe poziții de autoritate instituțională, asupra prezenței noilor musulmani în mediul urban în cadrul conceptului de securitate, ca o potențială sursă de pericol pentru siguranța populației. Ultima manifestare islamofobă pe internet a fost petiția “No Muslim Invasion”, lansată în februarie 2023 pe o rețea de socializare, cu scopul de a opri imigrația musulmană în Europa. Petiția atrage atenția asupra pericolului de islamizare a Europei și a României, asupra barbariei culturii islamice și asupra pericolului pe care îl reprezintă pentru societatea românească curentul ideologic liberal-progresist, care încurajează imigrația musulmană.

Executive Summary

Even if no racially motivated violence and incidents directed at Muslims were recorded during 2023, empirical observation shows that the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023 led, in the following months, to an increase in the level of hate and Islamophobia, reflected especially in messages found in urban spaces. Also, a trend in the Romanian media following the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, has been an increase in reporting anti-Semitic actions in Western European countries in the wake of the conflict. While some newspapers also reported in parallel the phenomenon of increasing Islamophobic incidents, most of them focused exclusively on anti-Semitic ones. In March-April 2023, an episode that drew the attention of the media was the construction of a mosque in Timișoara by an Egyptian businessman who has been established in Romania since 1991. On this occasion, the Mufti of Romania raised the issue of the functioning of Muslim places of worship which do not have the legal status of authorized mosques in large cities across the country. The episode drew attention to people in institutional positions of power casting the presence of newly arrived Muslims in urban areas within the framework of the security concept as a potential source of danger for the safety of the population. In February 2023, the online Islamophobic petition “No Muslim Invasion” was launched on a social media network with the aim of stopping Muslim immigration to Europe. The petition drew attention to the danger of the so-called Islamization of Europe and Romania, the “barbarism” of Islamic culture, and the danger posed to Romanian society by the liberal ideological trend encouraging Muslim immigration.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Romania

Type of Regime: Republic

Form of Government: Unitary semi-presidential republic

Ruling Parties: Social Democratic Party (PSD) (social-democratic), National Liberal Party (PNL) (liberal)

Opposition Parties: Save Romania Union (USR) (center right), Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) (far right), Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) (center right, representative organization of the Hungarian minority in Romania).

Last Elections: 2019 Presidential Election (Klaus Iohannis of the PNL won with 66.09% of votes against Viorica Dăncilă of the PSD with 33.91%); **2020 Romanian Legislative Election** (PSD: 157 [center left], PNL: 134 [center right], USR: 80 [center right], AUR: 47 [center right], UDMR: 30 [center right], Minorities: 18); **2019 European Parliamentary Election** (PNL: 10 MEP mandates, PSD: 9, USR-PLUS 2020 Alliance [center right]: 8, ProRomania [center left]: 2, PMP: 2, UDMR: 2)

Total Population: 19,053,815 (2021 census)

Major Languages: Romanian (official) 91.6%, Hungarian 6.3%, Romani 1.2%. Others: Ukrainian, German, Turkish, Tatar, Russian, Slovakian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, Greek, Yiddish, Italian, Macedonian, Polish, Ruthenian (2021)

Official Religion: No state religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: According to the latest survey by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) in 2019, Muslims along with homosexuals and Roma people, represent one of the groups with the lowest level of trust. Seventy-four percent of those surveyed say they do not trust homosexuals and 72% do not trust Roma. Immigrants (69%), Muslims (68%), people living with HIV/AIDS (58%), people of other religions (58%), Hungarians (53%), and Jews (46%) are among the most distrusted groups. The scale of social distance indicates a high intolerance towards Muslims (39% do not accept becoming their relatives, 28% do not accept being their friends, and 19% do not accept them as co-workers).

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: There are no designated procedures for recording hate crimes by the Romanian police. Consequently, criminal offenses committed with a bias motivation cannot be identified through the system. According to the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), in 2020, there were 1,039 petitions registered, out of which the largest number were on the grounds of belonging to a social category (258), the smallest number on the grounds of HIV/AIDS status (7), and there was one case on the grounds of race. There were 138 pe-

titions submitted on the grounds of religion and beliefs, an unprecedented increase compared to 11 petitions in 2019.

Major Religions (% of Population): Eastern Orthodox (85.3%), Roman Catholic (4.5%), Reformed Protestants (3.0%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 0.4%

Main Muslim Community Organizations: The Muftiate of Romania is the only religious authority for Muslims in Romania recognized by law.

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Islamic and Cultural League in Romania (Liga Islamică și Culturală din România); Cultural Centre “Islam Today” (Centrul Cultural “Islamul Azi”); “Crescent” Cultural Centre Foundation (Fundăția Centrul Cultural “Semiluna”); Cultural Humanitarian Association D.U.A. (Asociația Cultural Umanitară D.U.A.); Foundation for Islamic Services (Fundăția de Servicii Islamice); Romanian National Council for Refugees (Consiliul Național Român pentru Refugiați- CNRR); Romanian Forum for Refugees (Forumul Român pentru Refugiați, ARCA), Young Generation (Generație Tânără), Save the Children (Salvați Copiii)

Far-Right Parties: Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, AUR), New Right (Noua Dreaptă, ND), United Romania Party (Partidul România Unită, PRU)

Far-Right Movements: N/A

Far-Right Violent Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** A legislative proposal for banning face covering with any material that prevents the recognition of physiognomy was launched in December 2017 and rejected by the Chamber of Deputies in April 2018. The law was further submitted to the Senate for deliberation which decided to close the legislative procedure with a final rejection. If the law had passed, the burqa, niqab, or other clothing used to cover the face for cultural purposes (religious or ethnic) or for other reasons, except for medical reasons, would have been prohibited in educational institutions. After the final rejection by the Senate in 2018, the legislative proposal was not resumed in any form. In the 2020 parliamentary election, the People’s Movement Party (PMP), which initiated this legislative project, did not obtain the 5% electoral threshold to enter Parliament.
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

Although no racially motivated violence and incidents directed at Muslims were recorded during 2023, empirical observation shows that the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023 led, in the following months, to an increase in the level of hate and Islamophobia, reflected especially in messages found in urban spaces. An example is a series of posters that appeared at the end of 2023 in the public space of the capital which conveyed xenophobic and anti-Muslim messages.

In February 2023, the petition “No Muslim Invasion” was launched on a social media network with the aim of stopping Muslim immigration to Europe, namely the granting of work permits by the Romanian government to workers from Muslim countries.¹ The petition was launched after Romania reported 286,500 persons settling in the country, a figure that shows that the number of immigrants exceeded that of 2023.²

In March-April 2023, media attention was drawn to the construction of a mosque in Timișoara by an Egyptian businessman who has been established in Romania since 1991. On the occasion, the Mufti of Romania raised the issue of the functioning of Muslim places of worship which do not have the legal status of authorized mosques in large cities across the country. The press release of the Muftiate of Romania described the construction of the mosque as a deviation from official legal protocol regarding the establishment of mosques in the country, calling on the state authorities to support the Muftiate and take the necessary measures so that the law is respected and the population continues to feel safe and protected.³ The episode drew attention to people in institutional positions of power casting the presence of newly arrived Muslims in the urban areas within the framework of the security concept as a potential source of danger for the safety of the population, requiring in this sense the action of Romanian state.

In September 2023, Law no. 258/2023 for the amendment of Art. 369, regarding incitement to violence, hatred, or discrimination of Law no. 286/2009 of the Criminal Code was adopted. From this date, the Criminal Code establishes that inciting the public, by any means, to violence, hatred or discrimination against a cat-

1. See https://www.petitiononline.com/nu_in vaziei_musulmane_In_romania.

2. “Premieră în România. Numărul imigranților a depășit numărul emigranților, în 2022”, *Euronews* (30 August 2023), retrieved 3 October 2024, from <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/premiera-in-romania-numarul-imi-grantilor-a-depasit-numarul-emigrantilor-in-2022>

3. “Muftiatul Cultului Musulman din România, îngrijorat de noua moschee care ar urma să fie construită la Timișoara: Nu am primit nicio solicitare de a construi un lăcaș de cult” (The Mufti of the Muslim Cult in Romania, worried about the new mosque that would be built in Timișoara: We have not received any request to build a place of worship), *HotNews* (7 March 2023), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-26145456-muftiatul-cultului-musulman-din-romania-ingrijorat-noua-moschee-care-urma-fie-construita-timisoara.htm>

egory of persons or against a person, shall be punishable by imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years or a fine.⁴

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Racially motivated violence and incidents directed at Muslims were not reported in 2023. The major problem in this respect remains the fact that the statistics do not provide an accurate picture, given that many civil society organizations and international organizations have drawn attention to the fact that one of the major problems in the hate crime segment is underreporting by victims due to a lack of trust in the authorities, and a lack of willingness or capability by the authorities to investigate these cases effectively.

Even if no racially motivated violence and incidents directed at Muslims were recorded in 2023, empirical observation shows that the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023 led, in the following months, to an increase in the level of hate and Islamophobia, reflected especially in messages found in urban spaces. An example is a series of posters that appeared at the end of last year in the public space of the capital which conveyed xenophobic and anti-Muslim messages, such as “Islam = terrorism,” “Foreigners out!,” “Immigrants out!,” “Quran = Filth.” Although the messages were temporary, with the authorities being notified, they were indicative of the existence of xenophobia in Romanian society which can take the form of Islamophobia under certain stimuli, in this case the outbreak of the war in Gaza. Islamophobia in this context is directed against “alien” and “foreign” Muslims, who are considered different from the moderate, integrated, and loyal historical Muslim community in the Dobruja region, in the southeastern part of Romania.

No television channel and no newspaper reported or problematized the appearance of these messages in the public space in Romania. The exception was an Instagram page, created by a group of human rights activists, who joined the Palestinian cause after October 7, 2023.⁵

Employment

From the very few available sources, namely the reports of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), no significant developments regarding the em-

4. Law no. 258/2023 for the amendment of art. 369, regarding incitement to violence, hatred or discrimination from Law no. 286/2009 regarding the Criminal Code, retrieved 19 May 2023, from <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/ge2danjsg44ts/legea-nr-258-2023-pentru-modificarea-art-369-din-legea-nr-286-2009-privind-codul-penal>

5. See the Insagram profile: https://www.instagram.com/romania_palestine_solidarity?igsh=MTZ2ZGN4aXR5d-WY1Zg==

ployment of Muslims were reported in the period under investigation. In the last data available (2023), the NCCD registered 389 petitions about access to employment.

Discrimination in employment was based on the following criteria: chronic disease, sexual orientation, language, beliefs, religion, age, nationality, ethnicity, social category, gender, disability, and HIV/AIDS. Also, there were cases of discrimination of Roma and immigrant workers. The NCCD investigated cases of employment-based discrimination both in the public and private sector.

In 14 of these cases, fines were issued, while twelve received a warning and two a recommendation. However, this data is not disaggregated by criteria such as ethnic origin or religion,⁶ a situation which presents an obstacle for obtaining accurate statistics regarding the employment access of Muslim immigrants. Individuals entering Romania on an asylum application have free access to the labor market either based on a residence permit, confirming the form of protection obtained, or based on a certificate attesting that the application is being processed.

Education

In November 2020, the European Commission adopted the “Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for 2021-2027,” which promotes inclusion through a whole-of-society approach and involves, among others, immigrant and local communities, employers, civil society, and all levels of government. This Action Plan focuses on providing targeted support throughout the integration process. While the task of developing and implementing social policies lies primarily with national governments, the EU plays a key role in supporting member states through funding, developing guidelines, and promoting relevant partnerships.⁷

One of the main actions laid out in the EU Action Plan, is inclusive education and training, from preschool to higher education, with a focus on facilitating the recognition of qualifications and learning host country languages, supported by EU funding. Moreover, the Commission provides expert advice through peer counselors to support reforms in member states, for example on the integration of newly arrived immigrants in schools. Such events are organized at the request of any member state and involve decision-makers from other national administrations and independent experts trying to find solutions to national challenges in a participatory workshop setting.⁸

In the educational field, access to education by Muslim immigrants is a topic of concern. Although the National Education Law stipulates that immigrants have

6. National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), “Activity Report 2023”, retrieved 20 May, 2024, from <https://www.cncd.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Raport-de-activitate-CNCD-2023-RO.pdf>

7. European Commission, “Refugee and migrant integration into education and training”, retrieved 20 May, 2024, from <https://education.ec.europa.eu/ro/focus-topics/improving-quality/inclusive-education/migrants-and-refugees>

8. Ibid.

a right to education without any discrimination, the reality is complex. The regular obstacles they face are the lack of educational documents, the lack of knowledge of the Romanian language, and the difficulties in adapting to the new social, cultural, and educational context.⁹

The foundation Terre des Hommes and its partner, JRS Romania (Jesuit Refugee Service of Romania), completed the project “PROMISE - Protection of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors,” regarding young immigrants, one of the most vulnerable categories of immigrants, as active agents of change, rather than passive victims of unfortunate circumstances. The two organizations carried out advocacy activities, supported the provision of free legal aid, information, and training, and facilitated young people’s participation in consultations with authorities.¹⁰

Politics

Romanian society is familiar with several historically domesticated Muslim religious minorities such as the Turkish, Tatar, and Roma communities, representing 71% of the total Muslim population in Romania. Most other Muslims are concentrated in the large urban centers, representing the remaining 29%. The Muftiate of Romania is the representative institution of the Muslim community in Romania whose leadership belongs by historical tradition to the Turkish-Tatar community. At the moment, there is a rift between the Great Mufti’s Office and other Muslim NGOs that are trying to organize their religious life.

Since the 2000s, Mufti Yusuf Murat has raised the issue of the legislative inability to oversee what is happening to immigrant Muslim communities, who came to study in the 1970s or with businesses after 1990, and of converts. More specifically, the complaints concerned certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which carry out religious activities in mosques proliferating Islamic teachings through regular sermons, lectures or published books, without the authorization of the Muftiate.¹¹

Overall, the process of distancing between the indigenous community and the newly arrived Muslims in the large cities raises the issue of their representation and inclusion - or, by contrast, exclusion - at the level of the representative institution and discourse about Islam in Romania, which is the prerogative of the historical community in Dobruja.

9. Terre de Hommes, “Dreptul la educație al copiilor migranți & refugiați trebuie respectat” (The right to education of migrant & refugee children must be respected), (20 June 2020), retrieved 29 November, from <https://www.tdh.ro/ro/dreptul-la-educatie-al-copiilor-migranti-refugiati-trebuie-respectat>

10. “Tinerii migranți din România arată cine sunt cu adevărat (comunicat de presă)” (The Young Migrants are showing us who they are), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://tdh.ro/ro/tinerii-migranti-din-romania-arata-cine-sunt-cu-adevarat-comunicat-de-presa>

11. Alina Isac Alak, “Vechiul și noul islam în România: provocări ale construcției identitare a musulmanilor autohtoni”, in Adriana Cupcea (ed.), *Turcii și tătarii din Dobrogea* (Cluj Napoca, Editura ISPMN), pp. 321, 324, 334.

Part of the problem is also the normative definition of a national minority in the Romanian electoral legislation, according to which a national minority is an ethnic group represented in the Council of National Minorities (CMN). By strictly referring to ethnicity to define a national minority, the new minorities established in Romania, such as Romanian citizens of Iranian or Iraqi nationality, can also be considered as national minorities. But in practice, the presence at the CMN level is restricted to historical minorities, such as Hungarians, Turks, Tatars, Roma, Slovaks, etc.

The above definition is reflected in the current Romanian political discourse, which considers Turks and Tatars as historical national minorities, loyal to the Romanian state, practising a local form of Islam adapted to the Romanian social and political context. An example of this is the congratulatory message addressed to the Muslims in the Dobruja region in April 2022, by the Romanian prime minister at the time, on the occasion of Ramadan, emphasizing that Muslims in Romania represent a model of intercultural dialogue, a community fully integrated into society as a whole.¹²

Although in 2022, the UN General Assembly designated March 15 as “International Day to Combat Islamophobia,” to date, there has been no mentioning or commemorations of this day by the Romanian government, political parties, or civil society in Romania.

Media

In 2023, the conservative Christian Orthodox website *infocrestin.ro* continued to publish articles portraying Islam as a violent and intolerant religion, giving examples of incidents in African countries such as Uganda and reporting that a 37-year-old man who had converted to Islam was killed by Muslims shouting “Allahu Akbar.”¹³

In March-April 2023, an episode that drew the attention of the media was the construction of a mosque in Timișoara by an Egyptian businessman who has been established in Romania since 1991. The Mufti of Romania reacted by stating in a press release that, as stated in the Muftiate’s statute, its role is to guide and coordinate all religious activities within Muslim communities, but it has not received any request from the community in Timiș County to take steps to build an official place of worship, authorized by the Romanian state.¹⁴ The mufti raised the issue of the function-

12. Andrea Tobias, “Iohannis, mesaj către musulmanii din România cu ocazia începerii lunii postului Ramadan” (Iohannis, a message to Muslims in Romania, at the beginning of Ramadan), *Mediafax*, (March 22, 2023), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/iohannis-mesaj-catre-musulmanii-din-romania-cu-ocazia-inceperii-lunii-postului-ramadan-21720441>

13. “Creștin ucis de musulmanii radicali” (Christian killed by the Muslim radicals), *Info Creștin* (16 January 2023), <https://infocrestin.com/crestin-ucis-de-musulmanii-radicali/>, retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://infocrestin.com/crestin-ucis-de-musulmanii-radicali/>

14. “Arabii din Timișoara îngrijorează Muftiatul Cultului Musulman. Alim Sawfan nu este recunoscut ca fiind imam și nu poate construi o moschee” (The Arabs of Timișoara worry the Mufti of the Muslim Cult. Alim

ing of Muslim places of worship which do not have the legal status of authorized mosques in large cities across the country. At the same time, he pointed out a problem debated since the 2000s, namely the fact that some of the imams who provide religious services in these places have not studied Islamic theology at institutions recognized by Romanian educational institutions and, therefore, cannot be considered part of the Muslim clergy in Romania. The press release described the approach taken in Timișoara as a deviation, calling on the state authorities to support the Muftiate and take the necessary measures so that the law is respected and the population continues to feel safe and protected.¹⁵ The episode drew attention to people in institutional positions of power casting the presence of newly arrived Muslims in the urban areas within the framework of the security concept as a potential source of danger for the safety of the population, requiring the action of the Romanian state.

A trend in the Romanian media following the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023 has been an increase in the reporting of anti-Semitic actions in Western European countries in the wake of the conflict. While some newspapers also reported in parallel the phenomenon of increasing Islamophobic incidents,¹⁶ most of them focused exclusively on anti-Semitic ones.¹⁷

Justice system

In September 2023, Law no. 258/2023 for the amendment of Art. 369, regarding incitement to violence, hatred, or discrimination of Law no. 286/2009 of the Criminal Code was adopted. The amendment intervened to put the national legislation in agreement with the provisions of art. 1 paragraph (1) of the Council's Framework Decision 2008/913/JAI on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia employing criminal law¹⁸ as a result of a notification by the European Commission on April 19, 2023. Through this document, it is communicated that, after examining the transposition measures, it is considered that Romania has

Sawfan is not recognized as an imam and cannot build a mosque), *Ziua de Vest* (17 March 2023), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <http://www.ziuainvest.ro/arabii-din-timisoara-ingrijoreaza-muftiatul-cultului-musulman-al-im-sawfan-nu-este-recunoscut-ca-fiind-imam-si-nu-poate-construi-o-moschee/>.

15. "Muftiatul Cultului Musulman din România, îngrijorat de noua moschee care ar urma să fie construită la Timișoara: Nu am primit nicio solicitare de a construi un lăcaș de cult" (The Mufti of the Muslim Cult in Romania, worried about the new mosque that would be built in Timișoara: We have not received any request to build a place of worship), *HotNews* (7 March 2023), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-26145456-muftiatul-cultului-musulman-din-romania-ingrijorat-noua-moschee-care-urma-fie-construita-timisoara.htm>
16. "Franța. Poliția anchetează un incident antisemit la Lyon" (France. Police are investigating an anti-Semitic incident in Lyon), *Biziday* (5 November 2023), retrieved 23 May 2024, <https://www.biziday.ro/266656-2/>
17. "Val de incidente antisemite în Franța și Marea Britanie după atacul Hamas împotriva Israelului" (Wave of anti-Semitic incidents in France and Britain after Hamas attack on Israel), *HotNews* (October 11), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-26599799-val-atacuri-antisemite-franta-marea-britanie-dupa-riposta-israelului-impotriva-hamas.htm>
18. Decizia-cadru 2008/913/JAI A CONSILIULUI din 28 noiembrie 2008, privind combaterea anumitor forme și expresii ale rasismului și xenofobiei prin intermediul dreptului penal, retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32008F0913>

not fulfilled its obligations under art. 1 paragraph (1) lit. a) of the framework decision.¹⁹ In this sense, the new text contained in Art. 369 of the Criminal Code includes the following:

Inciting the public, by any means, to violence, hatred or discrimination against a category of persons or against a person on the grounds that he is part of a certain category of persons defined on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, opinion or political affiliation, wealth, social origin, age, disability, non-contagious chronic disease or HIV/AIDS infection, is punishable by imprisonment from 6 months to 3 years or a fine.²⁰

Internet

The Facebook page “We don’t want a mega-mosque in Bucharest,” which was initially created to oppose the project of building a grand mosque in the capital, a project that was later cancelled, was limited in 2023 to one post consisting in a video of Mihail Neamțu, a nationalist-conservative intellectual and far-right politician.

In the video posted in July 2023, in the context of the protests in France of the Maghrebi and African minorities against discrimination, Neamțu addresses the so-called incompatibility between the Christian and Islamic civilizations, calling for comparisons between the attacks of the Ottoman Turks on Belgrade, which he describes as an attack from the outside, with the attacks in Paris, viewed as attacks from within, which, Neamțu asserts, are the outcome of France’s pro-Muslim immigration policies. His speech continues with a critique of globalism, liberal progressivism, and of the French model of secularism, which he considers an example of failure, especially due to the pro-immigration component, thus configuring the background on which he announces the decay of the West and Western civilization.²¹

Another online Islamophobic manifestation was the petition “No Muslim Invasion,” launched in February 2023 on a social media network, with the aim of stopping Muslim immigration to Europe via the granting of work permits by the Romanian government to workers from Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. The petition drew attention to the danger of an alleged Islamization of Europe and Romania, the “barbarism” of Islamic culture, and the “danger” posed to Romanian society by the liberal ideological trend encouraging Muslim immigration. By the end of December 2023, the petition had been

19. “Se modifică infracțiunea de incitare la violență, ură sau discriminare” (The offence of incitement to violence, hatred or discrimination is amended), *JURIDICE.ro* (29 September 2023), retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://www.juridice.ro/700954/se-modifica-infractiunea-de-incitarea-la-violenta-ura-sau-discriminare.html>

20. Law no. 258/2023 for the amendment of art. 369, regarding incitement to violence, hatred or discrimination from Law no. 286/2009 regarding the Criminal Code, retrieved 21 May 2024, from <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/ge2danjsg44ts/legea-nr-258-2023-pentru-modificarea-art-369-din-legea-nr-286-2009-privind-codul-penal.>

21. See <https://www.facebook.com/NuVremMegaMoscheeInBucuresti>, retrieved 23 May 2024, from <https://tdh.ro/ro/tinerii-migranti-din-romania-arata-cine-sunt-cu-adevarat-comunicat-de-presa>

signed by 52 people, showcasing that Muslim immigration is not a topic of interest at the moment.²²

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The main actors who are promoting Islamophobia in Romania are small, far-right movements and parties that combine a nationalistic agenda, strong Orthodox Christian religious convictions, and elements of the fascist ideology of the Legionary Movement, the Romanian fascist movement during World War II. These actors are active in trying to gain public exposure and political support by adopting a strong stance on Islam and immigration, and use a racist rhetoric.

The most prominent actor promoting racism at this moment in Romania is the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR, far right). It is a new party which entered the Parliament in the parliamentary election of December 2020 with a 9% percentage and was massively supported by the Romanian diaspora (23%).²³ In recent years, the leader of this party, George Simion, and its ideologist, Sorin Lavric, have become the central figures of the nationalist-conservative and racist discourse in Romania, which mainly targets the Hungarian, Roma, Jewish, and LGBT communities.

Populist, anti-immigration rhetoric is also present in the speeches of the People's Movement Party (PMP), which lost parliamentary representation in the 2020 parliamentary election. The first well-known Romanian politician to have introduced an anti-immigration rhetoric was Traian Băsescu, former president of Romania and founder of the PMP.

Currently, Mihail Neamțu, a conservative intellectual and a far-right politician, is a central figure in the critique of multiculturalism and Muslim immigration to Romania and Europe. He was a member of the PMP and recently announced that he would participate in the European parliamentary elections, with the support of George Simion and the AUR.

Observed Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

On May 13, 2021, the government of Romania adopted by government decision the first “National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization and Hate Speech (2021-2023).” On Feb-

22. See https://www.petitiononline.com/nu_invaziei_musulmane_In_romania.

23. “Alegeri parlamentare 2020, rezultate finale: PSD - 28,9%; PNL - 25%; USR PLUS - 15%, AUR 9%. PMP și Pro România nu intră în Parlament” (2020 parliamentary elections, final results: PSD - 28,9%; NLP - 25%; USR PLUS - 15%, AUR 9%. PMP and Pro Romania do not enter the Parliament), *Digi24.ro*, (9 December, 2020), retrieved 20 June, 2022, from <https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-parlamentare-2020/alegeri-parlamentare-2020-rezultate-finale-psd-289-pnl-25-usr-plus-15-aur-98-pmp-si-pro-romania-nu-intra-in-parlament-1415280>.

bruary 28, 2022, an Inter-ministerial Committee for monitoring the implementation of the National Strategy was established by Prime Minister's Decision no. 173/28.02.2022. According to the document, being the first strategy adopted in this field, it aims to achieve a correlation of sectoral efforts aimed at preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech, by (a) improving the collection of data on these phenomena in Romania; (b) the evaluation of current legislation to identify potential gaps and the preparation of proposals in order to cover them; (c) the evaluation of professional training programs for actors involved in the process of preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech (police officers, prosecutors, judges) and updating these programs; (d) the evaluation of current school programs and their revision; (e) the development of pilot cultural programs aimed at preventing the proliferation of these phenomena in Romanian society; and (f) intensifying Romania's involvement in international efforts aimed at combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech.²⁴

The National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD) has become increasingly effective in its work. It has received a growing number of petitions over the years and has provided its expert opinion on judicial proceedings.²⁵ The NCCD launched a project aimed at evaluating the transposition of the EU Council Framework Decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia at the country level. Envisaged activities include training for police involved in the registration and reporting of hate crimes.²⁶

The Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (CDMiR), established in 2017 and comprising of 22 NGO members and five academic and international supporters (among them the Romanian UNHCR Office), continued to be the leading civil society initiative aimed at improving the perception of immigrants and refugees in the public space, and improving their access to basic rights and services.²⁷ LOGS - Social Initiatives Group (LOGS - Grup de Inițiative Sociale) is an organiza-

24. Romanian Government, "Strategia națională pentru prevenirea și combaterea antisemitismului, xenofobiei, radicalizării și discursului instigator la ură aferentă perioadei 2021 – 2023" National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Antisemitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization and Hate Speech 2021-2023), p. 5., retrieved 21 November, from <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ANEXA-1-4.pdf>.

25. UN Human Rights Council, "Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. (National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21. Romania)", Twenty-ninth session, (15-26 January 2018), retrieved 29 November, 2022, from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/369/14/PDF/G1736914.pdf?OpenElement>

26. National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), "10 ani de Implementare a Deciziei Cadru UE privind rasismul și xenofobia în România: provocări și abordări noi ale acțiunilor privind infracțiunile motivate de ură - NoIntoHate2018" (10 Years of Implementing the EU Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia in Romania: Challenges and New Approaches to Hate Crimes' - NoIntoHate2018), (13 January, 2021), retrieved 29 November 2022, from <https://www.cncd.ro/proiecte/10-ani-de-implementare-a-deciziei-cadru-ue-privind-rasismul-si-xenofobia-in-romania-provocari-si-abordari-noi-ale-actiunilor-privind-infracțiunile-motivate-de-ura-nointohate2018/>

27. See <https://cdmir.ro/wp/despre-noi/>.

tion from western Romania which promotes the integration of vulnerable groups of immigrants and fights human trafficking since 2019.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The presence of Muslims and Muslim immigration are marginal topics of interest for the Romanian public. Despite the lack of reported hate crimes against Muslims, recent studies show that Romanians are not eager to accept Muslims in their vicinity. According to a poll conducted by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) at the request of the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD), more than 60% of Romanians consider Muslims as potentially dangerous, while 52% believe that immigrants should be stopped at Europe's borders. According to the same study, the scale of social distance indicates an increased intolerance towards Muslims, placed in third place, following homosexuals and immigrants. In the case of immigrants, 39% of Romanians do not accept them as relatives and 30% do not accept them as friends, while in the case of Muslims, again 39% of Romanians do not want to be related with them and 28% do not want to be their friends.²⁸ The studies that have been published so far on Islamophobia in Romania identify the following causes: the current intolerant discourse of Romanian media and politicians, and a nostalgia in the Romanian collective mentality for the interwar far-right, ultraorthodox, nationalistic, and xenophobic Legionary Movement.²⁹

Based on all the above, a series of recommendations are made below for the authorities and civil society.

- The authorities should put in place a system to collect and publish data on cases of hate speech and hate crime investigated by the police and pursued through the courts.
- The relevant authorities should develop data collection in the areas of hate crime and racism, recognizing anti-Muslim bias as a category, alongside a methodology and the necessary tools for monitoring the phenomenon.
- Both the Romanian authorities and academia should address online hate speech, and develop a methodology and the necessary tools for monitoring the phenomenon in the online environment.
- Qualitative research on the experiences of Muslims in their interactions with the legal, economic, educational, and service system in Romania should be conducted; these studies may underpin future public policy.

28. Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES). "Sondaj de opinie la nivel național privind nivelul discriminării în România și percepțiile actuale asupra infracțiunilor motivate de ură" (National opinion poll on the level of discrimination in Romania and current perceptions of hate crimes), 2018, retrieved 29 May, 2024, from <https://ires.ro/articol/367/discriminare-si-discurs-al-urii-in-romania--2019>.

29. Corneliu C. Simuț, "Negative Ecodomy in Romanian Politics and Religion: Anti-Muslim Attitudes in the Bucharest Mosque Scandal during the Summer of 2015", *Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2015), p. 1371.

- A review of textbooks in which Islam and Muslims are presented is necessary, eliminating prejudices and stereotypes about Islam and presenting Muslim minorities in the chapters dedicated to national minorities.
- The creation of dialogue groups is necessary including the political class, media, the NGOs that defend the rights of Muslim immigrants, and academics who study the phenomenon of Islamophobia.

Chronology

- **13 February 2023:** The online Islamophobic petition “No Muslim Invasion” is launched on a social media network, with the aim of stopping Muslim immigration to Europe, namely the granting of work permits by the Romanian government to workers from Muslim-majority countries. By the end of December 2023, the petition was signed by 52 people, showcasing that Muslim immigration is not a topic of interest at the moment.
- **17 March 2023:** The Mufti of Romania reacted to the construction of a mosque in Timișoara by an Egyptian businessman who has been established in Romania since 1991. He raised the issue of the functioning of Muslim places of worship which do not have the legal status of authorized mosques in big cities across the country. The press release of the Muftiate of Romania described the approach taken in Timișoara as a deviation from the established laws of Romania, calling on the state authorities to support the Muftiate and take the necessary measures so that the law is respected and the population continues to feel safe and protected.
- **2 July 2023:** The Facebook page “We don’t want a mega-mosque in Bucharest,” published a post claiming the incompatibility between Christian and Islamic civilizations, calling for comparisons between the attacks of the Ottoman Turks on Belgrade, which are described as an attack from the outside, with the attacks in Paris, which are characterized as attacks from within, resulting from France’s pro-Muslim immigration policies. The post praised the idea that unlike France, Romania and Eastern Europe managed to keep the Muslim civilization at their borders.
- **December 2023:** The outbreak of the conflict in Gaza in October 2023 led to a series of posters appearing in an area of Bucharest with the xenophobic and anti-Muslim messages “Islam = terrorism,” “Foreigners out!,” “Immigrants out!,” and “Quran = Filth.”

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
RUSSIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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1. The author's name is a pseudonym.

Резюме

2023 год ознаменовался большим количеством общественных дискуссий и медийных кампаний об исламе и мусульманах и их роли в общественной жизни современной России. В большинстве из них наблюдалась активизация исламофобской риторики. Наиболее острые дискуссии развернулись на фоне эскалации палестино-израильского конфликта 7 октября 2023 года. В то время как мусульмане стремились солидаризироваться с народом Палестины, некоторые журналисты и общественные деятели заняли откровенно произраильские и антимусульманские позиции. На этом фоне в социальных медиа и интернет-пространстве можно было наблюдать усиление негативного отношения к мусульманским общинам в целом, выражаемое в дезинформации, тиражировании стереотипов и враждебных высказываниях в отношении мусульман. Среди наиболее резонансных случаев: сожжение Корана в Волгограде Никитой Журавелем, суд над авторами пьесы «Финист - ясный сокол» о девушках, уехавших в ИГИЛ, а также антисемитские погромы в Махачкале. Также продолжают преследования в отношении мусульман, связанных с рядом исламских организаций, по подозрению в экстремистской и террористической деятельности, а также нарушения прав и применение насилия по отношению к мусульманам в тюрьмах.

Executive Summary

The year 2023 was marked by a large number of public discussions and media campaigns about Islam and Muslims and their role in public life. Most of them witnessed an intensification of Islamophobic rhetoric. The most heated discussions unfolded against the backdrop of the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on October 7, 2023. While Muslims sought to solidarize with the people of Palestine, some journalists and public figures took openly pro-Israeli and anti-Muslim positions. Against this background, in social media and the internet space one could observe an increase in negative attitudes towards Muslim communities in general, expressed through misinformation, stereotypes, and hostile statements about Muslims. Among the most high-profile cases were the burning of the Koran in Volgograd by Nikita Zhuravel; the trial of the authors of the play “Finist the Bright Falcon” about women who joined ISIS as brides; and the anti-Semitic pogroms in Makhachkala. Prosecutions against Muslims affiliated with a number of Islamic organizations on suspicion of extremist and violent activities also continue, as well as rights violations and violence against Muslims in prisons.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Russian Federation

Type of Regime: Democratic republic

Form of Government: Semi-presidential system

Ruling Parties: Edinaya Rossiya (United Russia) (right-wing, centrist-right)

Opposition Parties: Communist Party, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), A Just Russia, Civic Platform

Last Elections: 2024 Presidential Elections: Vladimir Putin won 87.28% of the vote; other candidates: Nikolay Kharitonov – 4.31%, Vladislav Davankov – 3.85%, Leonid Slutskiy – 3.2%.

2021 Legislative Elections: United Russia: 324 seats, Communist Party: 57 seats, A Just Russia – For Truth: 27 seats, LDPR: 21 seats, New People: 13 seats

Total Population: 146.7 million (2019)

Major Languages: Russian

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

Statistics on Islamophobia: No special statistics on Islamophobia

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: No special statistics on racism and discrimination. There is data from the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis that monitors human rights violations including ethnic discrimination.

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (71%), No religion (15%), Islam (10%), Other (4%) (Pew Research Center, 2017)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 13 million (9%) in 2010 (population census)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Central Spiritual Board of Muslims, Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russian Federation, Coordination Center of Muslims of North Caucasus

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: SOVA Center for Information and Analysis and MEMORIAL: An International Historical, Educational, Human Rights and Charitable Society

Far-Right Parties: N/A

Far-Right Movements: N/A

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** N/A
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** N/A
- **Minaret Ban:** N/A
- **Circumcision Ban:** N/A
- **Burka Ban:** N/A
- **Prayer Ban:** N/A

Introduction

The year 2023 was marked by a large number of public discussions and media campaigns about Islam and Muslims and their role in the public life of modern Russia. Most of them illustrated an intensification of Islamophobic rhetoric. The most heated discussions unfolded against the backdrop of the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on October 7, 2023. While Muslims sought to solidarize with the people of Palestine, some journalists and public figures took openly pro-Israeli and anti-Muslim positions. Against this background, in social media and the internet space one could observe an increase in negative attitudes towards Muslim communities in general, expressed through misinformation, stereotypes, and hostile statements about Muslims. All this contributed to the strengthening of negative attitudes built on fear and misunderstanding. We also continued to record cases of discrimination and violation of the rights of Muslims in various spheres of life.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

There were a series of physical and verbal attacks on Muslims in 2023 in Russia that we have divided into several groups.

The Case of the Burning of the Koran

On May 19, 2023, on the Dagestan telegram channel “Morning of Dagestan,” there appeared a video clip in which an unknown man is holding a burning Koran in his hands, and the Volgograd Cathedral Mosque can be seen in the background. The video is then interrupted and in another fragment, the young man is standing against a wall, and says loudly and clearly that on May 4 he bought a Koran on the instructions of the Security Service of Ukraine and burned it at the mosque on Povorinskaya Street in Volgograd, filming it and sending it to the Security Service of Ukraine. For this, he allegedly received 10,000 rubles (approximately \$100). “I did it with the purpose of inciting religious discord between Christians and Muslims in the Volgograd Region,” the young man said in the video. The following day, the young man was detained and his identity was established: 19-year-old Nikita Zhuravel, a native of Sevastopol, worked as a food deliveryman and studied at the Volgograd State Social and Pedagogical University.² He was charged under Part 2 of Article 148 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (Public actions expressing obvious disrespect for society and committed with the aim of offending the religious feelings of believers).

2. All the following footnotes are in Russian, only titles translated: “Who is Nikita Zhuravel and what he has been accused of”, Kommersant, 1 November 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6311051>

On May 21, 2023, the criminal case against Zhuravel was transferred for further investigation to the Investigative Committee of Russia for the Chechen Republic in connection with “numerous appeals of residents of the Chechen Republic with a request to recognize them as victims.” On the same day, Russian Justice Minister Konstantin Chuichenko said that Zhuravel should serve his sentence in a region with a predominantly Muslim population, as “this will promote respect for religion and religious feelings of believers in our multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country.”

On May 23, a protest rally organized by the regional public chamber took place in Grozny. Those gathered held placards stating “Hands off the Koran,” “Don’t touch the holy scripture,” “We are ready to give our lives for our religion.” “This man will be tried here,” said Chingiz Akhmadov, director of the Chechen State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company Grozny. “And, most likely, he will serve his sentence on the territory of the Chechen Republic. This is a huge gesture of favor and respect for the religion of Islam, for the Chechen people, and for the head of the republic Ramzan Kadyrov.”³

On May 27, the detainee was taken to the pre-trial detention center in the Chechen capital. The Chechen Republic is one of Russia’s Muslim-majority regions, but lawyers have pointed out that the decision to transfer the case to Chechnya was politically motivated and contrary to the law, since Russian law provides that preliminary investigations are conducted at the place where the crime was committed.⁴

On August 16, 2023, Tatyana Moskalkova, Commissioner for Human Rights in Russia, said that she had received a statement from Zhuravel that he had been beaten by Adam Kadyrov, the son of the head of the Chechen Republic, during a visit to a detention center.

On September 25, 2023, the head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov published in his Telegram channel a video in which his son Adam Kadyrov beats Nikita Zhuravel. Ramzan Kadyrov wrote, “He beat him and did the right thing. Moreover, I believe that anyone who infringes on any Holy Scripture, including by demonstratively burning it, who has offended tens of millions of citizens of our large country, must be severely punished,” and added that he was proud of his son’s deed. A criminal case against Adam Kadyrov was refused because of his age: he is 15 and responsibility for such crimes begins at the age of 16. On October 6, Adam Kadyrov was awarded the title of “Hero of the Chechen Republic.”

The case caused wide public resonance. While Chechen politicians, following Ramzan Kadyrov, continued to express support for Adam Kadyrov’s actions, a num-

3. Ibid.

4. Bagaturia, V. “Adam Kadyrov did everything right’. How Sharia law defeated the norms of the CPC in Russia”, RTVI, 22 August 2023, <https://rtvi.com/opinions/adam-kadyrov-vse-sdelal-pravilno-kak-v-rossii-zakony-shariata-pobedili-normy-upk/>

ber of journalists and experts emphasized in their publications “the victory of Sharia law over the norms of criminal procedural law”⁵ and “the victory of the Chechens.”⁶ They also emphasized “the separation of the Chechen state from the Russian state.” Political scientist Abbas Galyamov described quite succinctly what fractures in Russian society the current situation demonstrates,

No matter how idiotic the Volgograd resident who burned the Koran is, he is still an ethnic Russian, and now it turns out that Putin is ready to give a Russian to be eaten by Chechens. Naturally, the majority of Russians will not like this very much, and for the “Russian patriots” - the very ones who make up the backbone of the war support group - this is like a sickle in the throat.⁷

Thus, in addition to increasing general xenophobia and polarizing society on the issue of support for the special military operation in Ukraine, this incident also stimulates Islamophobia, which has its roots in the conflicts between the Chechen Republic and the federal center in the late 1990s and 2000s.

Discriminating against Muslims in Prison

Muslim prisoners face various forms of discrimination. One of the main problems is the attitude of prison staff towards Muslims. Many of them face neglect and violence from prison staff, which jeopardizes their physical and mental health. Such behavior not only deepens sociocultural divisions, but also violates prisoners’ basic rights to respect for human dignity. Muslims in prisons face restrictions on the manifestation of their religious practices. For example, they may not be allowed to pray regularly, read the Koran, or participate in religious rituals. Finally, prison authorities do not always provide sufficient facilities for Muslim religious practice. Lack of places for prayer, lack of opportunities for fasting during the month of Ramadan, and lack of religious literature and spiritual advisors create additional difficulties for imprisoned Muslims. Reports of previous years with reference to materials of human rights organizations and individual activists repeatedly drew attention to the existing problems.

Convicts from the North Caucasus republics serving their sentences in Orenburg colony No. 9 claimed that they were forbidden to celebrate Uraza-Bayram (Eid al-Fitr) as the prayer room in the penitentiary was closed for one of the main holidays in Islam. This became known only in June.⁸

5. Ibid.

6. Nikitinsky, L. “Mandate - not adat”, Novaya Gazeta x Live Nail, 30 September 2023, <https://zhivoygvozdmave.digital/ep-1970>

7. “Abbas Galliamov* - on the scandalous beating video”, Polit.ru, 26 September 2023, <https://dzen.ru/a/ZRL-RZj8A9FpkmoOl>

8. “Muslims complain of harassment in Russian colonies”, Idel.Realii, 30 June 2023, <https://www.idelreal.org/a/bez-prava-na-veru-osuzhdennye-s-kavkaza-pozhalovalisj-na-pritesneniya-v-kolonii/32470787.html>

In addition to the restriction of religious rights, there are known cases of pressure and violence against Muslims. For example, Zafar Yakupov, a prisoner of Samara colony IK-26, convicted in the Hizb at-Tahrir case, reported that he was “repeatedly sent to a Detention center on far-fetched pretexts, depriving him of the opportunity to visit his family for a long time”. In addition, he believes that the colony administration is forcing Central Asian prisoners to support the war in Ukraine by forcibly sending them to fulfill the state defense order and creating “inhumane conditions” in detention.⁹

Human rights activist Svetlana Gannushkina states,

We have been documenting violations of Muslim rights in penitentiary institutions for many years. One of the reasons for this attitude is the presence of a large number of ex-military personnel among law enforcers, who have gone through two Chechen wars.... Participants of military operations are traumatized people, there has been virtually no work on their rehabilitation, they carry a large charge of aggression. This affects their attitude to the convicts who profess Islam... Previously, members of regional Public Supervisory Commissions helped to identify such violations. Now the same people are in the Public Supervisory Commission as in the Federal Service for the Execution of Punishments - former employees of [law enforcement] agencies, military pensioners. It is obvious what their position is.

In September 2023, a court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced six more participants in the case of the “prison jamaat” in Kalmykia: they were given from five to eight years in a special regime colony. According to the investigation, while behind bars, more than 100 prisoners wanted to create a cell of the terrorist group “Islamic State” (IS) to “overthrow the constitutional order of Russia.” According to the case file (a copy is available to the editorial board), since 2013, a cell of IS supporters called “Ahlu Sunna-wal-Jamaa” had been operating on the territory of IK-2 in Kalmykia. Its goal, according to investigators, was “to spread Islamic fundamentalist ideology in Russia and create an independent Islamic state in the North Caucasus.” The prisoners deny participation in the cell, as well as its very existence.¹⁰ Oyub Titiev, coordinator of Civic Assistance’s program to help prisoners from the North Caucasus republics, states that “Jamaat means ‘group of people’ in Arabic: Muslims unite into jamaats. But today in the penal colonies, the administration perceives the Jamaat as a hostile group. They don’t want Muslims to unite, and that’s why they fabricate criminal cases.” Yana Helmél, a lawyer, argues, “When someone in the colony wants to harm a Muslim, they always cling to religion: they take away prayer mats and the Koran, forbid fasting. When there are Christian holidays, the FSIN website publishes congratulations,

9. “A political prisoner from Tatarstan was sent to a penal colony. Earlier, Zafar Yakubov told about forcing prisoners to support the war in Ukraine”, *Idel.Realii*, 18 June 2023, <https://www.idelreal.org/a/32464453.html>

10. Evloeva, I. ““I will not be allowed to live”: oppression of Muslims in Russia due to “prison jamaats””, *Kavkaz.Realii*, 28 September 2023, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/mne-ne-dadut-zhitj-pritesneniya-musuljman-v-rossii-iz-za-tyuremnyh-dzhamaatov/32601062.html>

but when there are Muslim holidays, there is nothing like that. Muslims in Russian penal colonies are unambiguously disadvantaged.”

A similar case of a prison jamaat is being considered in Dagestan colony No. 7. A criminal case of “organization and participation in a terrorist community” has been opened against the defendants. According to the lawyers, the investigating officers proceed from a kind of presumption of guilt of Muslims: “As soon as they [Muslims] would have come out, they would have immediately organized an illegal armed formation, gone into the forest, attacked and killed.” A terrorism charge allows for an extension of 10-20 years of the sentences of prisoners sentenced to relatively short terms of 3-5 years.¹¹

Police Raids in Mosques

One of the most high-profile incidents took place in Kotelniki (Moscow Region), a suburb of Moscow that is home to a large number of Central Asian migrants. In May, residents of Kotelniki recorded a video message to the president asking him to deal with the problems that had appeared in their town allegedly due to the influx of migrants, namely public order violations and harassment. After the collective complaint, the authorities launched a two-week raid. As a result, 951 protocols were drawn up against the newcomers and a total of 1,455 people were brought to the police station.¹² These inspections were followed by raids on mosques. On July 7, one of the most high-profile raids took place at a mosque in Kotelniki. In his video message to the Russian president, Salavat Ibatullin, a representative of the community, describes the situation as follows:

...during the mandatory prayer for Muslims, armed riot police burst into our premises. Without taking off their street shoes, they broke into the rooms where people were praying. Showing disrespect to the praying people, shouting, using foul language and physical force, they insulted the worshippers, most of whom were Russian citizens. At that moment, there were also women and children on our premises.

He added that the riot police refused to explain the reason for the raid and sprayed the fire extinguishers in the direction of the parishioners.¹³

On the same day, a statement of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Moscow Region was published. It read,

11. Abdullaeva, Z. “Prison Jamaat” from Dagestan: dozens of prisoners accused of terrorism”, *Kavkaz.Realii*, 30 May 2023, <https://www.kavkazr.com/a/mne-ne-dadut-zhitj-pritesneniya-musuljman-v-rossii-iz-za-tyuremnyh-dzhamaatov/32601062.html>

12. “Almost 150 migrants will be expelled from the country after a raid in the Moscow region following complaints from local residents”, *Gazeta.ru*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2023/06/01/20573312.shtml>

13. “Община мусульман Котельников обратилась к Путину после рейда полицейских в мечеть”, *New Izvestia*, 16 July 2023, <https://newizv.ru/news/2023-07-16/obschina-musulman-kotelnikov-obratilas-k-putinu-posle-reyda-politseyskih-v-mechet-413550>

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Moscow Region categorically condemns the barbaric actions of riot police officers who conducted this humiliating raid, which by its methods was more similar not to a check of documents, but to an operation to detain especially dangerous criminals. ... We believe that official places where people come to pray, to study their religion, to enlighten spiritually and to educate their children morally, should not become platforms for forceful operations, and today's raid is just such a raid.¹⁴

On July 14, a similar raid was held in the neighboring city of Dzerzhinsk.

The current situation is the result of many years of complex contradictions and unresolved problems. First, despite the large number of Muslims living in Kotelniki, there are only three Muslim centers in the city. Second, religious “cultural centers” here actually perform the functions of mosques, but are regulated by different norms. For example, a mosque cannot be located in a residential house (while a center can), but collective prayer in a religious center creates difficulties for non-Muslims living in the house and creates additional tension. As part of the adaptation of migrant workers, Rushan Abbyasov, head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Moscow Region, explains the status of the premises, “where it is not possible to erect a separate religious facility, Muslim communities legally and commercially rent ready-made premises and organize multifunctional Muslim centers in them.” Third, according to some reports, the raid was carried out at the initiative of a right-wing conservative organization called “Russian Community.”¹⁵ Sergey Melikov, head of the Republic of Dagestan, stated,

I was very unpleasant to see the footage from the mosque in the Moscow Region.... I know from my own experience - service is service, but religious feelings of other people should never be insulted! How justified was the decision of these officers to raid the mosque on holy Friday and why were they so intemperate in their statements? Do these people not realize that their actions can cast a shadow on the structure they serve in?¹⁶

Despite the attention that representatives of the Muslim community tried to attract at the highest level, the raids were repeated several months later in October 2023. On October 20, after Friday prayers at the mosque in Kotelniki, representatives of law enforcement agencies forcibly took “two or three busloads of Russian citizens” to the military recruitment center. Among the “detainees” was Mamut Usei-

14. “Statement of the Spiritual Muslim department of Moscow Region concerning the ride of force structures in the muslim center of Kotelniki”, Spiritual Muslim department of Moscow Region, 7 July 2023, <https://dummo.ru/home/events/5046-zayavlenie-dukhovnogo-upravleniya-musulman-moskovskoj-oblasti-otnositelno-rejda-silovykh-struktur-v-musulmanskom-tsentre-g-o-kotelniki>

15. “Kotelniki Muslims ask for protection from law enforcers”, Kommersant, 13 July 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6097887>

16. “I was very unpleasant to see the footage from the mosque in the Moscow region”, Sergei Melikov, tg-channel, 15.07.2023, <https://t.me/melikov05/1242>

nov, a participant in a Russian music show. On Saturday morning, he posted a video from the military recruitment center on his Telegram channel, thanks to which this story received a lot of publicity.

Similar raids took place in Yekaterinburg (Sverdlovsk Region) in February 2023. Eyewitness footage shows that police officers forced believers to leave the mosque during prayer, forcing Muslims to continue praying in dirty snow on the street. According to police officers, the purpose of the raid was to check documents in order to establish the identity of those staying at the religious site and the legality of their stay in the Russian Federation.¹⁷ Tatyana Merzlyakova, human rights ombudsman in the Sverdlovsk Region, has expressed her dissatisfaction with the actions of police officers and special forces fighters who raided the Abu Hanifa mosque on Repina Street in Yekaterinburg.¹⁸

A short time later, in early March, another raid took place at another mosque in Yekaterinburg. This time, according to Mirzo Hajji Nazarov, the imam of the mosque, the representatives of the law enforcement agencies were polite and courteous.¹⁹ The imam said, “We have been working for many years to prevent extremism, we warn our parishioners about the need to have all documents with them and behave accordingly to avoid provocations.”

Finally, on September 8, in Verkhnyaya Pyshma, a suburb of Yekaterinburg, a raid was held to hand out summonses to the army. According to official information, the summonses were handed out to those who had recently obtained Russian citizenship, but did not want to register for military service.²⁰

Mosque Building Restrictions/Debates

In mid-February, a rumor spread among residents of Kosino-Ukhtomsky district in the southeast of Moscow about the construction of a large mosque on the site of Holy Lake, a place of traditional pilgrimage for Orthodox Christians. Later, the Department of Urban Planning Policy of Moscow confirmed this information. This caused a wave of protests from the residents of the neighborhood and stimulated numerous actions against the construction of the mosque: rallies, letters, and collection of signatures. In mid-April, a video of an unknown person burning a Koran on the site of the proposed mosque construction site was circulated on social networks.²¹ Despite

17. “In a Russian city, police raided a mosque during prayers”, Lenta.ru, 17 February 2023, https://lenta.ru/news/2023/02/17/ekb_namaz/

18. “Sverdlovsk ombudsman criticized law enforcers for raiding a mosque”? Bez Formata, 22 February 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/3tkutww6>

19. “Masked people raided the prayer room of Muslims in Yekaterinburg”, IslamNews, 03 March 2023, <https://islamnews.ru/2023/3/3/lyudi-v-maskakh-nagryanuli-v-molelnuyu-komnatu-musulman-v-ekaterinburge>

20. “Law enforcers handed summonses to migrants during a raid on a mosque in Verkhnyaya Pyshma”, Tagilcity.ru, 8 September 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/3a9967zd>

21. “Provocation with the purpose to stratify the population of Russia”. What punishment is threatened for burning the Koran in Kosino-Ukhtomsky district”, Moscow online, 18 February 2023, <https://msk1.ru/text/gorod/2023/04/18/72228167/>

the fact that back in early April the mayor of Moscow Sergey Sobyenin announced that another place will be allocated for the construction, people continue to express dissatisfaction with the choice of the Holy Lake. Dissatisfied residents explained that they would not like to see new mosques because of the influx of immigrants and the deteriorating situation of the capital in recent years.

Why, unlike in other countries, where citizenship takes decades and many conditions are met, in Russia citizenship is handed out left and right to people from the former southern republics of the USSR? Many do not know the language or history. Now they want mosques too.

Muslims who have lived in the area for many years, citizens of Russia, also expressed their opinion. One such resident said, “I have been paying taxes for 35 years, and someone answer me why I have to pray every Muslim holiday in the street, on the asphalt, in the snow and rain?”

Hijab Hate Cases

In 2023, there were several cases of conflicts based on disagreement with the wearing of the hijab in public space. One of the most resonant was an incident concerning a Muslim woman named Elizaveta Baranovskaya. On September 1, a Moscow subway passenger demanded that the girl, who was dressed in a niqab, take it off and “wear normal clothes” while “Russian guys are being killed in the special military operation (SVO).” The victim managed to videotape part of the conflict. In this footage, a fellow passenger stands up for her, but the instigator states that such an appearance poses a “terrorist threat.” This statement is approved by a third passenger who believes that all the remarks were made “correctly.”²² It is noteworthy that certain media outlets and bloggers picked up this news, presenting the passenger as a victim. For example, these are some of the headlines associated with this story: “Girl in Niqab Provoked a Scandal in Moscow Subway”²³ and “Will E. Baranovskaya, Who Staged a Provocation in the Subway in the Guise of a Radical Islamist, Be Punished?”²⁴

In August, two similar attacks on women in traditional Muslim dress took place in the Moscow Region (Moskovskaya oblast’): on August 30, two women with dogs attacked a Chechen woman in hijab walking with her children in a forest park in the Moskovsky neighborhood in the outskirts of Moscow, and on August 31, again in Kotelniki, an unknown woman offered to send a covered

22. Besedin, A. “Insults in the subway, hounding by dogs, death wishes: Muslim women are persecuted in Moscow because of their clothes”, *Kavkaz.Realii*, 11 September 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/y5a3zekx>

23. Ushenin, I. “Girl in niqab provokes scandal in Moscow subway”, *NTV*, 06 September 2023, <https://www.ntv.ru/novosti/2788081/>

24. “Will E. Baranovskaya, who staged a provocation in the subway in the guise of a radical Islamist, be punished?”, 09 September 2023, <https://melissa-12.livejournal.com/7923991.html>

girl to Ukraine as “cannon fodder” and chased her for two minutes, shouting insults.²⁵

In January 2023, five female students studying nursing at the Novocherkassk Medical College in Rostov Region were expelled for wearing hijabs. The deputy director of the college claims that it is forbidden to wear religious clothes at the institution because it “has a negative impact on other students.” At the same time, the students’ lawyer stated that “the hijab is not a religious issue, but just a scarf, which under a white medical cap is almost invisible.”²⁶

Employment

As noted in previous reports, there is discrimination in the labor market on the basis of ethnicity against migrants from Central Asia. Since most of them are Muslims, positions against immigrants are closely linked to Islamophobia. In September-October, a number of initiatives were announced in the State Duma to restrict certain actions of immigrants. For example, in August, it was proposed to limit the number of immigrant children in schools. At the same time, a bill was discussed to deprive acquired Russian citizenship for evasion of military registration, military duty, or mobilization. The discussions were accompanied by alarmist statements. Thus, deputy Sergei Mironov mentioned, in particular, “the crime situation caused by the influx of citizens from neighboring countries” and “the need to protect the country’s residents from immigrants.” Also widely discussed in October was a speech by Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, on the threat to Russian identity from immigrants. “These people are not close to us in faith or culture. They have their own faith and their own culture,”²⁷ the head of the Russian Orthodox Church stated. Such rhetoric has caused concern on the part of the Muslim community.

The head of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia Albir Krganov stated, “It seems to us that this topic [migrantophobia] is being exacerbated, this wave is being rocked. We are concerned that this wave against immigrants may spread to Muslims who are citizens of our country. Who will stop this wave then?”²⁸

Education

We are not aware of systematic practices of promoting a negative image of Muslims. However, individual cases that have received public resonance can be interpreted, among other things, as manifestations of Islamophobia.

25. Besedin, A. Op. cit.

26. “Students of Novocherkassk Medical College expelled for wearing hijabs”, Kavkaz.Realii, 20 January 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/dv9z8fye>

27. “Patriarch warns of threat of Russia losing its identity due to influx of migrants”, Vedomosti, 25 October 2023, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2023/10/25/1002388-patriarh-predupredil-ob>

28. “Interethnic relations seemed biased”, Kommersant, 9 November 2023, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6322798>

Politics

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15 is not commemorated by the government, political parties, and civil society.

The escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on October 7, 2023, stimulated, on the one hand, the growth of Muslim solidarity with the residents of the Gaza Strip around the world and, on the other hand, caused a new round of Islamophobia in the coverage of the events. The noted tendencies have been observed in Russia since the beginning of October 2023.

With the beginning of the conflict, daily prayers were organized in many mosques across Russia (Moscow, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Chechnya). In the official releases of the Tatarstan Spiritual Administration of Muslims the following was stated: “For the people of Palestine, so that peace, tranquility and the end of suffering may prevail on their land.”²⁹

The Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation and the Council of Muftis of Russia Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gaynutdin expressed support and solidarity with the residents of Gaza at a meeting with the Palestinian ambassador to Russia. Mufti Ravil Gainutdin stated,

Speaking about the attitude of Russian Muslims, it should be noted that we have been together with you for decades - we always hold Al-Quds Day in the Moscow Cathedral Mosque on the last Friday of Ramadan, we always meet, we always try to be useful to you, to raise the voice of Russian Muslims. We stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people and demand the implementation of UN resolutions on the need to create a viable, sovereign, independent state of Palestine, recognized by everyone around the world. This is our firm conviction - without the creation of a Palestinian state and its recognition there can be no peace in the Middle East.³⁰

Russian Muslim charitable organizations began collecting financial and humanitarian aid for Gaza immediately after the conflict began. According to various sources, the total amount as of mid-November had reached 50 million rubles (about \$500,000).³¹

Along with numerous actions of solidarity with the Palestinian people, anti-Semitic rhetoric has intensified in public space. On October 28, the head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov called Israel’s actions in Palestine fascism. Kadyrov stated,

29. “Russian mosques organize collective prayers for Palestinian Muslims”, NeMoskva says, 18.10.2023, https://t.me/Govorit_NeMoskva/17049

30. “Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin discussed with the Palestinian Ambassador the issues of providing humanitarian aid to the residents of the Gaza Strip”, Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation, 26 October 2023, <https://www.muslim.ru/articles/287/38365/>

31. “Russia’s Muslims Dismayed by Anti-Israeli Airport Riot”, The Moscow Times, 2 November 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4f5k96xb>

“The victims of the horrifying Zionist act of genocide were several thousand innocent people. In terms of its cruelty towards Palestine, Israeli fascism today is in no way inferior, if not superior, to Hitler’s.”³²

Already on October 29, 2023, unprecedented anti-Semitic riots began at the airport in Makhachkala (Dagestan). On the evening of October 29, about 1,000 local residents gathered at the airport to protest against the arrival of Jews arriving in Makhachkala on a regular flight from Tel Aviv. The protesters were able to take over the airport, enter the airfield, and surround the bus with passengers. In total there were about 50 people on board, most of them women with children. A few days before the incident, anti-Semitic calls, provocations, and fake information (for example, about plans to receive refugees from Israel in the region) were spread on social media networks. At least 23 people were injured during the riots. A case was opened under the article on mass riots, and more than 400 people were brought to administrative responsibility. Imams of Dagestan mosques and representatives of rural communities published a video message in which they called on the authorities not to punish the rioters. Athletes, bloggers, and religious figures stood up for the participants in the pogroms and called for the participants in the riots to be exempted from liability.³³

At an operational meeting on October 30, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that behind both the unrest in Dagestan and the crisis in the Middle East are the same beneficiaries: the United States and its allies. Russian President Putin stated,

We must clearly understand who in reality is behind the tragedy of the peoples of the Middle East and in other regions of the world, who organizes the deadly chaos, who benefits from it. Today, in my opinion, it has already become obvious and clear to everyone - the customers are acting openly and brazenly. The current ruling elites of the United States and their satellites are the main beneficiaries of global instability. They are extracting their bloody rent from it.³⁴

At the same time, the unrest in Dagestan again stimulated anti-Islamic rhetoric, which has been already intensified since early October during the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A number of journalists and public figures took pro-Israeli positions almost immediately against the background of the action of Hamas representatives on October 7.³⁵

32. “Practically the whole world doesn’t want to hear the voices of poor Palestinian children...”, Kadyrov_95, 28 October 2023, https://t.me/RKadyrov_95/4056

33. “Pity cannot be punished. Why Dagestan showed leniency to the pogromists”, *Novye Izvestia*, 1 November 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/5x2xbptu>

34. “Meeting with members of the Security Council, the Government and the leadership of security agencies”, the President of Russia, 30 October 2023, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72618>

35. See, for example materials of Viktor Biryukov for the popular electronic resource “Military Review” “World Jihad - a threat not only to Israel and Europe, but also to Russia” and “Islamization of Russia: Sharia ‘morality patrols’ are not far off”.

Media

The most resonant discussion in the media in 2023 was the criminal case on justification of terrorism against playwright Sviatlana Petriichuk and director Yevgenia Berkovich, who participated in the creation of the play “Finist the Bright Falcon.” The play is about Russian women who flee to Syria to become the wives of terrorists there; it is based on real criminal cases against women who went to Syria and were later persecuted for “aiding and abetting terrorism.” The first public reading of the play took place in 2019. In 2022, the play was among the winners of the prestigious Russian theater awards Golden Mask Awards. On May 4, 2023, Petriichuk and Berkovich were detained. The charge was brought on the basis of a linguistic examination for extremism. The experts noted that,

The submitted materials contain signs of the following destructive ideologies: the ideology of ISIS, which includes the ideology of jihadism, the idea of permanent violence, including revolutionary violence, and the recognition of jihad as the sixth pillar of Islam, which sacralizes violent actions and imputes them to Muslims as obligatory; the ideology of caliphate - the idea of building a world Islamic state; the ideology of Islamism or Muslim liberation. And also signs of destructive subculture of Russian neophyte wives of terrorists, extremists, subculture of so-called Russian Islam.³⁶

The source of the expertise is no less important: it was conducted by the Laboratory of Destructology at Moscow State Linguistic University, which has been headed by Professor Roman Silantiev since its establishment in 2019. “Destructology is a new applied science that comprehensively examines the most dangerous destructive entities: extremist and terrorist organizations, psychocults and non-religious sects; totalitarian sects and the sphere of magical services; suicidal games and hobbies, deadly youth subcultures (“Columbine”, AUE, etc.) and medical dissidence.”³⁷ Materials related to Islam have been repeatedly examined by experts of this research center.

The other source of expertise found that the playwright and director had deliberately created a “romantic image of a terrorist” in the play to make him “interesting and attractive to girls and women,” as opposed to Russian men, whom the play’s heroines characterize negatively.³⁸

Justice System

Thanks to the activities of a number of human rights organizations, mass media, and research centers monitoring abuses in the fight against terrorism and extremism and related human rights violations, it is possible to provide an accurate overview of the

36. Galeeva, V. “From ISIS* to Feminism. What exactly pulled a criminal case in the play “Finist Yasny Sokol”, Fontanka.ru, 5 May 2023, <https://www.fontanka.ru/2023/05/05/72278702/>

37. Laboratory of Destructology, <https://linguanet.ru/proektnaya-deyatelnost/laboratoriya-destrukologii/>

38. Misuse of extremism in 2023, SOVA, 18 March 2024, <https://www.sova-center.ru/misuse/publications/2024/03/d49483/>

law enforcement practice of Russian legislation that in some manner criminalizes the activities of Muslims and Muslim organizations. We have identified several groups of measures that affect various Muslim groups.

The Criminalization of Certain Muslim Organizations³⁹

1. *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. Representatives of (or accused of association with) Hizb at-Tahrir continue to be prosecuted and are accused of organizing the activities of a terrorist organization. The status of the organization and the existence of evidence of its involvement in terrorist activities have been discussed in previous reports. In 2023, 21 convictions of people accused of having links to Hizb at-Tahrir became known. The defendants were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in strict regime colonies under Part 1 and 2 of the Article 205.5 of the Criminal Code (Organization and participation in the activities of a terrorist organization). The maximum term (20 years of imprisonment with serving the first five years in prison and the rest of the term in a strict regime colony) in 2023 was imposed on Ansar Osmanov from Sevastopol, an activist of the association Crimean Solidarity. At least three new criminal cases with links to Hizb at-Tahrir are also known.
2. *Tablighi Jamaat*. In 2023, there were no convictions under Article 282 of the Criminal Code for continuing the activities of Tablighi Jamaat, a religious movement recognized as extremist in Russia. In addition, the already passed sentences of six persons were toughened.
3. *Nurdzhular*. It should be reminded that Nurdzhular does not exist as such on the territory of Russia, but nevertheless it was banned in 2008. Muslims are persecuted for distributing books by Said Nursi under Part 2 of Article 282.2 of the Criminal Code (Participation in the activities of an extremist organization). In 2023, three verdicts were passed, in which nine people were convicted.

Persecution of Muslim Activists

- 1) Bakhrom Khamroev

In May 2023, Uzbek human rights activist Bakhrom Khamroev was sentenced on charges of organizing Hizb at-Tahrir activities. Over the past 25 years, he has provided legal counseling to immigrants, Muslim refugees, and prepared complaints to the International Court of Human Rights. The court sentenced him to 14 years of imprisonment with the first three years to be served in prison and the rest of the term in a strict regime colony.

39. The source of data on the persecution of members of these organizations is the “Illegal Extremism” project of the SOVA Information and Analytical Center.

Internet

In 2023, several social media projects with Islamophobic content were detected. They do not have a significant political impact, but they create a general alarming background, reinforcing stereotypes and tensions in the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The International Muslim Lawyers Association “IMLA” monitors manifestations of Islamophobia. In July 2023, on its Telegram channel, it reported on the activities of the Islamophobic Telegram channel “Deislamizer” (2,000 subscribers). As of June 2024, its activities have been terminated. At the same time, in July, the association reported on its assistance in the arrest of Said Abu Mustafa, who, according to the organization, for two years had been releasing videos insulting Muslims and the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁰

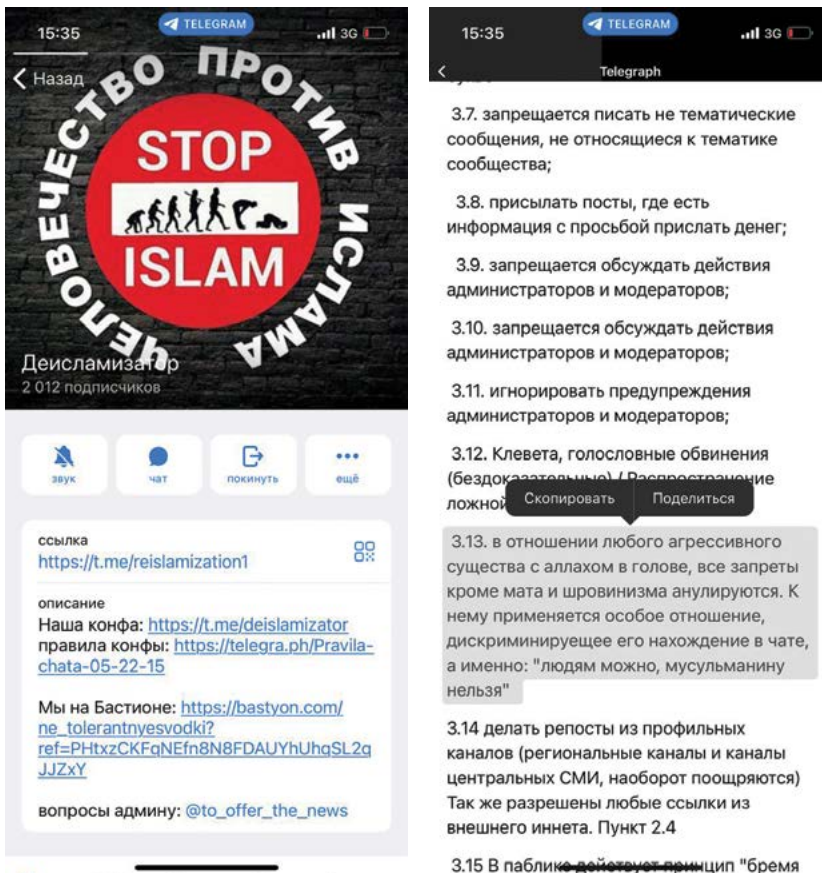


Figure 1: Highlighted section: “3.13. With respect to any aggressive being with Allah in his head, all prohibitions except mat and chauvinism are revoked. He is given special treatment that discriminates against his presence in the chat, namely: ‘people are allowed, Muslims are not allowed.’”

40. While being detained in his rented apartment, Islamophobe Said Abu Mustafa rushed to inform his loved ones about the threat from FSB officers, MAJUM News, 06 July 2023, <https://t.me/islamlawnews/887>

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

The court overturned the decision to recognize as extremist literature one of the translated editions of the *tafsir* collection “Sahih Al-Bukhari” by the famous theologian of the 9th century Al-Bukhari. The appeal was filed by the Council of Muftis of Russia, the head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov, and the translator of the books Elmir Kuliev. Their interests in court were represented by lawyers of the National Association of Lawyers of Russia.⁴¹

On September 27, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation adopted a resolution in which it once again drew attention to the lack of mosques in large cities. “The lack of mosques in cities with millions of inhabitants provokes tension and discontent among both the Muslim population and non-Muslims.” The adopted resolution also notes that, at the request of the heads of centralized religious organizations within the DUM of the Russian Federation in the framework of cooperation with the Federal Service for the Execution of Punishments, it is necessary to develop and approve a model project of a prayer house for places of detention.⁴²

In February, a project for the construction of the Cathedral Mosque in Chelyabinsk was approved, which will be able to accommodate up to 1,000 worshippers.⁴³ It is planned that the mosque will become one of the largest in the Urals. In June, the allocation of land for the construction of a mosque in New Moscow on the territory of the inter-religious center in the settlement of Kommunarka became known.⁴⁴

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The events of 2023, especially the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, stimulated the previously recorded negative trends: the spread of stereotypes about the connection between Islam and radicalism and the homogeneous perception of Muslims as a whole. The discourse of securitization is still in demand and various manifestations of discourses against immigrants and especially against people from the Caucasus, of which Islamophobia is also an element, are being recorded. Lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslim culture, terrorist activities, negative media coverage, and lack of protection of the Muslim community all contribute to the spread of Islamophobia. In order to address this problem, efforts are needed on the part of both

41. “Case of banning a book revered by Muslims sent for review”, RIA Novosti, 19 April 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230419/kniga-1866309281.html>

42. “Shortage of mosques provokes social tension, Russian DUM says”, RIA Novosti, 27 September 2023, <https://ria.ru/20230927/mecheti-1899030597.html>

43. “A large cathedral mosque with a madrasa will be built in Chelyabinsk”, Interfax, 08 February 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/3h9tzhfn>

44. “The first stone for the construction of a mosque in New Moscow will be laid this year”, TASS, 28 June 2023, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18142301>

the state and society at large. Education, outreach, legislative measures, and cooperation with religious organizations are the main mechanisms for overcoming negative attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. Among the recommendations are the following:

- Encourage dialogue between representatives of different religious and ethnic groups. The organization of public forums, conferences, seminars, and youth student organizations will help to create a platform for the exchange of views and ideas and promote mutual understanding. Such events should be open and accessible to everyone, regardless of nationality or religion.
- Counter the spread of negative stereotypes and prejudices about Islam and Muslims. It is important to conduct information campaigns that will be aimed at combating Islamophobia and planting correct ideas about Islam in the minds of members of society. The media and social media should also accept responsibility and refrain from inciting hatred and spreading negative stereotypes.
- Increasing penalties for manifestations of religious hatred and discrimination on the basis of religion. Moreover, the implementation of legislation should guarantee the protection of Muslims' rights and provide them with the opportunity to seek legal assistance in case of Islamophobia.
- Intensify cooperation between the state and non-profit organizations on the issues of education and combating Islamophobia.

Chronology

- **February 2023:** Police raids on mosques in Yekaterinburg
- **April 2023:** Protests against the construction of a new mosque in southeast Moscow
- **May 2023:** Uzbek human rights activist Bakhrom Khamroev is sentenced on charges of organizing the activities of Hizb at-Tahrir.
- **4 May 2023:** The playwright and director of the play “Finist the Bright Falcon” about women who join ISIS as brides were detained; the materials of the examination noted the danger of spreading the “destructive subculture of Russian terrorist neophyte wives.”
- **19 May 2023:** Burning of the Koran in Volgograd by Nikita Zhuravel
- **7 July 2023:** Police raid on a mosque in Kotelniki (Moscow suburb)
- **16 August 2023:** Video of Nikita Zhuravel, who burnt a Koran, being beaten by Adam Kadyrov, son of the head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov.
- **1 September 2023:** Conflict in the subway over a woman wearing a niqab
- **September 2023:** A court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced six participants in the case of a “prison jamaat” in Kalmykia.
- **29 October 2023:** Anti-Semitic riots at Makhachkala airport (Dagestan) amid a provocation about allegedly organized accommodation facilities for Israeli refugees.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
SERBIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Executive Summary

The 2023 Freedom House report on Serbia highlights significant challenges regarding political freedoms and corruption, portraying a national environment fraught with authoritarian tendencies and eroded democratic principles. This report categorizes Serbia as “partly free,” underscoring ongoing concerns about the integrity of political processes and the rule of law. Key issues identified include the pervasive influence of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), led by President Aleksandar Vučić, and alleged connections between key political figures and organized crime, which cast shadows over the political landscape.

In 2023, several specific Islamophobic incidents underscored the tense environment for Muslim communities in Serbia. One of the most alarming events occurred on May 21, when Ervin Ćelahmetović, a Bosniak from Priboj, was beaten to death by a member of the Serbian police. This tragic event sparked concerns about violence and discrimination within law enforcement. Additionally, on November 14, Mišel Krstović stormed into the Bajrakli Mosque in Belgrade during evening prayers, shouting that all Muslims should be killed and threatening the mosque’s secretary with a scalpel. This hate-fueled attack highlighted the increasing verbal and physical threats faced by the Muslim community. Furthermore, the Serbian media, especially tabloids close to the government, frequently promoted Islamophobic narratives, dehumanizing Muslims and glorifying war criminals, such as General Ratko Mladić, through murals and public praise. These incidents reflected broader societal challenges in addressing hate speech, extremism, and violence toward Muslims.

The region of Sandžak, where a majority of the population are Bosniak Muslims, remains one of the least developed areas in Serbia. The lack of infrastructure investment in Sandžak highlights ongoing disparities in economic development, which are exacerbated by ethnic and religious divisions within Serbian society. These factors collectively undermine efforts towards social cohesion and equitable development.

These dynamics reflect a broader pattern of autocratic governance, where political power is centralized, and opposition and media freedoms are suppressed, limiting the scope for democratic engagement and accountability in Serbia.

The lack of observance of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15, 2023, by the government and political parties further highlights the reluctance within Serbia’s political and social landscape to actively address the issue. This atmosphere has perpetuated Islamophobia, contributing to ongoing social divisions and impeding efforts toward reconciliation and social cohesion.

Izvršni rezime

Izvještaj Freedom House-a za 2023. godinu o Srbiji ističe značajne izazove u vezi sa političkim slobodama i korupcijom, prikazujući nacionalno okruženje opterećeno autoritarnim tendencijama i erozijom demokratskih principa. Ovaj izvještaj kategorizira Srbiju kao djelomično slobodnu, naglašavajući stalnu zabrinutost u vezi s integritetom političkih procesa i vladavinom prava. Ključni problemi uključuju sveprisutni uticaj vladajuće Srpske napredne stranke (SNS), koju vodi predsjednik Aleksandar Vučić, i navodne veze između ključnih političkih figura i organiziranog kriminala, što baca sjenku na politički pejzaž.

Tokom 2023. godine, nekoliko specifičnih islamofobičnih incidenata naglasilo je napeto okruženje za muslimanske zajednice u Srbiji. Jedan od najupečatljivijih događaja desio se 21. maja, kada je Ervin Ćelahmetović, Bošnjak iz Priboja, pretučen na smrt od strane pripadnika srbijanske policije. Ovaj tragičan događaj izazvao je zabrinutost zbog nasilja i diskriminacije unutar organa za provođenje zakona. Dodatno, 14. novembra Mišel Krstović je upao u Bajrakli džamiju u Beogradu tokom večernje molitve, vičući da sve muslimane treba ubiti i prijeteći sekretaru džamije skalpelom. Ovaj napad vođen mržnjom istakao je rastuće verbalne i fizičke prijetnje s kojima se suočava muslimanska zajednica. Štaviše, srbijanski mediji, posebno tabloidi bliski vlasti, često su promovirali islamofobične narative, dehumanizirajući muslimane i veličajući ratne zločince poput generala Ratka Mladića, kroz murale i javne pohvale. Ovi incidenti su odraz šireg društvenog izazova u borbi protiv govora mržnje, ekstremizma i nasilja prema muslimanima.

Pored toga, regija Sandžak, u kojoj većinu stanovništva čine Bošnjaci muslimani, ostaje jedno od najmanje razvijenih područja u Srbiji. Nedostatak ulaganja u infrastrukturu u Sandžaku ističe kontinuirane nejednakosti u ekonomskom razvoju, koje su dodatno pogoršane etničkim i vjerskim podjelama unutar srbijanskog društva. Ovi faktori kolektivno podrivaju napore ka socijalnoj koheziji i ravnomjernom razvoju.

Ove dinamike odražavaju širi obrazac autokratske vladavine, gdje je politička moć centralizirana, a slobode opozicije i medija potisnute, ograničavajući prostor za demokratski angažman i odgovornost u Srbiji.

Nedostatak obilježavanja Međunarodnog dana borbe protiv islamofobije 15. marta 2023. godine od strane vlade i političkih stranaka dodatno naglašava nevoljkost unutar političkog i društvenog pejzaža Srbije da se aktivno bavi ovim problemom. Ova atmosfera je perpetuirala islamofobiju, doprinoseći stalnim društvenim podjelama i otežavajući napore ka pomirenju i socijalnoj koheziji.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Republic of Serbia

Type of Regime: Democratic republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary republic

Ruling Parties: The Serbian Progressive Party (populist, right-wing party)

Opposition Parties: Democratic Party, Party of Freedom and Justice, People's Party, Serbian Movement "Dveri", Social Democratic Party, Do not let Belgrade down (all of these parties boycotted the last parliamentary and local elections, Serbia Against Violence, Socialist Party of Serbia, United Serbia, Greens Serbia, National Democratic Alternative, We-Voice from the People

Last Elections: Parliamentary elections were held in Serbia on December 17, 2023 to elect members of the National Assembly. The Serbian Progressive Party won 48.06%, 129 seats; Serbia Against Violence won 24.32%, 65 seats; Socialist Party of Serbia, United Serbia, and Greens Serbia won 6.73%, 18 seats; National Democratic Alternative won 5.16%, 13 seats; We-Voice from the People won 4.82%, 13 seats.

Of the minority electoral lists, the electoral list Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians - Bálint Pásztor won 1.74%, 6 seats; Bosniak Party of Justice and Reconciliation (SPP) and the Democratic Alliance of Croats in Vojvodina 0.78%, 2 seats; the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action won 0.59%, 2 seats; the Albanian Coalition of Preševo Valley won 0.36%, 1 seat; and the Russian Party and the New Communist Party of Yugoslavia won 0.31%, 1 seat.

Total Population: 6.65 million (2022 census)

Major Languages: Serbian

Official Religion: No state religion. The dominant Serbian Orthodox Church and other "traditional" religious communities (Roman Catholic Church, Slovak Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Evangelical Christian Church, Islamic community, and Jewish community) receive preferential status based on the "Law on Churches and Religious Communities" adopted in 2006.

Statistics on Islamophobia: N/A

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Orthodox Christianity (84.59%), Catholicism (4.97%), Islam (3.10%), Protestantism (0.99%), No religion (1.11%), Others (5.24%)

Muslim Population (% of Population): Muslims are the second-largest religious group after Christians in Serbia, according to the 2022 census. A total of 278,212 people, representing 4.2% of the population, identified themselves as Muslims.

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Islamic Community in Serbia, Islamic Community of Serbia

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: There is no particular NGO that deals with Islamophobia. Data is collected and work is conducted by individuals.

Far-Right Parties: Serbian Radical Party (Srpska radikalna stranka), Serbian Movement “Dveri” (Srpskipokret “Dveri”), Serbian Right (Srpska desdesnica), Serbian Patriotic Alliance (Srpski patriotski savez), Healthy Serbia (Zdrava Srbija)

Far-Right Movements: National Avant-garde (Nacionalna avangarda), Serbian Right (Srpska desnica), Serbian Action (Srpska akcija), Otadžbinski pokret Obraz, Srpski sabor “Zavetnici”, Serbian People’s Movement “Naši” (Srpski narodni pokret “Naći”), Leviathan Movement (Pokret Levijatan), Serbian People’s Movement “1389” (Srpski narodni pokret “1389”), National Serbian Front (Nacionalni srpski front), Organization “Alternative” (Organizacija “Alternativa”)

Far-Right Militant Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No (depends on local decision)
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Prayer Ban:** No

Introduction

The 2023 *European Islamophobia Report* on Serbia highlights significant challenges related to political freedoms, media independence, and the treatment of Muslim communities. The national environment is characterized by authoritarian tendencies and eroded democratic principles, as underscored by the 2023 Freedom House report, which categorizes Serbia as “partly free.”¹ The pervasive influence of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) under President Aleksandar Vučić has led to a devastating decline in democracy since 2012, with concerns about the integrity of political processes and the rule of law.

Media freedoms are severely restricted, with independent journalism under constant threat, further entrenching the SNS’s dominance. This suppression of media freedom limits the public’s access to unbiased information and stifles dissenting voices, undermining democratic engagement.

Muslims in Serbia face significant struggles for fair representation and equitable treatment. The political marginalization of Muslim communities, coupled with economic and social disparities, particularly in regions like Sandžak, highlights the deep-seated ethnic and religious divisions within Serbian society. These challenges are compounded by the lack of infrastructure investment and economic development in predominantly Muslim areas, exacerbating existing inequalities.

The political landscape in Serbia is marred by the rise of nationalist rhetoric and far-right movements, which target Muslims and other minorities as scapegoats for broader societal issues. Hate speech and xenophobic propaganda are frequently disseminated by political leaders and media outlets, normalizing anti-Muslim sentiments. The lack of robust legal mechanisms to address hate crimes and discrimination leaves Muslim communities vulnerable and without recourse.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and heightened tensions within Serbian society. Muslim communities, already marginalized, have faced additional hardships due to inadequate governmental support and discriminatory practices in the distribution of aid and resources. This has led to increased feelings of alienation and mistrust towards the state among Muslims in Serbia.

Overall, the report paints a troubling picture of Serbia as a nation where authoritarian governance, nationalism, and Islamophobia intersect, posing significant threats to democratic principles and social cohesion.

1. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2023>

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The incidents documented in Serbia throughout 2023 reflect a pattern of both physical and verbal attacks against Muslims, indicating deep-seated ethnic and religious tensions. The most severe cases involve fatal violence by law enforcement and public demonstrations of hatred, such as the disruption of religious practices and verbal threats in public spaces. These incidents highlight the need for comprehensive measures to address Islamophobia, protect minority communities, and ensure accountability for discriminatory actions. The escalation of such events calls for immediate intervention by both governmental and non-governmental organizations to promote tolerance and safeguard the rights of all citizens.

On May 21, Ervin Čelahmetović, a Bosniak from Priboj, was beaten to death by Igor Avramović, a member of the special police unit in Belgrade. The incident occurred in a local establishment where a confrontation escalated into a fatal assault. Security footage captured the event, and Avramović was identified as the assailant. This incident highlights tensions and potential abuse of power by law enforcement members, sparking concerns about violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities.²

On November 14, an alarming incident unfolded in Belgrade at the Bajrakli Mosque during evening prayers. Mišel Krstović, a 48-year-old man, stormed into the mosque's courtyard, shouting that all Muslims should be killed and hurling profanities. He then threatened the mosque's secretary with a scalpel, spreading fear and distress. Krstović's actions led to his arrest by the Belgrade police on charges of inciting racial, national, and religious hatred and intolerance.³

On December 19, during a live report by a Bosnian-Herzegovinian Radio Television (BHRT) journalist in Belgrade, a man entered the frame and shouted "Ratko Mladić," the name of a convicted war criminal responsible for genocide and crimes against Bosniaks. This incident occurred during a protest organized by the opposition list "Serbia Against Violence over alleged election fraud. The man's choice of words, aimed at a Bosnian journalist, underscores a significant expression of Islamophobia and nationalism. Ratko Mladić, a figure celebrated by far-right nationalists, symbolizes Serbian dominance and anti-Muslim sentiment, making his invocation particularly offensive to Bosniaks. The man's actions reflect the broader issue of glorifying war criminals in Serbian society, perpetuating ethnic tensions and intolerance towards Muslims.⁴

2. See: <https://sandzakpress.net/nasmrt-pretuce-bosnjak-u-priboju-ubio-ga-policajac/>

3. See: <https://ttpress.rs/2023/11/14/beograd-usao-u-dvoriste-bajrakli-dzamije-vicuci-kako-sve-muslimane-treba-pobiti-psovao-im-majku-i-pretio-sekretaru-dzamije-skalpelom/>

4. See: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/svijet/novinarka-bhrt-a-izvjestavala-iz-beograda-muskarac-usao-u-kadar-i-povikao-ratko-mladic/231219121>

Employment

Although mostly undocumented, there are ongoing issues of employment discrimination faced by Bosniaks and other Muslim communities in Serbia. For example, in 2022, the Bosniak National Council (Bošnjačko nacionalno vijeće) filed a complaint regarding discrimination after none of the Bosniak applicants succeeded in the firefighter recruitment process.⁵ The pattern of exclusion in public service jobs is part of a broader context of systemic discrimination that affects various aspects of employment for these communities.

The economic disparities are starkly evident in regions with significant Bosniak populations, such as Novi Pazar, which consistently ranks at the bottom of the list in terms of average salaries across Serbia. According to recent reports, Novi Pazar has some of the lowest average wages in the country, exacerbating economic and social inequalities. The lack of infrastructure investment and economic development in these predominantly Muslim areas further compounds the issue, limiting opportunities for upward mobility and reinforcing existing disparities.⁶

This economic marginalization is reflected in the broader context of employment discrimination, where Muslims often face barriers to securing jobs, fair wages, and career advancement. The combination of systemic bias in hiring practices and the economic neglect of regions like Sandžak perpetuates a cycle of poverty and exclusion, undermining efforts towards social cohesion and equitable development. Addressing these issues requires targeted economic policies and inclusive hiring practices to ensure that all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, have equal opportunities for employment and economic prosperity.

Education

In 2023, a series of events and initiatives in Serbia highlighted how historical narratives from the wars of the 1990s continue to fuel Islamophobic sentiment. These instances reflect a troubling trend of glorifying war criminals and revising history to perpetuate anti-Muslim narratives, which are instrumental for far-right nationalists in Serbia.

On April 20, a convicted war criminal for crimes against humanity perpetrated against Albanians in Kosovo spoke to elementary school students in Novi Sad via video link from prison. (Fig. 2) The public class and forum, titled “Košare, Stories of Heroes,” honored the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Košare during the Kosovo War in 1999.⁷ This event, attended by many citizens, emphasized the importance of remembering and celebrating these soldiers, with the lesson being included in the his-

5. <https://nova.rs/emisije/diskriminacija-pri-zaposljavanju-o-nacionalnom-kljucu-medju-vatrogascima-u-novom-pazaru/>

6. <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/ekonomija/novi-pazar-na-zacelju-liste-po-visini-prosecnih-zarada/>

7. See: <https://vojvodinauzivo.rs/javni-cas-u-kacu-kosare-price-heroja/>

tory curriculum for eighth-grade students. Such initiatives embed a narrative of Serbian heroism and victimization into the educational system, fostering a skewed perception of historical events that excludes the atrocities committed against Muslims.



Figure 1: A convicted war criminal for crimes against humanity perpetrated against Albanians in Kosovo spoke to elementary school students in Novi Sad in a public history lesson via video link from prison. **Source:** vojvodinauzivo.rs

The following day, a panel in Belgrade titled “Was Sarajevo a Besieged and Blocked City?” was organized by the Representation of the Republika Srpska in Serbia.⁸ (Fig. 3) The panel made claims that the siege of Sarajevo was merely a defense of the Serbs of Sarajevo against the Muslims. This revisionist narrative downplays the suffering of the Bosniak Muslim population during the siege and attempts to rewrite the history of the Bosnian War in favor of the Serbian perspective. This perpetuates a narrative of Muslim aggressors and Serbian defenders, which is instrumental in maintaining Islamophobic sentiments.



Figure 2: In Belgrade, a panel entitled “Was Sarajevo a Besieged and Blocked City?” was organized by the Representation of the Republika Srpska in Serbia, where claims were made that the siege of Sarajevo was only a defense of the Serbs of Sarajevo against the Muslims. **Source:** predstavnistvorsk.rs

8. See: <https://predstavnistvorsk.rs/sr-Latn/prethodni-dogadjaji-sr-latn/cicovic-istorijska-obaveza-razobliciti-sve-lazi-o-ratu-u-bih/>

In July, two Serbian students from the University of Sarajevo who were suspended for glorifying the convicted war criminal General Ratko Mladić were awarded scholarships and continued their studies in Belgrade.⁹ (Fig. 4) This decision was personally supported by the ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Serbia (ethnic Serb), who thanked the director of the Serbian Security Information Agency for his support.¹⁰ This act of rewarding students for glorifying a war criminal sends a powerful message that such views are not only acceptable but commendable. It reinforces the glorification of individuals responsible for genocide and war crimes against Bosniaks, thereby perpetuating a culture of hate and intolerance.



Figure 3: Two Serb students from the University of Sarajevo who were suspended for glorifying the convicted war criminal Mladić were awarded a scholarship and continued their studies in Belgrade. **Source:** klix.ba

The Film Center of Serbia allocated more than 200,000 EUR in August for the production of the film “Linija,” directed by Dragoljub Elčić.¹¹ (Fig. 5) The film glorifies the Siege of Sarajevo, focusing on Dr. Miodrag Lazić, who established a war hospital on the front lines. The project has been criticized for presenting a one-sided historical perspective, portraying Serbs as heroes and victims. Such cultural productions contribute to rewriting the narrative of the Bosnian War, minimizing the atrocities committed against Muslims and reinforcing a narrative of Serbian heroism. This skewed portrayal further fuels Islamophobic sentiments by denying the suffering of the Muslim population and justifying the actions of war criminals.

9. See: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/srbija-studentice-koje-su-velicale-mladica-nagradila-stipendijom-i-nastavkom-studija-u-beogradu/230715039>

10. See: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/4206324/ambasador-bih-u-srbiji-se-podrzao-i-zahvalio-se-vulinu-vranjes-rs-i-srpski-narod-dobro-znaju-sta-je-npravda>

11. See: <https://www.klix.ba/magazin/film-tv/filmski-centar-srbije-dao-vise-od-400-000-km-za-snimanje-filma-koji-glorifikuje-opsadu-sarajeva/230816044>



Figure 4: Director Dragoljub Elčić who was allocated more than 200,000 EUR by the Film Center of Serbia for his film “Linija,” offering a one-sided historical perspective of the Siege of Sarajevo in favor of the Serbs. **Source:** klix.ba

These occurrences are problematic as they embed a distorted historical narrative into the education system, public discourse, and cultural productions. By glorifying war criminals and revising history, far-right nationalists in Serbia perpetuate Islamophobic sentiments and hatred towards Muslims. These narratives serve to reinforce a sense of Serbian victimhood and heroism, while negating the experiences and suffering of the Bosniak and Albanian Muslim population. This ongoing revisionism hinders reconciliation efforts and fosters an environment of intolerance and division, perpetuating the cycle of ethnic and religious hatred in the region.

Politics

In 2023, various political events and statements in Serbia revealed how historical narratives from the Balkan wars are leveraged to foster Islamophobic sentiments and nationalist ideologies. These narratives reinforce ethnic divisions and perpetuate a climate of intolerance towards Muslims, often under the guise of patriotism and defense of Serbian identity.

On January 3, the Minister of Defense of Serbia made the following statement on the Day of the Republika Srpska:

Just as we celebrate together the Day of Serbian Unity, Freedom and the National Flag, so this January 9 we send a message that the years ahead must be a sign of Serbian unification, because in the general crisis the world is facing, only harmony and unity are the guarantors of freedom.¹²

This call for unification extends beyond Serbia’s borders, suggesting an expansionist agenda that inherently involves the exclusion and marginalization of non-Serb populations, particularly Muslims. This statement is deeply problematic for several reasons.

12. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/ministar-odbrane-srbije-povodom-9-januara-naredne-godine-moraju-biti-u-znaku-srpskog-ujedinjenja/230103107>. Emphasis by author.



Figure 5: Minister of Defense in the Operational Center of the Serbian Defense System. **Source:** Foto: MO Srbije

First, it is particularly problematic that such a statement comes from the Minister of Defense, the individual in charge of the military of a sovereign state. This implies a readiness to use military force to achieve political goals that extend beyond the country's recognized borders. It suggests a militaristic approach to ethnic and territorial disputes, potentially destabilizing the region and threatening the sovereignty of neighboring countries.

Second, it invokes the concept of "Greater Serbia," a nationalist ideology that envisions the unification of all Serb-populated territories into a single state. This ideology was a significant driver of the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, leading to widespread ethnic cleansing and atrocities, particularly against Muslim populations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. By referencing this concept, the Minister of Defense is tapping into a dangerous and divisive historical narrative that has caused immense suffering and loss in the region.

Third, such statements reinforce the far-right narrative that Serbs are under threat and need to assert their dominance to ensure their survival. This narrative perpetuates a siege mentality, where any action taken against perceived enemies, particularly Muslims, is justified as a defense of Serbian identity and territory. This mentality is dangerous as it legitimizes violence and discrimination against non-Serbs and undermines efforts towards reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in the region.

In April, the President of Republika Srpska declared the following from Belgrade on the occasion of the presentation of the capabilities of the Serbian Armed Forces "Granit 2023":



Figure 6: President of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik, Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán, and President of Serbia Aleksandar Vučić. **Source:** Granit 2023, Foto: RTRS

Every time we come here, we see how much change there is - a change towards better capacity, equipment, training and everything that is important in order for Serbia, its territory, our people, wherever they are, to defend themselves successfully and deter any attack by those who would potentially want it.¹³

This declaration undermines the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggesting that Serbian military forces might intervene in another sovereign state under the guise of protecting ethnic Serbs. Such rhetoric destabilizes the region by raising the specter of military intervention and undermining international borders. The statement, also, perpetuates a narrative of ethnic division and conflict. By framing the situation as one where Serbian people need defense, it implicitly casts other ethnic groups, particularly Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), as potential aggressors or threats. This kind of rhetoric has historically been used to justify acts of aggression and ethnic cleansing, as it paints one group as under threat and in need of protection against another group. The use of “defense” in this context is particularly insidious because it frames potential military aggression as a necessary and protective measure. This narrative has been a cornerstone of nationalist rhetoric in the Balkans, where historical grievances are invoked to justify present-day hostility and violence. By suggesting that Serbian forces might need to intervene to protect Serbs, the statement ech-

13. <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=510517>. Emphasis by author.

oes past justifications for violent actions against Muslim communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, such declarations can have a chilling effect on inter-ethnic relations within Bosnia and Herzegovina. They send a message to the Muslim population that their safety and sovereignty are not respected and that they could be subject to external military intervention. This exacerbates tensions and undermines efforts at reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in the region.

At a commemoration for the victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp on April 23, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić made a provocative statement:

“When a Serb gets fed up, there’s no going back.”¹⁴

The statement leverages deep-seated historical grievances to rally nationalist sentiment. The mention of Jasenovac, a site of horrific atrocities during World War II where many Serbs, Jews, and Roma were killed, evokes a powerful emotional response. By invoking this painful past, Vučić taps into collective memories of victimhood and persecution, positioning Serbs as perpetually under threat. The phrase suggests an inevitable and justified reaction to ongoing grievances. This framing implies that any future aggression or conflict is a necessary and unavoidable response to continuous provocations or injustices. Such rhetoric is dangerous as it normalizes the idea of retaliation and conflict, presenting it as a legitimate and even noble course of action. In the context of regional relations, this statement can be interpreted as a veiled threat to neighboring countries with significant Muslim populations, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, as it reinforces a narrative where Serbs must defend themselves against external threats, often coded as Muslim or Albanian, thereby perpetuating ethnic and religious divisions.

The political climate further escalated on May 29 when President Vučić urged Serbs in Kosovo to avoid conflicts with NATO, but warned that any action by the “Albanian occupier” would be met with a different response.¹⁵ This language demonizes Albanians and, by extension, Muslims, framing them as occupiers (thus they are not autochthonous to Kosovo as such) and enemies. Such statements not only perpetuate ethnic hatred but also justify potential violence against these communities.

On July 7, 2023, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán made the following statement:

Thank you to President Vučić for his cooperation and what he is doing for Europe. Without Serbia and Hungary, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands would have hundreds of thousands more migrants than they do now!¹⁶

14. https://www.b92.net/o/vesti/vesti?nav_id=2322311

15. <https://n1info.ba/regija/vucic-ne-ulazite-u-sukob-sa-nato-om-ali-ako-zapuca-albanski-okupator/>

16. <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/809536/hvala-predsedniku-vucicu-orban-porucio-bez-srbije-i-madarske-evropa-bi-imala-stotine-hiljada-migranata-vise>

This sentiment was echoed the following day in an article titled “Serbia Saved the EU from the Invasion of Immigrants! Viktor Orbán Recognized Our Country at the Summit in Vienna”, published in “Informer” - a popular tabloid newspaper in Serbia, known for its sensationalist and often provocative reporting.¹⁷

These statements are deeply problematic and Islamophobic for several reasons. First, they frame immigrants, many of whom are Muslim, as a threat or “invasion” to Europe. This language dehumanizes immigrants and perpetuates the stereotype that they are dangerous and undesirable, reinforcing negative perceptions and fear. By praising Serbia and Hungary for preventing these immigrants from entering Europe, Orbán and the article suggest that keeping Muslims out is a positive achievement. This validates xenophobic and Islamophobic policies and encourages other countries to adopt similarly exclusionary and discriminatory measures.

Furthermore, the notion of “saving” Europe from an “invasion” implies that Muslim immigrants are an existential threat to European identity and security. This rhetoric taps into long-standing Islamophobic tropes that depict Muslims as incompatible with Western values and civilization. It fosters an “us versus them” mentality, which is detrimental to social cohesion and integration efforts. These statements also reflect broader nationalist and far-right ideologies that prioritize ethnic and cultural homogeneity over diversity and multiculturalism. They align with a political agenda that seeks to exclude and marginalize non-Christian, non-European populations, thereby perpetuating systemic discrimination and prejudice against Muslims.

The controversial session of the Serbian National Assembly on July 11, where Jelena Jerinić was booed for acknowledging the genocide in Srebrenica, highlights the deep-rooted denial of historical atrocities against Muslims. The aggressive opposition to her remarks by ruling party members reflects the unwillingness to confront the past and acknowledge the suffering of the Bosniak Muslim population. This denial and hostility towards those who recognize the genocide underscore the persistent Islamophobia in Serbian political discourse.¹⁸

A couple of days later, the fact that President Vučić tried indirectly to justify denial of the genocide by referencing the crimes of the Handžar Division during the Independent State of Croatia further entrenches this sentiment. By shifting the blame and drawing false equivalencies, such statements perpetuate a narrative that diminishes the atrocities committed against Muslims and fuels ethnic hatred.¹⁹ It is worth noting that the director of the memorial center in Srebrenica, prior to July 11

17. <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/809662/priznanje-srbija-migranti>

18. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/predstavnica-opozicione-stranke-u-skupstini-srbije-izvzdana-jer-je-govorila-o-genocidu-u-srebrenici/230711156>

19. <https://sandzacke.rs/vijesti/srbija/vucic-odgovorio-becirovicu-na-govor-iz-srebrenice-ne-radim-na-velikosrpskom-projektu/>

had issued an apology for the atrocities committed by the Handžar Division during World War II.²⁰

On October 27, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić addressed incidents involving illegal migrants in Horgoš and Kanjiža, stating he is ready to deploy the military within 24 hours if necessary. He emphasized that local authorities must act decisively or step aside, as Serbia will not allow its territory to be used for criminal activities and violent conflicts among immigrants.

Vučić frames migrants as a significant security threat, justifying extreme measures. This approach militarizes a humanitarian issue, fostering fear and hostility towards migrants, many of whom are fleeing conflict and persecution. Vučić's language, also, suggests that migrants are primarily responsible for criminal activities and violent conflicts. This blanket criminalization reinforces negative stereotypes about migrants, particularly Muslims, and promotes xenophobia. Moreover, by emphasizing the need for local authorities to act decisively or step aside, Vučić empowers local actors to take potentially harsh measures against immigrants which can lead to increased local hostility and violence against these communities, further endangering vulnerable populations.²¹

The following day, referring to the exchange of fire involving immigrants in Subotica, Serbian Minister of Internal Affairs Bratislav Gašić (Fig. 8) declared,

“Subotica, as of tonight, is a forgotten city for immigrants.”²²

Gašić effectively criminalizes and dehumanizes all immigrants, suggesting that they are unwanted and unworthy of consideration. This blanket characterization ignores the diverse reasons for immigration, including escaping war and persecution. Gašić's statement implies that immigrants should be excluded and marginalized, fostering a hostile environment, and encouraging policies and attitudes that further isolate and discriminate against immigrant communities, particularly those who are Muslim.

The incident involved an exchange of fire, which Gašić used to generalize all migrants as violent and dangerous. Given that many immigrants in Serbia are Muslim, this rhetoric reinforces harmful stereotypes about Muslims being prone to violence, fueling Islamophobia. Such statements undermine efforts to integrate migrants into local communities, fostering division and hostility, and signal to local populations that it is acceptable to view migrants as threats, rather than as individuals deserving of empathy and support.

20. See: <https://radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/bosna-i-hercegovina/emir-suljagic-iz-srebrenice-uputio-izvinjenje-jevrejima-za-zlocine-koje-je-pocinila-handzar-divizija/503987>

21. <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/841299/aleksandar-vucic-vojska-horgos-migranti>

22. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/bratislav-gasic-porucio-da-ce-pripadnici-mup-a-uciniti-sve-da-svaki-gradanin-bude/j8545bp#:~:text=Ministar%20unutra%C5%A1njih%20poslova%20Bratislav%20Ga%C5%A1i%C4%87%20poru%C4%8Dio%20je%20da,da%20svaki%20gra%C4%91anin%20Republike%20Srbije%20bude%20maksimalno%20bezbedan.>

According to available information, the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, observed on March 15, was not officially commemorated by the Serbian government in 2023, nor were there notable initiatives from political parties or civil society organizations in relation to this date. A review of media reports, official statements, and social media presence for 2023 reveals a lack of significant activities marking this day. This absence may reflect a broader reluctance within the political and social landscape in Serbia to actively address the issue of Islamophobia, despite increasing reports of negative narratives targeting the Muslim community.

Media

In 2023, a number of incidents highlighted the role of Serbian media in perpetuating Islamophobic sentiments and reinforcing far-right narratives. These occurrences reveal a troubling pattern where historical grievances, xenophobia, and nationalist ideologies are used to marginalize and demonize Muslim communities.

On February 12, Croatian pop singer Severina Vučković's concert at the Kopaonik Music Week festival was canceled due to negative public reaction to her past affirmative statements about the genocide in Srebrenica and criticism of Patriarch Porfirije.²³ Thus, the festival organizers effectively silenced a dissenting voice that challenged the dominant nationalist narrative. This suppression of alternative perspectives fosters an environment where only certain viewpoints are allowed, stifling critical discussion, and perpetuating a one-sided historical narrative.

On March 28, during a match against Montenegro, Serbian fans raised a banner addressed to the Montenegrin president, quoting an Islamophobic poem from the 19th-century by Prince-Bishop Petar II Petrović-Njegoš.²⁴ The banner read, "We are a tough walnut, a strange fruit. You can't make us hate our brother! You tried, you broke your teeth." The poem contains Islamophobic themes and reflects historical animosities between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the Balkans. By quoting this poem, the fans are invoking a narrative that glorifies resistance against Muslims and frames them as eternal enemies. This historical context perpetuates longstanding prejudices and animosities.

Lack of media coverage for a certain topic can also be an indicator of an Islamophobic narrative; for instance, the lack of significant media and political reaction in Serbia to the final verdict by the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT), which found Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović guilty of being part of a joint criminal enterprise.²⁵ This verdict is historic as it's the first to convict Serbian officials for war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Despite this, Serbian leadership

23. <https://www.alo.rs/vip/estrada/724813/severina-incidenti-koncert-otkazani-koncert/vest>

24. <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/545177/crna-gora-srbija-utakmica-tribina>

25. See: <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/haska-presuda-za-uzp-stanisicu-i-simatovicu-u-srbiji-gotovo-izignorisana/230601051>

and major media largely ignored the ruling, reflecting an attempt to shield the public from the uncomfortable truth of Serbia's involvement in the War in Bosnia. The absence of coverage of such a significant verdict implies a deliberate attempt to censor and make a taboo of the topic. By not addressing the conviction of Serbian officials for war crimes, the media and political leaders are avoiding a necessary confrontation with historical truths and preventing a broader public understanding of Serbia's role in the atrocities committed against Bosniak Muslims. Ignoring the verdict perpetuates a culture of denial and historical revisionism. It allows the false narrative that Serbs were solely victims during the conflicts in the Balkans to persist, thereby minimizing the suffering of Bosniak Muslims and other communities that were targeted. This denial is a form of Islamophobia, as it erases the experiences and victimization of Muslim communities during the war.



Figure 7: Analyst Nebojša Krstić and actor Nikola Kojo holding a sign that says "Major Omer Mehic."



Figure 8: "A SHARPSHOOTER FROM SARAJEVO ADVISES HATERS TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE! A Muslim Extremist Calls for Violence in Belgrade!"

On June 1, an analyst commenting on civil protests in Serbia stated that a Serbian actor was a Satanist because of a banner dedicated to Omer Mehić, a deceased major of the Serbian Air Force who was a Bosniak Muslim from Novi Pazar.²⁶ (Fig. 10) Such comments undermine efforts to integrate and respect the contributions of all ethnic and religious groups in Serbia. It sends a message that Muslim individuals, regardless of their service or sacrifice, are not to be honored or respected in the same way as their non-Muslim counterparts.

On June 11, a Serbian tabloid headline referred to an actor from Bosnia and Herzegovina as “A SHARPSHOOTER FROM SARAJEVO ADVISES HATERS TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE! A Muslim extremist calls for violence in Belgrade!”²⁷ (Fig. 11) Labeling the actor as a “sharpshooter” and a “Muslim extremist” is a deliberate attempt to discredit and demonize him based on his ethnic and religious background. By calling him a “Muslim extremist,” the tabloid reinforces harmful stereotypes that associate Islam with violence and extremism. This incitement of fear perpetuates the narrative that Muslims are inherently dangerous and a threat to public safety. The headline serves to manipulate public opinion by framing a Muslim as an aggressor, diverting attention from legitimate issues and reinforcing the power structures that benefit from maintaining Islamophobic sentiments.

On June 20, during an interview on a talk show close to the Serbian regime, Goran Petronijević, who was the lawyer that defended the war criminal Radovan Karadžić, admitted and tried to justify the concealment of evidence for war crimes committed by Serbs in Kosovo.²⁸ Petronijević normalized and trivialized the war crimes committed against Muslim communities in Kosovo, while justifying the concealment of evidence, thus contributing to a broader agenda of denial and historical revisionism. Petronijević distorted the reality of the war crimes committed and attempted to rewrite history in a way that absolves the perpetrators, thus undermining the experiences and suffering of the victims, primarily Muslims. The interview reinforces negative stereotypes about Muslims by implicitly suggesting that the crimes committed against them are not significant enough to warrant full accountability. This diminishes the severity of the violence and discrimination faced by Muslim communities during the conflict. The interview’s context within a regime-friendly media environment indicates a political manipulation of historical narratives, and suggests an attempt to align public opinion with nationalist ideologies that prioritize Serbian victimhood and heroism while ignoring or downplaying the suffering of Muslim populations.

26. <https://www.klix.ba/magazin/showbiz/srbijanski-analiticar-naveo-da-je-kojo-sotonista-zbog-transparenta-posvecenog-omeru-mehicu/230601111>

27. <https://informer.rs/vesti/politika/801932/muslimanski-ekstremista-poziva-na-nasilje-u-beogradu#:~:text=Fe%C4%91a%20%C5%A0tukan%2C%20snajperista%20u%20Sarajevu%20iz%20Armije%20BiH%2C,%C5%A1ta%20uraditi%20kada%20se%20ti%20uslovi%20ne%20ispo%C5%A1tuju%3F>

28. <https://youtu.be/vyW8nL9lMJw?si=qRPU1CpK7Ki8ptx4&ct=1361>



Figure 9: Media headlines in Serbia on the occasion of the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica.

On July 11, the state radio and television service in Serbia (Radio Television of Serbia) referred to the genocide in Srebrenica as “Srebrenica events” in its reporting,²⁹ thus downplaying the severity and systematic nature of the atrocities committed against Bosniak Muslims. Such terminology reflects an attempt to rewrite history by avoiding the term “genocide,” which has significant legal and moral implications.

The following day, general media coverage in Serbia on the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide included headlines that denied the genocide and victimized the perpetrators.³⁰ Examples of such headlines were “At the Place of Graves They Threaten the Serbs with a New War,” “War Flags on the March of Peace” (referring to the first flag of independent Bosnia and Herzegovina), and “Genocide Is What Happened in Jasenovac! Is There Anything Like that in Srebrenica? No!” (Fig. 12) Comparing Srebrenica to Jasenovac in a way that diminishes the former’s significance is a deliberate attempt to relativize the genocide. Jasenovac was a horrific genocide against Serbs, Jews, and Roma, but using it to negate the genocide in Srebrenica undermines the unique and profound suffering of the Bosniak Muslim community. The aforementioned headlines use inflammatory language to incite fear and perpetuate ethnic divisions. This rhetoric is designed to provoke a defensive and hostile response, making reconciliation and peace-building efforts more difficult.

29. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/regija/izvjestavanje-javnog-servisa-u-srbiji-o-genocidu-u-srebrenici-28-godina-od-srebrenickih-desavanja/230711146>

30. <https://www.klix.ba/vijesti/bih/gruhonjic-logicno-je-da-mediji-u-drzavi-sa-najvise-ratnih-zlocinaca-negiraju-i-ignorisu-genocid/230712061>



Figure 10: Headline image for the article “INCUBATOR OF THREAT TO EUROPE: Who Are the ‘BALKAN LIONS’, The Main Jihadist Cell in the Balkans: Organized a Bloody Feast in Vienna, Prepared an Attack on Election Day in Kosovo?” The combination of these two scenes in a single image may be used to reinforce the article’s narrative about the threat posed by terrorist groups in the Balkans, with the emergency vehicles in the background symbolizing the aftermath of attacks and the armed militants in the foreground representing the perpetrators. The juxtaposition of the two emphasizes the connection between terrorism and the ongoing security threats discussed in the article.

Source: Foto: Profimedia, EPA / Ringier

On September 18, an article on Blic.rs³¹ discussed the issue of immigrants in Serbia, particularly focusing on how most immigrants enter Serbia illegally through Kosovo, a region with a significant Muslim population. Security expert Gordana Mišev highlighted Kosovo as a critical entry point for illegal immigrants, emphasizing the challenges faced by Serbian police in managing and identifying them. The article implicitly associates Muslims with illegal activity and security threats.

On October 23, an article titled “INCUBATOR OF THREAT TO EUROPE: Who Are the ‘BALKAN LIONS’, The Main Jihadist Cell in the Balkans: Organized a Bloody Feast in Vienna, Prepared an Attack on Election Day in Kosovo?” discussed a report on the “Balkan Lions,” a significant jihadist cell in the Balkans.³² (Fig. 13) This group consists of former ISIS fighters primarily based in Kosovo, with connections in Albania and North Macedonia. The article highlighted concerns about the group’s potential to organize and execute terrorist attacks across Europe, emphasizing the challenges in monitoring and preventing such activities, leveraging existing animosities towards Albanians and Bosniaks to perpetuate a narrative of fear and suspicion. The article reinforces stereotypes that associate these ethnic groups with terrorism and extremism, fueling ethnic and religious prejudice. Furthermore, it articulates the notion that “terrorists are pious” by describing, for example, images of a newborn with the *shaha-*

31. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/strucnjaci-u-jutarnjem-programu-blic-tv-nas-zadatak-je-da-zadrzimo-migrante-na-putu/2kqq70k>

32. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/ko-su-balkanski-lavovi-glavna-celija-dzihadista-na-balkanu/jed1xw6>

dab [the Muslim profession of faith] and a gun, and implying that the terrorists' devotion to the hereafter makes them willing to die for God. This conflation of piety with terrorism suggests that devout Muslims are inherently prone to violence, without distinguishing that piety in Islam does not equate to extremism or terrorism. The article also mentions the "Sandžak" region in Serbia, a term avoided by Serbian nationalists who prefer "Raška." By using "Sandžak," the article appears to intentionally evoke negative associations with the name, further marginalizing the Bosniak cultural heritage linked to the region. The article also targets the Roma population in Belgrade, suggesting that there are Wahhabis among them. This broad-brush approach stigmatizes an entire community based on the actions of a few, reinforcing discriminatory attitudes towards both Roma and Muslim populations. Also, the article mentions Bosnia and Herzegovina out of context, simply to highlight the presence of independent congregations ("paradžemati") with a more literalistic interpretation of Islam. This mention serves to create an unfounded association between Bosnia and Herzegovina and extremist activities, fostering an unjustified fear of the country's Muslim population.

On October 24, an article titled "WE HAVE 4 SECURITY CRITICAL POINTS IN SERBIA" on Blic TV featured a military analyst warning that jihad cells are infiltrating communities in Serbia's larger cities.³³ While the analyst discussed various regions, it can be concluded that the majority of the areas identified as security threats are those where Muslims form a significant portion, or the majority of the population., implying that these areas are breeding grounds for terrorism. The suggestion that jihadist cells are infiltrating Muslim-majority areas reinforces the stereotype that Muslims are inherently linked to terrorism.

On October 30, a Serbian tabloid reported on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly focusing on the majority-Muslim Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), with a headline: "POLICE ON THE SITUATION IN THE FBiH: 'Migrants Are Armed, Kidnap and Rape Women.'"³⁴ The headline uses sensationalist language designed to incite fear among readers. By emphasizing extreme and violent behaviors, it paints an alarmist picture that can lead to heightened anxiety and suspicion towards Muslim communities. This reinforces the stereotype that Muslim migrants are inherently dangerous and criminal, which is not supported by broader evidence. By focusing specifically on the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a region with a significant Muslim population, the article targets an entire ethnic and religious group. The portrayal of Muslim-majority regions as unsafe and violent undermines trust in these communities and fosters a hostile environment.

33. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/cetiri-bezbednosno-kriticne-tacke-u-srbiji-ovde-se-formiraju-dzihad-celije/2qfg1xj>

34. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/policija-o-stanju-u-fbih/ef4lvem#:~:text=POLICIJA%20O%20STANJU%20U%20FBiH%20%E2%80%9CMigranti%20su%20naoru%C5%BEani%2C,-%20saop%C5%A1teno%20je%20iz%20Federalne%20uprave%20policije%20%28FUP%29.>



Figure 11: “If We Stumble Now, We Are Finished! Germany Published a 50-Point Manifesto for Immigrants: We Have a Problem.”
Source: FOTO: Reuters

On October 31, an article titled “If We Stumble Now, We Are Finished! Germany Published a 50-Point Manifesto for Immigrants: We Have a Problem” featured a cover image of participants in a Gaza peace protest holding the Palestinian flag.³⁵ (Fig. 14) The use of an image from a Gaza peace protest to illustrate an article about a German manifesto on immigrants conflates Middle Eastern conflicts with the broader issue of immigration.



Figure 12: “On the Border of Serbia! Italy Will Build Immigrant Centers in Albania, They Will Be Able to Receive Tens of Thousands of People!”
Source: TanjugAP

35. <https://informer.rs/planeta/vesti/842492/nemacka-migranti-manifest#:~:text=Nema%C4%8Dki%20Bild%20objavio%20je%20u%20nedelju%20manifest%20od,istakli%20%C5%A1ta%20je%20ono%20%C5%A1to%20Nema%C4%8Dku%20%C4%8Dini%20Nema%C4%8Dkom.>



Figure 13: “They Were a Paradise for Guest Workers, Now Chaos Is Knocking on the Door of a Powerful State in the Heart of Europe! If They Don’t Solve This, They Will Pay Dearly...” Source: FOTO: Reuters

On November 7, an article titled “On the Border of Serbia! Italy Will Build Immigrant Centers in Albania, They Will Be Able to Receive Tens of Thousands of People!”³⁶ was published. (Fig. 15) Albania borders Kosovo, which Serbia considers its territory; aside from this contested territory, Serbia has no other land border with Albania. By highlighting the proximity of immigration centers to Serbia’s border and emphasizing Albania’s role, the article implies a potential threat from immigrants. This framing suggests that immigrants, many of whom are Muslims, pose a danger to Serbian security and stability. Mentioning the contested border with Kosovo invokes nationalistic sentiments and historical grievances, and exploits the sensitive issue of territorial integrity to stoke fears about an influx of Muslim immigrants from neighboring regions.

On November 24, Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic led the Serbian team onto the Davis Cup court with the controversial song “When the Army Returns to Kosovo.”³⁷ The song is a nationalistic anthem that evokes the historical and ongoing tensions between Serbia and Kosovo. Playing this song in a prominent international sporting event is a provocative act that stirs nationalist sentiments and can be seen as a call for reclaiming Kosovo, which has a significant Albanian Muslim population.

On December 26, an article titled “They Were a Paradise for Guest Workers, Now Chaos Is Knocking on the Door of a Powerful State in the Heart of Europe! If They Don’t Solve This, They Will Pay Dearly...” featured a cover image of Muslim women wearing hijabs protesting for peace in Gaza.³⁸ (Fig. 16) The use of such an image ma-

36. <https://informer.rs/planeta/vesti/844694/migranti-italija-albanija>

37. <https://www.klix.ba/sport/tenis/djokovic-uz-kontroverznu-pjesmu-izveo-tim-srbije-na-teren-ostre-reakcije-iz-crne-gore-i-s-kosova/231124019>

38. <https://informer.rs/planeta/vesti/859909/nemacka-migranti-desnica-nova-godina>

nipulates the narrative and conflates peaceful protest and political activism with chaos and disorder, unfairly associating Muslim identity and expression with instability.

Justice system

On May 19, the Serbian Court of Appeals rehabilitated Nikola Kalabić, a former commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (Chetniks), ruling that there was no written evidence of his collaboration with German occupying forces during World War II.³⁹ The decision is highly controversial, especially considering the Chetniks' involvement in wartime atrocities against civilians, including Muslims. The rehabilitation of Kalabić contributes to historical revisionism, effectively rewriting history to present a more favorable view of the Chetniks. It downplays their role in wartime atrocities and ethnic cleansing, particularly against Muslim communities, thereby erasing the suffering of these victims.

On October 3, Aida Ćorović, an activist, was fined 100,000 RSD (around 850 EUR) by a Serbian court for throwing eggs at a mural of Ratko Mladić, a convicted war criminal responsible for the Srebrenica genocide.⁴⁰ Ćorović criticized the Serbian government, alleging it protects criminals and suppresses dissent. The mural, located in Vračar, Belgrade, has been a point of contention, highlighting the societal divide over Mladić's legacy and the ongoing tension surrounding the acknowledgment of war crimes in Serbia. By punishing those who oppose the glorification of Mladić, the Serbian state appears to endorse a nationalist narrative that venerates individuals responsible for heinous crimes against Muslims.

Internet

In 2023, the internet and social media platforms in Serbia played a significant role in amplifying Islamophobic narratives and hate speech. Numerous online spaces, particularly nationalist forums, social media groups, and news portals, were used to spread anti-Muslim rhetoric. For example, the popular YouTuber Bogdan Ilić, known as "Baka Prase," made derogatory remarks during a livestream, refusing to donate to earthquake relief efforts in Türkiye by citing historical grievances against Turks.⁴¹ This incident sparked controversy and highlighted how internet personalities can perpetuate Islamophobic sentiments among their followers. Additionally, far-right websites and online communities frequently engaged in the glorification of war criminals like Ratko Mladić, while openly attacking Muslim communities and individuals. These digital spaces continue to serve as breeding grounds for hate speech, fostering a culture of intolerance towards Muslims.

39. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/rehabilitovan-nikola-kalabic/wlrw7bb>

40. <https://nova.rs/vesti/politika/osudjena-aida-corovic-jer-je-gadjala-mural-ratnog-zlocinca-mladica-mora-da-plati-100-000-dinara/>

41. <https://www.telegraf.rs/jeset/vesti-jeset/3628221-baka-prase-sokirao-izjavama-o-zemljotresu-u-turskoj>

Moreover, online media outlets in Serbia, particularly tabloids aligned with the government, played a troubling role in normalizing Islamophobia. Headlines and articles frequently used inflammatory language, portraying Muslims as a threat to Serbian identity and security. For instance, during the so-called refugee crisis, various media outlets described Muslim immigrants as invaders, dehumanizing them and fueling xenophobic fears. Additionally, online news portals either ignored or downplayed significant judicial verdicts, such as the 2023 ruling by the International Criminal Tribunal that convicted Serbian officials for war crimes against Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This selective reporting further contributed to the erasure of Muslim victimhood and perpetuated a narrative of Serbian nationalism, often justifying past atrocities while marginalizing the Muslim community in public discourse.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The central figures driving Islamophobic policies in Serbia encompass key elements within the current governing structures, certain opposition parties, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and influential media outlets. The current governing structures have fostered an environment where nationalist and Islamophobic ideologies can thrive, often using nationalist rhetoric to maintain political power. This is compounded by certain opposition parties that either support these ideologies or fail to challenge them, thereby perpetuating a climate of intolerance.

The Serbian Orthodox Church is a significant actor in this network, promoting radical nationalist ideologies that emphasize the unification of Serbian territories and glorify historical figures associated with anti-Muslim actions. The Church's extensive influence extends beyond Serbia's borders through its network of churches and monasteries, spreading these ideologies across the region. This cross-border presence reinforces ethnic and religious divisions, contributing to regional instability.

Public figures and intellectuals who glorify war criminals play a critical role in this network. They revise historical events to portray Serbs as perennial victims and Muslims as aggressors, thus justifying past atrocities and fostering ongoing discrimination. These figures often hold significant sway in academic and cultural spheres, embedding their narratives into the societal consciousness.

Media outlets closely aligned with the government, particularly tabloid newspapers and certain television stations, are pivotal in disseminating hate speech and false information. These media channels frequently publish inflammatory content that dehumanizes Muslims and perpetuates negative stereotypes. By spreading fearmongering and biased reporting, they normalize Islamophobic attitudes and incite ethnic and religious hatred.

Collectively, these elements create a pervasive environment where Islamophobia is institutionalized and perpetuated across Serbian society. The convergence of polit-

ical, religious, and media influences ensures that discriminatory ideologies are reinforced at multiple levels, making it challenging for minority communities to achieve fair representation and equitable treatment. Addressing this network requires a concerted effort to promote tolerance, accountability, and inclusivity across all sectors of society.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Below, we will note initiatives and efforts to counter Islamophobia in Serbia; however, let us first begin with an Islamophobic initiative.

On January 5, a protest was organized in Mladenovac against the construction of a mosque, three days before Orthodox Christmas.⁴² Protest organizers argued that building a mosque in Mladenovac, where no mosques existed during Ottoman rule, was a political act intended to provoke the local Serbian Orthodox population. The local mayor, Vladan Glišić, denied any plans or requests for constructing such a religious building, dismissing the claims as baseless.

On March 13, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) in Serbia filed 308 requests with local authorities in ten cities and municipalities to remove murals and graffiti honoring war criminal Ratko Mladić.⁴³ This initiative aims to cleanse public spaces of content that glorifies war criminals and promotes hate. The YIHR emphasizes the importance of consistent removal of inappropriate content by municipal services, rather than selective action. The majority of these graffiti are in Belgrade, indicating organized resistance to their removal efforts. These efforts by the YIHR are a significant step towards countering Islamophobia and promoting a more inclusive and tolerant society in Serbia.

On August 17, Serbian activists urged authorities to respond to the increasing number of graffiti with the message “When the army returns to Kosovo,” accompanied by the Serbian flag.⁴⁴ These graffiti are viewed as hate speech and are seen as promoting militaristic sentiments and hostility towards Kosovo. The activists highlight the state’s lack of action against such messages, which they argue perpetuate division and conflict.

By addressing the glorification of individuals responsible for atrocities against Muslim communities and opposing hate speech, these initiatives seek to foster a culture of respect and acknowledgment of past injustices.

42. <https://sandzakpress.net/islamofobija-u-mladenovcu-gradjni-protestu-protiv-izgradnje-dzamiye/>

43. <https://yih.rs/bhs/inicijativa-podnela-prijave-za-uklanjanje-vise-od-300-murala-i-grafita-posvecenih-ratku-mladicu/>

44. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/32552602.html>

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The 2023 Islamophobia report for Serbia highlights the persistent and deeply ingrained Islamophobia that permeates various aspects of Serbian society, from politics and media to education and public discourse. The report underscores the significant challenges faced by Muslim communities in Serbia, exacerbated by a political environment marked by nationalism, historical revisionism, and systemic discrimination.

The report identifies several key issues contributing to the perpetuation of Islamophobia in Serbia. These include,

- **Political Environment:** The influence of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) under President Aleksandar Vučić has led to an authoritarian governance style that marginalizes opposition voices and undermines democratic principles. This environment fosters an atmosphere where nationalist and anti-Muslim sentiments can thrive without significant opposition.
- **Media Representation:** Serbian media frequently engages in fearmongering and propagates negative stereotypes of Muslims. The lack of balanced reporting and the prevalence of hate speech in media narratives contribute to the normalization of Islamophobic attitudes.
- **Historical Revisionism:** The glorification of war criminals and the revision of historical events to portray Muslims as aggressors while victimizing Serbs perpetuates ethnic and religious divisions. This narrative is reinforced through educational initiatives and public commemorations, embedding biased perspectives in societal consciousness.
- **Discrimination and Violence:** Physical and verbal attacks against Muslims, including hate crimes and discriminatory practices, highlight the urgent need for protective measures and legal recourse. The failure to address and penalize such incidents adequately perpetuates a cycle of violence and discrimination.
- **Economic and Social Marginalization:** Predominantly Muslim regions like Sandžak suffer from underdevelopment and lack of infrastructure investment, exacerbating economic disparities and social exclusion. This marginalization is both a cause and consequence of entrenched ethnic and religious prejudices.

Policy Recommendations

To address and mitigate Islamophobia in Serbia, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Strengthen Legal Frameworks:** Implement robust legal mechanisms to combat hate speech, discrimination, and hate crimes against Muslims. Ensure that existing laws are enforced effectively and that perpetrators are held accountable.

- **Promote Media Responsibility:** Encourage responsible journalism by promoting media literacy and ethical reporting standards. Establish oversight bodies to monitor and address biased reporting and hate speech in media.
- **Educational Reform:** Revise educational curricula to include accurate and balanced representations of historical events, emphasizing the importance of diversity, tolerance, and mutual respect. Promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue in schools to foster understanding and cooperation among students of different backgrounds.
- **Economic Development Initiatives:** Invest in infrastructure and development projects in marginalized regions like Sandžak. Promote inclusive economic policies that address the specific needs of minority communities, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities.
- **Political Accountability and Inclusivity:** Encourage political leaders to adopt inclusive rhetoric and policies that promote national unity and respect for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Hold political figures accountable for inciting hatred and division.
- **Support Civil Society:** Strengthen and support civil society organizations that work to combat Islamophobia and promote human rights. Provide funding and resources for initiatives that foster community cohesion and advocate for minority rights.
- **International Collaboration:** Engage with international organizations and human rights bodies to monitor and address Islamophobia in Serbia. Collaborate on best practices and strategies to combat discrimination and promote social harmony.

By implementing these recommendations, Serbia can make significant strides towards reducing Islamophobia, fostering a more inclusive society, and upholding the principles of democracy and human rights for all its citizens.

Chronology

- **3 January:** The minister of defense of Serbia on the occasion of January 9 (Day of the Republika Srpska) stated, “The coming years must be in a sign of Serbian unification.”
- **5 January:** A protest was organized in Mladenovac against the construction of a mosque, three days before Orthodox Christmas. Protest organizers claimed that building a mosque in Mladenovac, where no mosques existed during Ottoman rule, is a political act meant to provoke the local Serbian Orthodox population. The local mayor, Vladan Glišić, denied any plans or requests for constructing such a religious building, dismissing the claims as baseless.

- **9 February:** Bogdan Ilić, popular Serbian YouTuber known as “Baka Prase,” during a livestream, stated he would not donate to earthquake relief efforts in Türkiye.
- **12 February:** An article reported that Severina Vučković’s concert at the Kopaonik Music Week festival was canceled due to her past statements regarding genocide in Srebrenica and criticizing Patriarch Porfirije. (
- **13 March:** The Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) in Serbia filed 308 requests with local authorities in ten cities and municipalities to remove murals and graffiti honoring war criminal Ratko Mladić. (
- **23 March:** A tabloid close to President Vučić and the ruling party called one of the biggest media in Bosnia and Herzegovina “Ustaša’s Media.”
- **28 March:** At the match against Montenegro, Serbian fans raised a banner addressed to the Montenegrin president, quoting an Islamophobic poem from the 19th century.
- **20 April:** A convicted war criminal for crimes against humanity perpetrated against Albanians in Kosovo spoke to elementary school students in Novi Sad in a public history lesson via video link from prison.
- **21 April:** In Belgrade, a panel entitled “Was Sarajevo a Besieged and Blocked City?” was organized by the Representation of the Republika Srpska in Serbia
- **22 April:** The President of Republika Srpska said from Belgrade that the Serbian Army is ready “to defend our people wherever they are.”
- **23 April:** Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić attended a commemoration for the victims of the Jasenovac concentration camp, where he said, “When a Serb gets fed up, there’s no going back.
- **19 May:** Serbian Court of Appeals rehabilitated Nikola Kalabić, a former commander of the Yugoslav Army in the Homeland (Chetniks).
- **21 May:** Ervin Čelahmetović, a Bosniak from Priboj, was beaten to death by Igor Avramović, a member of the special police unit in Belgrade.
- **29 May:** Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić urged Serbs in Kosovo to avoid conflicts with NATO, even amid escalating tensions. He also threatened, “If the ‘Albanian occupier’ shoots, then it will be different.”
- **1 June:** An article discussed the lack of significant media and political reaction in Serbia to the final verdict by the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (MICT) which found Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović guilty of being part of a joint criminal enterprise.
- **1 June:** Commenting on civil protests in Serbia, an analyst stated that a Serbian actor was a Satanist because of holding a banner dedicated to the deceased major of the Serbian Air Force who was a Bosniak-Muslim from Novi Pazar.
- **11 June:** A headline in a Serbian tabloid calling out an actor from Bosnia and Herzegovina reads, “A SHARPSHOOTER FROM SARAJEVO ADVISES

HATERS TO BE MORE AGGRESSIVE! A Muslim Extremist Calls for Violence in Belgrade!”

- **17 June:** Romanian football fans take a photograph in front of St. Sava’s Church with a banner stating “Made-up Countries, Fake Football For Us, They Don’t Mean Anything at All,” rejecting the legitimacy of Kosovo, which has a significant Muslim population.
- **20 June:** In an interview on a talk show close to the Serbian regime, Goran Petronijević, who was the lawyer that defended the war criminal Radovan Karadžić, admitted and tried to justify the concealment of evidence for the war crimes committed by the Serbs in Kosovo.
- **7 July:** Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán stated, “Thank you, President Vučić! Without Serbia and Hungary, Europe would have hundreds of thousands more migrants!”
- **8 July:** Article published under the title, “Serbia Saved the EU from the Invasion of Immigrants! Viktor Orbán Recognized Our Country at the Summit in Vienna.”
- **11 July:** During a session of the Serbian National Assembly, Jelena Jerinić, a representative of the opposition party, was booed by members of the ruling coalition when she spoke about the genocide in Srebrenica.
- **11 July:** Denial of genocide: reporting by the state radio and television service in Serbia reports about the genocide in Srebrenica as “Srebrenica events.”
- **12 July:** General media coverage in Serbia on the occasion of the anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica can be summarized as denial of the genocide and victimization of the Serb population. Serbian media, particularly those closely aligned with the government, often downplay or deny the genocide, framing the narrative in a way that minimizes the scale of the atrocities committed in Srebrenica.
- **13 July:** President Vučić indirectly justified the denial of the genocide in Srebrenica by claiming that Bosniaks did not apologize for the crimes of the Handžar Division during the Independent State of Croatia.
- **15 July:** Two Serb students from the University of Sarajevo who were suspended for glorifying the convicted war criminal Mladić were awarded a scholarship and continued studies in Belgrade.
- **27 July:** The ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Serbia, an ethnic Serb, personally thanked the director of the Security Information Agency of Serbia for his support in taking care of two students from Sarajevo who were suspended due to glorification of the convicted war criminal General Mladić.
- **16 August:** The Film Center of Serbia allocated more than 200,000 EUR for the production of the film “Linija” directed by Dragoljub Elčić. The film glo-

rifies the Siege of Sarajevo, focusing on Dr. Miodrag Lazić, who voluntarily came to Sarajevo to establish a war hospital on the front lines.

- **17 August:** Serbian activists urge authorities to respond to the increasing number of graffiti with the message “When the army returns to Kosovo,” accompanied by the Serbian flag.
- **18 September:** An article on Blic TV discusses the issue of immigrants in Serbia, particularly focusing on how most immigrants enter Serbia illegally through Kosovo, which has a significant Muslim population.
- **3 October:** Aida Ćorović, an activist, was fined 100,000 RSD (around 850 EUR) by the Serbian court for throwing eggs at a mural of Ratko Mladić, a convicted war criminal responsible for the Srebrenica genocide.
- **23 October:** Article published under the title, “INCUBATOR OF THREAT TO EUROPE” Who Are the “BALKAN LIONS”, The Main Jihadist Cell in the Balkans: Organized a Bloody Feast in Vienna, Prepared an Attack on Election Day in Kosovo?”
- **24 October:** Article published under the title, “‘WE HAVE 4 SECURITY CRITICAL POINTS IN SERBIA’ Military Analyst for ‘Blic TV’ Warns: ‘Jihad Cells Are Also Infiltrating Communities in Our Larger Cities.’” In the article, the analyst discussed various regions, but it can be concluded that the majority of the areas identified as security threats are those where Muslims form a significant portion, or the majority, of the population..
- **27 October:** Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić addressed the recent incidents involving illegal immigrants in Horgoš and Kanjiža, stating that he is ready to deploy the military within 24 hours if necessary to resolve the situation.
- **28 October:** After the incident in Subotica, which included an exchange of fire involving immigrants, the Minister of Internal Affairs of Serbia Bratislav Gašić stated that “Subotica, as of tonight, is a forgotten city for migrants.”
- **30 October:** An incident of fearmongering: a tabloid in Serbia reports on the alleged situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina: “POLICE ON THE SITUATION IN THE FBIF ‘Migrants Are Armed, Kidnap and Rape Women.’”
- **31 October:** Article with following title published: “‘If We Stumble Now, We Are Finished!’ Germany Published a 50-Point Manifesto for Immigrants: We Have a Problem.” The accompanying photograph depicted participants in a Gaza peace protest holding the Palestinian flag.
- **7 November:** Article published with the following title, “On the Border of Serbia! Italy Will Build Immigrant Centers in Albania, They Will Be Able to Receive Tens of Thousands of People!” Albania borders Kosovo, which Serbia considers its territory; apart from this contested territory, Serbia has no other land border with Albania.

- **14 November:** An incident occurred in Belgrade where a man, Mišel Krstović, entered the courtyard of the Bajrakli Mosque during evening prayers, shouting that all Muslims should be killed and cursing them.
- **24 November:** Serbian tennis player Novak Djokovic led the Serbian team to the Davis Cup court with the controversial song “When the army returns to Kosovo.”
- **19 December:** During the reporting of a Bosnian-Herzegovinian Radio Television journalist in Belgrade, a man entered the frame and shouted “Ratko Mladić,” the name of a convicted war criminal for genocide and war crimes against Bosniaks.
- **26 December:** The following article was published: “They Were a Paradise for Guest Workers, Now Chaos Is Knocking on the Door of a Powerful State in the Heart of Europe! If They Don’t Solve This, They Will Pay Dearly...” The cover image was one of Muslim women with hijabs protesting with other citizens for peace in Gaza.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
SLOVAKIA
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Zhrnutie

Verejné prejavy islamofóbie sa v roku 2023 sa sústredili viac-menej len na sociálne siete a boli v tieni iných tém, ktoré rozdeľovali slovenskú spoločnosť (vojna na Ukrajine, post-pandemická kríza, parlamentné voľby 2023 a pod.). Ojedinelé prejavy islamofóbie sme zaznamenali aj na pôde slovenského parlamentu. V parlamente sa síce neprerokovával žiaden konkrétny zákon, ktorý by sa týkal moslimskej komunity na Slovensku, avšak to nebránilo poslancom krajnej pravice, aby sa vo svojich vystúpeniach zamerali aj na šírenie islamofóbneho naratívu. Najmä v kontexte migračnej krízy v lete 2023.

Politici využívali islamofóbne vyjadrenia v rámci kritiky migračnej politiky vlády premiéra Ľudovíta Ódora a tiež pri rôznych ad hoc situáciách. Prednostne v čase predvolebnej kampane. Slovenskí politici (najmä národní socialisti a krajná pravica) opakovane ignorovali fakt, že moslimovia sú občanmi Slovenskej republiky, že majú rovnaké práva a povinnosti ako občania iných – dnes registrovaných cirkví a náboženských obcí na Slovensku. Slovenskí moslimovia boli v súvislosti s prípadom “prvej slovenskej teroristky” opäť spájaní s terorizmom, hrozbou nelegálnej migrácie a tiež boli označovaní za bezpečnostnú hrozbu pre Slovensko. Tento naratív sa ešte zvýraznil po teroristickom útoku Hamasu zo 7. októbra 2023.

Pozitívnu zmenou oproti minulým rokom bolo, že právne postavenie moslimov na Slovensku sa nezhoršilo. Nebol prijatý žiaden zákon, ktorým by sa obmedzovali práva slovenských moslimov. V roku 2023 sa viaceré mimovládne organizácie v spolupráci s Islamskou nadáciou na Slovensku zapojili do série diskusií spojených s medzináboženským dialógom s cieľom zmierniť dopady politickej islamofóbie na spoločnosť. Moslimskú komunitu podporil aj Verejný ochranca práv či predstavitelia katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku.

Executive Summary

The public manifestations of Islamophobia in 2023 were more or less concentrated on social networks and were overshadowed by other topics that divided Slovak society such as the war in Ukraine, the post-pandemic crisis, and the 2023 parliamentary elections. Isolated manifestations of Islamophobia were also recorded in the debates in the Slovak Parliament. Although no specific law concerning the Muslim community in Slovakia was debated in the Parliament, this did not prevent members of the far right from focusing their speeches on spreading the Islamophobic narrative, especially in the context of the so-called immigration crisis in the summer of 2023.

Politicians have used Islamophobic language in criticism of the immigration policy of Prime Minister Ludovít Ódor's government and also in various ad hoc situations. Preferably in their election campaigns, Slovak politicians (especially the National Socialists and the far right) have repeatedly ignored the fact that Muslims are citizens of the Slovak Republic and that they have the same rights and obligations as citizens of other - now registered - churches and religious communities in Slovakia. Slovak Muslims were again associated with terrorism, the threat of illegal immigration, and were also described as a security threat to Slovakia in connection with the case of the "first Slovak female terrorist". This narrative was further accentuated after the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023.

A positive change compared to previous years was that the legal status of Muslims in Slovakia has not deteriorated. No law has been passed restricting the rights of Slovak Muslims. In 2023, a number of NGOs, in cooperation with the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, engaged in a series of discussions related to interfaith dialogue to mitigate the effects of political Islamophobia on society. The Muslim community was also supported by the Public Defender of Rights and representatives of the Catholic Church in Slovakia.

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Country: Slovak Republic

Type of Regime: Democratic republic

Form of Government: Parliamentary system

Ruling Parties: SMER-SSD (Direction – Slovak Social Democracy; national populism, national socialist, social conservatism), HLAS-SD (Voice – Social Democracy; social democracy), Slovenská národná strana (SNS, Slovak National Party; right-wing populism, Euroscepticism)

Opposition Parties: Progressívne Slovensko (PS, Progressive Slovakia; social liberalism, pro-Europeanism), Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie (KDH, Christian Democratic Movement; Christian democracy), Sloboda a Solidarita (SAS, Freedom and Solidarity; national liberalism, soft Euroscepticism), Hnutie Slovensko – Kresťanská únia – Za ľudí (Movement Slovakia¹ – Christian Union – For the People; populism, conservatism, Christian right)

Last Elections: 2023 Legislative Election: SMER-SSD: Robert Fico, 42 seats; PS: Michal Šimečka, 32 seats; HLAS-SD: Peter Pellegrini, 27 seats; OĽaNO a Priateľia² – Kresťanská únia – Za ľudí: Igor Matovič, 16 seats; KDH: Milan Majerský, 12 seats; SAS: Richard Sulík, 11 seats; SNS: Andrej Danko, 10 seats. **2024 Presidential Election:** Peter Pellegrini (HLAS-SD) won 53,12 % of the vote against 46,88 % of Ivan Korčok (independent).³

Total Population: 5.42 million (2023)⁴

Major Languages: Slovak

Official Religion: No official religion (secularism)

1. Known as “Ordinary People and Independent Candidates” before 2023. See: TASR, “Hnutie OĽaNO opäť zmenilo názov, bude sa volať Slovensko” (The OĽaNO movement has changed its name again, it will be called Slovakia), *Pravda*, 25 October 2023, <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/686222-hnutie-olano-opat-zmenilo-nazov-bude-sa-volat-slovensko/>, accessed 30 May 2024.
2. In the 2023 parliamentary elections, Igor Matovič’s movement ran under the name “OĽaNO a Priateľia” (Ordinary People and Friends). See: Valid Votes Cast for Political Parties, https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/en/vysledky_hlasovania_strany.html#1, accessed 29 May 2024.
3. The Election of the President of the Slovak Republic 2024, https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2024/en/vysledky_hlasovania_kolo2.html, accessed 30 May 2024.
4. Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, “Stock of population in the SR on 31 December 2023”, 12 March 2024, https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/ext/products/informationmessages/inf_sprava_detail/08be1db3-7df3-4a2a-aa8a-b0c6b16ced9b!ut/p/z1/tVNNc5swFPwrOXAUeiCM5N6wpwFcx1Ps4A8uHYFloDYfARXi_vqK-JpfMJCy9VBdJM7v7dp-ecIT3OCp5l6dc5IXJL-p-iOwfafXZbGY4ALMIAX_xbbPy5vemG07w7i2ArdZf-wX90vrvrhWWANcHRbf4WRzhKSlNLDB-quOUZas8oL0-In6UG6IA1hXLTlQK1dcO7qwZdK-RZ7cBi-YRxxjgujxRJDFTY44ZxzFkNixYSfiOI0H-Tijj_jwKfRuLO8QBz5YDrzy567jWXSpDC7dCfiOF66nASHg-klF2vPBvFBjLR38htxyMZxgBOEEQbJbbLbhb8x58YriwCkNV0h4BPNr4oFLQD20aFO-6XPQ4Lle3veD-NPz6SB3gx1gg1uPnPp6flUdNVIV18S7z_H-Ol6pjiNw_whVQm4zAbpCu8_RVUZ8rjQ-6TQQaeMAqGU-WaY1tSeEDMJOGROMhBtxEo1o9F-N-pCZlHX7RQMN-r7X06pKLOJpKqKD9yhZ1argb5G4LsKCK-Wueo_Pa-z1bIXfHJLUS3p39wAa8gB/dz/d5/L0lIDUmITUSEhL3dHa0FKRnNBLzROV3FpQSEhL2Vu/, accessed 29 May 2024.

Statistics on Islamophobia: The Slovak Republic doesn't have official statistics that report Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: N/A

Major Religions (% of Population): Roman Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic (55.8%), No Religion (23.8%), Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (5.3%), Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia (4.0%), Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia – Calvinist (1.6%), Orthodox Church in Slovakia (0.9%)⁵

Muslim Population (% of Population): 3,862 or 0.07% (2021 census). The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia estimates the Muslim population at approx. 7,000 Muslims.⁶

Main Muslim Community Organisations: Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (Bratislava), Foundation al-Huda (Kosice), Association of Muslims in Central Slovakia – al-Bakara (Martin), Sakalib Cultural Association (Banská Bystrica)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, Forum of the World Religions Slovakia, Open Society Foundation, Centre for Research of Ethnicity and Culture

Far-Right Parties: Kotleba's – People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko, K-LSNS), The Republic Movement (Hnutie Republika)

Far-Right Movements: Slovak Revival Movement (Slovenské hnutie obrody, SHO), Our Homeland is the Future (Naša vlasť je budúcnosť, NVB)

Far-Right Terrorist Organisations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** N/A
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** N/A
- **Minaret Ban:** N/A. In 2017, members of the far-right and the populist party We Are Family (Sme Rodina) submitted a law banning the construction of mosques to the Parliament, which was not accepted.
- **Circumcision Ban:** N/A
- **Burka Ban:** N/A
- **Prayer Ban:** N/A
- **Handshake:** N/A

5. SODB 2021, "Roman Catholics represents 56% of the population", <https://www.scitanie.sk/en/roman-catholics-represents-56-percent-of-the-population>, accessed 30 May 2024

6. Lenč, Jozef, "Slovakia", Alibašič, Ahmed – Akgonul, Samim (eds.) Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, vol. 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2024), pp. 555-573

Introduction

The level of Islamophobia in Slovakia in 2023 was directly influenced by objective factors, which also influenced the behaviour of political elites, the topics they addressed, and the subsequent public reaction. In particular, the war in Ukraine, which overshadowed other political issues throughout the year, played a major role in the media, politics, and political debates. In addition, post-pandemic crises and the parliamentary elections (September 2023) occupied the public debate.

Attacks on Muslims are no longer seen as relevant in the media and in politics. Apart from the traditional actors who repeatedly propagate an Islamophobic narrative or feed the social fear of Islam and Muslims (immigrants), the topic of Islam, Muslims, and immigration has become a peripheral topic of political discourse. The portrayal of Islam and Muslims in most audio-visual and print media has been neutral or not deviating from the common - partly tabloid – image of Muslims, namely Muslim women in the niqab or burqa, angry crowds of Muslim men, or Muslims are perpetrators or victims of violent attacks. Some exceptions have been the so-called alternative (conspiracy) media and media with links to ultra-conservative organisations and communities.

In terms of verbal attacks on Muslims by Slovak politicians, the key actors in these attacks have not changed. As one of the tools of the politics of fear, Islamophobia is mainly used by politicians of the far right, most notably by the Kotleba's – People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, K-LSNS)⁷ and the Republic⁸ (Hnutie Republika – former members of K-LSNS, Republic).⁹ Attacks on immigrants (Muslims) have also taken place in the case of SMER-SSD (Robert Fico, Ľuboš Blaha, and others);¹⁰ Hlas-SD (Matúš Šutaj Eštok and others);¹¹ and far-right candidates (Rudolf Huliak, Tomáš Taraba, etc.) on the candidate list of the Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS).¹² Other politicians represented in the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic from various political parties have not directly expressed negative views on Islam, Muslims, or immigrants, but some con-

7. KOTLEBOVCI – LSNS, <http://kotlebovci.sk/>, accessed 24 May 2024

8. REPUBLIKA, <https://www.hnutie-republika.sk/en/>, accessed 24 May 2024

9. SITA, “Odídenci od Kotlebu sa už prezentujú vlastnou stranou” (Kotleba defectors are already presenting their own party), *SME*, 9 May 2021, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22613521/odidenci-od-kotlebu-sa-uz-prezentuju-vlastnou-stranou-zalozili-hnutie-republika.html>, accessed 25 May 2024

10. BARCA, Robert, “Slováci sú pred parlamentnými voľbami zaplavení dezinformáciami” (Slovaks are flooded with misinformation ahead of the parliamentary elections), *AFP Fakty*, 27 September 2023, <https://fakty.afp.com/doc.afp.com.33WR2RY>, accessed 25 May 2024

11. ŠUTAJ EŠTOK, Matúš, “Podľa progresívcov riešenie migrácie nenájdeme na Slovensku” (According to progressives, the solution to migration will not be found in Slovakia), *blog Pravda*, 18 September 2023, <https://matusestok.blog.pravda.sk/2023/09/18/podla-progresivcov-riesenie-migracie-nenajdeme-na-slovensku/>, accessed 24 May 2024

12. Vicienová, Radka – Máriássyová, Anna – Popík, Jakub, “Nenávisťný jazyk na politických facebookových profiloch. Správa z monitoringu nenávisťných prejavov”, (Slovenské národné stredisko pre ľudské práva, Bratislava: 2023), pp. 15-19

servative politicians have expressed views on the protection of ‘Christian values’ or ‘Christian Europe’, which have an inherently Islamophobic accent.¹³

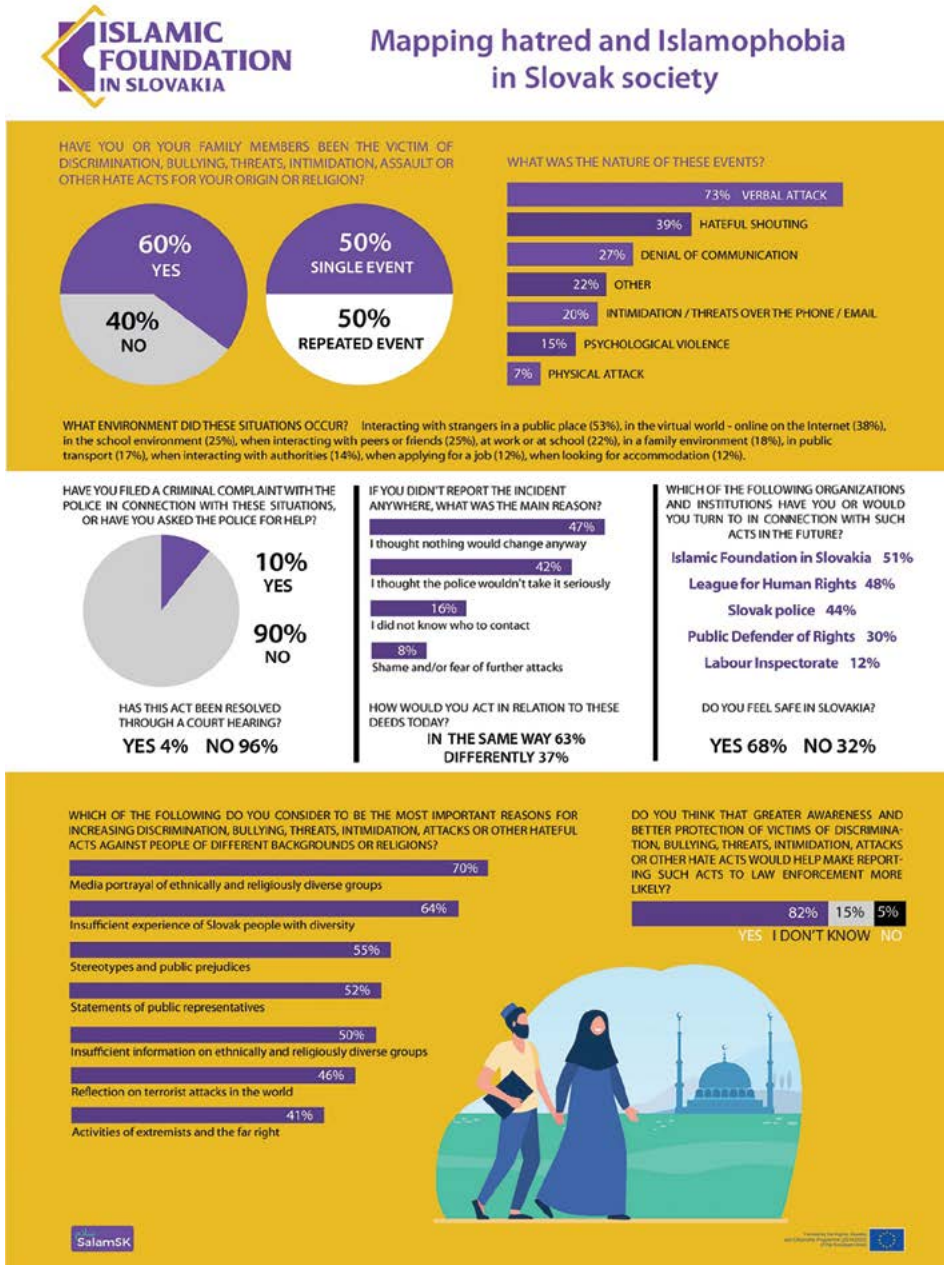


Figure 1: The research results of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (Islamská nadácia na Slovensku, IF): “Mapping hatred and Islamophobia in Slovak society” (2021)¹⁴

- Hasna, Zuzana – Plulíková, Nataša (eds.), “FRAMING: Mediálny obraz islamu a moslimov na Slovensku”, (Islamská nadácia na Slovensku, Bratislava: 2022), pp. 21-29
- Mapping hatred and Islamophobia in Slovak society (2021), IslamOnline, 2021, <https://www.islamonline.sk/salamsk/#prettyPhoto/1/>, accessed 30 May 2024

A breakthrough in gaining knowledge about Islamophobia in Slovakia was a survey conducted by the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (Islamská nadácia na Slovensku, IF), which in 2021 asked members of the Slovak Muslim community to comment on their experience of hate speech triggered by their faith through an online questionnaire. As no similar survey was carried out in 2022-3, it can be considered relevant in the context of this report for 2023.

The survey revealed that up to 60% of the respondents (72 women and 55 men) had been (or had a relative who had been) a victim of discrimination, bullying, threats, intimidation, physical assault, or other hate crime. The vast majority (73%) were verbal attacks (insults). Seven per cent of respondents reported that they had also had personal experience of a physical attack on their person. A striking finding was that only 10% of respondents said they had contacted the police after an assault. In contrast to these numbers, there was no significant physical attack on Muslims reported in the media (or by Islamic organisations in Slovakia) in 2023. The research also revealed that respondents consider the media portrayal of Islam and Muslims to be a crucial aspect that leads to discrimination against Muslims in Slovakia (70%), compared to only 41% for the activities of extremists and the far right.¹⁵

As the results of the research do not relate only to 2021, we present them here as an indication of the long-term state of the perception of Islamophobia in Slovakia on the part of members of the Muslim community.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The Slovak Republic does not provide official statistics on attacks motivated by hatred against a particular religion. Physical or verbal attacks against Muslims, which have been mentioned in past reports on Islamophobia in Slovakia, have been reported to the Islamic Foundation (IF), which has informed the public about them. Some of the attacks were directly directed at representatives of the IF or at Muslims who appear in the media on its behalf.¹⁶

In 2023, we recorded (documented) only one verbal attack on Muslims, which was reported by the IF on its Facebook page (previously on the IslamOnline.sk website). This was a verbal attack on Muslims who were returning from Friday prayers at

15. Hasna, Zuzana – Žofčín, Maroš, “Mapovanie nenávisťi a islamofóbie v slovenskej spoločnosti” in: Silvia Letavajová (eds.) “Súčasná migrácia a ich reflexia v spoločenskom vedomí”, (FF UMF Nitra: 2021), pp. 213-217

16. Bayrakli, Enes – Hafez, Farid (eds.), European Islamophobia Report, (Leopold Weiss Institute, Wien: 2022), p. 518.

the Cordoba Centre in Bratislava.¹⁷ Although only one attack was documented, we know from the past that Muslim men and women across Slovakia have been the targets of verbal attacks. However, due to the less intense negative discourse about Islam, Muslims, and immigrants in Slovakia, it seems that these attacks have partially decreased in 2023.

Employment

From the available sources, it is not possible to find any data on whether Muslims in Slovakia were discriminated against on the basis of their religion when looking for employment. NGOs report only occasional problems in the employment of foreign immigrants; however, these are not preferentially declared as a result of religious discrimination against job applicants. The majority of Slovak Muslims work as self-employed or are employed by fellow Muslims.

Education

Within the education system in Slovakia, primary and secondary schools have relative freedom in the textbooks used to teach particular subjects. In the case of history, there are several versions of textbooks, most of which focus on a chronological description of events related to the Ottoman (Turkish) presence in the territory of present-day Slovakia.

The Ottomans (Turks) and Islam are generally presented as a threat.¹⁸ They are presented as those who invaded Slovak territory, defeated and dominated Hungary, and threatened especially the important mining towns in central Slovakia. In history classes, pupils learn about the siege of Vienna (1529), the Ottoman (Turkish) robberies, and also the influence of the Ottomans on the internal political situation in Hungary (the anti-Habsburg Estates uprisings – Stephen Bocskai, Gabriel Bethlen, George and Francis Rákóczi, and Emeric Thököly, during the 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th century). In general, the image of the Ottomans (Turks) is conflated with that of Muslims and is negative and associated with the overall decline of Hungary.

These negative views of Muslims and Islam, framed by the Ottoman presence on the territory of today's Slovakia, are also reflected in the teaching of the Slovak language and literature. Here, pupils learn about works that describe the violence perpetrated by the Ottomans (Turks), e.g. Samo Chalupka's *Turčín Poničan* (Man from Poniky turned Turk) (1863) or Jozef Horák's *Sebechlebski hudci* (The Musicians from Sebechleby)

17. ISLAMSKÁ NADÁCIA NA SLOVENSKU, "Hlúpe reakcie" (Dumb reactions), 20 November 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/pfbid0JFjZR2GhhjivVLWmhx3PsfyGNTbcwf5QyhT-VZg3ctQ2HcS6cqCnswS6ZBpHWHbArl>, accessed 25 May 2024

18. Gazdík, Karol, "Osmanská okupácia Uhorska" (Ottoman occupation of Hungary), Christianitas, 20 October 2023, <https://christianitas.sk/osmanska-okupacia-uhorska/>, accessed 25 May 2024

(1954),¹⁹ among others.²⁰ Evidence of the negative image of Muslims in Slovakia and in Slovak is that the word *janičiar* (janissary) is perceived as a synonym for traitor.

This historical interpretation is also used by certain Christian communities or far-right political parties to spread a negative image of Muslims. The most frequently used argument for the current attitude towards Muslims is the unsuccessful siege of Vienna (1683)²¹ by the Ottomans and the victory of Christians over Muslims, which is interpreted as a key event in the defence of Europe against Islam.²²

Politics

As part of the analysis of the political discourse on Islam and Muslims, we looked at the statements made by politicians in the parliamentary debates that took place on the floor of the National Council of the Slovak Republic in the course of 2023. These form a realistic picture of how Islam and Muslims were discussed and framed, especially by the far-right part of the political spectrum in Slovakia.²³

The far right officially (according to the election results) receives approximately 12% of the votes of the electorate and constitutes a minority segment of the Slovak party system (SNS 5.62%, Republic 4.75%, and 1% of the remaining political parties, including K-LSNS).²⁴ Nevertheless, on the issue of immigration, Islam (and the alleged Islamisation of Slovakia), and the status of Muslims, other political parties are also leaning towards the far-right rhetoric. In particular, SMER-SSD, a national-conservative party that has repeatedly reserved itself against immigration and Islam;²⁵ Hlas-SD, especially on the issue of illegal migration;²⁶ and the liberal party

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19. In Jozef Horák's novel *The Musicians of Sebechleby*, which was filmed as a comedy by Jozef Zachar in 1975, we find very extreme assessments of the Turks: "How can an executioner be worse than a Turk? Is there a worse creature on earth than a Turk?" See: Uličianska, Zuzana, "Turci na Slovensku, prečo sa nám dostali pod kožu" (Turks in Slovakia, why they got under our skin), SME, 26 May 2016, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20168578/turci-na-slovensku-preco-sa-nam-dostali-pod-pod-kozu.html>, accessed 29 May 2024
 20. Uličianska, Zuzana, "Turci na Slovensku, prečo sa nám dostali pod kožu" (Turks in Slovakia, why they got under our skin), SME, 26 May 2016, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20168578/turci-na-slovensku-preco-sa-nam-dostali-pod-pod-kozu.html>, accessed 29 May 2024
 21. Mack, Boris, "Bitka pri Viedni. Nad tureckým polmesiacom sa začali sťahovať mračná" (Battle of Vienna. Clouds began to gather over the Turkish crescent), *Štandard*, 27 January 2024, <https://kosice.standard.sk/552922/bitka-pri-viedni-nad-tureckym-polmesiacom-sa-zacali-zatahovat-mracna>, accessed 29 May 2024
 22. HLAVNE SPRÁVY, "Schyluje sa znova k Bitke pri Viedni? Na viedenskom Kahlenbergu pomalovali Sobieskeho pamätník k Bitke pri Viedni 1683!" (Is the Battle of Vienna about to happen again? Sobieski's monument to the Battle of Vienna 1683 has been painted on the Kahlenberg in Vienna!), *Hlavné správy*, 10 September 2017, <https://www.hlavnespravdy.sk/schyluje-sa-znova-k-bitke-pri-viedni-na-viedenskom-kahlenbergu-znicili-sobieskeho-pamatnik-k-bitke-pri-viedni-1683/1131386>, accessed 29 May 2024
 23. Štefančík, Radoslav, Hvasta, Miloslav (eds.) "Jazyk pravicového extrémizmu", (Ekonom: Bratislava, 2019), pp. 174-183.
 24. Nicholson, Tom, "Coalition jockeying revs up in Slovakia after Fico's victory", *POLITICO*, 1 October 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/slovakia-election-prime-minister-robert-fico-smer-hlas-patience-coalition/>, accessed 29 May 2024
 25. Chadwick, Vince, "Robert Fico: 'Islam has no place in Slovakia'", *POLITICO*, 26 May 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/robert-fico-islam-no-place-news-slovakia-muslim-refugee/>, accessed 29 May 2024
 26. Strejčková, Simona, "V strasení migrantmi si Hlas môže podať ruku s Andrejom Babišom" (In scaring migrants, Hlas-SD can shake hands with Andrej Babiš), *Euractiv.sk*, 12 June 2024, <https://euractiv.sk/section/digitalizacia/news/v-straseni-migrantmi-si-hlas-moze-podat-ruku-s-andrejom-babisom/>, accessed 14 June 2024

Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a solidarita, SaS) and particularly its former chairman Richard Sulík.²⁷

First, it should be noted that, of the total number of contributions to the debates over the period under review, this is indeed a marginal part of the debate speeches. The almost complete absence of debates on Muslims and Islam can be attributed to the following factors: (a) the general reverberation of the so-called immigration crisis, which, compared to 2015-6, has become marginalised for political parties; (b) the focus of political debates on issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic crises (economic, financial, etc.); and (c) the polarisation of the coalition-opposition political debate, which was mainly limited to topical political issues.

In spite of this, some MPs resorted to tried and tested debate strategies aimed at fomenting negative and hostile sentiments towards Muslims. In the analysis of the debates, we identified the following strategies: (a) the choice of nominations and references (immigrants/Muslims were presented as a threat to society and Slovak traditions); (b) the prediction or attribution of specific attributes to social actors in order to negatively portray their impact in and on Slovak society; (c) the attempt to justify or excuse the xenophobic nature of the speech; (d) the perspectivisation, that is depicting events or the relationship to events from the perspective of only one group (“I went to see and I saw”, “how it looks in the West”, etc.); and (e) intensification of expressive means (invoking immigrants, influx of criminals, etc.). Stigmatisation of the Muslim community and the attribution of collective guilt to all Muslims and migrants also repeatedly emerged.²⁸

In the course of 2023, immigration (and secondarily Muslims) was discussed in the Slovak Parliament on only three occasions. This topic was always raised by MPs of the far right (K-LSNS, Republic and Life – National Party). In one case, they were joined by SMER-SSD MP Luboš Blaha (now deputy chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and an elected member of the European Parliament) and Hlas-SD MP Denisa Saková (the current Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic).

The fact that 15 March is the International Day to Combat Islamophobia is virtually unknown in Slovakia. That is why no one commemorates this day; specifically, no state institutions NGOs, or the Slovak Muslim community commemorate the occasion.

The topic of immigration (and illegal Muslim immigrants) became part of the discussion on the programme statement of the government of Ľudovít Ódor (June 2023), during the approval of the consent to the stay of foreign soldiers in Slovakia in

27. Cupřík, Roman, Ragáčová, Katarína, “Sulík: Islam nie je kompatibilný s našou kultúrou rovnako ako nacizmus” (Sulík: Islam is incompatible with our culture just like Nazism), *SME*, 19 August 2016, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20246047/sulik-islam-nie-je-kompatibilny-s-nasou-kulturou-rovnako-ako-nacizmus.html>, accessed 2 June 2024

28. Hasna, Zuzana, Plulíková, Nataša (eds.), “FRAMING: Mediálny obraz islamu a moslimov na Slovensku”, (Islamská nadácia na Slovensku, Bratislava: 2022), pp. 21-29

connection with the war in Ukraine, and also on the occasion of the amendment of Law No. 404/2011 Coll. on the stay of foreigners, which was submitted by K-LSNS MPs (May 2023). Most of the speeches included the usual insults to Muslims (MP Mizik) or prejudices associated with immigrants and Muslims (the remaining speakers). The following comments were made about immigrants (Muslims) in Parliament. MP Mizik (K-LSNS) said that “this immigration only and only negatively affects. No workforce, suckers of the state welfare system.”²⁹ In the context of labelling Muslims as responsible for terror in Europe, Mizik added,

In the first wave, especially in the first wave, Europe was flooded with jihadists, terrorists from the Islamic State. And suddenly there were terrorist attacks in all sorts of ways – people being hit by cars, bombs in the subways, churches, synagogues being attacked. Immigrants from the shores of Africa are being brought directly into Europe by NGOs, which are like travel agencies paid for by the foundations of incestuous people like George Soros.³⁰

In addition to the classic prejudices about Muslims, Mizik added conspiracy theories alleging that immigration is a tool for changing the ethnic and religious structure of Slovak society (Great Replacement theory).

Milan Mazurek (Republic) was a bit more conciliatory, also rejecting immigration, which he has long blamed for subverting European, Christian, white identity. In 2023, he added claims of security threats to people in regions where immigrants from Arab (Muslim) states had appeared.

Slovakia today faces a massive invasion of illegal migration. It is facing a massive invasion of criminals. (...) We know very well that if that criminal who crosses these borders here, because every illegal immigrant is by definition a criminal (...) And we are fighting here for the safety of all the people of the Slovak Republic. We want them not to be afraid, we want them to be able to live a normal, safe life, to feel that the state is there for them.

Mazurek added that his movement’s position is that “the only tolerable way of illegal immigration is zero illegal migrants. No illegal immigrant has any business here.”³¹

In line with describing immigration as a security threat in connection with the fact that the influx of immigrants is the result of the “cooperation” of NGOs, the government of the Slovak Republic (PM Ľudovít Ódor), and George Soros, MP Tomas Taraba (Life – National Party) had the following to contribute: “He [Interior Minister Ivan Šimko at the EU institutions] did not vote against the immigration pact

29. Mizik, Stanislav, “Speech in the parliamentary debate”, 15 June 2023, <https://tv.nrsr.sk/archiv/schodza/8/94?id=294256>, accessed 10 June 2024

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

so that the immigration pact could then pass and the Soros family could then get 21 million to look after the immigrants they are forcing to us.”³²

Before the parliamentary elections in September 2023, an extraordinary session of the National Council of the Slovak Republic was to be held due to the increase in the number of immigrants on the territory of Slovakia. It was to approve changes to existing laws and potentially threaten to intensify the debate on immigration (and Muslims).³³ However, this session failed to open and so negative statements about immigrants were concentrated only in the political parties’ election campaigns.

Media

The same phenomenon repeatedly appears in the Slovak media, which indirectly supports entrenched stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. The year 2023 was no exception, with Slovak media repeatedly exploiting the tabloid nature of information about Muslims and Islam in news and commentary. The themes that dominated the portrayal of Islam and Muslims were terrorism, extremism, and war conflicts in Muslim states. In reporting on Muslims, certain media have adopted a form of reporting used by the so-called conspiracy media (fake news).³⁴

The most common theme is the use of inappropriate companion pictorial material for a certain text. In most cases, when the media publish a report about Islam, they use the image of a woman in a niqab or burqa, or display a violent event that took place in the Middle East or cities in Western Europe. Such illustrative pictures support deep-rooted stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, such as the alleged inequality of women in Islam and the so-called violent nature of Islam. Zuzana Hasna and Nataša Plulíková write,

Muslims are portrayed as a population that is rejected, unacceptable, that must not enter Europe, that nobody wants as neighbours, that is a threat to Europe’s Christian values, that is a terrorist, that should be deported, that should adapt to European culture, that is being watched by German nationalists, that is misunderstood and criticised, that society is terrified of. Another image of Muslims presented by the media is that of victims of genocide or online and offline hate speech.³⁵

Thus, stylised media coverage of topics about Islam and Muslims fosters the public’s fear of Islam. Most of the Slovak media also use the word “jihad” as a synonym

32. Taraba, Tomáš, ““Speech in the parliamentary debate”, 14 June 2023, <https://tv.nrsr.sk/archiv/schodza/8/94?id=294092>, accessed 10 June 2024

33. TASR, “Parlament o migrácii rokovať nebude, opäť sa nenašlo dost hlasov” (Parliament will not debate migration, again not enough votes found), SME, 11 September 2024, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23214661/mimoriadna-schodza-parlamentu-o-migrantoch-sa-neuskutocni.html>, accessed 30 May 2024

34. Zuzana Hasna, Nataša Plulíková (eds.), “FRAMING: Mediálny obraz islamu a moslimov na Slovensku”, (Islamická nadácia na Slovensku, Bratislava: 2022), pp. 52-57

35. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

for terrorism. They create a common view that all Muslims who perform jihad are terrorists and that terrorism is an essential part of Islam. Women and children are portrayed as victims or witnesses of violence by Muslim men. Symbolically, they are meant to convey the position of women in Islam, which contrasts with Slovak values, and to reinforce readers' prejudices. Children are depicted as poor, neglected, and suffering: a huddled child, children in the arms of a mother mourning an attack, children as victims on the street, children huddled in a shelter, children screaming in front of a barbed wire fence, children wrapped in blankets on the ground in a refugee camp, children doing physically demanding labour, a child in the ruins of a house, an injured child on a stretcher, etc.³⁶

In the mainstream media, the authors writing for the online news web portal "Štandard" (Dag Daniš,³⁷ Jaroslav Daniška,³⁸ and others³⁹) have long held anti-immigrant and, partly related to this, anti-Muslim attitudes, but in this case, too, we saw in 2023 that this topic was not a priority for them. Most of the conspiracy media has given only marginal coverage to Islam and Muslims. At the time of the pandemic crisis and the war in Ukraine, other topics dominated. Similarly, in the run-up to the 2023 parliamentary elections,⁴⁰ the media focused on questioning the policies of parties that espoused liberal democracy and, therefore, the protection of Muslim rights in Slovakia.⁴¹

In the world of media that describe themselves as alternative (spreading various types of disinformation and hoaxes), the portals "Hlavné správy" (Konzervatívny denník)⁴² and "Zem a vek"⁴³ stand out in 2023, but even for them the topic of im-

36. Ibid., pp. 68-84.

37. Daniš, Dag, "Zobudme sa. Progressívny prístup k migrantom stroskotal" (Let's wake up. The progressive approach to migrants has failed), *Štandard*, 5 September 2023, <https://standard.sk/429473/zobudme-sa-progresivny-pristup-k-migrantom-stroskotal>, accessed 30 May 2024

38. Daniška, Jaroslav, "Migrácia je problém, ktorý Ódor nedokáže riešiť. Štát potrebuje vládu" (Migration is a problem that Ódor cannot solve. The country needs a government), *Štandard*, 4 October 2023, <https://standard.sk/457873/migracia-je-problem-ktory-odor-nedokaze-riesit-stat-potrebuje-vladu/?source=rssfeed>, accessed 30 May 2024

39. Kechlibar, Marian, "Dlhé tieňe džihádu. Čím menej islamu v krajine, tým menšie riziko" (The long shadows of jihad. The less Islam in the country, the less risk), *Štandard*, 5 June 2024, <https://standard.sk/681652/dlhtiene-dzihadu-cim-menej-islamu-v-krajine-tym-mensie-riziko>, accessed 15 June 2024

40. Pellegrini, Peter, "Už žiadna nekontrolovaná migrácia!" (No more uncontrolled migration!), *YouTube*, 3 September 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCGuF4HRw6M>, accessed 2 June 2024

41. Uhrík, Milan, "Okamžite treba uzavrieť hranice a odmietnuť migračný pakt EÚ!" (Immediately close the borders and reject the EU migration pact!) Facebook, 28 September 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/ing.milan.uhrik/videos/6745614555517712>, accessed 2 June 2024

42. Lehotský, Ivan, "Silné video: francúzske dievča varuje Slovákov, aby volili rozumne a nedopustili tu migrant-skú katastrofu" (Powerful video: French girl warns Slovaks to vote wisely and not let the migrant catastrophe happen here), *Hlavné správy*, 26 August 2023, <https://www.hlavnespravy.sk/silne-video-francuzske-dievca-varuje-slovakov-aby-volili-rozumne-a-nedopustili-tu-migrantsku-katastrofu/3241092>, accessed 28 May 2024

43. Richter, Alex, "Moslim tvrdí, že Západ sa dobrovoľne zaplnil najhorším "odpadom" z islamských krajín" (Muslim claims that the West has voluntarily filled itself with the worst 'trash' from Islamic countries), *Zem a vek*, 22 October 2023, <https://zemavek.sk/moslim-tvrdi-ze-zapad-sa-dobrovolne-zaplnil-najhorsim-odpadom-z-islamskych-krajin/>, accessed 29 May 2024

migration was only one of the peripheral topics that they used to question the policies of Progressive Slovakia (and President Čaputová) and the immigration policies of the European Union.⁴⁴ In online media that spread conspiracy theories, the topic of immigration was addressed by the “InfoVojna” website. In addition, various video platforms were active on YouTube and Facebook, behind which were far-right candidates (and parties): “Kulturblog” (Republika);⁴⁵ “TV Slovan”⁴⁶ (private activity of Peter Kotlár and Martina Šimkovičová, which became a platform for SNS and SMER-SSD candidates before the 2023 elections);⁴⁷ or the pages of numerous individuals spreading various forms of hate on social networks such as Judita Laššáková,⁴⁸ Daniel Bombic (aka Dany Kollár),⁴⁹ and others. All of these media outlets and individuals partly addressed the issue of the imagined threats of immigration (and Islam) to traditional Slovak society, or praised those who have cracked down on immigration.

A kind of “red line” in the perception of Muslims in Slovakia, which was present throughout 2023, was the case of the alleged “first Slovak female terrorist”. This case began unexpectedly at the beginning of 2023, after Slovak authorities brought a Slovak citizen of Muslim faith to Slovakia. The whole case was presented as a success story in Slovakia’s fight against terrorism, but ended up as a story of the tragic life of a woman with two minor children.⁵⁰ It all started in February 2023, when the media reported that Slovak authorities brought a Slovak citizen with her children from Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan), who was subsequently charged with terrorism and other crimes.⁵¹ The case became a topic of media interest at a time of government crisis.⁵² The desire

44. Štubňa, Ivan, “Tragédia Slovenska = vláda Progressívneho Slovenska” (Tragedy of Slovakia = Progressive Slovakia government), *Zem a vek*, 16 September 2023, <https://zemavek.sk/tragedia-slovenska-vlada-progressivneho-slovenska/>, accessed 29 May 2024

45. Hodás, Martin, “YouTube vysvetľuje zrušenie kanálov podporujúcich Republiku. Hovorí o vplyvových operáciách” (YouTube explains the cancellation of pro-Republic channels. Talks about influence operations), *Žive*, 19 June 2023, <https://zive.aktuality.sk/clanok/pz1kESr/youtube-vysvetluje-zrusenie-kanalov-podporujucich-republiku-hovori-o-vplyvovych-operaciach/>, accessed 2 June 2024

46. TV Slovan 2023. See: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPZ8sMAz9ur_xdt2HuYGrGK3TtSv2fcY5, accessed 1 June 2024

47. Video of the TV Slovan show on immigrants and the PS. TV Slovan used to belong to of the current Minister of Culture of the Slovak Republic Matina Šimkovičová (nominee SNS) and Peter Kotlár (now an MP). See: <https://www.facebook.com/martina.peter.1111/videos/1484510429040704/>, accessed 2 June 2024

48. Laššáková, Judita, “Kvíz na víkend: nelegálna migrácia” (Weekend quiz: illegal migration), *You Tube*, 9 September 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSI5_5NGer8, accessed 30 May 2024

49. The Telegraph account of Slovakia’s most infamous neo-Nazi, who is the subject of an international arrest warrant for spreading hate speech, anti-Semitism, and expressions of neo-Nazism. In 2023, he collaborated with Judita Laššáková, who was elected in June 2024 as an MEP for Smer-SSD. See: <https://t.me/s/dannykollar?before=2994>, accessed 2 June 2024

50. Striško, Rasto, “Dokument: Príbeh Slovenky podozrivej zo zločinov súvisiacich s terorizmom” (Documentary: the story of a Slovak woman suspected of terrorism-related crimes), *JOJ24*, 25 April 2023, <https://joj24.noviny.sk/utek-slovenky-z-isis/785236-dokument-pribeh-slovenskej-teroristky>, accessed 29 May 2024.

51. Hutko, Dominik, “Z Iraku priviezli možno prvú slovenskú teroristku” (The first Slovak female terrorist may have been brought back from Iraq), *Pravda*, 13 February 2023, <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/656888-slovenku-obvinili-z-terorizmu-naka-si-po-nu-letela-do-iraku/>, accessed 30 May 2024.

52. Kováčová, Veronika, “Údajná teroristka Renáta chce na slobodu: Žiada o zrušenie väzby! Jej obhajca prezradil dôvody” (Alleged terrorist Renáta wants to go free: she asks for her detention to be revoked! Her defence law-

for sensationalism led to the overstatement of the charges (as eventually decided by the Slovak courts) and, at the same time, reinforced social prejudices that Islam is a violent religion and that “all Muslims are terrorists”. At the end of the year, the prosecutor who originally charged the woman with terrorism ruled that this was merely irresponsible behaviour on the mother’s part, and the woman was only given a two-year suspended sentence. “The panel of the specialised court did not even consider it proven that the woman supported a terrorist group”.⁵³

Daily newspapers such as *Pravda*, *SME*,⁵⁴ *Dennik N*, *Aktuality.sk*, and the television stations RTVS and JoJ (JoJ24) reported in a much more factual way.

Justice System

Since 2017, legislation has been tightened in Slovakia. The National Council of the Slovak Republic approved the amendment of Law No. 308/1991 Coll. on Freedom of Religious Faith and regarding the status of Churches and religious communities. The law (a) increased the number of signatures required to register churches and religious communities in Slovakia from 20,000 to 50,000; (b) the condition has been determined that the signatories must be citizens of the Slovak Republic who are members of the Church or religious community; (c) and the signatories must confirm their signature by submitting personal data. These conditions are discriminatory because only four churches from the currently registered Churches and religious communities in Slovakia meet the conditions. Thirteen of the currently registered Churches and religious communities did not meet the original registration requirement, i.e., 20,000 believers. The most common argument in favour of a change in the law was the alleged threat of Islamisation of Slovakia.

This legal status of Muslims in Slovakia persists to this day and determines the possibilities of the Muslim community in the context of exercising their religious rights. In 2023, as a result of the activities of the IF and smaller Christian churches, there was an attempt to relax the current legislation which discriminates against the Muslim community and small Christian churches in the context of registration.

In February 2023, there was an unsuccessful attempt by the conservative MPs of the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osob-

yer reveals the reasons), *Topky.sk*, 30 May 2023, <https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/2509505/Udajna-teroristka-Renata-chce-na-slobodu--Ziada-o-zrusenie-vazby--Jej-obhajca-prezradil-dovody>, accessed 30 May 2024.

53. Kašiarová, Martina, Ivanková, Lubomíra, “Z údajnej teroristky je odrazu nezodpovedná matka. Renáta dostala dvojiročnú podmienku za ohrozovanie výchovy detí” (Suddenly the alleged terrorist is an irresponsible mother. Renáta was given a two-year suspended sentence for endangering the upbringing of her children), *TV Noviny*, 20 December 2023, https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/872609-z-udajnej-teroristky-je-odrazu-nezodpovedna-matka-renata-dostala-dvojirocnu-podmienku-za-ohrozovanie-vychovy-deti?campaignsrc=tn_clipboard, accessed 20 March 2024.

54. Hidbani, Suad, “Na Slovensku sa píše o moslimoch v drvivej väčšine negatívne” (In Slovakia, the overwhelming majority of what is written about Muslims is negative), *SME*, 14 July 2023, <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/23191182/na-slovensku-sa-pise-o-moslimoch-v-drvivej-vacsine-negativne.html>, accessed 30 May 2024.

nosti, OĽaNO) party and the Christian Union (Kresťanská únia, KÚ) to ease the current discriminatory legislation related to the registration of Churches and religious societies (Act No. 308/1991 Coll. on Freedom of Religious Belief).⁵⁵ This initiative was led by MP Anna Záborská, who at the time also held the post of Government Plenipotentiary for the Protection of Freedom of Religion and Belief. The aim of the change in the law was to remove the insurmountable obstacle of the high number of signatories required in order to petition for registration (currently 50,000 citizens of the Slovak Republic), and to create a system in which civil associations representing unregistered Churches would also be able to be classified as Churches and religious communities. The explanatory memorandum specifically states, “The main objective of the present draft Law is to make available the collective right to freedom of religious belief by making available the right to associate in religious associations which will be duly registered and registered religious entities.”⁵⁶

In 2023, we did not observe any direct manifestations of Islamophobia by the Slovak judiciary. The only case presented in the media was that of a Slovak woman of Muslim faith who was exonerated from all charges of terrorism by the court. In March 2023, the Specialised Criminal Court in Banská Bystrica considered the most famous case of Islamophobia in Slovakia, involving Sheila Szmereková, who in 2017 published a video of her urinating on the Quran.⁵⁷ She expressed no regret for her actions in court and the court sentenced her to three years in prison.⁵⁸

Internet

In the past, various conspiracy websites, websites of far-right political parties and movements, and some online platforms of Christian associations have been regular disseminators of Islamophobia on the internet. However, this has changed and most of them have focused on other topics in 2023: the war in Ukraine, the defense of tra-

55. “Návrh poslancov Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky Jána SZÖLLÖSA, Anny ZÁBORSKEJ, Vojtecha TÓTHA, Petra VONSA a Jána KERÉKRÉTIHO na vydanie zákona, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 308/1991 Zb. o slobode náboženskej viery a postavení cirkví a náboženských spoločností v znení neskorších predpisov” (Proposal of the members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Ján SZÖLLÖS, Anna Záborská, Vojtech TÓTH, Petr VONS and Ján KERÉKRÉTI to issue an Act amending *Law No. 308/1991 Coll. on Freedom of Religious Belief and the Status of Churches and Religious Societies*, as amended), *NR SR*, 24 February 2023, www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/cpt&ZakZborID=13&CisObdobia=8&ID=1483, accessed 10 March 2024.

56. “Dôvodová správa k návrhu zákona, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 308/1991 Z. z. o slobode náboženskej viery a postavení cirkví a náboženských spoločností” (Explanatory memorandum to the draft Law amending *Law No. 308/1991 Coll. on Freedom of Religious Belief and the Status of Churches and Religious Societies*), *NR SR*, 24 February 2023, www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=525057, accessed 10 March 2024.

57. TA3, “Zadržali mladú Slovenku, ktorá spálila a pomočila Korán” (A young Slovak woman who burned and urinated on the Koran is arrested), *TA3*, 17 February 2017, <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/100666/zadrzali-mladu-slovenku-ktora-spalila-a-pomocila-koran>, accessed 24 June 2024.

58. Kašiarová Martina, Murajdová, Alex, “Sheila, ktorá močila na korán, dostala tri roky basy” (Sheila, who urinated on a Koran, was given three years in prison), *TV NOVINY*, 1 March 2023, <https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/655828-sheila-ktora-mocila-na-koran-dostala-tri-roky-basy>, accessed 24 June 2024.

ditional values against liberalism, and the perceived negative effects of multiculturalism and illegal immigration. The latter two were partly about Islam and Muslims, although they were not directly named.

“Christianitas”, a conservative Christian website, has in the past presented itself as a platform for publishing messages warning against the so-called Islamisation of Europe and as a space to spread prejudices about Islam and Muslims.⁵⁹ In 2023, however, they mainly focused on defending conservative Christianity against what they identified as the agenda of the current Pope Francis, Christian Democrats, liberals, and defenders of minority rights (especially the LGBTQI+ community).⁶⁰

Past propagators of Islamophobia in Slovakia have included K-LSNS- (and Republic-) funded websites masquerading as news sites. Of these, only “Magazin 1”⁶¹ and “KulturBlog”⁶² are active, but they have only minimally included attacks on Islam and Muslims in 2023. The blog⁶³ and website of the Centre for the Study of Political Islam,⁶⁴ whose activities were directed against Muslims and Islam and have been shared in the past by Slovak politicians, were inactive in 2023.

In the past, most of these websites were shared by politicians of far-right parties (K-LSNS, Republic, etc.). The conspiracy portal “Hlavné správy”, which was briefly shut down by the state authorities in 2022 due to the dissemination of pro-Russian propaganda, is currently operating again and featured interviews by politicians who are not considered to belong to the far right (Robert Fico, Ľuboš Blaha, etc.).⁶⁵ In these interviews, they expressed negative narratives primarily about immigrants and secondarily towards Islam and Muslims.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

The list of those who can be considered the main figures of the Islamophobic network in 2023 is comparable to those who have represented this scene in the past. These were mainly opposition MPs for SMER-SSD (Robert Fico, Ľuboš Blaha, and others); MPs of the Republic movement (especially Milan Mazurek, Miroslav Suja) and their MEP

59. Christianitas, <https://christianitas.sk/>, accessed 20 June 2024.

60. Michalka, Branislav, “Slovenským vlastizradcom sa to nakoniec podarilo: Migranti prídu!” (The Slovak traitors finally succeeded: The migrants are coming!) *Christianitas*, 10 June 2023, <https://christianitas.sk/slovenskym-vlastizradcom-sa-to-nakoniec-podarilo-migranti-pridu-ake-dolezite-je-mat-filipa-a-simka/>, accessed 20 June 2024

61. Magazin 1, <https://magazin1.sk/category/slovensko/>, accessed 20 June 2024.

62. KulturBlog, “Rozhovor s Alice z Francúzska o multikultúrnom pekle” (Interview with Alice from France about multicultural hell), *KulturBlog*, 3 October 2023, <https://www.kulturblog.sk/post/rozhovor-s-alice-z-franc%C3%BAzska-o-multikult%C3%BArnom-pekle>, accessed 20 June 2024.

63. Blog N: Centrum pre štúdium politického islamu SR, <https://dennikn.sk/autor/cspi-sr/>, 20 June 2024.

64. Center for Study of Political Islam Slovakia, <https://www.cspii.org/sk/>, accessed 20 June 2024.

65. Struhárik, Filip, “Web Hlavné správy je zablokovaný. Postup štátu proti dezinformáciám nie je transparentný” (The Hlavné správy website is blocked. The state’s action against disinformation is not transparent), *Dennik N*, 2 March 2022, <https://dennikn.sk/2748815/web-hlavne-spravy-je-zablokovany-postup-statu-proti-dezinformaciám-nie-je-transparentný/>, accessed 20 May 2024.

Milan Uhrík; MPs of the K-LSNS (Marián Kotleba, Stanislav Mizik); and MPs of Life – National Party (Tomáš Taraba, Štefan Kuffa, etc.). To a limited extent also representatives of the ruling party Sme rodina (Boris Kollár – Speaker of Parliament and Minister of Social Affairs Milan Krajniak) can be included on this list. In addition, the Islamophobic narrative before the parliamentary elections in September 2023 was disseminated by various social networking figures like Rudolf Huliak, Judita Laššáková, etc.

The only non-governmental organisation that in the past tried to lobby politicians to focus their policies against Muslims and Islam was the Centre for the Study of Political Islam; however, their last activities were recorded in 2021. During the years 2022 and 2023, their activity was significantly minimised.

In general, we can say that in 2023, the topic of Islam and Muslims, with the exception of illegal immigration, shortly before the elections in September 2023, was in the periphery of the interests of politicians, media, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

The most active civil society organisation in the fight against Islamophobia is the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (IF), which monitors manifestations of Islamophobia, participates in projects that encourage interreligious dialogue, and creates a platform for the meeting of personalities from the Muslim community and the non-Muslim majority.⁶⁶ At the beginning of February 2023, the IF organised a discussion on the current status of Islam and small unregistered Churches in Slovakia, in the premises of the Cordoba Cultural Centre. The event “How Does the Law on the Registration of Churches Affect the Life of Religious Communities in Slovakia?” was attended by imam Mohamad S. Hasna, rabbi Misha Kapustin, Old Catholic priest Martin Kováč, and Catholic priest Radoslav Šaškovič. Despite the fact that only two of the discussants were representatives of Churches and religious communities that are registered with the state, the participants agreed that the current legislation on the registration of Churches and religious communities is discriminatory.⁶⁷

It should be noted that bearing in mind that the manifestations of Islamophobia have generally fallen into the background, the activities of NGOs in the fight against Islamophobia have also been minimised, mirroring this trend.

66. “17 verejných podujatí, slávnostná večera, pohár Islamskej nadácie a stovky postov. Toto ste nám pomohli v roku 2022 dosiahnuť” (17 public events, a gala dinner, the Islamic Foundation Cup and hundreds of posts. This is what you helped us achieve in 2022), *IslamOnline.sk*, 14 January 2023, <https://www.islamonline.sk/2023/01/17-verejnych-podujati-slavnostna-vecera-pohar-islamskej-nadacie-a-stovky-postov-toto-ste-nam-pomohli-v-roku-2022-dosiahnut/>, accessed 24 June 2024.

67. “Ako vplýva zákon o registrácii cirkví na život náboženských komunít na Slovensku?” (How does the Law on the registration of churches affect the life of religious communities in Slovakia?), *INS*, 7 March 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/videos/552953016642428/>, accessed 15 May 2024.

An important activity that improves the image of Islam and Muslims in Slovakia and can be described as crucial in the fight against Islamophobia is the traditional *iftar*. The IF managed to organise the seventh annual *iftar* ceremony, which was attended by representatives of diplomatic missions in Slovakia, prominent personalities of the Muslim community in Slovakia, and friends and supporters of Slovak Muslims.⁶⁸ In 2023, a gala dinner for the *iftar* was held on 18 April in Bratislava, and the opening speeches were delivered by Director of the IF Mohamad S. Hasna; Ambassador of the Holy See H.E. Msgr. Nicola Girasoli; rabbi Misha Kapustin; Ambassador of the United States H.E. Gautam A. Rana; and mayor of Bratislava Matúš Valo.⁶⁹ Among the 50 guests were, among others, the ambassadors of Indonesia and the United Kingdom, the partner of the President of the Slovak Republic (first gentleman) Juraj Rizman,⁷⁰ Archbishop Emeritus of the Trnava Diocese Msgr. Bezák, and the advisor to the President of the Republic Oľga Gyarfášová.

Representatives of diplomatic missions in Slovakia are also aware of the importance of the *iftar* in this context. This is evidenced by the fact that the US Embassy in Slovakia organised the first ever interfaith *iftar* in 2023.⁷¹ The importance of this event was underscored by the fact that it was attended by Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights of the U.S. Department of State.⁷²

Active critics of Islamophobia in the media are photographer and columnist Andrej Bán,⁷³ journalists from *Denník N*,⁷⁴ *SME*,⁷⁵ *Pravda*, and *Postoj*,⁷⁶ and members of

68. "Slávnostný iftár v Bratislave - siedmy ročník bol výnimočný" (Festive *iftar* in Bratislava - the seventh year was exceptional), *INS*, 19 April 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/pfbid0XJzATSf7wyQ3pYK-C5Yaw7CQrUBaiPhe1TWgsAjmNVEVd3GGW9rxLdSW8rshLG3wl>, accessed 29 June 2024.
69. "Slávnostný iftár v Bratislave – 7. ročník bol výnimočný" (Festive *iftar* in Bratislava – seventh year was exceptional), *INS*, 19 April 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/pfbid02aijf7G3HnRqo3K8uE-JhZakNHAMxApC5VRaSxmbYTKia8WSBcxRotGuEA1sitW1cRL>, accessed 18 June 2024.
70. "Verejný status Juraja Rizmana o jeho účasti na iftare organizovanom Islamskou nadáciou na Slovensku" (Public status of Juraj Rizman about his participation in the *iftar* organised by the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia), *INS*, 19 April 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/rizman/posts/pfbid0m45kqxZhwcSveZJwJNZo1KQA-hJBRL22ks4q2dXvq96H6k2K68R6NjxWZNARsDML>, accessed 18 June 2024.
71. "Medzináboženský iftár na pôde veľvyslanectva USA" (Interfaith *iftar* at the US Embassy), *U. S. Embassy Slovakia*, 11 April 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/USEmbassySlovakia/posts/pfbid0S6StFmRBskdM4QuCP-f4VG1MBDwjBkPfjeaUUsvgFfnsrnvbsGq88FuhhseBnpVMfI>, accessed 3 July 2024.
72. "Under Secretary Zeya's remarks at an interfaith *iftar* in Bratislava Slovakia", *U.S. Department of State*, 11 April 2023, www.state.gov/under-secretary-zeyas-remarks-at-an-interfaith-iftar-in-bratislava-slovakia/, accessed 3 July 2024.
73. Bán, Andrej, "Lenč: Statusom nech ako moslim nerobím v kresťanskej krajine politológa, Fico iba ukázal, že je xenofóbny fašista", *Denník N*, 27 August 2021, <https://dennikn.sk/2516614/lenc-statusom-nech-ako-moslim-nerobim-v-krestanskej-krajine-politologa-fico-iba-ukazal-ze-je-xenofobny-fasista/>, accessed 29 June 2024.
74. Jacková, Anna, "Som moslim, som Turek, som Slovák, hovorí Kamil Yilmaz. Azyl na Slovensku mu dal možnosť vybrať si, ako chce žiť", 21 September 2021, <https://dennikn.sk/2544864/som-moslim-som-turek-som-slovak-hovori-kamil-yilmaz-azyl-na-slovensku-mu-dal-moznost-vybrat-si-ako-chce-zit/>, accessed 29 June 2024.
75. Anna Fay, "Muslims were more accepted in Slovakia shortly after the fall of socialism", 16 March 2021, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22617323/muslims-were-more-accepted-in-slovakia-shortly-after-the-fall-of-socialism.html>, accessed 29 June 2024.
76. Mrvová, Iva, "Islam na Slovensku: Riziko radikalizácie je väčšie, ak budú moslimovia fungovať v poloilegalite", *Postoj*, 8 June 2021, <https://www.postoj.sk/80475/riziko-radikalizacie-je-vaecsie-ak-budu-moslimovia-fungovat-v-poloilegalite>, accessed 29 June 2024.

the editorial staff of “IslamOnline.sk.” A number of religious organisations, the Jewish religious community, and teachers in some primary and secondary schools are also helping to reduce the manifestations of Islamophobia by creating space in the school curriculum for learning about Islam and Muslims in Slovakia.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The most alarming development regarding Islamophobia in Slovakia has been that it has moved from social networks to Parliament and has become part of the political discourse, which also influences people’s behaviour and their attitudes towards Muslims. After 2020, however, the topic of Muslims and Islam has gradually disappeared from social discourse. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have caused politicians to lose interest in attacking Muslims and immigrants. This became fully apparent in 2023, when we saw only a minimum of verbal attacks on Muslims, while official statistics did not record any physical attacks on Muslims.

In recent years, Islamophobic statements have been part of the policy and political communication of most political parties, but this also changed in 2023. However, it is still true that overt or latent Islamophobic content has been consciously or unconsciously domesticated in all Slovak media (conspiracy, tabloid, and mainstream).

The biggest challenges for the coming period will be to spread awareness that Islamophobia is as dangerous for Slovak society and democracy as any other hatred against minorities, including anti-Semitism. Society – politicians, media, teachers – should realise that the destruction of democracy and the rise of totalitarianism in the 1930s was kick-started by anti-Semitism, which manifested itself in the same concomitant phenomena as Islamophobia in Slovakia.

Chronology

- **February 2023:** The unsuccessful attempt by Anna Záborská (Government Plenipotentiary for the Protection of Freedom of Religion) and the parliamentary opposition to change the law on Church registration.⁷⁷
- **March 2023:** A Specialised Criminal Court decided on the sentence for a woman who desecrated the Quran in 2017.⁷⁸
- **April 2023:** The seventh edition of the festive *iftar* of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia, which took place only online.⁷⁹

77. Draft amendments to the Act on Registration of Churches and Religious Societies, <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=525056>, accessed 5 July 2024.

78. “Court sends extremist Sheila, who urinated on the Koran, behind bars”, *StartitUp*, 1 March 2023, <https://www.startitup.sk/extremistku-sheilu-ktora-mocila-na-koran-sud-posiela-za-mreze/>, accessed 2 July 2024

79. Bán, Andrej, “Moslimovia naďalej nemajú na Slovensku plné náboženské práva” (Muslims still do not have full religious rights in Slovakia), *Denník N*, 22 April 2023, <https://dennikn.sk/3337595/moslimovia-nadalej-nemaju-na-slovensku-plne-nabozenske-prava/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR3uLNuWQg1eVRcZ-T1x->

- **August 2023:** Several thousand immigrants mainly from Syria and Afghanistan crossed the Slovak-Hungarian border during the month. This was framed as an “immigration crisis” and revived the Islamophobic rhetoric of certain politicians and political parties (the far right, SMER-SSD, Hlas-SD, etc.).⁸⁰
- **September 2023:** Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, which again included Islamophobic rhetoric.⁸¹
- **October 2023:** Minister of Interior of the Slovak Republic Matúš Šutaj Eštok organised a demonstrative police action at the Slovak-Hungarian border to show the strength of the new government in the fight against illegal immigration.⁸²

tQCYNHKnYbQArd4I-yswo-_X84IVpAcoHVx90bA_aem_-BAeavkYm2wQbHeDTFe13Q, accessed 2 July 2024.

80. Hajčáková, Daniela, “Fico si mesiac pred voľbami opäť všimol migráciu. Opakuje sa rok 2015?” (A month before the elections, Fico noticed migration again. Is 2015 repeating itself?) *SME*, 4 September 2023, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/23212333/kto-su-ludia-ktori-prudia-cez-slovensko-je-tu-utecenecka-kriza-ako-v-2015-otazky-a-odpovede.html>, accessed 2 July 2024.
81. Hanák, Peter, “Voľby 2023: Peter Pellegrini chce zatvárať migrantov, Eduard Heger za nimi vidí Viktora Orbána” (Election 2023: Peter Pellegrini wants to jail migrants, Eduard Heger sees Viktor Orbán behind them), *Aktuality.sk*, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/FU8NJmz/volby-2023-peter-pellegrini-chce-zatvarat-migrantov-eduard-heger-za-nimi-vidi-viktora-orbana/>, accessed 2 July 2024.
82. Pribelský, Matej, Ištók, Dávid, “Šutaj Eštok sľuboval ultimátne riešenie migrácie. Počas veľkej nočnej akcie nechtyli ani jedného utečenca” (Šutaj Eštok promised the ultimate solution to migration. Not a single refugee was caught during the big night action), *Aktuality.sk*, 30 October 2023, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/KZc-Caum/sutaj-estok-sľuboval-ultimátne-riesenie-migracie-pocas-velkej-nocnej-akcie-nechtyli-ani-jedneho-ute-cenca/>, accessed 2 July 2024.

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Resumen Ejecutivo

Durante el año 2023 a pesar de la lucha llevada a cabo desde las diferentes esferas de la Sociedad, los delitos de odio han vuelto a aumentar en España, siguiendo las tendencias de aumento, pasando de los 1.802 de 2021, a 1.869 en 2022. La mayoría (40%) de los 1.869 delitos de odio cometidos en 2022 (755) están relacionados con motivaciones racistas y xenófobas. Siendo las redes sociales el principal foco de difusión del discurso de odio, llegando el discurso islamofobo en noviembre y diciembre hasta el 35% del total de discurso de odio en noviembre-diciembre 2023, tal como recogía OBERAXE.

Criminalizar al musulmán, así como catalogarlo de invasor o terrorista da votos, y eso ha hecho que los partidos de extrema derecha entren en una carrera por ver quien de ellos es más radical. Para este discurso, han contado con la inestimable ayuda de youtuber e instagramers. Ellos son creadores de contenido, que normalizan y difunden discursos de odio de forma directa a una sociedad que se ve reflejada en ellos y que los toma como referencia política por encima de medios oficiales. La audiencia joven presta ya más atención a influencers que a periodistas, incluso a la hora de consumir noticias.

Los actos islamófobos tienen consecuencias jurídicas y durante 2023 en España se han llevado a cabo diferentes varias condenas por dichos motivos. Por eso, es necesaria la pedagogía para combatir el discurso del odio y seguir incrementando la colaboración entre gobiernos, instituciones y sociedad civil.

Executive Summary

During the year 2023, hate crimes have once again increased in Spain, following a rising trend from 1,802 in 2021 to 1,869 in 2022. This is despite the countering efforts carried out by various societal and governmental actors, increasingly aware of the challenges posed by Islamophobia in Spain. A majority (40% or 755 incidents) of the 1,869 hate crimes in 2022 were related to racist and xenophobic motivations. Social media platforms have been the primary focus for the dissemination of hate speech, with Islamophobic discourse peaking at 35% of all hate speech in November and December 2023, as reported by the state observatory for racism OBERAXE.

Extreme right-wing parties have been a big driver behind the increase in hate speech and hate crimes. Politicians routinely criminalise Muslims and label them as invaders or terrorists in order to garner votes. This has led to further radicalisation of the discourse, as competing extreme right-wing parties engage in a race to weaponise Islamophobia. Furthermore, social media actors like YouTubers and Instagrammers have helped extreme-right actors in Spain to disseminate this type of content. These content creators normalise and disseminate hateful discourses to a society that increasingly identifies with them, valuing content creators as political references over official media sources. Indeed, the younger audiences now pay more attention to influencers than to journalists, even when consuming news.

Islamophobic acts have legal consequences, and throughout 2023, there were several such convictions in Spain. Therefore, pedagogy is necessary to combat hate speech and continue increasing collaboration among governments, institutions, and civil society.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Kingdom of Spain

Type of Regime: Parliamentary democracy

Form of Government: Constitutional parliamentary monarchy

Ruling Parties: Coalición Coalition of Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and SUMAR (coalition of several left-wing parties)

Opposition Parties: Partido Popular (right), Vox (extreme right)

Last Elections: The last general elections, on 23 July 2023, were won by the Partido Popular (PP). Results: Popular Party (PP): 137/350, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE): 121/350, Vox: 33/350, SUMAR: 31/350, Catalan Republican Left (ERC): 7/350, Junts: 7/350, EH Bildu: 6/350, PNV: 5/350, BNG: 1/350, CC: 1/350, UPN: 1/350

Total Population: 48,592,909¹

Major Language: Spanish (official language); Catalan, Valencian, Basque, and Galician (main co-official languages)

Official Religion: None. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 established that “there shall be no state religion”. At the same time, Article 16.3 outlines that the state will cooperate with religious authorities from several confessions, among which chiefly Catholicism.²

Statistics on Islamophobia: The latest report conducted by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior³ in 2023 regarding the year 2022 tells us that in 2022, 1,869 crimes were committed, 67 more than in 2021, with 755 related to racism and xenophobia. On the other hand, OBERAXE, the Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia,⁴ has been indicating throughout 2023 the increase in hate speech against Muslims on social media platforms, ranging from 35% (of the total hate speech recorded) in November and December, or 34% in September and October, to 17% in May and June, the lowest. Islamophobic speech has remained at 23-26% of total hate speech incidents in the months of January-February, March-April, and July-August.

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: The latest statistics come from the 2023 report by OBERAXE, the Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia.

1. “Estadística Continua de Población (ECP)”, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1 April 2024, <https://www.ine.es/dyngs/Prensa/ECP1T24.htm> (Access date: 19 July 2024).
2. Article 16.3 of the Spanish Constitution, “Official State’s Bulletin” (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*) <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1978-31229> (Access date: 6 May 2024).
3. “Informe sobre evolución de los delitos de odio en España 2021”, Ministerio del Interior, 5 July 2023, https://www.interior.gob.es/opencms/pdf/archivos-y-documentacion/documentacion-y-publicaciones/publicaciones-descargables/publicaciones-periodicas/informe-sobre-la-evolucion-de-los-delitos-de-odio-en-Espana/Informe_evolucion_delitos_odio_Espana_2022_126200207.pdf (Access date: 5 May 2024).
4. From here onwards referred to by its acronym, OBERAXE.

Major Religions (% of Population): Practising Catholics 19.3%; Non-practising Catholics 39.1%; Agnostic 10.1%; Indifferent 11.2%; Atheists 14.8%; Other religions 3.5%, according to a report by the Sociological Research Centre.⁵

Muslim Population (% of Population): By the end of 2023, more than 2.4 million Muslims were residing in Spain, of which more than 45% have Spanish nationality while 55% are immigrants; of the latter, 36% are from Morocco and 19% from other nationalities. Spanish and foreign Muslims together represent approximately 5% of the total population of Spain.⁶

Main Muslim Community Organizations: The Comisión Islámica de España (CIE) is the sole interlocutor with the Spanish state and is part of the Muslim Council for Cooperation in Europe (MCCE),⁷ a representative body in the European Union. The CIE is composed of the Unión de Comunidades Islámicas de España (UCIDE), the Federación Española de Entidades Religiosas Islámicas (FEERI), and other minority federations.

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Asociación Estudiantes Musulmanes, Asociación Jóvenes Musulmanes Españoles, Asociación de Mujeres Musulmanas Biddaya, Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes, Asociación Musulmana por los Derechos Humanos, European Network of Women of African Descent, Fundación Al Fanar, Fundación Cepaim, Fundación de Cultura Islámica, Cinved, Fundación Euroárabe, Fundación Ibn Battuta, Musulmanes contra la Islamofobia, Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los Medios, SOS Racisme Catalunya, SOS Racismo Madrid, Stop Als Fenòmens Islamòfobs, Unitat contra el feixisme i el racism

Far-Right Parties: Vox, Hacer Nación, España 2000, Alianza Nacional, La Falange, Falange Española de las JONS, Alternativa Española, Democracia Nacional, Orden y Ley (POLE), ADÑ, Identitarios, Partido Social Patriota, Partido Nacional-socialista Obrero Español (FNI-PNSOE), Partido Solucionista, Partido Nacional Bolchevique, Movimiento Católico Español, Front Nacional de Catalunya (FNC), Movimiento Aragonés Social, Renaixença Nacional Catalana (RNC), Som Identitaris, Som Catalans Aliança Catalana

Far-Right Movements: Hazte Oír, Vanguardistas, Asociación Cultural Málaga 1487, Noviembre Nacional, Españoles en Acción, In Memoriam Juan Ignacio, Ohka, Facta, Cedade, Plataforma 711, Revuelta, Getafe Nacional Revolucionario, El Empecinado, Resistencia Social Alcalá de Henares, Asociación Cultural Fernando III, Distrito Sur, Revolutio España, Talavera Nuestra, Sección Asalto, Murtia Magna, Alm-

5. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas [CIS], *Barómetro de Abril 2024: Estudio no 3450*, (Madrid: CIS, 2024) https://www.cis.es/documents/d/cis/es3450mar_a (Access date: 23 May 2024)

6. Observatorio Andalusi, *Estudio demográfico de la población musulmana*, (Madrid: UCIDE, 2023) <http://observatorio.hispanomuslim.es/estademograf.pdf> (Access date: 6 May 2024).

7. Muslim Council for Cooperation in Europe (*Consejo Musulmán de Cooperación en Europa- CMCE*) <http://www.hispanomuslim.es/panya/cmce.htm> (Access date: 6 May 2024).

ería Nacional Sindicalista, Paso al Frente, Comunidad Identitas, Córdoba Nuestra, Caserna La Jabea, Alcalá 1247, Acción Juvenil Valencia, Valencia Nostra, Acción Social Navarra, Acción Social Galicia, Hibera Genus, A Nosa Coruña, Caserna Don Pe-layo, Asociación Cultural Alfonso I Cantabria, Tas Raices, Centro Social y Nacional Salamanca, Juventud Patriota Valladolid, Asociación Liberum, Devenir Castellano, Asociación Rodrigo de Bastidas, Valentia Forum, Somatemp, Asociación Cultural Tradicionalista Fernando III El Santo, Defensa Catalunya, Patriotes Catalans, Mov-iment Identitari Català (MIC)

Far-Right Violent Organizations: Some of the above organisations, namely Bastión Frontal and Hogar Social Madrid, together with splinter groups operating under the umbrella name “Hacer Nación”, have been targeted by the Spanish courts for attacks against immigrants, Muslims, and unaccompanied minors (MENAS). “An emerging violent organisation in 2024 is “Nucleo Nacional”, a neo-nazi anti-govern-mental far right activist group”

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No
- **Forcible Enforcement of Handshake:** No

Introduction

The latest official data offered by the Spanish Ministry of the Interior and OBERAXE, the Spanish Observatory of Racism and Xenophobia, tell us that both hate crimes and online hate speech has continued to increase in Spain with respect to previous years, and that the Spanish Muslim community continues to be one of the main victims. Different actors such as politicians, media, journalists, and more recently, social media “influencers” like YouTubers and Instagrammers have contributed to this increase, disseminating Islamophobic ideas to a younger sector of the population.

A newer trend with respect to previous years is the increase in double standards and discrimination against Muslims in the workplace. Whereas before discrimination mostly occurred during the hiring process, there are now ongoing cases where workers have refused to serve customers on account of their religious belief or presumed origin.

In order to evaluate the state’s response to the growth of Islamophobia in Spain in 2023, we first describe several different convictions by the Spanish justice on Islamophobic grounds.

Then, we examine existing policies and measures to counteract Islamophobia in Spain. As a matter of fact, several state and grassroots institutions of different types continue to carry out all types of academic and social actions that help combat hate speech, help integration and contribute to preserving a climate of coexistence in Spanish society, as has been the case to this day.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

The latest data on Islamophobia in Spain confirm the upwards trend of previous years. Throughout 2023, new verbal and physical attacks against Muslims have been recorded as hate crimes, as targets were chosen based on their Islamic religious beliefs and/or geographical origin.

Meanwhile hate speech targeting Muslims has grown the most in 2014. Islamophobic discourse largely originates from extreme-right parties but is exponentially growing as it spreads by sympathetic content creators through various social media platforms to permeate all spheres of Spanish society. This growth can be seen in the attitudes, comments, and content projected online and offline (traditional media) on a daily basis, and also exploding as everyday, street-level anti-Muslim harassment.

On the other hand, hate crimes have also increased. At the end of 2023, the Spanish Ministry of the Interior released its report on 2022 hate crimes, indicating that such crimes had also increased by 3.7% in Spain in 2022, rising from a total of 1,802

hate crimes in 2021 to 1,869 in 2022. Forty per cent of these crimes (755) were related to racist and xenophobic motivations targeting Muslims.

An essential tool for evaluating and monitoring this growth, particularly in social media, is OBERAXE, which has been operating in Spain since July 2020. In January-February 2023, OBERAXE reported that attacks specifically against Spanish Muslims and Islam had risen to 23% of online hate speech, a 13% increase from the 10% recorded in November-December 2022. The report from March-April 2023 shows that Islamophobic speech had reached 26% of all hate speech cases, rising to 35% in the months of November and December.

According to a recent study by the government of the Basque Country's Sociological Prospecting Office, 11% of young people aged 18 to 29 believe that discrimination based on religion or religious beliefs is very widespread in the Basque Country, and another 35% believe that this type of discrimination is quite widespread.⁸

Among the most shocking hate crimes in 2023, we must highlight the actions carried out in February 2023 by a high school teacher from Santa Coloma (Barcelona) who insulted and attacked a student,⁹ shouting “Bloody shitty Moor, I don't pay taxes for you [to receive] assistance” (*Puto moro de mierda, yo no pago impuestos para sus ayudas*).

Between March and April, several events took place. The first one was when Yuerriux, a young Muslim woman, denounced on TikTok that she was prevented from working at a restaurant in Vitoria (Basque Country) for wearing an Islamic veil.¹⁰ Her post was followed by attacks by other social media users with statements such as “I'm not racist, but I wouldn't hire a girl wearing a veil” (*No soy racista, pero no contrato a una chica que lleve velo*). Later in the year, a young man of Maghreb origin was assaulted by two young neighbours in Cartaya (Huelva, Andalucía). The attack was allegedly motivated by a rumour that had spread the day before through different social media platforms warning about the presence of a “Moorish man” (*hombre moro*) in certain parks of the municipality “attempting to attack with a knife” (*intentando agredir con un arma blanca*).¹¹

Shortly after, an employee of the Eurostars Madrid Tower Hotel was accused of posting racist comments against the Moroccan national football team on his Instagram profile,¹² even going as far as to say, “The Moroccan national team at the Tow-

8. Gabinete de Prospección Sociológica – Presidencia del Gobierno Vasco, *Sociómetro Vasco 83- Marzo 2024* (Bilbao: Lehendakarizta, March 2024), https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/documentacion/sociometro_vasco_83/es_def/adjuntos/24sv83.pdf (Access date: 23 May, 2024).

9. “Educación aparta tres meses a un profesor de Santa Coloma por insultar y agredir a un alumno”, *El Periódico*, 13 February, 2023.

10. “Le impiden trabajar en un restaurante de Vitoria por llevar velo islámico”, *Noticias de Álava*, 7 March, 2023.

11. “Un bulo en redes sociales acaba en un ataque racista en Cartaya”, *Huelva Información*, 11 March, 2023.

12. “Detienen a un empleado de un hotel por insultos racistas contra la selección marroquí: “Malditos moros de mierda””, *La Sexta*, 27 March, 2023.

ers, you are a pain in the neck. Damn shitty Moors. I shit on Ramadan and on their damn dead.”¹³

In April, a judge started an investigation into a case of racist assault on a young man by local police officers from Cornellà. After the detained man asked for the reason for the identification stop, one of the officers’ response was partly recorded: “Shitty Moroccan, aren’t you from around here? Go to hell, I’m going to smash your head in” (*Moro de mierda, ¿tú no eres de por ahí? Vete a tomar por el culo que te voy a reventar la cabeza*).¹⁴ Meanwhile, in April, the vice president of the Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers (*Asociación de Trabajadores Inmigrantes*, ATIM), Sabah Yacoubi, reported to the Murcian Health Service (*Servicio murciano de Salud*, SMS) that “a nurse had called her a Moor” (*mora*). She made a plea for an official review of the treatment that Spanish patients from other ethnicities receive when they seek healthcare.¹⁵

Finally, between May and September, several significant attacks took place. On Tuesday, 9 May, in the morning, another racist incident took place in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Canary Islands). At a popular terrace of a café in the centre of the capital, a customer began to strongly verbally harass another client for simply wearing a hijab. The assailant finished her attack with “Thank goodness a white c*** gave birth to me” (*menos mal que a mi me parió un c*** blanco*) and added, seeing that the victim was recording the events, “Wait, I am also recording you, jihadist” (*Espera que yo también te estoy grabando, yihadista*).¹⁶

On 2 August, three people were convicted of a hate crime for attacking a fruit shop in Valencia while shouting, “Dirty Arab, get out of my country” (*moro de mierda vete de mi país*).¹⁷ Also in August in Benicalap (Valencia), a security guard at a swimming pool refused entry to a Spanish Muslim woman wearing a hijab, telling her “your clothing is disgusting.” The police have arrested two swimming pool employees in relation to this incident for an alleged crime against fundamental rights and public liberties.¹⁸

The latest known Islamophobic incident in 2023 happened in December in Villarreal, where a series of Islamophobic graffiti appeared throughout the town.¹⁹

13. (*La selección de Marruecos en el Towers, sois unos tocapelotas. Malditos moros de mierda. Me cago en el Ramadán y en sus putos muertos*).

14. “Una jueza investiga a policías locales de Cornellà por una agresión racista: “Te voy a reventar la cabeza””, EIDiario.es, 13 April, 2023.

15. “Denuncia ante el SMS que “un enfermero la llama mora” para que se revise el trato a pacientes de otras etnias”, La Opinión de Murcia, 16 April 2023.

16. “Insultos xenófobos en una cafetería del centro de Santa Cruz de Tenerife”, EIDiario, 9 May 2023.

17. “Condenan por delito de odio a 3 personas por atacar una frutería de Valencia al grito de “moro de mierda vete de mi país””, Levante-EMV, 2 August, 2023.

18. “Una mujer denuncia que le impidieron entrar a una piscina de Valencia por llevar velo: “Con esa ropa que lleváis, qué asco””, El País, 11 August, 2023.

19. “La Policía Nacional asume la investigación sobre la autoría de pintadas islamófobas en Vila-real”, El Periódico Mediterraneo, 19 December, 2023.



Figure 1: Picture of the Islamophobic graffiti in Virrereal. It reads, “Mosques to Morocco”. **Source:** *El Periódico Mediterráneo* (18 December 2023)

Employment

Islamophobia manifests itself in many ways. On the one hand, there is discrimination against Muslims due to their ethnicity, appearance, or religious beliefs. On the other hand, there are also cases where individuals refuse to work with Muslim colleagues or serve Muslim clients.

As we mentioned before, we have the cases of Yueriux who was prevented from working at a restaurant in Vitoria for wearing a hijab, and the incident that took place during the Moroccan national team’s stay at the Eurostars Madrid Tower Hotel, on the occasion of a friendly match against Peru, when a 28-year-old Spanish worker posted racist comments on his Instagram profile against the Moroccan team.

However, some cases of discrimination against Muslims in the workplace have started to face consequences. In November, the Social Court of the Superior Court of Justice of Extremadura (*Sala de lo Social del Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Extremadura*) ratified the dismissal of a pizza delivery driver who, on 29 May 2021, refused to deliver food to Muslim customers after seeing their name. The worker explained to his boss that he “does not deliver orders to damn Moors” (*no llevo pedidos a moros de mierda*) which ultimately led to his dismissal, which he challenged.²⁰

Education

Spanish Law 26/1992, dated 10 November, ratifies the Cooperation Agreement between the Spanish State and the Islamic Commission of Spain (*Acuerdo de Cooper-*

20. “Despedido un repartidor por negarse a llevar pizzas a clientes musulmanes”, *Diario de Cádiz*, 3 November, 2023.

ación del Estado Español con la Comisión Islámica de España). Section 1 of Article 10 of its annex guarantees, in order to give effect to the freedom of worship provisions of Article 27.3 of the Spanish Constitution, the right of Muslim students, their parents, and school governing bodies which request it to receive Islamic religious education in public and privately funded schools.

Thus, the subject of Islamic religion in school aims to support students' educational processes and is oriented towards achieving the objectives of early childhood education and the initial acquisition of key competencies for lifelong learning, as outlined in the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 22 May 2018, adapted to the Spanish school context most recently in 2022.²¹

This latest protocol once more highlights the importance of active engagement with families in order to ensure that the everyday aspects of Islam taught at home and the educational intentions of this field at school complement each other, ensuring positive collaboration to facilitate the progress of students. For this purpose, the hiring of Islamic religion teachers has increased from 144 in the academic year 2022-2023 to 243 in the academic year 2023-2024, an almost 69% increase. The number of students studying Islamic religion has also increased from 374,779 in the previous academic year to 386,070 in the current academic year.²²

Regarding latest trends in Islamophobia research, in 2023, Sabina Civila, Mónica Bonilla-del-Río, and Ignacio Aguaded presented their work "Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok". Their work argues that in order to combat Islamophobic discourse targeting entire Muslim communities in Spain, it is necessary to investigate and analyse specifically how this discourse has permeated through different social layers and become normalised. Their findings confirm that this has happened primarily via social media. The participatory features of social media promote the construction of meanings and identities different from those emitted by mainstream media, and this very aspect of social media has become a tool allowing the reconfiguration of dominant discourses, incorporating political perspectives and establishing social media as a new communication platform for political and social discussions, moving well beyond its original entertainment value.²³

Politics

Spanish right-wing politicians have continued to emulate other successful European far-right politicians and have similarly been very skilful in turning public opinion against Muslims and immigrants in general, blaming their presence for the current

21. Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, *Real Decreto 95/2022-1 de febrero* (Madrid: BOE, 2022), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1654> (Access date: 24 May, 2024).

22. "Los musulmanes en España superan los 2,4 millones", Europa Press, 1 February, 2024.

23. Sabina Civila, Mónica Bonilla-del-Río, Ignacio Aguaded, "Social Media and Otherness: The Case of #Islamterrorism on TikTok", *Cogitatio*, Vol. 11, No 2 (May, 2023).

socio-economic problems of Western society - unemployment, housing shortages, inflation, etc. These discourses can and, in fact, spread through traditional media and sympathetic journalists. But, by far the preferred channels are generally social media, where censorship is, at best, self-imposed and, at worst, non-existent. Popular sites like Facebook, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), or Reddit with many Spanish users are experiencing an epidemic of Islamophobic hate speech that links Muslims to threats, violence, and chaos.

Despite the highly celebrated political defeat of the far-right figure Santiago Abascal and his party, Vox, which came close to forming a government in the recent Spanish elections, anti-Muslim rhetoric continues to grow, and the far right is doing a lot to capitalise on this momentum. Abascal even used the riots in France in 2023 to launch an attack on the Muslim community. In a political rally in Barcelona, the far-right leader claimed that “Europe is threatened by anti-European mobs” (*Europa está amenazada por turbas de antieuropeos*).²⁴

During a set of right-wing protests, supposedly against the government’s decisions regarding the Catalan amnesty, in front of the Socialist Party headquarters, sympathisers of the far-right party Vox and its youth branch, Revuelta, chanted slogans such as “Christian Spain, not Muslim!” and “You lot don’t have the balls with the Moors!” (*¡España cristiana, no musulmana!* and *¡Con los moros no tenéis cojones!*).²⁵ It is evident that these chants had little to do with Catalan independence; rather, they point towards the instrumentalisation of anti-Muslim rhetoric to gain political traction and delegitimise opponents. Another Spanish far-right politician, Rocío de Meer from San Isidro-Níjar, Almería, used social media to spread the theory of “great replacement” (of ethnically Spanish citizens) as fact in Spain in 2023. De Meer wrote, “We are witnessing a very strong cultural change, where there used to be church towers we are now seeing minarets, and in places like the municipality of Níjar, Islamisation is a fact” (*estamos asistiendo a un cambio cultural muy fuerte, que donde antes había campanarios ahora estamos viendo minaretes, y que en lugares como el municipio de Níjar la islamización es un hecho*).²⁶

At the same time, politician Juan García-Gallardo (Vox) denied having ever committed hate crimes, while pointing to a “North African”²⁷ as the culprit of a 2023 assassination attempt against former PP leader and Vox founder Alejo Vidal-Quadras.²⁸ García-Gallardo is the regional vice president and has repeatedly referred to the ar-

24. “Abascal usa los disturbios en Francia para lanzar un ataque contra la comunidad musulmana”, *El País*, 2 July, 2023.

25. “Cánticos racistas en la manifestación contra la amnistía de Ferraz: “España cristiana, nunca musulmana””, *ElDiario.es*, 8 November, 2023.

26. Rocío De Meer, TikTok, 7 December, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@rociodemeer/video/7309971428386819361> (Access Date: 25 abril 2024)

27. “García-Gallardo niega haber cometido delitos de odio mientras señala a “un magrebi” por el atentado contra Vidal-Quadras”, *ElDiario.es*, 21 November, 2023.

28. “La Audiencia Nacional asume la investigación del atentado contra Vidal-Quadras”, *El Periodico*, 13 November, 2023.

rival of migrants in Medina del Campo (Valladolid) as an “invasion”. He was also involved in the aforementioned racist chants aimed at the Socialist Party headquarters.

Another politician who has used anti-Muslim statements to her personal benefit is the far-right Catalan independentist Silvia Orriols (Aliança Catalana). In 2023, an investigation was opened against her as the then mayor of Ripoll for her comments about Muslims on public channel 8TV, where Orriols went as far as to say, “Allowing the massive entry of Muslim immigrants is a mistake that we may pay dearly for, because Muslims basically do not recognise European democracies or our civil laws” (*Permitir la entrada masiva de inmigrantes musulmanes es un error que podemos pagar muy caro, porque básicamente los musulmanes no reconocen las democracias europeas ni nuestras leyes civiles.*)²⁹

Finally, it is worth mentioning a self-defined left-wing social movement which is also instrumentalising Islamophobic tropes about invasions for political growth. This movement is Frente Obrero (Workers’ Front) and its leader is Roberto Vaquero. In 2023, Frente Obrero carried out various actions blaming Islam for social maladies. On 12 July, the party wrote on their X profile that Islam is related to an increase in violence and crime, ghettoization, the introduction of Islam in public education, Sharia law, Islamist attacks, and a reactionary view of women’s role in society.³⁰ In December, the party hung a banner in Palma de Mallorca (Balear Islands) that read “Get Islam out of schools” (*Fuera el Islam de las escuelas*).³¹



Figure 2: Screenshot of Rocío de Meer’s TikTok video. De Meer is a politician from Vox in Almería and warns users about “Islamisation”³²

29. “Abren un expediente a la alcaldesa de Ripoll por sus declaraciones sobre los musulmanes”, Onda Vasca, 23 October, 2023.
30. Frente Obrero, X, 12 July, 2023, <https://twitter.com/frenteobreroesp/status/1679146354533183489> (Access Date: 25 April, 2024)
31. “Frente Obrero despliega una pancarta en Plaza del Tubo con el mensaje ‘Fuera el Islam de las escuelas’”, Europa Press, 11 December, 2023.
32. Rocío De Meer, Tik Tok, 7 December, 2023, <https://www.tiktok.com/@rociodemeeer/video/7309971428386819361> (Access Date: 25 abril 2024)



Figure 3: Frente Obrero's poster stating "Get Islam out of Schools" (*Fuera el Islam de las escuelas*) and two headlines about it. **Source:** Frente Obrero, X account (13 December 2024)

Media

Amongst traditional media, there has been an increase in outlets that focus on the "other" as the dangerous one, the one who goes against customs, threatens hard-won rights, or the one who can and will destroy Western values. These outlets fan and spread such accusations through provocative publications that seek rapid (and profitable) clickbait engagement.

Among these, in line with previous years, we can highlight *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera*, a media outlet aligned with Vox. In early 2023, they published the article "The Permanent Islamist Threat" which stated, "Unfortunately, the religious fanaticism of Islamist nature does not spring in the brain of a Muslim through some innate science, but it is the result of the deliberate action of certain states that demonize the West, take advantage of our extraordinary weakness resulting from excessive goodwill, and finance radical hate speeches that, from madrasas and mosques built in Europe, ignite in the minds of thousands of young people who long to destroy those who welcome them. Islamism is a serious threat to our identity and security."³³

At the same time, the outlet VozPopuli has published several Islamophobic articles. The journalist Irene Gonzalez wrote an article titled "The Danger of Islam and 'Wokism'",³⁴ where she repeated "Islamisation" claims that "Islamic propaganda has managed to detect the vulnerabilities of European society by presenting itself, deceptively, to uprooted young people without identity as a morally superior lifestyle model."³⁵

Juan Abreu, also from VozPopuli, presented a column in April titled "Islamophobia, a Moral Duty". VozPopuli is an online news journal, founded by Jesus Cacho,

33. "La permanente amenaza islamista", *La Gaceta de la Iberosfera*, 26 January 2023.

34. "El peligro del Islam y lo woke", *Vozpópuli*, 1 February, 2023.

35. *La propaganda islámica ha sabido detectar las debilidades de la sociedad europea al presentarse de forma engañosa ante jóvenes desarraigados sin identidad como un modelo de vida superior moralmente.*

aimed at middle-aged professionals of liberal and conservative political leaning and with nationwide readership. In “Islamophobia, a Moral Duty”, Abreu went as far as to state that “[a] few days ago, a large group of young Muslims could be seen (I don’t know if because of Ramadan) in front of the Barcelona Arc de Triomf. They were hitting their chests. While they beat themselves, as if possessed by a frenzied deity, they emitted a kind of chilling chant. There is little discussion (or none) about the wisdom or prudence of allowing groups of immigrants, instead of accepting and adapting to the rules of Western civilisation (the only civilisation that exists), to import their macabre religious rituals and, in passing, their sexist, misogynistic and obscurantist norms to Europe.” He added, “The reality [is] that Europe is being invaded” and that “Islam is a religion that kills.”³⁶

Another media outlet, HerQles, in 2023, also started to frame and report news in relation to a potential Islamist invasion. HerQles is a smaller, minority online newspaper, aimed at the youth, primarily Vox sympathisers, and with a strong xenophobic and nationalist editorial line. It has contributed to propagating the doctrines of far-right parties like Hacer Nación, with headlines such as “The Nationalist Political Party Hacer Nación Has Launched a Campaign against ‘Spain 2030’ with the Slogan ‘Let’s Stop the Invasion’”.³⁷ Additionally, HerQles has tweeted various times during 2023 talking about Muslims and threats from “invasion”, “cultural conquest”, and “cultural replacement”.³⁸

Justice System

Throughout 2023 and in line with previous trends of increased policy and judicial attention to Islamophobic events, several convictions for Islamophobic incidents have taken place in Spain.

In February, the Prosecutor’s Office requested a sentence of ten months in prison and a fine of 4,950 euros for a bus driver from Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona (TMB) for an alleged hate crime, after pulling on a passenger’s veil and verbally harassing her by saying, “If you have to live like this, go back to your country” (*si tienes que vivir así, vete a tu país*).³⁹

In March, a racist assault on a Moroccan man and his underage son occurred. The assailant bit off a piece of the father’s finger and hit the child on the head multiple times. The Prosecutor’s Office is seeking seven years and four months of jail time for the man.⁴⁰

36. “Islamofobia, un deber moral”, Vozpópuli, 27 April, 2023.

37. Herqles, X, 10 September, 2023 https://x.com/herqles_es/status/1700933958857355446 (Access Date: 25 April, 2024).

38. Herqles, X, 31 August, 2023 https://x.com/herqles_es/status/1697237337800134924 (Access Date: 25 April, 2024).

39. “Fiscalía pide prisión a un conductor de autobús de Barcelona por tirar del velo a una pasajera y gritar ‘vete a tu país’”, Europa Press, 2 February, 2023.

40. “Piden más de 7 años de cárcel por una agresión racista a un marroquí y a su hijo menor de edad”, 20minutos, 22 March, 2023.

Also in March, the Prosecutor's Office requested eight months imprisonment for a man accused of harassing a ten-year-old girl with "nefarious and racist intentions". The man, who had a criminal record, allowed his dog to urinate on the girl's backpack to scare her and hurled racist insults towards the rest of the family such as "shitty Moor" (*moro de mierda*).⁴¹

In May, the provincial Prosecutor's Office in Valencia requested three years for the bouncers at the Mya nightclub in València for an alleged racist assault. The bouncers threatened a young Maghrebi with "Shitty Moor, I'll kill you." The victim claims he was invited to go out and then assaulted once outside.⁴²

In July, the Provincial Court of Almería sentenced a man in Almeria, alias "El Sangre", to three years and three months in prison for leading Islamophobic groups and social media accounts that fuelled a "xenophobic hatred", distributing racist content posters, and forming "night watch groups" that took on "pseudo-police" roles, interrogating and threatening Moroccan citizens in the area.⁴³

Some of these sentences have been positive developments for 2023. In September, the Provincial Court of Málaga handed down the harshest prison sentence imposed in Spain to date for a hate crime, against seven men "for projecting comments that induce hatred, contempt, and discrimination against a social group in the city of Melilla, the unaccompanied minors (MENAs)".⁴⁴ In October, a young man was sentenced to one year in prison for inciting "hunting for Moors" in Irun (Basque Country) through a social media channel.⁴⁵ Finally, in December, a man accused of spreading fake news and false data about migrant persons online in order to fuel their social exclusion was sentenced to three years in prison.⁴⁶ In contrast, however, in November, 14 members of a neo-Nazi group were sentenced to minimal penalties after serious attacks and harassment of a mosque in Madrid back in 2021.⁴⁷

Internet

As mentioned at the beginning of the report, the discourse of the far right has permeated all layers of society and has been embraced by young people from different so-

41. "La Fiscalía pide ocho meses de prisión a un acusado de increpar con "ánimo vejatorio y racista" a una niña de 10 años", ElDiario.es, 28 March, 2023.

42. "Piden cinco años de prisión para tres vigilantes de la discoteca 'Mya', en València, por una supuesta agresión racista", Cadena SER, 17 May 2023.

43. "Condenado el líder de un grupo islamófobo de Antas (Almería) por promover el odio hacia ciudadanos marroquíes", Europa Press, 31 July, 2023.

44. "Siete condenados a prisión por delitos de odio tras difundir mensajes racistas e incitar a la violencia contra menores extranjeros", Cadena SER, 25 September, 2023.

45. "Condenado a un año por llamar a una "caza de moros" en Irun a través de Instagram", Noticias de Gipuzkoa, 26 October, 2023.

46. "Piden tres años de cárcel para un hombre acusado de publicar datos falsos de personas migrantes para propagar rechazo", Cadena Ser, 24 December, 2023.

47. "Condenados a penas mínimas 14 miembros de un grupo de neonazis por el hostigamiento a una mezquita", El Periódico, 2 November, 2023.

cial classes, from the humblest to the wealthiest. Each person embraces the part of the discourse that appeals to them the most. The growth of the far right throughout the 21st century is intrinsically linked to the changes that have been taking place around public communication. This resurgence cannot be explained without first understanding this evolution, and the way in which digital marketing techniques have displaced traditional media outlets in political identity formation and negotiation processes.

Social media has given the far right complete control over the distribution of all content, almost always “free”. This content can be widely disseminated by recipients, viewed at any time, and has allowed all these (political) parties and actors to develop their own narratives without being monitored. In addition to traditional media, we must also consider other actors that we had previously overlooked: YouTubers and Instagrammers. They are content creators who directly broadcast their thoughts to a social sector that identifies with them and sees them as references above established communicators.

Young audiences now pay more attention to influencers than journalists, even when consuming news. Similar trends apply to the Spanish case, as stated in previous sections. This is highlighted in the recent annual survey by the Reuters Institute on information habits:⁴⁸ only 24% of young people access news through conventional means, while 39% directly inform themselves through social media, especially TikTok, the primary source of information for 20% of individuals under 35 years old.⁴⁹

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Aside from the outlets and politicians already mentioned, there are several figures of relevance in the Spanish Islamophobia network.

Among the most prominent figures disseminating Islamophobia in Spain, we must highlight Rafael Bardají, who in 2023 wrote the article “Jihad Wants Your Daughter (and Your Neck)”⁵⁰ for the publication *Libertad Digital*. Bardají, an ideologue for Vox, was also involved at one point in the Friends of Israel Initiative report, where phrases such as “The New Right could see Israel not only as a reliable ally but also as an example in many fields, such as the fight against radical Islam or the defence of Western civilisation” could be found.⁵¹

Among the most notable Islamophobic media outlets in previous years were *Libertad Digital*, *Diario Patriota*, and *El Manifiesto* where articles claiming that “[m]

48. Nic Newman with Richard Fletcher, Kirsten Eddy, Craig T. Robertson, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023*, Reuters Institute, 2023.

49. “Misoginia, negacionismo y xenofobia: ¿condicionan los mensajes de ‘youtubers’ y ‘streamers’ el voto joven?”, *ElDiario.es*, 4 July, 2023.

50. “La Jihad quiere a tu hija (y tu cuello)”, *Libertad Digital*, 21 October, 2023.

51. “An approach to the ‘New [Alt] Right’ in Europe. The Emerging European Political Environment and the consequences for Israel”, *Friends of Israel Initiative*, 2017

ore Europeans were enslaved by Muslims than black slaves sent to America [by Europeans]” appeared.⁵² Similar publications were put out by Radio Decisión, EsRadio, Aquí la Voz de Europa, and Toro Tv. This trend affects both national and regional outlets, such as La Tribuna del País Vasco and its article “Al-Andalus: The Spain That Stopped Being Spain”.⁵³ Other smaller outlets that have continued or started to become particularly active in spreading invasion and Islamisation discourses are Alerta Digital, Estado de Alarma, Euskalnews, HerQles, Periodista Digital, and OKDiario.

Among the key public figures promoting Islamophobic discourse are well-known personalities such as journalists Javier Esparza, Herman Tertsch, Vox co-founder Cristina Seguí, Isabel San Sebastián, Javier Negre, Federico Jiménez Losantos, Noelia de Trastámara, Yolanda Couceiro, and Javier García Isac. New faces in the network include Carlos Paz, a regular contributor to far-right outlets such as 7NN (now closed) or Decisión Radio, both channels close to VOX. Further, Carlos Paz was also present at the presentation of the neo-Nazi group Núcleo Nacional in April 2024, and he currently collaborates with the far-right think tank FACTA and the previously mentioned Juan Abreu and Irene Gonzalez.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

As we have pointed out, the growth in Islamophobic discourse in certain sectors of Spanish society has been accompanied by increasing initiatives carried out by institutions and civil society to combat it and reverse these trends. Throughout 2023, there have been quite a number of events and initiatives, as is usual in a democratic and inclusive society such as Spain.

In January, an extended debate about gender Islamophobia took place during the prime-time national radio programme Hoy por Hoy Andalucía Centro (Cadena SER). Other events targeting gendered Islamophobia have unfolded in 2024; at the Public Library of Lucena (Córdoba) the Magic Project, in collaboration with Friends of Europe, organised a workshop on Gendered Islamophobia and media portrayals⁵⁴. The Magic Project stands for “Muslim Women and Communities against Gender Islamophobia in Society”, and its main focus is to correlate the volume of fake news to events that trigger discriminatory narratives and public discussion about Muslim communities.

In February, the University of Murcia (UMU) led an innovative European project to evaluate Islamophobic hate speech on social media with Professor of

52. “Hubo más europeos esclavizados por los musulmanes que esclavos negros enviados a América”, El Manifiesto, 10 January, 2023.

53. “Al-Ándalus: La España que dejó de ser España”, La Tribuna del País Vasco, 25 October, 2023.

54. “La islamofobia de género, a debate en Hoy por Hoy Andalucía Centro”, Andalucía Centro, 13 January, 2023.

Arab and Islamic Studies Pilar Garrido as the principal researcher⁵⁵ Alongside Garrido, Professors Rocío Zamora and María del Mar Grandío are also participating in this European project, including one of the authors of this report, Sergio Gracia.

In terms of training for civil society in implementing anti-discrimination initiatives, in March, a meeting was held in Barcelona by the IEMED (Instituto Europeo del Mediterráneo) where different professionals participated, and the results of the aforementioned European Magic Project were presented.⁵⁶ In April, the Laboratory of Immigration, Interculturality, and Social Inclusion of the University of Cadiz produced a podcast analysing hate speech on social media. The laboratory carries out various actions throughout the year on the social inclusion of migrants and rumours or misinformation, such as their International Congress on social inclusion of migrants, led by Professor Siham Zebda.⁵⁷

In terms of representation in media, in July, the editor of *Onda Regional de Murcia*, Paulino Ros, published the documentary “Tears That Forge Diamonds: Adil, Wiam and Basma, Murcians of Moroccan origin”⁵⁸. The documentary talks about the phenomenon of immigration in Murcia, frankly depicting the hopes and tragedies of migrant boat arrivals to the Spanish coasts, and how such scenes are repeated almost daily. The documentary emphasizes how it is possible for these people to move forward starting from scratch, overcoming racism and the labyrinth of bureaucratic obstacles.

In terms of data collection and analysis, and beyond the OBERAXE monitoring, the Euro-Arab Foundation and Columbares organised the 1st International Conference against Hate Crimes and Underreporting this September.⁵⁹

There are also other initiatives that are aimed at increasing the reporting of hate crimes by Spanish Muslims. For the fifth consecutive year, the Moroccan Association for the Integration of Immigrants held the 5th National Congress “Dismantling Islamophobia”.⁶⁰ Likewise, in December, the Moroccan Association presented the report “Your Rights against Hatred: A Guide to Reporting Islamophobia”.⁶¹ Finally, in

55. “La UMU lidera un innovador proyecto europeo para evaluar discursos de odio islamófobos en redes sociales”, Universidad de Murcia, 27 February, 2023.

56. IEMED, X, 21 marzo 2023, https://x.com/IEMed_/status/1638170416018780160 (Access Date: 16 April 2024).

57. Lab3In (Laboratorio de inmigración, interculturalidad e inclusión social), X, 20 April, 2023 <https://x.com/Lab3In/status/1648958713628114946> (Access Date: 8 mayo 2024).

58. Paulino Ros, Youtube, 10 September, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhnBiWryNVg&t=442s> (Access Date: 16 April, 2024).

59. *I Jornadas internacionales contra los delitos de odio y la infradenuncia*, Columbares y Fundación Euroárabe, 25 September, 2023.

60. *V Congreso Nacional “Desmontando la Islamofobia”*, Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes, 8-9 November, 2023.

61. “Tus derechos frente al odio: guía para denunciar la islamofobia”, Asociación Marroquí para la Integración de Inmigrantes, 27 December, 2023.

December, the 2nd Congress against Islamophobia of the Valencian Community was held by the Jovesólides Association.⁶²

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

During 2023, and spearheading the counter efforts outlined before, the Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination (CEDRE) (*Consejo para la Eliminación de la Discriminación Racial o Étnica*) developed improved recommendations concerning discrimination against Muslim people or Islamophobia, given the close relationship between this type of intolerance and issues related to racism and racial discrimination in Spain. Among these recommendations were that politicians should shoulder their responsibility on the increased anti-Muslim sentiments in society and refrain from making racist statements, statements associating individuals of a particular religion with those who commit terrorist acts, and/or avoid drawing moral comparisons between religions, due to the evident danger this poses to coexistence and religious equality in Spain.⁶³

CEDRE's recommendations also pointed towards the media, urging them to adhere to professional ethical codes and avoid establishing connections between criminal acts and the religious affiliation of the perpetrators, especially when, as is frequently the case, such information does not provide relevant elements to the news. CEDRE also directed attention to social media platforms, requesting that private companies invest and take responsibility for continued specialised monitoring to detect and eliminate Islamophobic hate speech and calls for violence against Muslims and other ethnic minorities.⁶⁴

Furthermore, CEDRE highlighted that while more efforts were made to increase and improve the representation of Muslims in Spanish society and mainstream media, the advances of most media outlets towards curbing Islamophobic speech and frames have been slow and partial at best. Moreover, CEDRE encouraged civil society and, especially, educators to further recognise the contributions of Muslim communities to the common Spanish cultural heritage, with particular care taken to address any narratives potentially leading to the stigmatisation of Muslim students in classrooms

These initiatives reflect larger European Union efforts to understand and counteract anti-Muslim hatred, namely those of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). In its “General Policy Recommendation No. 5 on the prevention and combat of racism and discrimination against Muslims”, the ECRI states, “...anti-Muslim racism is not only limited to hostility towards a ‘religion’, but

62. *II Congreso contra la Islamofobia de la Comunidad Valenciana*, Jovesólides, 1 December 2023.

63. “Recomendación del CEDRE para identificar, prevenir y atajar la discriminación contra las personas musulmanas y la islamofobia”, CEDRE, 19 September, 2023.

64. *Ibid.*

is closely linked to other forms of exclusion, which may overlap with anti-immigration sentiments, xenophobia, gender or class prejudices. In other words, anti-Muslim racism is multi-layered and intersectional”.⁶⁵ Policy and cultural initiatives aiming to address anti-Muslim hatred, therefore, require intersectional and transversal solutions.

Chronology

- **6 February 2023:** A teacher is reported for hitting and insulting a student shouting “F***ing Moroccan piece of s***, I don’t pay taxes for [your] assistance” in Santa Coloma (Barcelona).
- **7 March 2023:** A young Muslim woman reports her job dismissal for wearing a headscarf on social media.
- **11 March 2023:** A hoax on social media leads to a racist attack in Cartaya (Huelva, Andalucia). Two young locals attacked a youth of Maghrebi origin after a social media post that claimed that a “Moor was attacking the area’s population with bladed weapons”. The local police and civil guard deny the rumour.
- **27 March 2023:** A hotel employee is arrested for posting racist statements on social media against the Moroccan national team staying at his place of work.
- **13 April 2023:** A judge investigates local police officers in Cornellà for a racist assault. They allegedly told a young man, “I’m going to smash your head in.” The young man reported being stopped and threatened by an officer who told him “F*** off” and “F***ing Moroccan” after questioning his identification based on ethnic profiling action.
- **16 April 2023:** A Muslim woman complained to the Murcian Health Service (*Servicio murciano de Salud*, SMS) that “a nurse calls her a Moor”, asking for a review of the treatment of patients from other ethnic backgrounds in the Spanish healthcare system.
- **9 May 2023:** Xenophobic insults in a café in the centre of Santa Cruz de Tenerife. “Thank God I was born from a white c***” and “Wait, I’m also recording you, jihadist.”
- **2 August 2023:** Three people convicted of a hate crime for attacking a grocery store in València shouting “F***ing Moor, get out of my country.”
- **11 August 2023:** A woman expelled from a municipal swimming pool in Valencia for wearing a veil. She was told, “What disgusting clothes you wear, go back to your country.”
- **18 December 2023:** The National Police opens an investigation into the authorship of Islamophobic graffiti in Villareal.

65. “ECRI revised General Policy Recommendation No. 5 on preventing and combating anti-Muslim racism and discrimination”, *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)*, Brussels: December 2021. <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-5-revised-on-preventing-and-comb/1680a5db32> (Access date: 24 May, 2024).

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
SWEDEN
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Sammanfattning

Den nationella rapporten om islamofobi i Sverige för 2023 visar en betydande ökning av islamofobiska incidenter, i takt med att högerextrema politiska rörelser fått större inflytande i landet. Sverigedemokraterna, kända för sin invandringskritiska och anti-islam retorik, har blivit en betydande politisk kraft under de senaste åren och skapat en mer fientlig miljö mot muslimska samhällen. Denna förändring har lett till en påtaglig ökning av hatbrott, inklusive attacker mot moskéer, koranbränningar samt både verbal och fysisk misshandel, vilket återspeglar en fördjupad social splittring.

Rapportens viktigaste fynd visar på ett direkt samband mellan framväxten av högerextrema ideologier och ökningen av islamofobiska handlingar. Riksdagsvalet 2022 var en avgörande tidpunkt, då Sverigedemokraterna fick ett betydande inflytande i svensk politik och erhöll nästan 20% av rösterna. Denna politiska förändring har följts av en ökning av hatbrott, särskilt de som drivs av religiös diskriminering.

Vidare påpekar rapporten att incidenter som koranbränningar inte klassificerades som hatbrott utan snarare som uttryck för yttrandefrihet, vilket ökade de sociala spänningarna och avslöjade bristerna i den nuvarande rättsliga strukturen för att bekämpa islamofobi. Rapporten antyder att Sveriges rykte som en "moralisk stormakt" med ett starkt engagemang för mänskliga rättigheter och social rättvisa har undergrävt av det växande inflytandet av extremistiska ideologier.

För att motverka dessa negativa trender betonar rapporten behovet av att stärka det rättsliga skyddet mot hatbrott, ge större stöd till utbildningsprogram som främjar religiös tolerans och vidta åtgärder för att stärka den sociala sammanhållningen. Den varnar för att utan dessa åtgärder riskerar Sverige att ytterligare alienera sina muslimska samhällen och undergräva sitt engagemang för mänskliga rättigheter och jämlikhet.

Executive Summary

The 2023 national report on Islamophobia in Sweden highlights a significant rise in Islamophobic incidents, coinciding with the growing influence of far-right political movements in the country. The Sweden Democrats, known for their anti-immigration and anti-Islam rhetoric, have become a major political force in recent years, fostering a more hostile environment towards Muslim communities. This shift has led to a marked increase in hate crimes, including attacks on mosques, Quran burnings, and both verbal and physical abuse, reflecting a deepening social divide.

Key findings in the report indicate a direct correlation between the rise of far-right ideologies and the surge in Islamophobic acts. The 2022 general elections were a pivotal moment, with the far-right Sweden Democrats gaining substantial power in Swedish politics, capturing nearly 20% of the vote. This political shift has been accompanied by a rise in hate crimes, particularly those driven by religious discrimination.

Furthermore, the report points out that incidents like Quran burnings were not classified as hate crimes, but rather as exercises of free speech, exacerbating social tensions and revealing the inadequacy of the current legal framework in addressing Islamophobia. The report suggests that Sweden's reputation as a "moral superpower" with a strong commitment to human rights and social justice has been undermined by the increasing influence of extremist ideologies.

To counter these negative trends, the report underscores the need to enhance legal protections against hate crimes, provide greater support for educational programs that promote religious tolerance, and take steps to strengthen social cohesion. It warns that without these measures, Sweden risks further alienating its Muslim communities and undermining its dedication to human rights and equality.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: Kingdom of Sweden

Type of Regime: Constitutional monarchy

Form of Government: Parliamentary democracy

Ruling Party: Moderate Party (Moderates led by Ulf Kristersson) in coalition with Christian Democrats and Liberal Party. The Sweden Democrats, despite being the largest party in the coalition, did not take ministerial posts.

Opposition Parties: Swedish Social Democratic Party, Centre Party, Left Party, Green Party

Last Elections: General election 2022: Social Democratic Party 30.3%, Moderates 19.1%, Sweden Democrats 20.5%, Centre Party 6.7%, Left Party 6.7%, Christian Democrats 5.3%, Liberal Party 4.6%

Total Population: 10.49 million (2022)

Major Languages: Swedish

Official Religion: No official religion, but the head of state must be Christian according to the constitution.

Statistics on Islamophobia: In the report compiling Islamophobic-motivated hate crimes by the Swedish police force for the period until the autumn of 2023 and in 2022, 52 percent of the hate crime cases recorded in 2022 were motivated by Islamophobia. While there were 234 cases in total, the fact that victims generally do not resort to complaining to official authorities after such attacks suggests that these figures reflect the minimum. By 2023, significant changes have been detected in the way hate crimes are committed. For example, in cases of public provocation, the rate increased from 19 percent in 2022 to 34 percent in 2023. Regarding harassment and vandalism, hate crimes decreased from 25 percent to 19 percent. Additionally, a significant increase has been detected in the use of digital platforms for these crimes, with a 47 percent increase in non-physical acts of violence observed.

Major Religions (% of Population): Church of Sweden (Evangelical Lutheran) (56.4%), Other Protestants (3.4%), Islam (1.9%), Eastern Orthodox (1.7%), Catholic Church (1.2%), Other Christian (0.3%), Other religions (0.3%) (2019)

Muslim Population (% of Population): There are no official statistics, but reports have stated figures up to 810,000 (more than 7%) based on statistics of background in Muslim countries, out of which about one third is estimated to be practicing Muslims. According to the Swedish Agency for Support for Faith Communities there were 242,000 registered members of Muslim faith communities in Sweden 2020.

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Sveriges Muslimka Förbund, SMF, Förenade Islamiska Föreningar i Sverige, FIFS, The Ibn Rushd Education Association, Islamiska Kulturcenterunionen i Sverige, IKUS).

Main NGOs combatting Islamophobia: Sveriges Muslimka Förbund, SMF, Förenade Islamiska Föreningar i Sverige, FIFS, The Ibn Rushd Education Association, Islamiska Kulturcenterunionen i Sverige, IKUS).

Far-Right Parties: Sweden Democrats led by Jimmie Akesson

Far-Right Movements: None

Far-Right Terrorist Organizations: None

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** No
- **Minaret Ban:** No
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Burka Ban:** No

Introduction

Sweden, a traditional welfare state and neutral country, whose “moral superpower” perception is persistently emphasized in the Western public opinion and academia, faces many issues that pose problems in terms of its human rights record, such as anti-immigration, ethnic, and religious discrimination. For this purpose, in 2009, within the framework of the protection provided by the article “The freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others, as far as social peace is not disturbed or it causes general offense” in the Swedish Constitution regarding the fight against discrimination, the federal agency Equality Ombudsman was established. With this institution and legal regulations, the Swedish government protected citizens from discrimination based, among others, on gender, ethnicity, and religion in spheres of social life such as schools, recruitment, health services, or housing, while the Equality Ombudsman was responsible for supervising the implementation of this law.

However, in parallel with the data of the EIR’s 2021 report, in 2023, the Ministry of Employment Division for Human Rights and Discrimination Issues published the report titled “Sweden’s Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Periodic Report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.”¹ The report revealed the inadequacy of the legal regulations regarding hate crime and discrimination cases between 2017 and 2021, thereby introducing new measures taken by the Swedish government.

Table 1: Number of complaints of discrimination to the Equality Ombudsman

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Disability	742	729	801	916	1212
Ethnicity	686	709	724	1146	1033
Age	256	294	301	497	624
Sex	339	376	397	676	585
Religion or other belief	211	143	183	237	222
Sexual orientation	66	79	62	62	96
Transgender identity or expression	59	67	53	49	78

Source: Equality Ombudsman

According to the report, a total of 2,031 different cases of discrimination were officially recorded as complaints between 2017 and 2021. As can be seen in Table 1, while the total number was expected to be higher, it was observed that in some cases more than one motivation was seen in a single case. Islamophobic motivation, sometimes together with racist motivation, was present in discriminatory and aggressive

1. Government of Sweden, “Sweden’s Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Periodic Report to CERD,” (Stockholm: Ministry of Culture, 2018), <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/ddc2b527534e42d59218ba632d0df760/swedens-twenty-fourth-and-twenty-fifth-periodic-report-to-cerd.pdf>.

actions against Muslim citizens. Aside from the decrease in cases, since the continuity stands out with an increasing trend day by day, new institutional arrangements have been made against the existing legal regulations. As highlighted in the report, several initiatives and measures have been developed and implemented since the end of 2021. These include the Special Action Program by the Swedish National Crime Prevention Council to investigate Islamophobic hate crimes; regulations by the Swedish Crime Victim Authority to raise awareness about the constitutional rights of hate crime victims and ensure they receive compensation; activities by the Swedish Police Authority to enhance coordination and interaction with religious communities; innovative methods using artificial intelligence under the EU's PROTECTOR Project to detect and reduce hate crimes in public spaces; initiatives by the Living History Forum to increase teachers' awareness of Islamophobia in 2022-2024; and various institutional and legal arrangements or projects such as the Government Grants Regulation aimed at increasing the security of faith communities and non-profit organizations (NGOs), and compensating victims for losses following incidents like mosque attacks.²

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

For Sweden, Islamophobia is an ongoing issue. The existence of a far-right political atmosphere in Sweden, may create a favorable environment for cases of Islamophobia. In the elections held in 2022, after a long period, the Social Democrat left wing, led by Magdalena Andersson, lost the elections with 176 to 173 seats against the right-wing parties, including the strong far-right parties. Although Moderate Party Chairman Ulf Kristersson, defined as a "liberal conservative," formed the government, the far-right Sweden Democrats led by Jimmie Åkesson created a significant shift in Swedish politics by receiving almost 20% of the votes. The Sweden Democrats were not a direct part of the coalition at this point, but they played an indirect part in ensuring the survival of the established minority government. As can be seen in the following stages of the report, Åkesson supports radical demands such as the closure of mosques or issues that will push society towards hatred and hostility, such as burning the Quran. Therefore, with this election, Sweden entered perhaps its most dangerous period for Islamophobia, which it has been trying to seriously combat since 2009. In this political and social environment, when looking at the Islamophobia cases for 2022 and 2023, which will be detailed in the following sections, only the number of complaint records shows the gravity of the situation. According to the Discrimination Ombudsman's 2023 report,³ while 222 religiously motivated discrimination

2. Ibid.

3. Swedish Equality Ombudsman, "DO Årsredovisning 2023," (Stockholm: Swedish Equality Ombudsman, 2024), <https://www.do.se/download/18.2a331bee18c0fb19b479a1/1713949962769/DO-arsredovisning-2023.pdf>.

complaints were recorded in 2021, this number increased to 373 in 2022 and 377 religiously motivated discrimination and hate crime cases were detected in 2023. Furthermore, while a total of 2,031 cases of discrimination with different motivations were detected from 2017 to 2021, this number increased to 4,607 in 2023. In other words, it is clear that there is a positive correlation between the political atmosphere in Sweden, where the far right, which feeds Islamophobia, has risen, and both the number of general discrimination cases and Islamophobia cases.

While a correlation can be detected between the increases observed in Islamophobia cases in 2022 and 2023 and the political environment in Sweden, it is necessary to mention the primary issue that perhaps dominates this political environment. The actions of burning the Quran, which were the most significant incidents throughout these two years, dominated the media agenda and were directly associated with Sweden's foreign policy preferences. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 changed security calculations across the entire Nordic-Baltic region. Historically, Sweden has tried to protect itself by taking a balanced position among the great powers, acting as a buffer zone between the Western and Eastern blocs since the Cold War, and remaining neutral in the event of war to avoid offensive intentions from either side.

However, due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and increasing violations in Swedish territorial waters, conservative Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson from the Moderate Party decided to shift Sweden's security and foreign policy axis from historical non-alignment to NATO membership. From this moment on, the NATO membership process dominated the Swedish agenda, with negotiations between Türkiye, the USA, and Sweden. Ulf Kristersson was sympathetic to Türkiye's demands, where Türkiye put Sweden's distance from PKK and FETO terrorism as a prerequisite.⁴ However, this relatively asymmetrical relationship between Türkiye and Sweden attracted many reactions in Swedish domestic politics. Particularly from media elements and politicians who opposed NATO membership, there were radical statements suggesting that freedom of expression was being compromised for Türkiye's demands. Based on this argument, the actions of burning the Quran began at the end of 2022.

On January 12, 2023, a case that could be described as Islamophobic and a hate crime occurred, but was categorically discussed in the media as an action within the framework of freedom of expression. A group of radical-leaning protesters in front of Stockholm Municipality hung an effigy of President of the Republic of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by its feet and chanted slogans comparing him to Mussolini, drawing reactions from the Turkish-Muslim community. This hate crime against President Erdoğan was essentially an attack against millions of Turkish-Muslim communities living in Europe. The atmosphere of resentment and hatred created by this action

4. Muhammed Çağrı Bilir, "İsveç'te Yeni Terör Yasası ve Türkiye'nin Tutumu," Türkiye Araştırmaları, June 16, 2023, <https://turkiyearchastirmalari.org/2023/06/16/fokus/isvecte-yeni-teror-yasasi-ve-turkiyenin-tutumu/>.

quickly led to similar Islamophobic attacks. Just nine days later, the far-right figure Rasmus Paludan committed an action directly against Islam and Muslims by burning the Quran in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm.

A similar event occurred in June 2023, when the 37-year-old Christian Iraqi refugee Salwan Momika burned the Quran in front of Stockholm's largest mosque during Eid al-Adha. Momika burned the holy book of Muslims, insulting Islam and Muslims, and disturbing Muslim communities in Sweden and across the world. However, the striking point here was that both the judiciary and the police force in Sweden allowed these actions. Although two other individuals were not allowed to carry out a similar action after Paludan's actions, the Stockholm Administrative Court's decision was in favour of Quran Burning. It was noteworthy that the police force's reason for preventing these actions was not human rights.⁵ Instead, the justification was the threat of terrorism and the possibility of attacks from radical terrorist organizations. In other words, human rights were not the determinant.

While it is a separate matter of debate whether the Swedish authorities considered this act a crime or not, the lack of any deterrent decision from the judiciary allowed both Paludan and Momika to commit these acts more than once and, worse yet, others to resort to similar acts. For example, on August 3, Bahrami Marjan, an Iranian immigrant, committed a similar provocative act in Angbybadet near Stockholm. After this series of actions, serious reactions and protests arose within the Muslim community in Sweden, and as of February, news began to circulate in the media that such events could isolate Sweden from the international community and place the country on the radar of terrorist organizations. As seen in Figure 1, in the headline news, especially with Iranian religious and political leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accusing Sweden of preparing for war against the Muslim world, an issue that was actually social became the subject of both domestic and foreign politics simultaneously.⁶ This has also reinforced the prevailing perception on social networks that places the collective blame for terrorism on Muslims.

Following the burning of the Quran, Iran's religious and political leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei accused Sweden of preparing for war against the Muslim world. Violent protests broke out at various Swedish embassies, and threats were made against Sweden. According to information provided by Aftonbladet, the police administration assesses that the threat to Sweden has increased. All police officers have been called to be vigilant against terrorist threats.⁷

5. "Swedish Court Upholds Rejection of Quran Burning Ban," Voice of America, June 15, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/swedish-court-upholds-rejection-of-quran-burning-ban/7133954.html>.

6. "Aftonbladet. "Uppgift: Polisen Ökar Vaksamhet för Terrorhot i Sverige," Aftonbladet, June 15, 2023, <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/pQEkl6/uppgift-polisen-okar-vaksamhet-for-terrorhot-i-sverige>.

7. Ibid.



Figure 1: Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, 17 August 2023 (Details: The police increase vigilance for terrorist threats)

As seen in *Aftonbladet's* news article, the view that reactions against Islamophobic attitudes in Sweden can be used as an excuse for radical groups seems to be adopted by official sources. Therefore, it can be said that Islamophobic actions in Sweden in 2022 and 2023 have actually become a phenomenon taken out of context. What Swedish citizens think about these actions actually contains results that give insight into the issue. According to this survey, which was frequently covered in the media, 53% of society wanted attacks on the Quran or other holy books to be banned.⁸ Although this rate indicates a majority, it also shows that there is a significant part of the population that is not disturbed by these acts.⁹ In other words, there is a parallelism between the increase in Islamophobic hate crimes and the reaction to this issue.

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Another issue that came to the fore during this period when discussions were at their peak was direct physical and verbal attacks and threats against Muslims and mosques. According to a report on Sveriges Radio on August 18, in an interview with the imam of the Islamic Center in Malmö, it was revealed that a letter with a threatening message had recently arrived at the mosque.¹⁰ The letter stated that the fire that had occurred in Eskilstuna in southeast Sweden on September 25, 2023, was the result of arson. The

8. "Suspected Arson Attack Severely Damages Mosque in South-Eastern Sweden," Middle East Monitor, September 25, 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230925-suspected-arson-attack-severely-damages-mosque-in-south-eastern-sweden/>.

9. "Sweden Grants Permit for Yet Another Quran Desecration Protest," Anadolu Agency, July 15, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/sweden-grants-permit-for-yet-another-quran-desecration-protest/3208404>.

10. "Sveriges Radio, "Terrorhotnivån Oroar Judiska och Muslimska Församlingar," Sveriges Radio, July 15, 2023, <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/terrorhotnivån-oroar-judiska-och-muslimska-forsamlingar>.

fact that this mosque had been subjected to threats and physical attacks before is also recorded in police records. Additionally, in a similar example, it was announced that Islamophobic attacks with hate messages took place in November 2023 against a mosque in Stockholm.¹¹ According to the statement made by the organization, the mosques in Umea, Gothenburg, and Linköping were frequently subjected to similar attacks.¹²

While the prominent issues regarding Islamophobia in Sweden in 2022 and 2023 are attacks on mosques and Quran burnings, on the other hand, physical and verbal attacks against individuals are also observed on a continuous basis.

Table 2: Police-reported hate crimes with Islamophobic motives (Fall 2023, Fall 2022)¹³

Category	Fall 2023	Fall 2022	Overall 2022
Crime Scene			
Public Area	7 (11%)	5 (10%)	50 (21%)
Digital Environments	25 (40%)	4 (8%)	30 (13%)
Home	6 (10%)	9 (18%)	39 (17%)
Service and Public Institutions	9 (15%)	13 (26%)	39 (17%)
Religious Places	6 (10%)	11 (22%)	21 (9%)
School	3 (5%)	4 (8%)	15 (6%)
Other/Unspecified Places	6 (19%)	4 (8%)	40 (17%)
Crime Method			
Online Chat and Public Posts	17 (27%)	1 (2%)	20 (9%)
Direct Message via SMS/Email/Letter	10 (16%)	5 (10%)	26 (11%)
Physical Harassment	6 (10%)	6 (12%)	40 (17%)
Graffiti, Vandalism, General Dissemination	12 (19%)	16 (32%)	59 (25%)
Phone and Digital Calls	2 (3%)	2 (4%)	3 (1%)
Verbal Harassment	15 (24%)	18 (36%)	81 (35%)
Other/Unspecified	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	5 (2%)
Victim's Gender			
Men	11 (18%)	15 (30%)	63 (27%)
Women	19 (31%)	15 (30%)	90 (38%)
Mixed/Unknown Gender	3 (5%)	4 (8%)	14 (6%)
Non-Physical Entities	29 (47%)	16 (32%)	67 (29%)

11. "Suspected Arson Attack Severely Damages Mosque in South-Eastern Sweden," Middle East Monitor, September 25, 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20230925-suspected-arson-attack-severely-damages-mosque-in-south-eastern-sweden/>.

12. "Pressmeddelande med Anledning av Hatattack mot Stockholms Mosk ," FIFS, November 8, 2023, <https://fifs.se/2023/11/08/pressmeddelande-med-anledning-av-hatattack-mot-stockholms-moske/>.

13. Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, "Polisanm lda Hatbrott med Islamofobiska Motiv under H sten," (Stockholm: Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023), 16, https://bra.se/download/18.4488712e18f0fafb6a6339e/1714475310106/2024_Polisanmalda-hatbrott-med-islamofobiska-motiv-under-hosten-2023.pdf.

In the report compiling Islamophobic hate crimes by the Swedish police force for the period 2022-Fall 2023, 52% of the hate crime cases recorded in 2022 were motivated by Islamophobia. While there were 234 cases in total, the fact that victims generally do not report the attacks to the authorities suggests that these figures reflect the minimum. By 2023, significant changes were detected in the way hate crimes are committed. For example, in cases of public provocation, the rate increased from 19% in 2022 to 34% in 2023. Regarding harassment and vandalism, hate crimes decreased from 25% to 19%. Additionally, a significant increase was detected in the use of digital platforms for these crimes, with a 47% increase in non-physical acts of violence observed.

An example of the awareness-raising activities carried out by the Swedish government can be seen in the brochure prepared by the Crime Victims' Authority for the Muslim community, who are seen as potential victims, in many different languages and containing information on the rights of a person who has been subjected to an attack and how to file a complaint. While the brochure defines Islamophobia as prejudice and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, it provides information about receiving support and help, the right to compensation and protection, and the necessary steps to be taken when reporting to the police. Another official step concerning 2022 and 2023 was the Action Plan to Combat Islamophobia. This program can actually be described as the Swedish government's roadmap to combat hate crimes that can be defined as Islamophobia in four main strategic areas. These areas include: "Strengthening Information, Education, and Research"; "Strengthening Online Preventive Measures"; "A More Active Justice System"; and "More In-Depth Dialogue with Civil Society." The plan was intended to be implemented in 2022-2024. Online preventive measures in this action plan are of critical importance

The rise in actions aimed at provoking the public and the increase in hate crimes in digital environments may be related to the political transformation that Sweden has been experiencing in domestic and foreign policies since the end of 2022. The increasing prominence of right-wing politics in Sweden and the engagement with a Muslim country like Türkiye due to NATO membership negotiations created a politicized atmosphere that is unusual in Nordic societies. Consequently, the society, which is focused on the Quran burnings at the center of these discussions, has not remained indifferent, especially on social media. As a result, it can be inferred that in Sweden, where far-right politics is expanding its scope day by day, the masses influenced by this drift are also impacted by figures such as Paludan or Momika, whom they constantly encounter in the media. In Islamophobia-motivated hate crimes, actions aimed at "provoking" the Muslim community, especially on social media or in daily life, and actions of burning the Quran are consistent in terms of their methods and purposes. While these changes in the general tendencies in Islamophobia cases are noted, according to the same report, the "crime locations" of these cases are gen-

erally public spaces, the victim's home, or nearby homes, schools, and religious places. While the identity of the perpetrators is generally unknown to the victims, similar attacks have also been recorded from neighbors or people with whom they have business relations.

There are also cases of Islamophobia encountered in public spaces where the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) found the perpetrator and compensated the victims. For example, during a train journey, three Muslim brothers were questioned and discriminated against because of their ethnicity during train ticket control. Following the DO's investigation as a result of the complaint, 30,000 SEK (\$3,000) compensation was paid to each brother. Additionally, cases of Islamophobia are seen in areas such as cafés and restaurants. As a general trend, special need Muslim individuals with the "guide dogs" are prevented from entering cafés and restaurants. In such cases, the DO is reported to have paid 15,000 SEK (\$1,500) and 60,000 SEK. (\$6,000) compensation fees. Another case involved a Muslim woman who took her two children to kindergarten and an elderly woman verbally harassed them, saying, "Go home, terrorist, I'm tired of people like you." In another instance, a man disturbed students by constantly shouting in the proximity of a school frequented by Muslim students, stating that there could be no caliphate in Sweden. In yet another case, a man, after a conflict with his client, verbally attacked him, calling him a "Taliban bastard" and saying he should "return to his home in the desert in a coffin."

Apart from these examples, there are arson attacks on mosques, threats, and indirect discriminatory and Islamophobia-motivated cases against Muslims occurring in more ambiguous areas. These incidents can particularly be observed in the media news, hiring practices, and the rhetoric of politicians. These cases will be discussed in the following sections.

Employment

While the general situation of Islamophobia cases and hate crimes in Sweden is as described, when looking at the dimensions of the problem on a sectoral basis, the "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden" report prepared by the U.S. Department of State in 2023 states that the number of Muslims discriminated against in business life has increased significantly.¹⁴ In the report, which covers the period 2015-2022, it was observed that the number of complaints about discrimination based on religion or belief increased by 127% and 373 complaints were recorded in 2022. By 2023, according to another report published by the DO, 1,144 complaints regarding ethnic and religious discrimination cases in workplaces were recorded across Sweden. According to the report, this figure was 849 in total in 2021

14. U.S. Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sweden/>.

and 922 in 2022. Discrimination and hate crimes motivated by Islamophobia constitute the majority of these complaints.¹⁵

Sections of research in the report titled “State of Discrimination 2023” by the Equality Ombudsman were shared revealing that discrimination is clearly observed in the recruitment processes of Swedish citizens and people with known Muslim identities or Muslim names. It was determined that people with names of Swedish origin have an advantage in job applications, especially compared to people with names that reflect both Islamic and Arabic ethnicity, such as “Muhammad,” even though the latter might be sufficiently qualified for the jobs in question. Another study, in order to reveal the type of employees preferred by employers across Sweden, presented two different candidate types differing in terms of factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion, education, family status, height and weight, and asked them which one they would choose.¹⁶ The results demonstrate that non-European, Muslim, Jewish, and overweight candidates were not preferred. In other words, discrimination is observed in terms of both ethnicity and religion. Therefore, it becomes clear that Islamophobia is a serious problem in the workplace.

Several cases investigated by the Discrimination Ombudsman reveal that people with Islamic sensitivities are exposed to discrimination in the workplace.¹⁷ For example, a woman wearing a headscarf was hired to work in a company’s warehouse, but her job offer was later withdrawn on the grounds that she was wearing a headscarf. The company’s reason for not hiring her was that there was a dress code in the company and that she could not work there while wearing a headscarf for security reasons. In another case, a woman who avoided contact with the opposite sex, such as shaking hands, due to her religious sensitivities, was not hired for this reason. When the DO investigated this incident, it defined the issue as indirect discrimination.

In addition to the cases of Islamophobia experienced during recruitment in Sweden, there are many Muslims who encounter Islamophobia in the institutions where they work. For example, a woman working in a home care job in a municipality while wearing a veil was told that she could not work in elderly care with a hijab. The woman’s working hours and earnings decreased. The municipality claimed that this was due to a misunderstanding and brought the woman’s status at the workplace to the required standard. Another type of discrimination is known as assigning more work to some employees due to their ethnic or religious identity, or assigning them tasks that require fewer qualifications than those they possess.

15. Swedish Equality Ombudsman, “Diskrimineringsombudsmannens Årsredovisning 2023,” (Stockholm: Swedish Equality Ombudsman, 2024), 16, <https://www.do.se/download/18.2a331bee18c0fb19b479a1/1713949962769/DO-arsredovisning-2023.pdf>.

16. Swedish Equality Ombudsman, “The State of Discrimination 2023,” (Stockholm: Swedish Equality Ombudsman, 2023), <https://www.do.se/choose-language/english/reports/the-state-of-discrimination-2023>.

17. Ibid.

In an interview, Amina, who wears a veil, reported experiencing the following discrimination in her workplace.¹⁸ According to the complaint, her co-worker asked Amina, “Why do you always wear so much clothing? We’re in Sweden. It’s hot. It’s summer, yet you insist on wearing so much clothing.” The dialogue is a concrete example of Islamophobic motivations on the part of Amina’s co-worker.

In examples reflected in the media, in 2022, Kramfors Municipality discriminated against women by saying that a woman working in a nursing home would lose her job if she continued to wear a headscarf. As a result of public reaction and investigations, the woman returned to her job, and the municipality had to pay her 70,000 SEK (\$7,000) in compensation.¹⁹ Similarly, in 2023, a woman named Sara, who was not allowed to wear a veil in her workplace, complained to the court, but the company Rapid Sakerhet AB did not receive any penalty. Sara objected to this decision and took the situation to the Labor Court.²⁰

Finally, in a case recorded by the Discrimination Ombudsman in 2024, a doctor in Uppsala tried to forcibly remove the headscarf of his patient during a consultation in March 2023. As a result of the DO’s decision, a compensation of 70,000 SEK (\$7,000) was awarded to the victim.²¹

Education

Sweden presents a profile of a country with constant Islamophobic cases in the field of education. For example, in December 2020, the Supreme Administrative Court of Sweden overturned two municipalities’ bans on headscarves, burqas, veils, and other clothing that covers the face and hair for preschool and primary school students and staff, stating that the bans violated constitutional provisions on freedom of expression.²² In another case in 2022, the Inspectorate closed four schools, stating that these schools did not comply with Sweden’s education law, as some sections of the Bible and the Quran were taught and hymns were sung in Muslim and Christian schools. They also reported that radical tendencies were detected in two students in particular.²³

18. Swedish Equality Ombudsman, “The State of Discrimination 2023,” (Stockholm: Swedish Equality Ombudsman, 2023), 80, <https://www.do.se/choose-language/english/reports/the-state-of-discrimination-2023>.

19. U.S. Department of State, “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sweden/>.

20. “Fick Inte Bära Slöja på Jobbet: Nu Startar Rättegången i Arbetsdomstolen,” Civil Rights Defenders, October 25, 2023, <https://crd.org/sv/2023/10/25/fick-inte-bara-sloja-pa-jobbet-nu-startar-rattegangen-i-arbetsdomstolen/>.

21. “Swedish Ombudsman Rules Against Doctor Who Forced Muslim Woman to Remove Headscarf,” ANews, January 31, 2024, <https://www.anews.com.tr/islamophobia/2024/01/31/swedish-ombudsman-rules-against-doctor-who-forced-muslim-woman-to-remove-headscarf>.

22. U.S. Department of State, “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sweden/>.

23. U.S. Department of State, “2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sweden/>.

Also in 2022, Sweden's Minister of Education Lena Axelsson Kjellblum faced serious reactions from the Muslim community when she announced that a law covering the closure of independent religious schools would be submitted to parliament. While some of these schools were successful throughout Sweden, the government's justification was that their closure could stop the increasing anti-Islamic rhetoric in Sweden. Another justification was that there were findings in some of these schools that followed the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood and were associated with terrorism. According to the Swedish domestic security service SAPO, even Muslim kindergartens put children at risk of radicalization. However, there was no specific reference to these events in SAPO's reports, which stated that this data was obtained from confidential sources. Therefore, the government's attitude towards Muslim schools carries serious suspicions of Islamophobia.²⁴ Sweden, which closed 16 Muslim schools since 2019, was known to be planning to close another school with more than 200 students in Gothenburg in 2023. After this latest case, Mikail Yuksel, leader of the Nuance Party in Sweden, said, "There is a witch hunt against Muslims in Sweden."²⁵

Amid suspicions that even the government could act motivated by Islamophobia in the field of education, it was reported in the media that a teacher at a school in Sweden was caught on camera verbally abusing Muslim refugee children in 2022. In this video, it is clearly seen that the teacher was pressuring a female student wearing a headscarf to name the male genital organ.²⁶ As a result, considering that an average 5% of Islamophobia cases reported across Sweden in 2022 and 2023 took place in schools, it is determined that the social tendency towards discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in Sweden is also encountered in the field of education.

Politics

The transformation of the political atmosphere in Sweden, as seen in the elections in 2022, was mentioned at the beginning of the report. Norrbotten County in the north of Sweden is an important example to understand better this transformation led by Jimmie Åkesson, the leader of the far-right party Sweden Democrats. In this town, where the working class is concentrated due to the mines, in the 1990s, left parties with a social democratic tendency had around 70% of the votes in total. By 2018, this situation decreased to 62% and most recently to 57.5% in the 2022 elections. In the same election, Åkesson's Sweden Democrats reached almost 20% of the votes. As Swedish politics moves towards the far right, there is an increase in the number of cases of Islamophobia. The number one agenda item that occu-

24. "Sweden Banning Islamic Schools," Anadolu Agency, December 13, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/sweden-banning-islamic-schools/2739879>.

25. "İsveç'ten Müslüman Okullarına Kilit," Yeni Şafak, December 13, 2022, <https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/isvecten-musulman-okullarina-kilit-3899249>.

26. "Swedish Teacher Caught Lashing Out at Muslim Refugee Students," Islam Channel, January 15, 2023, <https://islamchannel.tv/swedish-teacher-caught-lashing-out-at-muslim-refugee-students/>.

pied Swedish politics regarding Islamophobia in 2022 and 2023 was undoubtedly the Quran burnings.

Jimmie Åkesson made statements suggesting that the issue should be addressed with freedom of expression and that restricting these actions is dangerous for Swedish democracy. However, more radical statements came from Richard Jomshof, a member of the Sweden Democrats and chairman of the Justice Committee. Jomshof commented, “I don’t like burning the Quran, but this is legal, and let’s burn 100 more Qurans for those who are disturbed by this.”²⁷ He also called Islam an “anti-democratic, violent, and misogynistic religion/ideology” in a social media post in July 2023. Although there were reactions from both the Muslim community and many Muslim states internationally against the approach of the Swedish far right, former prime minister Magdalena Andersson responded to Åkesson with a meaningful statement, “You always have the right to express yourself, but you have a responsibility to think through the consequences, that it could be hurtful to others.”²⁸ Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, on the other hand, seems to be stuck between his inability to disrupt the balance between himself and the Sweden Democrats, who are in a critical position for the government he formed, and Türkiye, with whom he continues negotiations at the table regarding NATO membership. Kristersson, who did not take action against the Quran burnings, could only try to evade the issue by saying that he was “extremely worried.”²⁹

Another issue in Sweden, where politics has shifted towards right-wing discourse, was Jimmie Åkesson’s proposal to stop the construction of new mosques in Sweden and demolish some existing ones.³⁰ He also called for wiretapping religious communities and the removal of Islamic symbols from public spaces. In another case, Stockholm City Council candidate Gabriel Kroon (SDP) proposed a headscarf ban for students under 18 and women working in the healthcare and public transport sectors.³¹ He also called for a halt to the construction of mosques and described the ideology of Islam as “disgusting.” As far-right parties become stronger in Swedish politics, the boldness of such discourse increases.

27. “Kuran-ı Kerim Yakılmasıyla İlgili İsveç’ten Yine Skandal Açıklamalar: ‘Üzülürse 100 Tane Daha Yakın’,” Haber İskelesi, January 28, 2023, https://haberiiskelesi.com/2023/01/28/kuran-i-kerim-yakilmasiyla-ilgili-isvecten-yine-skandal-aciklamalar-uzulduyseler-100-tane-daha-yakin#google_vignette.

28. “Those Who Burn Quran Are ‘Useful Idiots’ for Those Who Want to Divide Sweden: Former Premier,” Anadolu Agency, January 28, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/those-who-burn-quran-are-useful-idiots-for-those-who-want-to-divide-sweden-former-premier/2803960>.

29. Jon Henley, “Swedish PM ‘Extremely Worried’ About Quran-Burning Protests,” *The Guardian*, July 27, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/27/swedish-pm-extremely-worried-about-quran-burning-protests>.

30. “Swedish Far-Right Leader Suggests Ban on New Mosques, Destruction of Existing Ones,” Anadolu Agency, June 13, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/swedish-far-right-leader-suggests-ban-on-new-mosques-destruction-of-existing-ones/3064785>.

31. U.S. Department of State, “2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2022), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sweden/>.

In addition, it was noteworthy that Lars Arrhenius, the head of the Discrimination Ombudsman established by the Swedish government, on March 23, attended an event at the Malmö Mosque as part of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia (March 15) and gave a speech emphasizing that Muslims are subject to discrimination in every aspect of society.³² While the Swedish government has taken a step to combat Islamophobia after 2022, it is also known that there are radical reactions in politics, especially from the Swedish far right, to this observance. For example, Richard Jomshof (SD) described the government's consideration of Islamophobia as a problem for Sweden as a waste of time, while Gothenburg Council member Jörgen Fogelklou (SD) implied with relatively threatening language that a government that SD is directly a part of would not take such a step.³³

Media

How the media handles issues, especially in terms of language and concept usage, and how it reflects the news to society is an important matter. As seen in the figures below, the use of news language that associates Islam and Muslims with violence can be a triggering factor for Islamophobic actions. For example, the online daily "Bulletin" wrote, "The threat of Islamist terrorism has led the police to patrol the streets and squares with reinforced weapons before the 2023 Christmas holiday."³⁴ (Fig. 2) The definition of the "Islamist terrorist" threat clearly shows that the newspaper establishes a relationship between terrorism and ways of interpreting Islam. By associating the religion of Islam with any crime, the media adopts a language that puts Muslims under suspicion and, worse yet, makes the entire Muslim community a target.

In another news example, the question "Is Islamization a Threat to Sweden?" was posed in response to a prediction by the PEW Research Institute that the number of Muslims in Sweden will reach 4.5 million in 2025.³⁵ (Fig. 3) This again is Islamophobic language. Additionally, the fact that the article included a photograph of a woman wearing a headscarf in front of old buildings in a location that can almost be considered a slum by Swedish standards can be interpreted as an attempt to influence the perception of Islam and Muslims negatively. The news discusses whether the issue of "Islamization" is a threat or not, disregarding the fact that it is a reality that can happen with people's free will in accordance with freedom of religion and belief.

32. Diskrimineringsombudsmannen (DO), 2023. En dag för att uppmärksamma kampen mot islamofobi. [online] Available at: <https://www.do.se/om-do/pressrum/aktuellt/2023/2023-03-23-en-dag-for-att-uppmarksamma-kampen-mot-islamofobi> [Accessed 9 Oct. 2024].

33. Helmerson, E., 2023. UD ville bekämpa islamofobi – ni kan aldrig gissa vad som hände sedan i SD-sfären. Dagens Nyheter. [online] Available at: <https://www.dn.se/ledare/erik-helmerson-ud-ville-bekampa-islamofobi-ni-kan-aldrig-gissa-vad-som-hande-sedan-i-sd-sfaren/> [Accessed 9 Oct. 2024].

34. "Skogkär: Hot om Våld Banar Vägen för Islamisering," Bulletin, October 15, 2023, <https://bulletin.nu/skogkar-hot-om-vald-banar-vagen-for-islamisering>.

35. "Är Islamisering ett Hot mot Sverige?" Dagen, April 20, 2018, <https://www.dagen.se/dokument/2018/04/20-ar-islamisering-ett-hot-mot-sverige/>.

☰ 🔍 Bulletin

Ledare

🔒 Skogkär: Hot om våld banar vägen för islamisering



Dvt islamistiska terrorhotet ledde till att polis med förstärkningsvapen patrullerade gator och torg inför julhelgen 2023. Foto: Johan Nilsson/TT

Våld och hot om våld fungerar. I den stora världen och i den lilla. Det är Sveriges och andra västliga länders anpassning och eftergifter till islam på olika plan ett dystert exempel på.

Figure 2: Skogkär: Threats of Violence Pave the Way for Islamization. **Source:** Bulletin, October 15, 2023

☰ Meny 🔍 **Dagen**
En tidning på kristen grund

Nyheter Debatt Ledare Kultur Relationer Livsstil Familj Podd Kontakt

DOKUMENT

Är islamisering ett hot mot Sverige?

Kommer korset i den svenska fanan att omformas till en halvmåne? Enligt forskningsinstitutet PEW kan det år 2050, med hög invandring, finnas nästan 4,5 miljoner muslimer i Sverige. Men många forskare ger en annan bild av utvecklingen, och de ser rädslan för muslimer som den stora faran.

✕ Förstora ▶ Spela upp 🔍 Lave <<



Figure 3: Is Islamization a Threat to Sweden? **Source:** Dagen, April 20, 2018

It is crucial to consider what kind of language the media adopts on issues concerning Islam and Muslims and whether they reflect events from far-right arguments or perspectives. This requires caution as it has the potential to affect the language and attitudes that societies adopt towards Muslims.

Justice System

The issue that occupied the most attention regarding Islamophobia in the legal system in Sweden in 2022 and 2023 was the legal status of Quran burnings. In discussions about the police stopping activists such as Rasmus Paludan and Salwan Momika, who carried out Quran burnings, the courts ruled that this fell within the scope of freedom of expression, thus preventing the police from taking any preventive measures. Another topic of discussion was whether the perpetrators of the Quran burnings in June 2023 could be tried for the crime of incitement against an ethnic group.

Richard Jomshof, a member of the Sweden Democrats, in his interpellation or parliamentary question addressed to the Swedish Minister of Justice Gunnar Strömmer, stated that the Quran burning incidents should be evaluated in the context of freedom of expression in Sweden.³⁶ He argued that this action does not constitute a crime according to Swedish law and asked whether the minister of justice would refrain from taking a general initiative on this issue. Thus, the far-right Sweden Democrats tried to influence the judiciary in this manner.

There were also opposing views in this debate reflected in the media. For example, former Swedish Supreme Court member Göran Lambertz claimed that burning the Quran could be considered a crime of public incitement (*hets mot folkgrupp*) under Swedish law.³⁷ Lambertz argued that this action did not fall within the scope of freedom of expression and should be considered hate speech, especially against religious minorities. He emphasized that burning the Quran should be prohibited, citing the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and Swedish law. According to Kristina Patring,³⁸ Swedish law protects people who practice a religion or belief, not the religions themselves. Therefore, there is no Swedish legislation or jurisprudence regarding attacks on religion itself, such as burning a holy book. Although the issue appears to fall within the scope of freedom of expression, existing case laws regarding incitement against ethnic groups indicate that acts of burning the Quran could also be addressed from this perspective.³⁹

36. Richard Jomshof, "Interpellation till Statsråd från Riksdagsförvaltningen," (Stockholm: Riksdagsförvaltningen, April 19, 2023), <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/2C975A73-91A7-4D47-8AB0-650AA8341445>.

37. Göran Lambertz, "Att Tala om Barns Bästa – När Juridik Motsäger Förnuft och Empati," *Svensk Juristtidning* 2023, no. 312 (2023): 312-324, <https://svjt.se/svjt/2023/312>.

38. "Kristina Patring, was a member of the newly formed Advisory Council on Human Rights, an advisory body to the Swedish National Institute for Human Rights.

39. "Religionsfrihetsexperten om Koranbränningarna och Yttrandefrihet," SMC, July 14, 2023, <https://www.smc.global/nyheter/religionsfrihetsexperten-om-koranbranningarna-och-yttrandefrihet/>.

Another controversial decision of the Swedish judiciary was the Swedish Labor Court's approval of a security company's decision not to allow a Muslim woman who wears a headscarf to wear it at work. The court stated that the headscarf might be perceived as provocative by some people and could lead to violence. Citing the employer's responsibility to ensure workplace safety, the court made a decision that could set a precedent for other workplaces and potentially open up more space for Islamophobia.⁴⁰

Internet

According to the report prepared by the Swedish police force for the period 2022-Fall 2023, 52% of the hate crimes recorded in 2022 were Islamophobic. A total of 234 cases were identified, but these figures are thought to reflect the actual number minimally, as victims often do not report such attacks to authorities.

By 2023, significant changes were observed in the way hate crimes are committed. For example, cases of public incitement increased from 19% in 2022 to 34% in 2023. Harassment and vandalism decreased from 25% to 19%. A significant increase was observed in the use of digital platforms for hate crimes, with a 47% increase in non-physical acts of violence. The rate of Islamophobic hate crimes committed in digital environments reached 40% in 2023, compared to 8% in the same period of 2022. These crimes often took place in various chat rooms and on social media platforms.

The study titled "A Study in Prejudice - Racist Stereotypes in Digital Environments," mentioned above, reveals the existence of serious online hate speech that can be defined as Islamophobia. For example, women wearing headscarves are called insulting and derogatory epithets such as "huckle" on social networks like Facebook and Reddit. The term "Middle East and North Africa" (MENA) is used with meanings such as "corruption" and "underdevelopment," or a society is associated with terrorism simply because of the religion it practices.

Following the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, an increase in attacks against Muslims was observed in Sweden. Hate speech against Muslims increased, especially in the digital environment and hate crimes reported to the police increased by 40%. The highest incidents of public incitement in 2023 were observed in the first three weeks following the Hamas attack. During this period, 28 cases of public provocation were recorded, compared to 15 in the same period in 2022.

The rise in actions aimed at provoking the public and hate crimes in digital environments can be associated with the political transformation that Sweden has been experiencing in domestic and foreign policy since the end of 2022. The increasing prominence of right-wing politics in Swedish politics and the engagement with a

40. U.S. Department of State, "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Sweden," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/sweden/>.

Muslim country like Türkiye due to NATO membership negotiations have created an unusually politicized atmosphere in Nordic societies.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In recent years, a correlation has been identified between the rise of far-right political ideology in Sweden and the increasing cases of Islamophobia. It is evident that political figures have also become central to the Islamophobia network. With the rise of the Sweden Democrats under the leadership of Jimmie Åkesson to a key position in the Riksdag between 2022 and 2024, Islamophobic actions and rhetoric have become a direct part of Sweden's agenda in both politics and the media. For example, as described in the previous sections of the report, Richard Jomshof, a prominent member of the party, made strong statements supporting “the burning of Qurans” and described Islam as an “anti-democratic, violent, and misogynist ideology,” while Åkesson made agenda-setting statements about stopping the construction of new mosques and questioning whether existing ones should continue their activities. This situation also shows how hostility towards Islam in Sweden has reached a new level of politicization.

The Sweden Democrats, led by Åkesson, are now at the center of the Islamophobia network. Names such as Magnus Ranstorp⁴¹ and Sameh Egyptson,⁴² who have been directly and indirectly supporting the Islamophobic narratives triggered by the Sweden Democrats in the political mechanism for years, are particularly effective in promoting this anti-Islamic discourse. Ranstorp, who is the head of research at the Center for Total Defense and Social Security (CTSS), has spread conspiracy theories claiming that Muslim organizations in Europe are linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, which has led to significant opposition from Muslim civil society in Sweden. Similarly, Egyptson, who works as an expert for public institutions and right-wing political parties, has put forward the idea of an Islamization agenda, supposedly led by the Muslim Brotherhood in Sweden, and has brought this idea to a wider audience. Both Ranstorp and Egyptson have played important roles in deepening the atmosphere of Islamophobia in Sweden. Ranstorp's views, which are widely shared in the media, and Egyptson's speeches on right-wing platforms contribute to the growth of Islamophobia, creating a basis for further discrimination and hostility towards Muslims in Swedish society.

Collectively, these elements show that Islamophobia in Sweden goes beyond mere individual prejudice: it is a phenomenon deliberately orchestrated and perpetuated by political actors and influential public figures. This coordinated effort not only exac-

41. Georgetown University Bridge Initiative, “Factsheet: Magnus Ranstorp,” *Georgetown University*, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-magnus-ranstorp/>.

42. Georgetown University Bridge Initiative, “Factsheet: Sameh Egyptson,” *Georgetown University*, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/factsheet-sameh-egyptson/>.

erbates the discrimination and exclusion faced by Muslims in Sweden, but also leads to the further institutionalization of Islamophobia in Swedish political discourse.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Organizations such as the Living History Forum run initiatives aimed at improving teachers' awareness of Islamophobia. Projects aimed at improving the security of faith communities and non-profit organizations (NGOs) have been established through the Government Grants Regulation. The Swedish Crime Victims Authority has prepared brochures in various languages to raise awareness about the rights of those who have been subjected to Islamophobic hate crimes. This program, which the Swedish government put into effect in 2022-2024, aims to combat Islamophobia in four main strategic areas: "Strengthening Information, Education and Research," "Strengthening Online Preventive Measures," "A More Active Justice System," and "More In-Depth Dialogue with Civil Society." Within this framework, efforts are also being made to detect and block content that can be defined as Islamophobic on the internet.

When it comes to civil initiatives, several institutions stand out. The Ibn Rushd Education Association organizes training, seminars, and cultural events with a mission to build bridges between Muslims and Sweden's state institutions, regardless of Sweden's internal political atmosphere and party policies.⁴³ The Swedish Muslim Association (Sveriges Muslimka Förbund, SMF) is also an NGO that aims to protect the identities of Muslims in Sweden, encourage them to maintain their Muslim identity, and strengthen their integration into society. The organization collaborates with the United Islamic Societies of Sweden (Förenade Islamiska Föreningar i Sverige, FIFS) and the Swedish Islamic Cultural Center Association (Islamiska Kulturcenterunionen i Sverige, IKUS). These civic initiatives published a joint statement against the frequent Quran burnings in 2022 and 2023, which allowed them to make their voices heard by Swedish political actors.⁴⁴ On February 2, 2023, they met with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and Minister of Social Affairs Jakob Forssmed to discuss ongoing problems related to anti-Islam and anti-Muslim hate crimes.⁴⁵ They particularly expressed their concerns about practices that many describe as Islamophobic, such as Quran burnings, the closure of Muslim schools, and the difficulties Muslim associations face in opening bank accounts. However, after the meeting, no concrete steps were observed from the Ulf Kristersson administration regarding the demands of the Muslim community.

43. "Ibn Rushd Eğitim Birliği," Ibn Rushd, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.ibnrushd.se/ibn-rusd-egitim-birligi/>.

44. "Svenska Muslimer för Fred och Rättvisa," SMF-Islam, June 28, 2023, <https://smf-islam.se/230628/>.

45. "Svenska Muslimer för Fred och Rättvisa, Möte med Statsminister," SMF-Islam, January 20, 2023, <https://smf-islam.se/mote-med-statsminister/>.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This report highlights a concerning rise in Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes in Sweden, driven by the increasing influence of far-right ideologies. The data shows a significant correlation between the political success of the Sweden Democrats and the surge in discriminatory actions against Muslims, including mosque attacks, verbal and physical harassment, and Quran burnings. Despite Sweden's reputation as a "moral superpower" with strong human rights records, recent political shifts have created a hostile environment for Muslim communities.

The legal system's treatment of Quran burning incidents as freedom of expression rather than hate crimes has further exacerbated tensions. The Swedish government's initiatives, such as the Action Plan to Combat Islamophobia, aim to address these issues, but more comprehensive measures are needed. Educational programs promoting religious tolerance, enhanced legal protections, and increased community support are crucial steps toward mitigating Islamophobia.

If Sweden does not address the far-right's hostile stance towards Islam and Muslims, Islamophobic incidents are likely to increase. It is imperative to strengthen legal frameworks to classify such acts as hate crimes and to foster an inclusive society through education and community engagement. This approach will not only protect the rights of Muslim communities, but also uphold Sweden's commitment to human rights and social justice.

Chronology

- **20 May 2022:** The Swedish Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) revealed that Kramfors Municipality discriminated against a woman by telling her she would lose her job if she continued to wear a hijab. The municipality later admitted wrongdoing. The DO ordered the municipality to pay the woman 70,000 SEK (\$7,000) in damages.
- **12 September 2022:** Swedish general elections
- **January 2023:** In Stockholm, protesters hung an effigy of Turkish President Erdoğan and compared him to Mussolini, causing outrage in the Turkish-Muslim community.
- **21 January 2023:** Far-right figure Rasmus Paludan burned the Quran in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm, an act seen as a direct attack on Islam and Muslims.
- **2 June 2023:** The Swedish Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) published the 2023 report on discrimination.
- **13 June 2023:** Swedish far-right leader Jimmie Åkesson suggested banning new mosques and demolishing existing ones.

- **28 June 2023:** Iraqi refugee Salwan Momika burned the Quran in front of Stockholm's largest mosque during Eid al-Adha, causing widespread outrage.
- **3 August 2023:** Iranian immigrant Bahrami Marjan carried out a similar provocative act in Angbybadet near Stockholm.
- **18 August 2023:** The imam of the Islamic Center in Malmö revealed that the mosque had received a threatening letter.
- **25 September 2023:** A fire at a mosque in Eskilstuna was determined to be arson.
- **25 October 2023:** The trial began in the Swedish Labor Court for a Muslim woman denied the right to wear a veil at work at Rapid Sakerhet AB.
- **13 December 2023:** The Swedish Labor Court ruled in favor of a security company that denied a Muslim woman the right to wear a headscarf at work, citing workplace safety concerns.
- **31 January 2024:** The Swedish Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) ruled against a doctor in Uppsala who tried to forcibly remove a Muslim woman's headscarf during a consultation in March 2023.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN
SWITZERLAND
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Résumé

La communauté musulmane de/en Suisse a connu une augmentation de l'islamophobie. Le sentiment anti-musulman est alimenté par la représentation des musulmans comme une menace pour la sécurité, souvent liée à «l'islam politique». Cette perception a profondément influencé le discours suisse sur la religion, la migration et la sécurité nationale, entraînant des actions législatives significatives et des débats publics.

En 2023, la Suisse a enregistré 1 058 incidents racistes, dont 876 cas de discrimination raciale et 62 cas de racisme antimusulman. Ces chiffres reflètent une augmentation par rapport à l'année précédente, due à une volonté accrue du public de signaler la discrimination. Les victimes identifient souvent le lieu de travail (56%) et les espaces publics (31%) comme des domaines de préoccupation majeure, les établissements d'enseignement étant également notablement touchés (22%).

En Suisse, la discrimination est la plus répandue au sein des organisations et des institutions (534 cas), suivie par la vie publique (329 cas). Les établissements d'enseignement et les lieux de travail sont des sites importants d'incidents discriminatoires, en particulier contre les musulmans et les personnes d'origine arabe.

Les débats politiques et publics mettent fréquemment en lumière les pratiques musulmanes, telles que le port du hijab ou du burkini, et ces expressions de l'identité islamique sont souvent mal interprétées comme des signes d'extrémisme. Lors des campagnes précédant un vote ou une élection, l'islam est exploité et les musulmans sont stigmatisés. L'UDC influence significativement ces discussions, contribuant à un climat d'intolérance. Le parti considère l'islam comme un danger pour les «valeurs suisses» et cherche à l'exclure de la vie publique. Le parti a connu une augmentation notable de 3% du nombre de voix reçues lors des dernières élections. Lors des campagnes électorales et de vote, le Réseau des centres de conseil pour les victimes de racisme a signalé une augmentation des incidents racistes.

L'extrémisme de droite est en hausse, presque doublé avec 53 cas signalés en 2023, poussé par des campagnes politiques intensifiées. Cela souligne l'interaction complexe entre les dynamiques socio-politiques et les pratiques discriminatoires en Suisse.

Aborder ces questions nécessite de lourds efforts pour combattre les inégalités structurelles et promouvoir l'inclusivité, garantissant ainsi que la communauté musulmane suisse puisse participer pleinement aux affaires sociales sans craindre la discrimination ou la marginalisation.

Zusammenfassung

Die muslimische Gemeinschaft in/aus der Schweiz hat eine Zunahme der Islamophobie erlebt. Anti-muslimische Gefühle werden durch die Darstellung von Muslimen als Sicherheitsbedrohung, oft in Verbindung mit dem "politischen Islam", geschürt. Diese Wahrnehmung hat den Schweizer Diskurs über Religion, Migration und nationale Sicherheit tiefgreifend beeinflusst und zu bedeutenden gesetzlichen Maßnahmen und öffentlichen Debatten geführt.

Im Jahr 2023 wurden in der Schweiz 1.058 rassistische Vorfälle dokumentiert, darunter 876 Fälle von Rassendiskriminierung und insbesondere 62 Fälle von antimuslimischem Rassismus. Diese Zahlen spiegeln einen Anstieg gegenüber dem Vorjahr wider, was auf eine erhöhte Bereitschaft der Öffentlichkeit zur Meldung von Diskriminierung zurückzuführen ist. Die Opfer identifizieren häufig den Arbeitsplatz (56%) und öffentliche Räume (31%) als Hauptsozialbereiche, wobei Bildungseinrichtungen ebenfalls bemerkenswert betroffen sind (22%).

In der Schweiz ist Diskriminierung am häufigsten innerhalb von Organisationen und Institutionen (534 Fälle), gefolgt vom öffentlichen Leben (329 Fälle). Bildungseinrichtungen und Arbeitsplätze sind wichtige Orte für diskriminierende Vorfälle, insbesondere gegen Muslime und Menschen arabischer Herkunft.

Politische und öffentliche Debatten rücken häufig muslimische Praktiken wie das Tragen von Hijabs oder Burkinis in den Vordergrund, und diese Ausdrucksformen der islamischen Identität werden oft fälschlicherweise als Anzeichen von Extremismus interpretiert. Während der Kampagnen vor einer Abstimmung oder einer Wahl wird der Islam instrumentalisiert und Muslime werden stigmatisiert. Die Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) beeinflusst diese Diskussionen erheblich und trägt zu einem Klima der Intoleranz bei. Die Partei betrachtet den Islam als Gefahr für die "schweizerischen Werte" und strebt an, ihn aus dem öffentlichen Leben auszuschließen. Die Partei verzeichnete einen bemerkenswerten Anstieg von 3% der erhaltenen Stimmen. Während der Wahl- und Abstimmungskampagnen meldete das Netzwerk der Beratungsstellen für Rassismuspfer einen Anstieg der rassistischen Vorfälle.

Der Rechtsextremismus ist auf dem Vormarsch und hat sich fast verdoppelt, mit 53 gemeldeten Fällen im Jahr 2023, angetrieben durch verstärkte politische Kampagnen. Dies unterstreicht das komplexe Zusammenspiel zwischen den sozio-politischen Dynamiken und den diskriminierenden Praktiken in der Schweiz.

Die Bewältigung dieser Probleme erfordert erhebliche Anstrengungen, um strukturelle Ungleichheiten zu bekämpfen und Inklusivität zu fördern, damit die muslimische Gemeinschaft in der Schweiz uneingeschränkt am gesellschaftlichen Leben teilnehmen kann, ohne Angst vor Diskriminierung oder Ausgrenzung zu haben.

Executive Summary

Switzerland's Muslim community has experienced a surge in Islamophobia. The negative attitudes towards Muslims are often fueled by their portrayal as a security risk, commonly associated with "political Islam." This perception has significantly impacted Swiss discussions on matters of religion, immigration, and national security, resulting in significant legislative measures and public discussions.

In 2023, Switzerland documented 1,058 racist incidents, which included 876 instances of racial discrimination and specifically 62 cases of anti-Muslim racism. These numbers indicate a rise from the previous year, driven by an increased willingness among the people to report discriminatory incidents. Victims frequently point to the workplace (56%) and public areas (31%) as the main areas of concern, with educational environments also experiencing significant impact (22%).

Discrimination is most prevalent within organizations and establishments (534 cases), followed by the public sphere (329 cases). Educational institutions and workplaces are key locations for discriminatory behaviors, especially targeting Muslims and individuals of Arab descent.

Political and public dialogues often emphasize Muslim traditions, such as the wearing of hijabs or burkinis, which are frequently misrepresented as indicators of extremism. Prior to votes or elections, Islam is often manipulated, leading to the strong stigmatization of Muslims. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) plays a significant role in these discussions, contributing to an atmosphere of intolerance. The SVP views Islam as a threat to "Swiss values" and aims to exclude it from the public sphere. The party witnessed a notable increase of 3% in the number of votes in the last elections. During electoral campaigns, the Network of Advice Centers for Victims of Racism reported a rise in racist incidents.

Right-wing extremism is escalating, with reported cases nearly doubling to 53 in 2023, driven by intensified political activities. This underscores the intricate interplay of sociopolitical dynamics and discriminatory tendencies within Switzerland.

Efforts to address these issues necessitate sustained actions to combat structural inequalities and promote inclusivity, ensuring that the Swiss Muslim community can actively engage in societal matters without facing discrimination or marginalization.

Country Profile

EIR 2023

Country: Swiss Confederation (Switzerland)

Type of Regime: Federal semidirect democracy under a multiparty system

Form of Government: Federal republic system at three levels: the confederation, the cantons, and the communes

Ruling Parties: Swiss People's Party (SVP), Social Democratic Party (SP), the Centre (an alliance of Christian Democrat People's Party [CVP] and Conservative Democratic Party [BDP]), and The Liberals (FDP)

Opposition Parties: Green Party (GPS), Green Liberal Party (GLP), Federal Democratic Union (EDU), Ensemble à Gauche, Lega dei Ticinesi, Swiss Evangelical People's Party

Last Elections: October 22, 2023

Total Population: 8.8 million (as of 2022, according to Federal Statistical Office [FSO])

Major Language: German, French, Italian, Romansh (Art. 4)

Official Religion: Switzerland has no official state religion, but most cantons support the Swiss Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Statistics on Islamophobia: Discrimination based on anti-Arab racism accounted for 69 cases, while anti-Muslim racism comprised 62 cases (The Advisory Network for Victims of Racism, 2024)

Statistics on Racism and Discrimination: The annual report "Racist incidents recorded by the Advisory Network for Victims of Racism" (2024) documented 1,058 incidents, including 876 cases of racial discrimination as of 2023. Xenophobia was the most common ground for discrimination, with 387 cases reported.

Major Religions (% of Population): Roman Catholic 32.1%, Protestant Reformed 20.5%, Other Christian communities 5.6%, No religious affiliation 33.5% (FSO, 2022)

Muslim Population (% of Population): 5.9% (FSO, 2022)

Main Muslim Community Organizations: Federation of Islamic Organizations in Switzerland (FIOS), Coordination of Islamic Organizations in Switzerland (KIOS), Islamischer Zentralrat Schweiz (IZRS)

Main NGOs Combating Islamophobia: Federal Commission Against Racism (FCR), Intercultural Association (JASS), National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), Humanrights.ch

Far-Right Parties: Swiss People's Party, Federal Democratic Union of Switzerland, Swiss Nationalist Party, Ticino League

Far-Right Movements: Résistance Helvétique, Swiss Association Vigilance Islam (ASVI), Pegida Switzerland

Far-Right Violent Organizations: N/A

Limitations to Islamic Practices

- **Hijab Ban:** No
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** Yes (since 1893)
- **Minaret Ban:** Yes (since 2009)
- **Circumcision Ban:** No
- **Full-Face Veil Ban:** Yes, all of Switzerland (since 2021) (exceptions to the ban include religious services, indigenous customs, theatrical performances, and veiling for health or climatic reasons)

Introduction

Switzerland's Islamic community stands as the third largest religious group in the country, with an estimated 500,000 followers.¹ This surge can be traced back to significant waves of international migration that began in the 1960s, leading to Islam becoming Switzerland's second most widely practiced religion. Nevertheless, despite their presence, Muslims in Switzerland are confronted with escalating Islamophobia, particularly in the post-9/11 period. This is because Muslims' activities are often seen as threats, leading to restrictions on their rights. Race, religion, and ethnicity have been inextricably linked with "political Islam," resulting in portrayals of Muslims as radical and a security threat.² This perceived "Islamic threat"³ has been a central issue in Swiss discussions on religion, migration, and security.⁴ Since the 2004 referendum to facilitate citizenship for second- and third-generation immigrants, debates about Islam have shifted to concerns about extremist Islam and its perceived danger to Swiss culture, democracy, and institutions.⁵

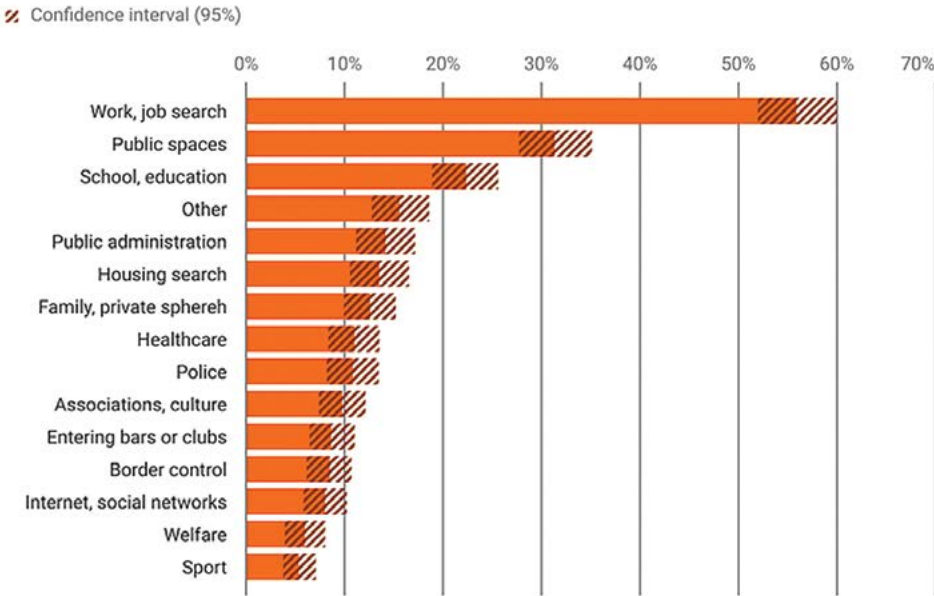
In Switzerland, there is documented evidence of structural racism.⁶ Over the past five years, documented incidents of racial discrimination have nearly doubled,⁷ with a significant increase in reported cases in 2023. Switzerland documented 1,058 incidents including 876 cases of racial discrimination, marking a rise of 168 from the

1. Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, "Islam and Muslims in Switzerland Through the Prism of Religious Visibility and Islamic Militancy," in Rauf Ceylan and Michael Mücke (eds.), *Muslims in Europe: Historical Developments, Present Issues, and Future Challenges* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2024).
2. Amnesty International and Open Societies Foundation, "Europe: A Human Rights Guide for Researching Racial and Religious Discrimination in Counter-Terrorism," *Amnesty International*, Vol. EUR 01/3606/2021, (February 2021), retrieved March 3, 2024, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/3606/2021/en/>
3. In the words of John Esposito, 9/11 was a major catalyst in the perception of Islam and Muslims as a global threat. Interviewed by Indlieb Farazi Saber, "Seen as Less Human: Why Has Islamophobia Surged Amid Israel's Gaza War?" *Al Jazeera*, (December 21, 2023), retrieved March 3, 2024, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/21/seen-as-less-human-why-has-islamophobia-surged-amid-israels-gaza-war>.
4. Lucia Direnberger, Elisa Banfi, and Vista Eskandari, "Locating the Threat, Rebordering the Nation: Gender and Islamophobia in the Swiss Parliament, 2001-2015," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July, 2022), pp. 384-401; One fundamental element of Swiss nationalism revolves around the notion of Switzerland as a relatively small nation that must resist "Überfremdung" which can be translated as "foreign overpopulation" or "foreign domination." It includes concerns about the number of foreigners living in Switzerland and the perceived cultural and spiritual threat posed by their over-representation in the population. Gérald Arlettaz and Sylvia Arlettaz, *La Suisse et Les Étrangers: Immigration et Formation Nationale, 1848-1933* (Lausanne: Antipodes et Société d'Histoire de la Suisse Romande, 2004).
5. Purdie, 2024, p. 101.
6. Fachstelle für Rassismusbekämpfung, "Kurzfassung Grundlagenstudie: Struktureller Rassismus in der Schweiz," *Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern* (2023); Leonie Mugglin, Denise Efonayi, Didier Ruedin, and Gianni D'Amato, "Grundlagenstudie zu Strukturellem Rassismus in der Schweiz," *SFM Studies*, Vol. 81d (2022), Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies, Université de Neuchâtel; Pamela Ohene-Nyako, "Struktureller Rassismus Bleibt eine Realität in der Schweiz," interview by Samuel Jordan (2020).
7. According to a survey, "racial discrimination has affected one in six residents of Switzerland over the past five years, with younger individuals and those with migration backgrounds experiencing this issue more frequently." Swissinfo, "One in Six People in Switzerland Suffers Racial Discrimination," *Swissinfo* (February 1, 2024), retrieved March 3, 2024, from <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/business/one-in-six-people-in-switzerland-suffer-racial-discrimination/49177682>.

previous year.⁸ This increase is due in part to an increasing public willingness to speak out against discrimination. Out of the 876 recorded incidents, 512 were reported directly by the victims. Interestingly, there is a noticeable trend where women are more inclined to seek assistance from support centers. News headlines often highlight behaviors associated with Muslims, such as debates over handshakes with the opposite gender, wearing burkinis in swimming areas, private prayers in university stairwells, and veiling⁹ among school-aged girls and trainees. Expressions of Islamic identity are often seen as signs of Islamic extremism infiltrating Swiss society,¹⁰ indicating communitarianism and the emergence of parallel communities.¹¹

Situations of discrimination, 2023

Proportion of the victims mentioning the situations



Data as on: 29.02.2024 gr-e-01.05.08.06.03-su
 Source: FSO – Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Module discrimination and racism © FSO 2024

Figure 1: Percentages of victims mentioning the situation in which they experienced discrimination in Switzerland as of 2023.

8. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, *Incidents Racistes Recensés par les Centres de Conseil 2023: Rapport sur la Discrimination Raciale en Suisse Établi sur la Base des Données du Système de Documentation et de Monitoring du Racisme DoSyRa* (2024).

9. Particularly the use of full-face veils in public

10. For instance, Vallette argues that the burkini is not just a piece of clothing but part of a series of requests and accommodations (such as separate swimming schedules, halal meals, veils at work, prayer spaces, etc.) that represent a broader push towards Islamic practices and norms in Western societies. For more elaboration: Mireille Vallette, “Contre les soldates de l’islamisme, l’UDC tente d’interdire le burkini,” *Les Observateurs* (November 28, 2023), retrieved March 3, 2024, from <https://lesobservateurs.ch/2023/11/28/contre-les-soldates-de-l-islamisme-ludc-tente-dinterdire-le-burkini/>

11. Purdie, 2024, p. 102.

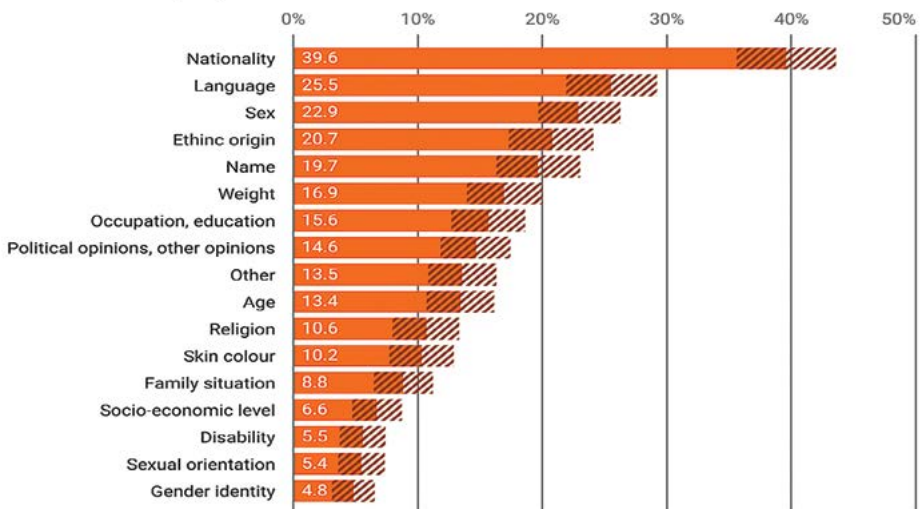
According to the Federal Statistical Office (FSO), victims of discrimination typically identify incidents in the workplace and job searches as their primary source of worry, accounting for 56% of reported cases. Public spaces are also identified as sites of discrimination, with 31% of victims citing experiences of marginalization and prejudice in communal settings. Furthermore, educational settings, including schools and institutions of learning, are another prominent area where prejudice occurs, affecting 22% of those impacted.

Discrimination is most prevalent within organizations, institutions, and the private sector, with 534 reported cases, followed by public life, comprising 329 cases. Incidents were predominantly observed in two key spheres: education, where 181 cases were reported, encompassing incidents occurring during training, at schools, or in daycare facilities, and the workplace, with 124 documented cases. Moreover, significant incidences of discrimination were noted in other domains, including in the public space (113 cases), administrative settings (110 cases), neighborhoods (99 cases), private sector offerings (71 cases), and social or political spheres (62 cases).¹² Structural inequalities embedded within institutions, coupled with overt instances of discrimination in daily life, serve to hinder individuals' access to resources such as employment, housing, and training, thereby impeding their full participation in societal affairs. This systemic discrimination contributes to cynicism towards both institutional frameworks and societal norms.

Grounds of discrimination, 2023

Proportion of the victims mentioning the grounds

▨ Confidence interval (95%)



Data as on: 29.02.2024

Source: FSO – Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Module discrimination and racism

gr-e-01.05.08.06.02-su

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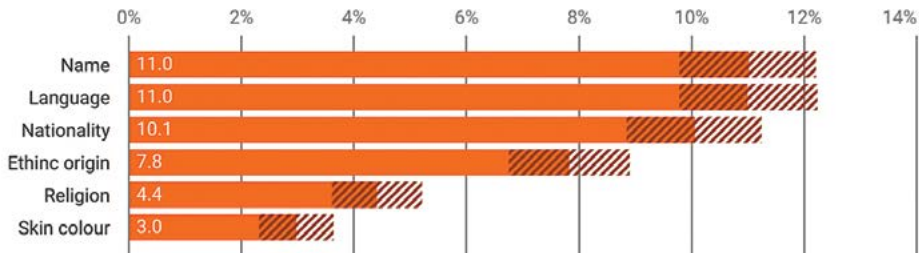
Figure 2: Percentages of victims based on the grounds of the discrimination they experienced in Switzerland as of 2023.

12. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, p.9.

Disadvantages, 2023

Proportion of the population that feels disadvantaged, by ground

▨ Confidence interval (95%)



Data as on: 29.02.2024

Source: FSO – Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Module discrimination and racism

gr-e-01.05.08.06.02d

© FSO 2024

Figure 3: Percentages of the population that feels disadvantaged by grounds of discrimination in Switzerland as of 2023.

The public sector emerges as the third most affected domain, with 279 reported cases, while instances of discrimination in private life are comparatively fewer, totaling 194 cases. A detailed examination of subcategories reveals that educational settings constitute a significant locus of discrimination, with 181 reported cases occurring during training, at school, or in daycare facilities. Similarly, the workplace is identified as a prominent site of discrimination, with 124 reported cases. Of particular concern is the escalating trend of discriminatory incidents within the field of education, especially in compulsory schooling, with anti-Black racism (77 cases) and xenophobia (57 cases) being the most commonly reported forms.¹³

In 2023, the prevailing bases for discriminatory incidents predominantly centered around xenophobia, accounting for 387 reported cases, and anti-Black racism, with 327 documented cases. Eighty-one incidents exhibited intersections between these two grounds, underscoring the intricate interplay of ideologies, racist opinions, and ingrained biases within society. Instances of discrimination rooted in xenophobia primarily manifested in unequal treatment (182 cases) and “other denigrating expressions/illustrations” (154 cases). Conversely, incidents associated with anti-Black racism frequently involved “other denigrating expressions/illustrations” (183 cases) and denigrating treatment (114 cases). Despite these prevalent forms of discrimination, the persisting prevalence of anti-Arab racism (69 cases) and anti-Muslim racism (62 cases) underscores ongoing challenges in addressing discrimination across various societal spheres. In particular, educational settings emerged as prominent sites for discriminatory incidents within the anti-Muslim and anti-Arab rac-

13. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, p. 12.

ism categories, with 31 reported cases. Additionally, the workplace and public spaces each witnessed 16 reported cases within these categories. Notably, incidents linked to right-wing extremism exhibited a significant uptick, nearly doubling to 53 cases. This surge is attributed to the heightened political campaigns preceding the federal elections, indicating the multifaceted nature of discriminatory dynamics influenced by sociopolitical contexts.¹⁴

Discrimination manifests across various axes. In 2023, 11% of individuals encountered obstacles due to their names, nearly 8% faced challenges because of their ethnic origin, and an additional 4.4% felt disadvantaged and encountered adversity due to their religious affiliations.

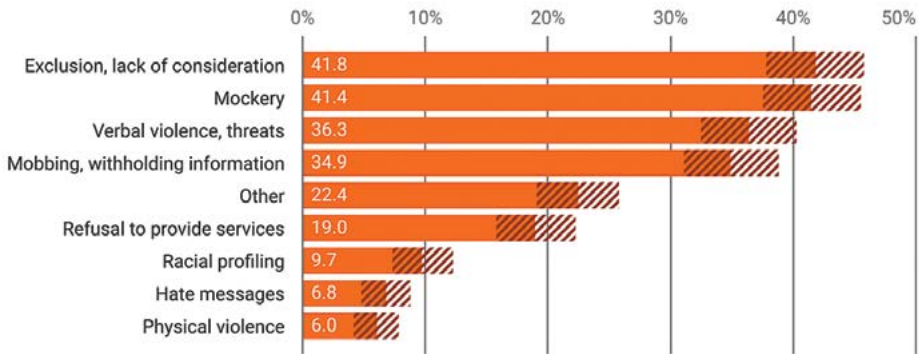
Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Forms of discrimination, 2023

Proportion of the victims mentioning the forms

▨ Confidence interval (95%)



Data as on: 29.02.2024

Source: FSO – Survey on diversity and coexistence in Switzerland, Module discrimination and racism

gr-e-01.05.08.06.04

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Figure 4: Percentages of the victims mentioning forms of discrimination in Switzerland as of 2023.

Two cases of physical assaults highlight the discrimination and violence faced by Muslims in Switzerland. Both incidents involved verbal abuse and physical assault based on the victims' religious identity, reflecting a troubling pattern of Islamophobia. One incident occurred at a gas station, while the other involved two Muslim women attacked on the street.

14. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, p. 16.

Table 1: Forms of Discrimination (Number of Advisory Interviews: 876)¹⁵

Form of Discrimination	Subcategory	No. of Cases	Total
Communication	other denigrating expression/illustration	362	939
	insults	227	
	slander/false accusations	104	
	threat	74	
	gestures, facial expressions, sounds	71	
	hate speech in public	66	
	deliberate withholding of information	27	
	negation or trivialization of a genocide	8	
Violence	physical violence	79	99
	property damage	19	
	violence with weapons	1	
Exclusion	unequal treatment	348	888
	denigrating treatment	288	
	harassment	71	
	refusal of services (offers intended for the public)	69	
	protection failure	61	
	racial profiling	39	
	not assisting a person in danger	12	
Far-right propaganda	racist propaganda (written and audio documents)	22	23
	far-right demonstrations, rallies	1	

Source: Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024.

Incident 1: Two Muslim women leave their bicycles and their children's scooters at a bicycle park in a public area. Upon their return, a man berates the children for improper scooter parking, causing them distress. Attempting to intervene, one of the women is physically assaulted by the man, who grabs her throat and proceeds to strangle her. Despite the other woman's efforts to intervene, both women are subjected to further physical violence. A passerby intervenes, restraining the assailant until he flees. The police are summoned, but the women are steered towards conciliation, though they firmly seek legal recourse. In addition to physical injuries, the ordeal leaves lasting emotional and psychological scars on both the women and their

15. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, pp. 14-15.

children. Seeking justice, they solicit the support of an advice center, which conducts research and recommends legal representation from a firm specializing in criminal law and discrimination protection. With the assistance of victim support services, the public prosecutor initiates legal proceedings for assault and battery stemming from racist violence. The legal process is underway, highlighting the need for robust measures to address and combat discriminatory acts in society.¹⁶

Incident 2: Mrs. B. and her two children, including her veil-wearing daughter, were involved in a disturbing incident at a gas station when three bikers obstructed their exit and insulted her son because of his religious affiliation. Despite Mrs. B.'s call to the police, the gas station employee sided with the motorcyclists, claiming her son was aggressive. Mrs. B. sought justice by demanding that the gas station rectify its employee's actions and seeking help from an advising center. She then sought legal advice and filed a lawsuit for threats (art. 180 CC) and insults (art. 177 CC). The public prosecutor recommended an amicable solution, resulting in the accused admitting fault and apologizing, and the criminal charge being withdrawn.¹⁷

Based on a study examining how Muslims and Jews experience and respond to discrimination, it was found that while both groups face significant levels of dislike and discrimination, Jews are more likely to report discriminatory incidents and seek legal action than Muslims.¹⁸ This disparity is due to a variety of factors: (1) perceived costs: Jews are more confident that reporting discrimination will result in a positive outcome, whereas Muslims may view reporting as hazardous or ineffective; (2) in-group norms: Muslims may be hesitant to identify as victims owing to fears of stigma or poor attitudes in their communities; (3) structural factors: Muslims may be less aware of various avenues for reporting discrimination and may encounter hurdles such as linguistic or cultural barriers; (4) organizational opportunities: Jewish communities may have higher organizational capacity to combat discrimination, such as established support networks and advocacy groups. Other factors accounting for underreporting discrimination among Muslim women include unawareness, fear of blame, feelings of shame, fatalism, and the complexity of legal procedures.¹⁹

Employment

Discrimination is pervasive in the workplace. Fifty-six percent of individuals reported experiencing discrimination in their daily work routine or job search. They encountered various forms of mistreatment, including humiliation, insults, and discrimina-

16. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, p. 11.

17. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, p. 10.

18. Anaïd Lindemann and Jörg Stolz, "To Speak Out or Not to Speak Out? Exploring the Reporting of Discrimination Among Muslims and Jews in Switzerland," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 8 (2022), pp. 1977-1997.

19. Anaïd Lindemann, "Discrimination against Veiled Muslim Women in Switzerland: Insights from Field Experts," *Religions*, Vol. 12, No. 7 (2021): 500.

tory behavior from colleagues or unequal treatment from superiors. Other forms included unjustified bias in hiring, verbal abuse, harassment, and unequal pay practices.

Muslims often encounter challenges in the workplace due to their identity. Patterns of discrimination continue to persist in hiring processes based on discriminatory attitudes toward Muslim candidates. El Maohub et al. conducted an experimental formative study with employees to measure the presence of Islamophobia in the hiring practices in the case of Ticino, Switzerland.²⁰ The findings revealed a negative perception of Muslim applicants, with a significant difference between the two scenarios: candidates perceived as Muslim were more frequently rejected for front-office positions compared to back-office roles. As long as Muslims were “not seen as Muslims to the customers,” they were considered suitable/acceptable for certain job positions. These results suggest that hiring practices in Ticino exhibit instances of discrimination.

There was a reported incident where a veil-wearing trainee encountered conflicts during her nursing internship when her supervisor criticized her attire and suggested she wear a lycra cap as an alternative, which the trainee declined, expressing openness to exploring other options. Confronted with her supervisor’s inflexibility, the trainee reluctantly terminated her internship. Subsequently, amidst protests from her peers, mediation ensued to explore viable resolutions, yet the internship supervisor remained unyielding to any proposed solutions. Following consultations with health professionals and school management regarding industry standards and potential remedies, the trainee opted to pursue an alternative career path.²¹

In June 2023, a Muslim employee at Coop, a Swiss retailer, decided to quit her job due to a ban on wearing headscarves at work. The woman had been employed by Coop for twelve years, including working at the cash register.²² The employee wished to start wearing a headscarf, which led to a conflict with Coop’s clothing regulations that prohibit headgear for employees in sales roles.

Despite negotiations with her superiors, no exception was made. Coop reportedly told her, “Either you go to work or you wear a headscarf.”²³ The employee felt discriminated against by this policy, especially since Coop promotes itself as inclusive and supportive of integration. She eventually resigned, stating that Coop failed to find a suitable solution that would allow her to wear the headscarf and continue her

20. Yassmeen El Maohub, Natalie Rangelov, and L. Suzanne Suggs, “The Best Person for the Job is the Most Qualified, Right? An Experimental Study About Islamophobia in Hiring Practices,” *Journal of Social Marketing*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2023): 63-81.

21. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, p. 16.

22. Bluewin, “Coop-Mitarbeiterin kündigt wegen Kopftuchverbot,” (June 26, 2023), retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://www.bluewin.ch/de/news/schweiz/mitarbeiterin-kuendigt-wegen-kopftuchverbot-1790896.html>

23. Janina Schenker, “Coop verbietet Kopftücher für Mitarbeitende im Verkauf,” *20 Minuten* (June 26, 2023), retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://www.20min.ch/story/coop-verbietet-kopftuecher-fuer-mitarbeitende-im-verkauf-557854055243>

role. The incident highlights inconsistencies among Swiss retailers regarding headscarf policies.²⁴ Coop confirmed the incident, but rejected the discrimination claim, noting that they try to find alternative roles for employees wishing to wear headscarves, such as in administration, production, and logistics.

Education

In several Swiss cantons, regulations prohibit civil servants, including teachers, from wearing religious symbols as a means to uphold the principle of secularism within public institutions.²⁵ The case of a Geneva teacher who was forbidden to wear the veil on grounds of secularism went as far as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Federal Court ruled that all religious symbols should be banned from compulsory schooling to avoid influencing students. The ECHR confirmed this verdict, considering that students' right to a neutral education in compulsory school outweighed the teacher's right to religious expression.²⁶ Interestingly, no comparable cases have been reported for other religious communities. Arguably, there is a pronounced distrust towards Muslim teachers, who are more frequently suspected of proselytizing or attempting to influence students. The FCR (2023) states that while the principle of secularism is applied to followers of all religions, Muslim women,²⁷ in particular, find themselves disproportionately affected by these restrictions and suspicions, reflecting broader societal dynamics surrounding Islamophobia and religious discrimination within Swiss educational institutions.

The FCR commissioned an analysis of school textbooks to gain a comprehensive understanding of how these materials address racism, racist rhetoric, and social diversity.²⁸ The analysis focused on four key areas: the treatment of racism as a theme, the portrayal of migration, territorial representations (distinguishing between “here” and “elsewhere”), and representations of society. This investigation aligns with the broader societal discourse on structural racism, which is increasingly reflected in school textbooks. The analysis highlighted a growing sensitivity to racist language and colonial history within Switzerland. However, it also revealed a notable gap: textbooks offer

24. For instance, Aldi and Lidl allow headscarves, while Migros's policies vary by region, where in Zurich, wearing a headscarf is permitted when in contact with customers, but not in Basel, Eastern Switzerland, Aargau, Bern, and Solothurn.

25. This also concerns the wearing of the veil, which is however generally tolerated for students by the cantonal authorities.

26. Commission fédérale contre le racisme, 2023. Racisme à l'égard des musulmans, p. 9.

27. The study conducted by Loxston and Jachens argues that forming positive Muslim identities and feeling a sense of belonging in Switzerland is challenging for Muslim women. See Rachael Loxston and Liza Jachens, “‘Liberty Can Be for You One Thing, and for Me Something Different’: Muslim Women's Experiences of Identity and Belonging in Switzerland,” *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2023): 308-320.

28. Simon Affolter et Vera Sperisen avec la collaboration de Melissa Girardet, Elena Rudin, Oliver Dlabac, Benjamin Schlegel, *Racisme et Représentation de la Diversité Sociale dans les Manuels Scolaires: Une Étude Commandée par la Commission Fédérale Contre le Racisme*, retrieved March 3, 2024, from https://www.ekr.admin.ch/pdf/EKR_F_Lehrmittelanalyse_Online.pdf.

limited opportunities for critical reflection on racism due to its peripheral position and the absence of racism as a central theme within educational resources.²⁹ Racism is addressed from a historical perspective, focusing on colonialism, racial theories, and National Socialism, or geographically distant issues such as those in the USA and former colonial powers. This approach limits students' opportunities to engage with racism in a contemporary and local context. Although overtly racist terminology is seldom found in textbooks, the broader societal discourse on racism has influenced how these terms are presented and treated in educational curricula. Phrases previously recognized as discriminatory, such as "ni**r head," "Eskimo," or "Indian" still appear occasionally in textbooks without adequate contextualization. A significant pedagogical issue is the portrayal of contemporary racism, which is often depicted merely as an interpersonal or ideological phenomenon, focusing on conscious and intentional discriminatory ideologies. This approach overlooks the concept of structural racism, which is extensively explored in social and human sciences research, but remains conspicuously absent from educational discourse and materials.

An examination of teachers' use of textbooks indicated that although they considered the discussion of racism to be part of their educational mandate, the available textbooks are unsuitable for addressing this subject in the classroom. Teachers expressed that their training did not provide them with the essential tools to initiate and lead conversations on racism with their students.³⁰ As a result, addressing racism in school presents a challenge, as educators often feel uncertain about addressing the issue and providing support to affected students. This underscores systemic deficiencies, such as the absence of proper training for teachers regarding racism and its limited integration into school curricula.³¹

The FCR (2023) reported several cases of racism in educational and training settings. For instance, school management reached out to a counseling center after observing a surge in racist incidents on campus, including insults targeting migrant youth, the presence of far-right symbols, and offensive graffiti. Tensions escalated during a classroom discussion when a teacher used a racially charged term, further highlighting the need for improved awareness and intervention strategies in educational environments. Gina Vega attributes the rise in reported incidents in educational settings to heightened awareness among affected students and their families, as well as increased attention from educational institutions toward addressing racist incidents.³²

29. Except for a few instances, racism is seldom explicitly named or developed as a subject for comprehensive discussion.

30. Commission fédérale contre le racisme, *Étude sur le Racisme et la Représentation de la Diversité Sociale dans les Manuels Scolaires*, retrieved March 3, 2024, from https://www.ekr.admin.ch/pdf/LMA_Zusammenfassung_und_Empfehlungen_EKR_FR.pdf.

31. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, *Incidents Racistes Recensés par les Centres de Conseil 2022*.

32. Ibid.

The representation and contextualization of individuals within educational textbooks wield a profound influence on the perceptions of students.³³ How various groups are portrayed within these texts can reinforce or challenge prevailing stereotypes. Besides, including individuals from diverse backgrounds within educational materials has significant implications for students' identity formation. Exposure to diverse identities and experiences within textbooks fundamentally impacts how students see themselves and others. Moreover, students' experiences of belonging, whether inclusive or discriminatory, are mirrored in the school environment. For instance, empirical evidence underscores that representations within textbooks exert a direct and discernible influence, particularly on students who may find themselves marginalized due to factors such as physical appearance, migration background, or name.³⁴

Politics

There is a widespread use of discriminatory speech and xenophobic messages in Swiss political campaigns. In 2023, the SVP employed derogatory slogans targeting immigrants, specifically labeling them as “Algerian,” “Tunisian,” “North African,” “foreigner,” and “asylum seeker.”³⁵ The party launched “Keine 10-Millionen-Schweiz! (Nachhaltigkeits-Initiative)” to control immigration.³⁶ During electoral and voting campaigns, the Network of Advice Centers for Victims of Racism reported an increase in racist incidents. The centers received complaints from people who, while not directly targeted, sought to stop the spread of prejudice and discriminatory discourse.³⁷

In other reported cases, election pamphlets and campaigns used racist and xenophobic messages to target minority groups and promote stereotypes. For instance, in one case, an electoral brochure showed Black people crossed out next to white people, implying racial prejudice. Another case featured insinuations that immigrants³⁸ were responsible for violence and crime in Switzerland, instilling fear, stigmatization, and rejection. A third case sparked worries about presenting migrants as

33. Through recurrent encounters with particular characterizations and categorizations, students assimilate these narrative patterns, thereby shaping their self-conception and their understanding of others.

34. Affolter et al., 2023, pp. 39–40.

35. These discriminatory comments were frequently accompanied by distressing and graphic imagery, predominantly depicting women as victims.

36. At the media conference on the launch of a sustainability initiative, National Councilor Thomas Matter (ZH) spoke as follows: “Massless and uncontrolled immigration is the main cause of the most pressing and important problems, from which Switzerland suffers.” The SVP claims that the center-left majority in the Bundeshaus is fueling this dramatic development because the FDP, the Mitte, the SP, the Greens, and the Green Liberals refuse to implement the constitutional mandate to manage immigration independently. SVP, “Lancierung eidgenössische Volksinitiative -Keine 10-Millionen-Schweiz! (Nachhaltigkeits-Initiative),” (July 4, 2023), retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://www.svp.ch/aktuell/publikationen/medienmitteilungen/lancierung-eidgenossische-volksinitiative-keine-10-millionen-schweiz-nachhaltigkeits-initiative/>

37. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, pp.20–21.

38. With specific reference to asylum seekers and particular nationalities.

criminals. These campaigns sparked reports and complaints as they violated principles of equality and fueled hostility towards minority/marginalized communities.³⁹ Consequently, individuals pursued legal action and lobbying to counter these distorted narratives and promote inclusive electoral processes. Despite people's efforts to address these issues through legal procedures and complaints, political parties' responses varied, with some admitting concerns and others dismissing requests for involvement. These incidents highlight the challenges in combating Islamophobia and xenophobia in the political realm, underlining the significance of continued lobbying and vigilance to preserve minority rights and promote inclusive and equitable discourse in election processes.

Political discourses frequently use terminology such as “political Islam,” “Islamism,” and “Muslim Brotherhood” without fully defining them. The Federal Council's reaction emphasizes two crucial issues. First, there are currently laws and measures in place to prevent extremism; nevertheless, targeting a certain faith would be discriminatory and unconstitutional. Second, action can only be taken against an ideology if it becomes violent or breaks the law because ideologies are protected by the right to freedom of opinion and expression.⁴⁰

Studies have examined the impact of populist electoral material and discourse, often labeled as “fear populism” or “penal populism.”⁴¹ Populist parties typically exploit themes like crime and insecurity to appeal to public opinion. Muslims have been marginalized from the imagined boundaries that define belonging to the Swiss nation, largely due to the pervasive “Islamic danger” paradigm in Swiss politics.⁴² The resurgence of the SVP has intensified legislative measures focusing on security, the preservation of Swiss culture, and women's rights, leading to the increased exclusion of Muslims from Swiss society.⁴³ During campaigns preceding a vote or an election, Islam is exploited and Muslims are strongly stigmatized. The SVP considers Islam a danger to “Swiss values” and seeks to exclude it from public life.

The SVP constantly uses phrases such as “Islam is intolerant,” “Islam is a women-unfriendly religion,” and “Muslims are an integration-resistant minority.”⁴⁴ Sen-

39. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2024, pp.20-21.

40. Hansjörg Schmid, Noemi Trucco, and Federico Biasca, “Swiss Muslim Communities in Transnational and Local Interactions: Public Perceptions, State of Research, Case Studies,” *Swiss Center for Islam and Society, University of Fribourg*, (2022), p. 26.

41. “Penal popularism” refers to “a set of social beliefs, political maneuvers, and legislative measures that deliberately marginalize the role of experts and are influenced by media, marked by a rigid stance on crime, a lack of empathy towards offenders, and the strategic utilization of crime victims.” Wojciech Zalewski, “Penal Populism As a Threat to Constitutional Values and Human Rights,” in Javier Cremades and Cristina Hermida (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Constitutionalism* (Cham: Springer, 2023), pp. 1-11.

42. It is widely known that public policies negatively impact Muslims, given that state authorities frequently use national security legislation and monitoring measures to target Muslim individuals and groups.

43. Direnberger et al., 2022.

44. The SVP demonstrated a strong political influence during the 2023 Swiss elections by attaining 62 seats in the House of Representatives. This outcome solidified the SVP's position as the party holding the largest num-

sitive to any challenge to “Swissness,” the party acts as the “protector of Swiss values” and uses defamation and popular fears to defend assimilationist demands on Muslim immigration.⁴⁵ The SVP’s political project centers around stereotyping public debate and leading anti-Islam initiatives and campaigns.⁴⁶



Figure 5: SVP’s series “Neue Normalität?” (New Normality?) exhibiting racist and xenophobic messages. The headline reads: “Thousands of young men from Africa, Afghanistan, Türkiye, etc. come to Switzerland - and stay here! This policy costs taxpayers CHF 4 billion annually - and those are just the costs of the federal government. In addition, there are thefts, harassments, violence.” **Source:** SVP, 2024

ber of seats with 27.9% of the vote (+2.3 percentage points since 2019). Swissinfo, “Elections 2023: results,” *Swissinfo*, (November 20, 2023), retrieved March 10, 2024, from <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/elections-2023-projected-results/48897354> The party experienced a notable increase of 3% in the number of votes received, in comparison to the previous general election held in 2019. The party capitalized on its election campaign by emphasizing its core theme of combating “mass immigration” and the projected growth of the Swiss population to 10 million.

45. Amir Sheikhzadegan and Michael Nollert, “Religion, the Public Sphere, and Identity Politics: How A Radical Muslim Organization Defies the Populist Right in Switzerland,” *European Societies*, Vol. 19, No. 5 (2017), pp. 645-669.
46. This includes federal referendums against easing naturalization in 2004 and 2008, anti-Islam propaganda in the 2007 national parliamentary elections, banners targeting Muslims, and a proposal to prohibit minarets in 2009 following 2006 legal disputes to construct Islamic centers with minarets in three Swiss cities, namely Wangen (canton Solothurn), Langenthal (canton Berne), and Wil (canton St. Gallen); For instance, in a 2009 communal election in Bremgarten (Aargau), the SVP displayed a banner featuring a smiling young blond woman on one side and a Muslim woman in a black burka on the other, with the burka’s face cover depicted as prison bars. The slogan read: “Rather Maria than Sharia.” This narrative, framed as a defense of women’s rights and the protection of Swiss values, has encouraged right-wing discourse on Muslims and Islam, aligning with broader societal concerns about gender equality and cultural identity.

The FCR sent a letter to the SVP, urging them to remove their “New Normality?” series from their website and cease its broadcast.⁴⁷ This series exhibits a distressing racist and xenophobic undertone, deliberately designed to provoke adverse emotional responses among its viewers. In some headlines, we read: “North African criminals are causing insecurity in Switzerland”; “Switzerland is less and less safe, due to the importation of crime”; “An Arab robs a woman”; “The center-left’s asylum chaos allows Islamist terrorists to come to Switzerland and stay there.”

Exposure to anti-Islamic, right-wing populist political campaign ads leads to heightened hostility toward Muslims, subsequently influencing voting intentions in favor of right-wing populist parties.⁴⁸ Likewise, the persistent use of racist and discriminatory rhetoric contributes to a hostile and demeaning atmosphere for Muslims and those perceived as Muslim,⁴⁹ hence reinforcing anti-Muslim attitudes in society.

Media

The influential role of the media in framing and shaping public opinion is widely acknowledged in scholarly discourse. The media make stereotypes and stereotype-related knowledge easier to access.⁵⁰ Islam and Muslims are frequently discussed in political debates and media coverage.⁵¹ Esposito asserts that the media is hugely responsible for the rise in Islamophobia. He argues that media commentators, far-right political actors, and religious figures, have all taken advantage of news outlets’ attention on “terrorist” assaults, speaking out about Islam and Muslims without regard for checks and balances. Media outlets continue to play a significant role in perpetuating Islamophobia by portraying Islam as a potential threat, hence, generating negative

47. Le temps, “L’UDC se fait taper sur les doigts par la Commission fédérale contre le racisme,” *Le temps*, (October 6, 2023), retrieved March 13, 2024, from <https://www.letemps.ch/suisse/l-udc-se-fait-taper-sur-les-doigts-par-la-commission-federale-contre-le-racisme>.

48. Desirée Schmuck and Jörg Matthes, “Voting ‘Against Islamization’? How Anti-Islamic Right-Wing, Populist Political Campaign Ads Influence Explicit and Implicit Attitudes Toward Muslims as Well as Voting Preferences,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2019), pp. 739-757.

49. Amnesty International and Open Societies Foundation, “Europe: A Human Rights Guide for researching racial and religious discrimination in counter-terrorism” (Index: EUR 01/3606/2021), February 2021, retrieved March 3, 2024, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/3606/2021/en/>, p.10.

50. Markus Appel, “Medienvermittelte Stereotype und Vorurteile,” in Bernad Batinic and Markus Appel (eds.), *Medienpsychologie*, (Heidelberg: Springer Medizin Verlag, 2008), pp. 313-336.

51. For elaboration, see Mathieu Couttenier, Sophie Hatte, Mathias Thoening, and Stephanos Vlachos, “The Logic of Fear: Populism and Media Coverage of Immigrant Crimes,” GATE Working Paper No. 1914, 2019; Patrik Ettinger, “Qualität der Medienberichterstattung über Muslime in der Schweiz,” in Marc Eisenegger, Linards Udris, and Patrik Ettinger (eds.), *Wandel der Öffentlichkeit und der Gesellschaft* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2019), pp. 211-243; Patrick Ettinger, *La qualité de la couverture médiatique des musulmans en Suisse* (Berne: Forschungsinstitut Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft, Université de Zurich, 2018), https://www.ekr.admin.ch/pdf/Studie_Qual_Berichterst_F.pdf; Carmen Koch, *Religion in den Medien: Eine quantitative Inhaltsanalyse von Medien in der Schweiz* (München: UVK, 2012); Max Ammann and René Pahud de Mortanges, *Religion in der politischen Arena: Eine Auswertung parlamentarischer Vorstöße auf kantonaler Ebene* (Rechtswissenschaftliche Fakultät Universität Freiburg, 2019), <https://www.unifr.ch/ius/religionsrecht/de/assets/public/documents/Gutachten%20und%20Studien/Studie%20IRR%20-%20Religion%20in%20der%20politischen%20Arena.pdf>.

stereotypes and adverse consequences for Muslim communities. A striking example is the Gaza war, which amplified xenophobic rhetoric globally, particularly in Western countries. Increased media coverage and polarized public discourse during this time exacerbated existing prejudices against Muslims and Islam. Additionally, social media platforms have become a breeding ground for the dissemination of Islamophobic stereotypes and hate speech. The proliferation of unverified sources and the rapid dissemination of misinformation and inflammatory content online have further perpetuated stereotypes and discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities.

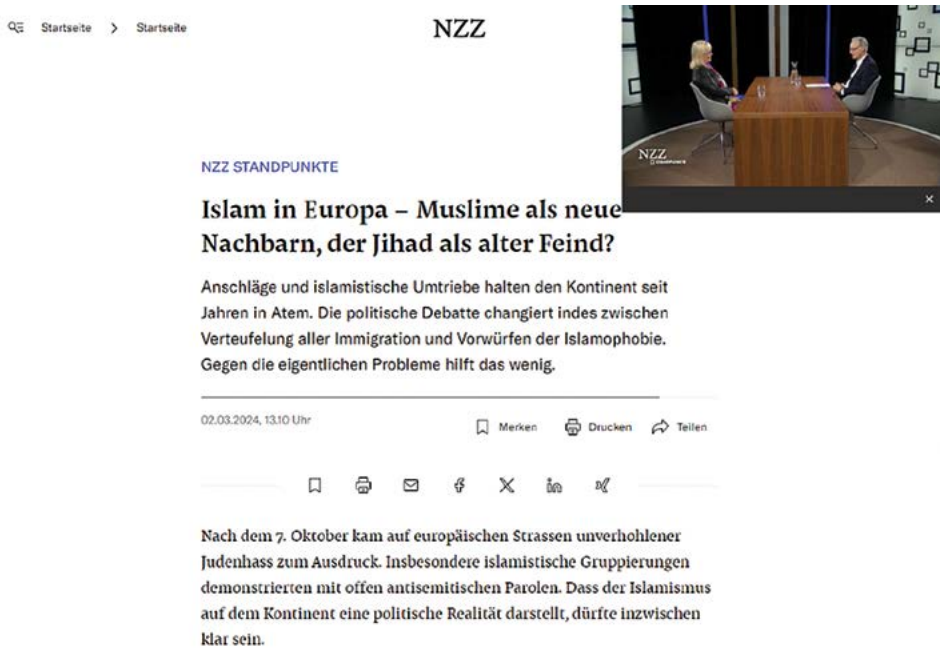


Figure 6: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) editor-in-chief Eric Gujer talks about Islam in Europe with Susanne Schröter, German ethnologist and director of the Frankfurt Research Center for Global Islam. The talk is titled “Islam in Europe - Muslims as New Neighbors, Jihad as Old Enemy?” Source: NZZ, 2024

The majority of Swiss non-Muslims believe the media’s coverage of Islam and Muslims in Switzerland is distorted. The portrayal of Islam in recent years has gained increased media attention, and the overall image portrayed remains similar to, or possibly even more negative than, it was a decade ago. In 78% of articles, Islam is portrayed in connection with either negative events involving violence, physical harm, or death, or events that, while not directly violent, still result in damage or negativity. Islam receives significant attention in discussions related to the political system, accounting for 42% of coverage, as well as in discussions about crime and justice, which represent 27% of the coverage. Both categories place a major focus on terrorism as the dominant issue.⁵²

52. Koch and Hüsler, 2023.

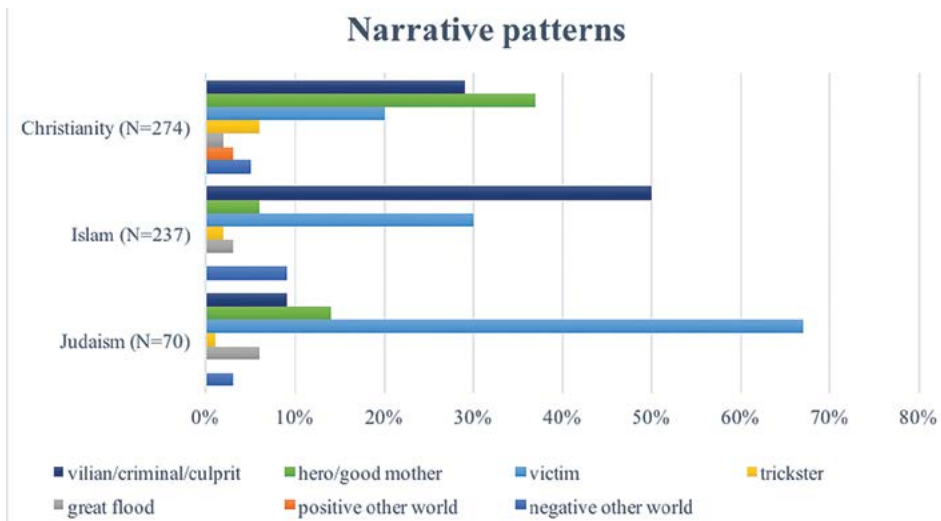


Figure 7: Manifestation of narrative patterns in Swiss media coverage. **Source:** Koch and Hüsser, 2023: 10.

Muslims in Switzerland receive increased media coverage, which can be attributed to the influence of events occurring in neighboring countries, and political campaigns centered on popular initiatives.⁵³ An assessment of media representation of Islam reveals that Muslims are predominantly voiceless and marginalized.⁵⁴ The media's consistent emphasis on themes like terrorism, radicalization, and visible symbols such as the burqa or headscarf⁵⁵ reinforces stereotypes, instills fear and mistrust towards Muslims,⁵⁶ and exacerbates societal divisions. A study reveals that a significant portion of the Swiss population perceives media coverage on topics such as the alleged Islamization of Switzerland, Islamist terror threats, the compatibility of Islam with Western values, and Muslim integration as distorted. About one-third of respondents believe the media exaggerate these issues, while another one-third feel they downplay them. Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims, political orientation, and personal interactions with Muslims significantly influence perceptions of discrimination. Interestingly, support for a nationwide ban on wearing burkas or niqabs in public was linked to the belief that the media understate issues concerning Islam and Muslims in Switzerland.⁵⁷

53. Ettinger, 2018.

54. According to Ettinger's study, the percentage of articles producing distance has thus increased from 22% in 2009 to 69% in 2017.

55. Ettinger, 2018.

56. Amnesty International, "Regional Overview of Islamophobia in Europe," June 1, 2022, for The Parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination Report "Raising Awareness of and Combatting Islamophobia in Europe" (Index: EUR 01/5659/2022), <https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PACE-submission-Islamophobia-1-June-2022.pdf>; Eidgenössische Kommission gegen Rassismus EKR, "Jahresbericht 2019," April 2020, retrieved March 3, 2024, from https://www.ekr.admin.ch/pdf/Jahresbericht_2019.pdf.

57. Dorothee Arlt, "Banning burkas and niqabs? Exploring perceptions of bias in media coverage of Islam and Muslims in Switzerland and their relation to people's voting intention concerning the burka-initiative," *Studies in Communication Sciences*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2021), pp. 9-25.

Research findings about the campaign surrounding the initiative to ban face coverings show a significant lack of visibility for individuals of the Muslim faith. Muslim actors garnered minimal attention in traditional media outlets (11%) and X (formerly Twitter) (13%). Women constituted a minority presence (26%) on X, whereas their representation paralleled that of men (51%) in traditional media. Consequently, discussions regarding women's veiling practices in Islam on X were predominantly led by non-Muslim men, while both non-Muslim men and women predominated the discourse in traditional media channels.⁵⁸

The (Muslim Brotherhood) is frequently portrayed in Swiss media as a threat to Western values such as democracy, free speech, pluralism, and tolerance.⁵⁹ The group is often associated with negative attributes like terrorism, dubious financial links, anti-Semitism, and alleged infiltration into European countries. The pejorative undertones further fuel a sense of fear, suspicion, and skepticism, with the term “Muslim Brotherhood” often utilized to sow seeds of doubt regarding individuals and organizations. The study argues that Swiss media have not adequately defined the concept of “political Islam,” presenting it as a heterogeneous amalgamation of actors and groups with differing ideologies.

Muslims stress that Swiss media often portray Islam in a negative light, even on minor issues like parking problems near mosques. They argue that while negative incidents should not be dismissed, they should be contextualized properly. For instance, journalists could provide statistics indicating that Muslims make up only a small percentage of Switzerland's population when discussing the perceived threat of Islamization. Moreover, they could explain that mosques are often situated in industrial areas not because of illegal activities, but due to challenges in finding suitable locations. One of the main complaints is that the media tend to overlook the diversity within Islam, often depicting Muslims as a homogeneous group. They condemn the media for mainly amplifying the voices of a few extremists who do not represent the wider Muslim community, instead of including viewpoints from unbiased experts like Islamic scholars.⁶⁰

In essence, Islam is primarily associated with adverse conclusions in the media discourse examined.

Justice System

Although the Swiss constitution guarantees religious freedom, minority religions such as Islam often do not receive the special legal status of “recognition under pub-

58. Linards Udris, Sarah Marschlich, and Daniel Vogler, “Abstimmungskampf um das Verhüllungsverbot: Sichtbarkeit von Akteur und ihrer Positionen in redaktionellen Medien und auf Twitter,” *Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft* (2021).

59. Schmid et al., 2022, p. 22.

60. Carmen Koch and Angelica Hüsler, “Caught in Narrative Patterns? Analysis of the Swiss News Coverage of Christians, Muslims, and Jews,” *Religions*, Vol. 14, No. 10 (2023), p. 1275.

lic law.”⁶¹ In the context of direct democracy, the use of popular initiatives, whether at the federal or cantonal levels, functions as a mechanism to obscure and marginalize Muslim religious practices.

Several countries breach the principle of nondiscrimination by enforcing administrative control orders and other anti-terrorism measures. These measures have been shown to disproportionately target specific groups, particularly Muslims, foreign nationals, or those perceived as such, leading to unfair and adverse effects.⁶² Switzerland’s parliament enacted new laws in April 2021, giving police more power to impose restrictions on those judged “potentially dangerous,” even in the absence of formal criminal charges. This legislation authorizes federal police to enforce control measures such as obligatory reporting and interviews with authorities, restrictions on contacts, travels, and residency, electronic surveillance, and even forced residency. These measures can be implemented at the request of intelligence services, cantonal, or communal authorities. However, these laws have been heavily criticized by numerous expert groups for potentially infringing on civil freedoms and perpetuating discrimination.⁶³

The portrayal of women as “victims of oppressive Islamic practices” is used to legitimize anti-Muslim sentiment and justify discriminatory policies targeting Muslim communities. Legislations such as the bans on minarets and the burqa have reinforced public Islamophobic narratives and promoted a homogenized depiction of Muslims.⁶⁴ In Switzerland, gender plays a crucial role in racializing Muslims, serving as a tool for discrimination based on race or ethnicity. The concept of “gender equality” is often manipulated to depict Muslims as inferior or in need of “civilization.” This is evident in Swiss advertisements focusing on Muslim women, frequently using images of veiled women to highlight cultural differences and justify discrimination. Legislation targeting Muslim practices,⁶⁵ illustrates how gender is employed to racially profile Muslims and perpetuate discrimination.⁶⁶

61. René Pahud de Mortanges, “Recognition of New Religious Communities under Public Law in Switzerland: An Adequate Accommodation Tool?” in Katayoun Alidadi, Marie-Claire Foblets, and Dominik Müller (eds.), *Re-designing Justice for Plural Societies: Case Studies of Minority Accommodation from around the Globe* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 66-78.

62. Amnesty International, “Regional Overview of Islamophobia in Europe,”; Amnesty International, *Europe: Dangerously disproportionate: The ever-expanding national security state in Europe* (Index: EUR 01/5342/2017), retrieved March 20, 2024, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/5342/2017/en/>, p. 7.

63. Amnesty International, *Regional Overview of Islamophobia in Europe*, June 1, 2022, for The Parliamentary Assembly of The Council of Europe Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination Report “Raising Awareness of and Combatting Islamophobia in Europe” (Index: EUR 01/5659/2022), retrieved March 20, 2024, from <https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PACE-submission-Islamophobia-1-June-2022.pdf>, p. 7.

64. Vista Eskandari and Elisa Banfi, “Institutionalising Islamophobia in Switzerland: The burqa and minaret bans,” *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2017), pp. 53-71.

65. In this case the prohibition of face veils.

66. Khazaei (124-125) writes: “The depiction of a woman in a black burqa amidst black minarets encroaching upon the Swiss flag vividly evoked the concept of “Überfremdung,” portraying foreigners as a threat to Swiss social cohesion due to their numbers and perceived incompatible practices, with Muslim women being the primary focus.” Faten Khazaei, “Le racisme antimusulman en Suisse,” in Santos Pinto, Jovita dos, Pamela Ohene-Nyako, Mélanie-Evely Pétremont, Anne Lavanchy, Barbara Lüthi, Patricia Purtschert, and Damir Skenderovic

In Switzerland, judicial procedures exist to handle publicly committed racist crimes, defining the criteria under which such behavior is punished. These laws prohibit public incitement of hatred or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion, including online hate speech against Muslims. They also forbid the spread of doctrines that dehumanize certain communities, such as racist language against Muslims, whether spoken or written. Participation in propaganda acts that promote hatred, such as anti-Muslim protests, carries legal implications. Furthermore, any public acts -through speech, writing, images, gestures, or assaults- that denigrate or discriminate against persons and violate their human dignity because of their associations are illegal. This includes slurs such as “dirty Muslim.” Furthermore, refusing services to people or organizations based on their racial, ethnic, or religious affiliations is condemned, including instances where restaurants refuse to serve veiled women.⁶⁷

Certain racist acts and statements targeting Muslims may not be deemed criminal offenses, either because they were not committed or expressed in a public setting, or because they fail to meet other legal requirements. Nonetheless, this does not diminish their possible racism or hostility against Muslims, often contributing to the reinforcement of prejudiced attitudes.⁶⁸

Physical harm, property damage, and offenses against reputation are subject to punishment under Swiss criminal law (art. 122 ff., 144 and 173 ff. Criminal Code). Nevertheless, racist motivation is not necessarily considered an aggravating factor in these cases. Switzerland also prohibits attacks on freedom of belief and worship (art. 261 CC), safeguarding all religious beliefs and sacred places from denigration or attacks. Legal provisions relevant to racism against Muslims include those concerning human dignity (art. 7 Cst.), equality (art. 8 Cst.), freedom of conscience and belief (art. 15 Cst.), and the protection of personality (art. 28 ff. CC). For instance, if a Muslim woman is denied a job because she wears a veil, it may constitute indirect discrimination based on sex under the Equality Act. Additionally, racism against Muslims can be viewed as a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (art. 3) and other international standards.

A look at the Swiss CFR’s legal case database reveals a startling reality: the majority of registered cases include racist comments targeting Muslims on social media platforms. These incidents account for more than 90 criminal proceedings initiated since 1995, accounting for nearly 10% of all instances prosecuted under Article 261bis of the Swiss Criminal Code. Seventy-one of these trials resulted in guilty verdicts. It is worth noting that, unlike many other European countries, violent assaults against Muslims in Switzerland are quite uncommon, with such events being isolated. Despite the low occurrence of physical assault, Muslim women who choose

(eds.), *Undoing Race: La racialisation en Suisse* (Zurich et Genève: Seismo, Sciences sociales et questions de société SA, 2022), pp. 119-133.

67. Réseau de centres de conseil pour les victimes du racisme, 2023, p.6.

68. Ibid, p.6.

to wear the veil are disproportionately exposed to discriminatory actions since their religious identity is easily visible, making them susceptible targets for prejudice and hostility. This underlines the unique obstacles that veiled Muslim women confront within the larger context of Islamophobia.⁶⁹

Table 2: Religious Affiliations of Individuals Targeted in Alleged Racist Incidents since 2001⁷⁰

Victims	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	Total
Jewish	6	4	12	10	12	10	18	11	13	6	3	5	7	10	55	15	16	12	11	12	28	276
Muslims	2	2	2	1	2	1		3	1	4	2	1	1	6	10	15	2	16	7	11	4	93
Members of other religious communities	1	1			1	1		1	1				1		1		1					9

Source: CFR, 2024

Table 2 details the religious affiliations of individuals targeted in alleged racist incidents since 2001.⁷¹ Individuals of the Jewish faith emerge as the most impacted group, with Muslims following behind.

On behalf of the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland (OAG), Fedpol (Federal Office of police of Switzerland), and local cantonal police forces carried out seven house searches in Vaud and Neuchâtel, resulting in the arrest of four Syrian nationals, aged between 28 and 57, on grounds of suspected involvement in supporting a terrorist organization. These legal proceedings, opened between January 2022 and September 2022, are being conducted in relation to suspicions of supporting and/or participating in a criminal organization (Art. 260ter Swiss Criminal Code) and offences under Article 2 of the Federal Act on the Proscription of the Groups Al-Qa-eda and Islamic State and Associated Organizations.⁷²

This legal case highlights the complex intersection of counterterrorism measures and the asylum framework. While it is crucial to address security concerns, there exists a potential jeopardy of perpetuating Islamophobic sentiments, especially when incidents involving individuals of Muslim background are sensationalized or depicted in a way that reinforces stereotypes. Moreover, such instances could fuel broader societal concerns regarding immigration and asylum policies, potentially amplifying the marginalization of

69. Lindemann, 2021.

70. This table reports from 2001 onward to highlight the impact of post-9/11 dynamics, which marked a significant escalation in Islamophobia and targeted discrimination against Muslims. Since 9/11, Islam has been considered a danger in European societies. May Elmahdi Lichtsteiner, "Wie Islamophobie nach 09/11 zum Mainstream wurde," *Swissinfo*, September 11, 2021, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/get/gesellschaft/wie-islamophobie-nach-09-11-zum-mainstream-wurde-11-september-terroranschlag-islam-muslime/46924030>

71. CFR, "Victimes," (2024), retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://www.ekr.admin.ch/prestations/f279.html>.

72. Bundesanwaltschaft, "Terrorismusbekämpfung: Hausdurchsuchungen und Festnahmen in den Kantonen Waadt und Neuenburg," Der Bundesrat, August 10, 2023, retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/medienmitteilungen.msg-id-97294.html>

refugee communities. Hence, authorities and media platforms need to approach these cases with sensitivity and accuracy, ensuring that they do not contribute to the discrimination or exclusion of individuals based on their religious beliefs or nationality.

Internet

Switzerland has seen a concerning surge in the spread of hateful, racist, discriminatory, and provocative discourse via numerous internet channels. *Basler Zeitung*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and “Politically Incorrect” (PI News) often serve as hubs for Islamophobic discourse.



Figure 8: Excerpts from the PI News website Source: PI News, 2024

Organizations openly hostile to Islam, like Identitäre Bewegung, Pegida, Stop the Islamization of Europe (SIE), and Pax Europa (BPE) have used internet channels to rally followers and spread anti-Muslim messages. These organizations use social media not just to organize themselves, but also to connect with their peers, building global networks of Islamophobic action. Furthermore, they frequently organize protests under the guise of resisting “creeping Islamization,” often with the support of right-wing political figures. This intersection of online and offline activism underscores the multifaceted nature of Islamophobia, where digital platforms serve as conduits for the dissemination and consolidation of discriminatory ideologies and practices.

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

In the “Swiss Stop Islamization Award 2023,” Piero Marchesi and Mattinonline.ch were recognized for their actions against the perceived Islamization of Switzerland and Europe. Marchesi has actively pursued anti-Islam initiatives since his election to the National Council in 2019. He has proposed banning le Conseil central islamique suisse and l’Association des savants musulmans. He filed a postulate asking the Federal Council to write a report on the center’s activities to assess whether federal funding should be cut. Additionally, Marchesi supported the federal “anti-burqa” initiative and raised issues regarding individuals like Rachid Nekkaz.⁷³ Mattinonline.ch, an online news site founded in 2007 by Giuliano Bignasca, has been another significant contributor to anti-Islam rhetoric. The site has consistently supported initiatives and published articles against Islamic practices. It has been a strong proponent of the “anti-burqa” initiatives at both the cantonal and federal levels and frequently publishes content critical of the EU’s immigration policies and the so-called (rampant Islamization) of society. Mattinonline.ch has also been the sole media outlet in Ticino to consistently support and promote the “Swiss Stop Islamization Award,” often ignored by mainstream media.⁷⁴

The actions and rhetoric of both Marchesi and Mattinonline.ch significantly contribute to the rise of Islamophobia. They legitimize anti-Islam emotions through political activities and media coverage, influencing public opinion and mainstreaming anti-Islam beliefs. Their attempts polarize society by portraying Islam and its followers as threats to democratic values, causing the greater discrimination and marginalization of Muslims.

A tweet on July 13 by Christoph Mörgeli, a former politician, raises concerns about the influence of political Islam within the Swiss military, suggesting that the

73. An Algerian businessman and politician who offered to pay fines for women in France who did not comply with the constitutional ban on covering their faces.

74. Les Observateurs, “Voici les trois lauréats du ‘Swiss Stop Islamization Award 2023’,” retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://lesobservateurs.ch/2023/03/25/voici-les-trois-laureats-du-swiss-stop-islamization-award-2023/>

integration of a Muslim chaplain who might associate with radical figures could be problematic. The mention of Begovic's lack of fear in engaging with radical preachers implies a potential risk or controversy surrounding his appointment, as it might indicate tolerance or acceptance of extremist views that could conflict with the values and security of the military institution.

Saïda Keller-Messahli criticized the decision of Geneva's left-leaning and Green Party members to allow the burkini in public swimming pools. She claims that this decision impacts Muslim women and reinforces Islamists' oppressive and misogynistic ideology. She argues that this move, made under the banner of diversity and inclusion, perpetuates totalitarian and discriminatory practices against women. On September 15, she responded to the journalist/editor Rico Bandle's tweet: "Do these young people, who call for 'more freedom and less state,' really understand the repressive and misogynistic meaning of the veil for Muslim women? Have they understood why young women and men in Iran have been rejecting and even publicly burning this veil for years - often at the cost of their lives? I don't think so." (Fig. 10) On October 11, Keller-Messahli tweeted that Islamist organizations in Zurich, which receive public funds, become apprehensive whenever the media makes a critical inquiry. Commenting on the tweets by a lecturer at the University of Bern on "20 Minuten," she asserted that individuals holding inhumane views have no place at a university and expressed that she would immediately dismiss such a disguised Islamist. On October 1, she shared her excitement on X about being chosen as a role model for a 13-year-old student, proudly posting the student's school project poster. Keller-Messahli also criticized the construction of a hijab statue in Birmingham, arguing that it promotes Islamist ideologies and propagates Islamist propaganda, which she believes disregards religious practices incompatible with democratic values. (Fig. 11)



Figure 9: Rico Bandle's tweet about a poster by the youth of the FDP poster in the canton of Zug. Source: @rbandle, X, 2023



Figure 10: “The Strength of the Hijab,” a sculpture celebrating women who wear the hijab in Smethwick near Birmingham, described by NZZ writer as “Monument der Ignoranz.”⁷⁵ Source: NZZ, 2023

The financing of Islamophobic initiatives is sustained through funding sources including private donations, membership fees, and political party contributions. Private donors contribute to these initiatives through fundraising events and online campaigns, while membership fees play a significant role, as organizations offer structured membership programs where individuals pay fees in exchange for exclusive content and access to special events. Political entities that sympathize with anti-Muslim sentiments, such as the SVP, allocate funds to support these activities, often collaborating with far-right groups on an international level. According to the Politransparency platform, the SVP spent CHF 112,000 on social media advertising. Interestingly, a video released by the party on Instagram gained remarkable traction, with a viewership exceeding 300,000 individuals.

75. Lucien Scherrer, “Monument der Ignoranz - während Frauen in Iran unter Lebensgefahr gegen das islamische Kopftuch protestieren, wird der Hijab in England mit einer fünf Meter hohen Statue gewürdigt,” *NZZ* (September 26, 2023), retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/hijab-statue-birmingham-islamismus-iran-kopftuch-ld.1757795>

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessment and Initiatives

Local authorities are working on alternative strategies to include minority religions, indicating a departure from the conventional legal mechanisms employed by the Swiss state and cantons to govern interactions with religious groups. These approaches seek to address the marginalization experienced by minority religions such as Islam within the official legal and social frameworks at the cantonal level. Some of these strategies include the government's review of construction laws to ensure they facilitate the construction of mosques and Muslim centers on private sites. Any interpretation or application of these laws that poses obstacles to the building of religious facilities for migrant groups is being reevaluated, as it may contravene the principle of equal treatment outlined in Article 8 of the Swiss Constitution. The government has supported initiatives in some cities to construct new large mosques to address the needs of the Muslim community.

Over the last fifty years, the evolution of Muslim civil society in Switzerland has been remarkable, considering their dynamic responsibilities and purposes. Initially, Muslim organizations centered on cultural transmission and religious activities, acting as gathering places for migrant populations to share customs and practice Islam. However, over time, activities expanded to include youth and women's programs, social services such as meal distribution, interfaith conversation, and counseling. There are roughly 260 mosque organizations in Switzerland, each established under a cantonal or federal umbrella body that allows them to communicate with authorities and the media collectively. Besides, three main ethnic-linguistic umbrella groups (Albanian, Bosnian, and Turkish) support national and international networking activities.⁷⁶

The Swiss Center for Islam and Society is highly praised for its efforts in fostering collaborations with Muslim organizations. This inclusive approach, which actively involves these organizations, is perceived as a significant strength of the center. The Federal Council acknowledges the center's extensive collaboration with Muslim organizations across German-speaking and French-speaking regions of Switzerland, evident through their joint participation in numerous events and the establishment of workshops tailored to Muslim communities. Additionally, the center has developed specialized training programs aimed at enhancing the skills and capacities of imams and Muslim management personnel.⁷⁷ This collaborative approach underscores a proactive effort towards promoting mutual understanding, fostering dialogue, and addressing the diverse needs of the Muslim community within Switzerland.⁷⁸

76. Purdie, 2024, pp. 99-100.

77. SZIG, "Jahresbericht," Universität Freiburg, 2023, retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://www.unifr.ch/szig/de/assets/public/uploads/Rapports/2023/SZIG%20CSIS%20Annual%20Report%202023.pdf>.

78. Hansjörg Schmid, a key figure at the Swiss Center for Islam and Society, argues that secularism is outdated and that the state should recognize the social importance of religion, including supporting Islamic projects.

Islam&Society (I&S) serves as a trilingual information platform concerning Islam and the Muslim community in Switzerland. Since its initiation in July 2023, I&S has consistently disseminated new content every two months. The platform's outreach has been significantly bolstered by its decision to open its columns to contributions from the scientific community, thereby enhancing its credibility and expanding its audience reach. By the end of 2022, I&S was attracting approximately 4,000 monthly visitors, a figure that surged to an average of 7,800 internet users by December 2023, with a peak of 11,429 visitors recorded in November. The majority of the audience hails from Switzerland and Germany. Platforms like I&S serve as a counterbalance to the misinformation and stereotypes often perpetuated in mainstream media and public discourse. Moreover, a trilingual nature ensures accessibility to a diverse audience, facilitating cross-cultural understanding and fostering dialogue.

The “Network Imam” project, funded by the State Secretariat for Migration, the Office for Combating Racism, and the Dialogue between Churches, Religions, and Cultures Foundation, seeks to empower imams and Muslim caregivers to serve as crucial intermediaries between Muslim communities and integration-promoting institutions.⁷⁹ Through collaborative efforts between academic institutions, practitioners, and umbrella organizations, the project promotes a participatory approach to combat anti-Muslim racism. The project follows on from the “Muslim Organizations as Social Actors” project, which was completed in 2022 and took place between March 2016 and April 2023. The “Network Imam” project was started at the beginning of 2023 by the Center for Religious Research.⁸⁰

The Islamic Central Council Switzerland (ICCS) seeks to promote Islamic education programs in Switzerland and build a cohesive Islamic identity that transcends the country's various ethnocultural origins of Muslims. The group aims to fight for Muslims' moral concerns and ethical practices while simultaneously pursuing specific political goals.⁸¹ The ICCS began actively combatting the populist right's anti-Islam rhetoric.⁸² In recent years, key personalities within the ICCS, like Nicolas Blancho, Abdel Azziz Qaasim Illi, Nora Illi (who passed away in 2020), and Naïm Cherni, have participated in different media appearances, including interviews and TV programs, discussed the rise of Islamophobia in Switzerland, and condemned restrictions on Muslims' freedom of worship. They have engaged in communicative

79. “Network-Imam - Integration und gesellschaftliche Partizipation,” Universität Freiburg, retrieved March 24, 2024, from <https://www.unifr.ch/szig/de/weiterbildung/soziale-partizipation/network-imam/>.

80. Dr. Phil. Jürgen Endres and Dr. Phil. Silvia Martens, “MOGA-Projektevaluation,” Zentrum Religionsforschung, Universität Luzern, 2023, retrieved March 24, 2024, from https://www.unifr.ch/szig/de/assets/public/uploads/Rapports/2023/MOGA_Evaluationsbericht_ZRF.pdf.

81. Susanne Leuenberger, *“I have become a stranger in my homeland”: An analysis of the public performance of converts to Islam in Switzerland* (Bielefeld: Transkript, 2013).

82. Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, “Performer l’islam, dessiner les contours de la ‘communauté musulmane’ de Suisse. Le Conseil central islamique suisse comme performance de l’islam ‘authentique’,” in Christophe Monnot (ed.), *La Suisse des mosquées. Derrière le voile de l’unité musulmane* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2013), pp. 151-171.

and event-driven activities through public events like congresses, information booths, seminars, and protests.⁸³ In 2017, Blanco, Illi, and Cherni were charged with propagating for Al Qaeda, which resulted in a court procedure that ended in 2021⁸⁴ and harmed the ICCS's reputation, resulting in decreased financial assistance from Qatar and Kuwait. As a result, the association faced challenges in getting permits to hold its public events,⁸⁵ and took a more low-key strategy, abstaining from holding large conferences since 2014 and lowering its profile in mainstream media. Nonetheless, the ICCS maintains an active online presence on YouTube and Facebook, where it discusses themes ranging from anti-Muslim prejudice to current societal concerns. In doing so, the ICCS sees itself as an actor of Islam and a protector of Muslims in Switzerland, hoping to overcome cultural divides and unify them under a single identity of "authentic Islam." Purdie argues that the public perception of the ICCS reflects the concerns of a sizable segment of society, which supported actions targeting minarets and the niqab. This perception also positions the ICCS as both a focal point and an active participant in domestic political discourse.⁸⁶

A recent study on Islamic groups in Western Switzerland claims that Islamic organizations have integrated their religious principles with secular values, expanding their efforts to cover welfare assistance for both Muslim and non-Muslim communities.⁸⁷ Islamic organizations have positioned themselves as advocates for programs aimed at promoting social justice, political recognition, and equal opportunities by implementing such (coping) strategies. In addition, they work towards encouraging collaboration and cohesion among diverse segments of Swiss society. This approach not only contributes to promoting social capital through bonding and bridging activities, but also exemplifies a strategic shift aimed at increasing understanding and collaboration across cultural and religious borders.⁸⁸

Based on exploratory research on Muslim service providers in Switzerland, it was found that Muslim religious professionals face both internal community concerns such as generational divides and cultural changes, as well as external pressures

83. Ibid; These are forms of bridging activities used by Muslim groups as coping mechanisms. See Jürgen Endres, Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, Samuel-Martin Behloul, and Martin Baumann, *Jung, muslimisch, schweizerisch Muslimische Jugendgruppen, islamische Lebensführung und Schweizer Gesellschaft. Ein Forschungsbericht* (Luzern: University of Lucerne, The Center for Research on Religion (ZRF), 2013).

84. Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, and Andreas Tunger-Zanetti, "Switzerland. Country report 2021," in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe*, Samim Akgönül, Jorgen Nielsen, Ahmet Alibasic, Stephanie Müssig, and Raciun Egdunas (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 14: 667-683.

85. Reasons include ongoing legal cases, concerns about religious division, coexistence, accusations of extremism, deception regarding event purposes, and security considerations. Sheikhzadegan and Nollert, 2017.

86. Purdie, 2024, pp. 108-109.

87. Elisa Banfi and Matteo Gianni (eds.), *Islamic Organisations in Western Switzerland. Actors, Networks, and Socio-Cultural Activities* (Zürich: Seismo, 2023).

88. Through participating and dialogue projects, Muslims can gain social capital, raise their voice, shape local political and social conditions, and get support, fostering their role as active members and increasing their visibility. Jan Winkler, *Gouvernementalität der Freundschaft: Lokale Praktiken, Technologien und Emotionalitäten im kommunalpolitischen Dialog mit Muslimen* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2021).

such as radicalization and societal challenges.⁸⁹ Despite being accused of a lack of integration into society and frequent concerns about Islamic radicalization and terrorism, they strive, oftentimes voluntarily, to demonstrate their peacefulness and commitment as citizens.⁹⁰ They usually participate in low-key activities to avoid confrontation and attempt to meet expectations from both inside and outside their society. They also actively engage in interreligious dialogue to promote community cohesiveness and overcome gaps.⁹¹

Volunteering within Muslim CSOs in Switzerland involves several obstacles, notably in terms of dependability on volunteers and funding concerns. Because CSOs rely heavily on volunteers, they frequently have insufficient funds and staff to continue expanding their activities adequately. This can put a burden on Muslim organizations' ability to handle their communities' various demands. Furthermore, Muslim CSOs may struggle to secure proper financial assistance for a variety of reasons, including perceived biases in funding distribution processes and a lack of access to mainstream funding sources. Consequently, they may experience financial difficulties, limiting their capacity to carry out long-term projects and initiatives. For instance, Ahmed and Ismail, two volunteers/leaders of a youth group in Zurich, stated that dependence on volunteers poses challenges because so much depends on individuals. "If one of us leaves, the entire thing begins to shake," states Ahmed. Thus, they must continually inspire and engage volunteers to avoid setbacks. Concerns persist regarding the sustainability of their progress due to lacking long-term support. Ismail emphasizes that when volunteers receive no compensation for their work, there is a risk of losing valuable knowledge and expertise when individuals feel tired or unable to continue contributing. By having paid positions, the expertise, energy, and effort invested in the organization would be retained even if someone needs to step back due to fatigue or other reasons. Both volunteers/leaders assert the societal need for their assistance. While frequently invited by schools and mosques to deliver speeches on Islam, they often struggle to accommodate such requests amidst their other commitments. Financial aid is limited, with some assistance provided by the city of Zurich for their meeting venue, requiring additional funding sourced from donations and membership fees. They believe that expanding their outreach beyond the Muslim community could attract more support, particularly for covering meeting expenses.⁹² Nonetheless, even this expansion would not com-

89. Noemi Trucco, Hansjörg Schmid, and Amir Sheikhzadegan, "Within and Beyond the Community: Tensions in Muslim Service Provision in Switzerland," *Religions*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2024), p. 15.

90. This can be contextualized within the framework of heightened societal expectations placed upon Muslims and Muslim communities as they became the center of public discourse and attention which is too often "mediatized and politicized," and therefore they need to cope with an inhospitable space that questions their integration and belonging to society.

91. Trucco et al., 2024.

92. Trucco et al., 2024, p. 11.

pletely resolve their challenges related to volunteering and funding. One could argue that the dependence on volunteerism, financial constraints, and the question of Muslim (in)visibility potentially serve to perpetuate existing stereotypes and biases, consequently exacerbating the prevalence of Islamophobia in Switzerland. When Muslim CSOs struggle to provide essential services and fulfill their civic duties owing to limited resources and the political atmosphere, it may perpetuate unfavorable perceptions of Islam and Muslims among the general public. This, in turn, may breed discriminatory attitudes and acts, further marginalizing Muslim communities and reinforcing Islamophobia. Increased attention to security concerns and debates about radicalization and terrorism in media and politics has led to pressure on Muslims to present themselves as “peaceful and loyal citizens,” while also demonstrating their understanding of Swiss social and legal norms. As a result, they often face criticism for either being “too visible or too invisible,” which many interpret as signs of exclusion.⁹³

Since 2021, the CFR has been overseeing the reportonlin Racism.ch platform, providing a vital space for individuals to report instances of hateful and discriminatory speech online. In 2023, the platform received reports of 191 cases of racist content. Of particular concern is the rise in reports of anti-Muslim racism, with 27 cases documented compared to 16 in 2022. The comment sections of online media emerged as the primary source of reported content (46 cases), closely followed by Facebook and X, each with 44 reported instances. The prevalence of hateful content extended to platforms such as Instagram (21 cases) and TikTok (8 cases). A significant portion of the reported content, approximately one-third (67 cases), constituted offenses punishable under Swiss law. Fourteen cases led to formal complaints filed with criminal prosecution authorities. Additionally, some reported cases were found to have no connection to Switzerland, originated from deleted accounts, or required reporting by the affected parties to be pursued legally.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Islamophobia transcends mere animosity towards Islam; it fundamentally denies Muslim identity and the right to live freely without judgment based on faith and worship. This contradiction is evident in countries that purport to champion human rights, yet impose everyday restrictions on Muslims. Every act of Islamophobia represents a failure to embrace difference and respect diversity. In such circumstances, the principle of a multicultural Europe becomes untenable when one culture faces discrimination and threats. If Western societies aspire to be the bastions of human rights and freedoms, when and where will religiously diverse communities -particularly Muslim ones- practise these freedoms? The perpetuation of in-

93. Ibid, pp. 13-14.

tolerance, lack of acceptance, and absence of respect undermines integration, participation, and trust, calling into question the principles these societies claim to uphold. Despite increased visibility, public conversation on discrimination is often trapped in superficial frustration, stifling substantial societal and institutional change. Combating discrimination necessitates a collaborative effort by governmental institutions, civil society, and professionals to promote inclusive attitudes and remove structural barriers that perpetuate injustice and inequality. This report suggests the following policy recommendations to combat Islamophobia and promote inclusion:

Employment

- Strengthening anti-discrimination laws, particularly in the areas of hiring, promotion, and workplace practices.
- Adopting mandatory anti-discrimination and cultural sensitivity training for employers and employees to promote inclusive workplace space.
- Incentivizing employers to adopt hiring practices that actively promote diversity within their workforce.

Education

- In multicultural societies, schools should incorporate comprehensive diversity and anti-discrimination education into their curricula at all educational levels.
- Schools should provide continuous training in cultural competency, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism to teachers and educational staff, and managing diversity within classrooms.
- Safe and accessible channels must be available for students and parents to report cases of discrimination or harassment within educational settings.

Politics

- Political parties should be encouraged to include candidates from diverse backgrounds, including Muslims, to ensure a more inclusive representation.
- Legislation aimed at safeguarding the rights of all religious and cultural groups, ensuring equal treatment under the law, should be drafted and passed.
- Strict policies against hate speech by political figures should be implemented, with penalties enforced for any violations.

Justice System

- Establishing a national database for reporting and monitoring hate crimes is essential to ensure transparency and accountability.

- Law enforcement should receive specialized training on identifying, responding to, and preventing hate crimes and discrimination.
- Comprehensive support systems should be settled for victims of hate crimes, including access to legal aid and psychological counseling.

Media

- Media outlets should be encouraged to adopt guidelines for “fair and unbiased” reporting on Islamophobia-related issues.
- Media literacy programs should be provided to the public to help them critically assess news sources and resist biased reporting.
- Support should be offered to initiatives that promote positive stories and contributions of Muslim communities to counteract negative stereotypes.

Internet

- Digital literacy campaigns should be implemented to educate users on distinguishing and countering online Islamophobia.
- Stricter regulations should be enforced on online platforms (especially social media) to combat online hate speech and Islamophobia. Holding these platforms accountable for violations will help create a safer online environment.

The Islamophobia Network

- Individuals and organizations that promote Islamophobia should be inspected and exposed. Thorough investigations into their networks and funding sources will reveal the extent of their influence and help develop strategies to counter their ideologies.
- Legal frameworks to prosecute Islamophobia networks and hold offenders accountable for their actions must be strengthened.
- Counternarratives to challenge and dismantle extremist ideologies propagated by Islamophobia networks need to be developed. By presenting alternative perspectives, it becomes possible to undermine the influence of Islamophobic networks and promote understanding.

Civil Society

- Interfaith dialogues offer an effective way to promote dialogue and understanding between different religious and cultural communities.
- Capacity building and regular assessment of policies and initiatives aimed at combating Islamophobia should be supported in order to adapt and respond to changing dynamics. This will help refine strategies and ensure that they remain responsive to the evolving challenges posed by Islamophobia.

Chronology

- **12 January 2023:** Martina Bircher, National Councilor Aarburg, declares that violence comes from non-integrated foreigners (young men from Afghanistan, Syria, or North Africa who have received asylum).
- **14 January 2023:** In St. Gallen, activists of the Young Act distributed flyers and hoisted a banner with the inscription; “Safe in your own country?” and suggestive statistics that specifically refer to migrant crime.
- **28 January 2023:** A group of activists from Résistance Helvétique demonstrates in front of an accommodation for refugees, in Martigny VS.
- **31 January 2023:** National Councilor Céline Amaudruz points to the increasing number of immigrants including Muslims coming from misogynistic cultures, and associates this with rising cases of domestic violence and even murder in Switzerland. Amaudruz criticizes the left for welcoming foreign perpetrators, which she argues betrays Swiss women and girls.
- **14 February 2023:** Saïda Keller-Messahli criticized the decision of left-leaning and Green Party members in Geneva to allow the burkini in public swimming pools.
- **3 March 2023:** In St. Margarethen, CVP politician Majlinda Sulejmani falls victim to various threats because of her Muslim and Kosovar background. Election posters with her pictures are destroyed. In an election poster, an ax is placed next to her head. She receives anonymous calls demanding that her candidacy be withdrawn.
- **25 March 2023:** Christine Tasin (France), Piero Marchesi (Tresa), and Martinonline.ch (Lugano) won the “Swiss Stop Islamization Award 2023.”
- **8 May 2023:** The SVP parliamentary group submitted several motions to tighten asylum policies - all of which have been rejected by the center-left majority in parliament.
- **26 June 2023:** A Muslim employee at Coop was prohibited from wearing a headscarf.
- **30 June 2023:** The SVP criticizes the current asylum policy under Federal Councilor Elisabeth Baume-Schneider and calls for immediate action to address “asylum chaos” caused by center-left politics. SVP’s Executive Board has laid out several demands and proposals to reform the asylum system and strengthen border controls.
- **1 July 2023:** The SVP announces that riots occurring in France have spilled over into Switzerland. Authorities report the arrest of seven young individuals with migrant backgrounds in connection to the disturbances.
- **2 July 2023:** Landlord closes Biel mosque Ar’Rahman.
- **2 July 2023:** The SVP posts a photo on Twitter at the beginning of the Islamic Festival of Sacrifice, which shows Swiss soldiers praying against Mecca

and comments on it with the words: “What’s next? Child marriages, Sharia courts, stoning?”

- **27 July 2023:** The SVP claims that thousands of young men from Africa, Afghanistan, etc. are coming to Switzerland and that this asylum chaos is costing CHF 4 billion annually.
- **1 August 2023:** The SVP highlights an incident where an Algerian allegedly stabbed an Afghan, drawing attention to what they characterize as the turmoil within the asylum system. Emphasizing a narrative of accountability, the SVP attributes responsibility for the situation to the center-left and underscores its exclusive dedication to ensuring the systematic deportation of foreign nationals involved in criminal activities.
- **2 August 2023:** The SVP wrote on social media: “Kaum ein Tag ohne Messerstecherei! Dieses Mal in Solothurn: Eritreer ersticht mutmasslich einen Landsmann. Frau Bundesrätin Elisabeth Baume-Schneider (SP): Stoppen Sie endlich dieses blutige Asyl-Chaos! Für mehr Sicherheit: SVP wählen!”
- **10 August 2023:** Four Syrian nationals, aged between 28 and 57, were arrested in Vaud and Neuchâtel, on suspicion of supporting a terrorist group.
- **17 August 2023:** Winterthur district court sentenced a 50-year-old Algerian man for attacking two worshippers in the An’Nur mosque. He received a suspended prison sentence of 12 months and a seven-year ban from entering Switzerland.
- **12 September 2023:** In Lausanne, a local council committed to supporting refugees received a racist letter.
- **20 September 2023:** The Swiss Parliament passed legislation known as the “Burqa ban” making it illegal to cover one’s face, including wearing a niqab.
- **26 September 2023:** “The Strength of the Hijab” in Smethwick near Birmingham was described by *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* writer as a “Monument der Ignoranz”. Keller-Messahli criticized the construction of the sculpture celebrating hijabi women which she believes promotes Islamist ideologies.
- **18 October 2023:** In Chur, a 16-year-old boy calls his father in Arabic and is insulted by an older passerby with the words, “You Arabs are all terrorists.”
- **22 October 2023:** The SVP, which has centered its campaign on anti-immigrant rhetoric, wins national elections.
- **27 October 2023:** The SVP criticizes Federal Councillor Baume-Schneider for not implementing border controls like neighboring countries and for facilitating illegal asylum migration managed by criminal smugglers. They warn that Switzerland could become the only country with open doors to asylum seekers, most of whom are young Muslim men, posing a security threat. They also stressed the growing number of crimes associated with asylum seekers and

the need for border controls to protect the Swiss population from Islamist terrorism and anti-Semitism.

- **30 October 2023:** The SVP tweeted: “Germany has increased border controls to stop migration. Switzerland is one hotspot. Border controls NOW! Sign the petition today.”
- **9 November 2023:** The SVP tweeted: “Asylum chaos, open borders, and now Switzerland is becoming a refuge for terrorist helpers! Federal Councilor Baume-Schneider is a security risk for our country. Sign the petition for border controls NOW!”
- **10 November 2023:** The CIP-N adopted a motion calling for developing a comprehensive strategy and action plan to combat racism.
- **15 November 2023:** The Federal Council supports implementing measures to combat the dissemination of illegal hate speech and extremist propaganda.
- **16 November 2023:** The Valais Grand Council rejected the burkini ban requested by a motion by the SVP.
- **12 December 2023:** The SVP called on Federal Councilor Baume-Schneider to implement their petition “Border controls NOW” immediately arguing that the asylum chaos caused by the center-left is making Switzerland less safe.
- **19 December 2023:** Federal Councillor Elisabeth Baume-Schneider independently lowered the asylum threshold for Afghan women. The SVP’s attempt to reverse this decision failed in the National Council because the center aligned with the left.
- **21 December 2023:** National Councilor Martina Bircher claimed that primary school students in Bern-Bethlehem intimidating a teacher by shouting “Allahu Akbar” is a result of the asylum chaos caused by the center-left, with too many unsuitable foreigners coming to Switzerland.

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE
UNITED KINGDOM
NATIONAL REPORT 2023

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Executive Summary

In 2023, the UK saw a significant rise in Islamophobia, with a 600% increase in reported cases in the two months following the Hamas attack on Israel in early October. It is, therefore, impossible to discuss the status of Islamophobia in the UK during 2023 without talking about October as a momentous turning point. The October attack and the ensuing retaliatory invasion of and attack on Gaza acted as a catalyst that exacerbated existing trends and gave rise to a whole new set of tensions and contentious issues that have reframed the political discussion in the UK. The ripple effects from the conflict in the Middle East have left Muslims feeling even more threatened and scared in every aspect of their everyday lives.

Still, the new cycle of crisis in the Middle East fell on fertile ground. For years, reports have highlighted the steady creep of Islamophobia attacks in the UK, both off- and online, in the last decades. This year too, Muslims represented by far the most frequently targeted group in hate crime (44% of all religiously aggravated reported incidents). The increasing use of social media as means of communication and information means that over the years online hate crime against Muslims has overtaken all other forms. Other studies published after October 2023 found that the increase in anti-Muslim hate was disproportionately driven by online platforms. The growing use of social media and failures in self-regulation have been instrumental in facilitating a coordinated culture of misinformation that affects Muslims disproportionately.

Mainstream Islamophobia had a vintage year in 2023. The publication of the much-anticipated review of PREVENT, the government's controversial anti-radicalisation programme, did nothing to address the long-standing concerns of Muslims communities. The hardening of the Conservative government's official discourse on immigration, multiculturalism, and Islam, reached new and dangerous lows. There was a notable shift towards more and more extreme anti-immigration and 'anti-extremism' rhetoric and measures, driven by key government officials (including the Home Secretary Suella Braverman) and party figures, in an attempt to prop up its rapidly declining public support. Meanwhile the threat of the far right remains every bit as grave as ever. Far-right engagement on migration has been steadily increasing as the government's 'Stop the Boats' campaign ramped up. A study found a 149% increase in messages on anti-migrant far-right social media channels from 2021 to the first months of 2023. Far-right activity - especially online - spiked around key government announcements about immigration, highlighting the porosity and growing convergence between mainstream and extremist Islamophobic trends in the UK. And yet, one of the key recommendations for PREVENT in 2023 was that it should "shift its focus away from far-right extremism and towards 'Islamist extremism'".

For a government so keen to redefine 'extremism' in legal terms, the stubborn refusal to adopt an official definition of Islamophobia is one more case of double standards. But recent government narratives emphasising the alleged threat of 'Islamist extremism' illustrate its diminished (and rapidly diminishing) political commitment to fighting Islamophobia.

Country Profile EIR 2023

Country: United Kingdom

Type of Regime: Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy

Form of Government: Parliamentary democracy headed by a prime minister (since October Rishi Sunak, Conservative Party; before Liz Truss (September-October) and Boris Johnson (December 2019-September 2022) leading the executive.

Ruling Parties: Conservative Party (since 2010)

Opposition Parties: Labour Party (official opposition); Liberal Democrats; regional parties (Scottish National Party; Plaid Cymru – Party of Wales; Democratic Unionist Party; Sinn Féin); Green Party; Reform UK (since 2019)

Last Elections: 2019 Parliamentary Election: the Conservative Party won 43.6% of the vote and 365 out of 650 parliamentary seats in the House of Commons, achieving a parliamentary majority of 86; the Labour Party came a distant second with 32.1% and 202 seats, with the Liberal Democrats third (in votes) with 11.5% but only 11 seats; and the Scottish National Party fourth with 3% but with a larger share of 48 seats (all in Scotland).

Total Population: 66,182,000 (2011 census)/66,775,286 (2019 estimate)

Major Languages: English (98%), Scots (2.5%), Welsh (1%); Scottish Gaelic, Cornish, and Irish (all <0.1%)

Official Religion: Church of England (Christian Anglican) in England only; no established religion in other parts of the United Kingdom

Statistics on Islamophobia: The most recent official figures of hate crime in England and Wales show that, in the year ending March 2023, there were 8,241 religious hate crimes recorded by police in England and Wales, a 4% decrease from the previous year. Of those, Muslims were the most frequent targets of religiously motivated hate crimes. Forty-four per cent of all religious hate crimes, 3,400 offenses, targeted Muslims. Significant spikes of up to 700% in reported Islamophobic incidents occurred after 7 October.

Major Religions (% of Population): Christianity (59.5%), No religion (25.7%), Islam (4.5%), Hinduism (1.3%), Sikhism (0.7%), Judaism (0.4%), Buddhism (0.4%), Other (0.4%) (2011 census)

- For **England and Wales** only the figures from the 2021 census are: Christianity (46.2%), No Religion (37%), Muslims (6.5%) of a population of 59.6 million (an increase of 6.3% compared to 2011); Hinduism (1.7%)
- **Scotland:** No religion (51.1%), Christianity (38.8%), Islam (2.2%), Other (1.7%)

Muslim Population (% of Population):

The total Muslim population in the UK is approximately 3,998,875, which represents 6.0% of the total population.

- In **England and Wales** specifically, there are 3,868,133 Muslims, making up 6.5% of the population. This figure increased significantly since 2011, growing by 1.16 million from 2.71 million (4.8% of the population) to 3.87 million (6.5% of the population).
- In **Scotland**, a separate census (2022) showed that Muslims represent 2.2% of the population (119,878).
- In **Northern Ireland**, there are 10,870 Muslims (0.6% of the population).
- **London** has the largest concentration of Muslims, with 1,318,754 Muslim residents (15.0% of the city's population).
- Other regions with significant Muslim populations include:
 - West Midlands:** 569,963 (9.6% of the region's population)
 - North West England:** 563,105 (7.6%)
 - Yorkshire and the Humber:** 442,533 (8.1%)
- The top 5 local authorities with the largest Muslim populations are:
 - Birmingham:** 341,811
 - Bradford:** 166,846
 - London Borough of Tower Hamlets:** 123,912
 - Manchester:** 122,962

Main Muslim Community Organisations: Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Muslim Association of Britain, Muslim Council of Wales (MCW), Muslim Council of Scotland (MCS), Muslim Charities Forum (MCF), Islamic Relief (IR), Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS)

Main NGOs Combatting Islamophobia: Muslim Council of Britain, Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), Tell MAMA UK, Islamophobia Watch, Islamic Human Rights Commission, Islamophobia Response Unit (ISU), Cage International, HOPE not hate

Far-Right Parties: British National Party (BNP), UK Independence Party (UKIP), For Britain, National Front, English Democrats, British Democrats, British Freedom Party

Far-Right Movements: English Defence League (EDL), Britain First (deregistered in 2017), Generation Identity, New British Union (NBU), Football Lads Alliance, Veterans Against Terrorism, Patriotic Alternative, Blood and Honour, British Movement, British Hand, White Stag Athletic Club

Far-Right Terrorist Organisations: Combat 18, National Action (proscribed in 2016)

Limitations to Islamic Practices:

- **Hijab Ban:** None, but schools have the right to determine their own dress code, which has led to some cases of hijab ban for particular student age groups.
- **Halal Slaughter Ban:** None
- **Minaret Ban:** None
- **Circumcision Ban:** None
- **Burka Ban:** None
- **Prayer Ban:** None

Introduction

In 2023, the UK Parliament held two significant debates on Islamophobia. The first, titled ‘General debate on tackling Islamophobia’ took place on 18 May. This debate centred on the government’s ongoing refusal to accept the 2018 definition of Islamophobia proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims, which characterised it as “anti-Muslim racism”. In the past six years, supporters of the official adoption of the APPG definition have repeatedly pointed out that, without an agreed-upon legal definition, efforts to address discriminatory outcomes faced by Muslims would be seriously hindered. The debate also rehearsed by now familiar counter-arguments to the APPG definition. For example, the National Secular Society has rejected it as “vague and unworkable”, claiming that it could potentially conflate supposedly legitimate criticism of Islam with discrimination against Muslims. Once again, the UK government affirmed its commitment to tackling Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, acknowledging the seriousness of the issue, but it also reiterated its reluctance to adopt a formal definition, stating a desire to consider a range of viewpoints on the proposed terminology.

Nearly seven months later, on 7 December, the UK Parliament held another debate on Islamophobia, this time with a somewhat different title - ‘Tackling Islamophobia’. In some respects, this second debate covered similar territory to the earlier one in May. The main speaker, the Labour deputy Naz Shah, accused the Conservative government of failing to take concrete actions to address Islamophobia, despite repeatedly announcing measures like appointing an adviser on Islamophobia and adopting a working definition of Islamophobia. Shah bemoaned the government’s limited engagement with mainstream Muslim organisations and its failure to provide sufficient funding to tackle Islamophobia, in stark contrast to their approach towards antisemitism. She warned that, if the government did not act with some urgency to combat Islamophobia, Muslims in the UK could face a Christchurch-style terrorist attack, drawing parallels with the persecution of Muslims in other countries like China, Myanmar, and India. Echoing the May parliamentary debate, Shah once more called on the government to adopt the APPG definition of Islamophobia, to appoint an adviser on Islamophobia, and to announce new policies and funding to tackle the issue. However, the most devastating moment of the debate came when discussion moved to the exponential rise of the number of Islamophobic incidents in the UK, quoting a 600% increase of recorded cases in the two months preceding the debate.

These were no ordinary two months of course. The year 2023 snapped into two on 7 October 2023. The shocking Hamas attack on Israel on that day was followed by a ruthless and sustained Israeli military campaign against Gaza that gathered momentum in the final months of the year. There was a world before and a world after this escalation, for Muslim and Jewish communities in Palestine and indeed across

the world. Time-old problems did not go away of course. The persistence of Islamophobia in the UK, remained a significant concern, with a negative long-term trend since 2012-13 and especially following the Brexit referendum highlighted by a report published in December by Tell MAMA. Nor was this the first time that international events had a devastating effect on the life of Muslim communities in the UK. For years, the rise of far-right extremism and the spread of anti-Muslim rhetoric created an environment of fear and hostility towards Muslims. This was compounded by continued hate crimes targeting Muslims, including verbal abuse, physical attacks, and vandalism of Islamic centres. Negative media portrayal played a role too, with stereotypical depictions of Muslims in some outlets perpetuating prejudices and fuelling Islamophobic attitudes. This problem extended beyond fringe groups, with Islamophobia becoming endemic in parts of the political and media mainstream. Discrimination has persisted and in many cases increased in diverse spheres of individual and community Muslim life across the UK. Public opinion on immigration, which often intersects with attitudes towards Muslims, has remained divided. As of April 2023, 52% of the British public thought immigration numbers should be reduced, although only 32% viewed immigration as inherently negative. Notably, attitudes varied based on factors such as the migrants' skill level, country of origin, and reason for migration, with people of Muslim background treated far less positively than those from an English-speaking, European, or Christian-majority country.¹

However, since October 2023 the already deeply worrying indices of Islamophobia became markedly worse in every respect. This is a situation not confined to the UK. Officials across Europe have voiced their deep worry and concern over the recent surge in hate crimes and violent attacks that have been primarily targeting Muslim and Jewish communities all over the continent. A joint statement issued by officials from ten European nations, along with the European Union, on 30 November 2023, drew attention to the alarming increase in both physical and verbal attacks directed at Muslims and Jews, which has resulted in these communities feeling increasingly unsafe in both digital and physical spaces. The statement highlighted the danger that the rising trend of Islamophobia across the world could jeopardise the life of Muslims and undermine further social cohesion in multicultural/multi-faith communities.² The situation on social media was just as bleak, with anti-Muslim statements made online increasing by a factor of forty-three in the days immediately after the attack.³

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1. 'UK Public Opinion toward Immigration: Overall Attitudes and Level of Concern'. *Migration Observatory*. 28.9.2023 - <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/uk-public-opinion-toward-immigration-overall-attitudes-and-level-of-concern/>
 2. 'European Officials 'deeply Concerned' for Muslims amid Surge in Attacks'. *The Guardian*. 30.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2023/nov/30/european-officials-deeply-concerned-for-muslims-amid-surge-in-attacks>
 3. '43-Fold Increase in Anti-Muslim YouTube Comments Following Hamas' October 7 Attack'. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. 19.12.2023 - https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/43-fold-increase-in-anti-muslim-youtube-comments-following-hamas-october-7-attack/



Figure 1: Increase in anti-Muslim comments on YouTube, 3-19 October 2023

Source: "43-Fold Increase in Anti-Muslim YouTube Comments Following Hamas' October 7 Attack." 2023, ISD, 19.12.2023, https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/43-fold-increase-in-anti-muslim-youtube-comments-following-hamas-october-7-attack/.

Therefore, it becomes nearly impossible to discuss what happened in 2023 without bringing up October as a momentous turning point. This event acted as a catalyst that exacerbated existing trends - not least the sheer number of anti-Muslim hate crimes, but it also gave rise to a whole new set of tensions and contentious issues that have reframed the political discussion in the UK. The ripple effects from the conflict in the Middle East have left Muslims feeling scared to lead normal lives, threatened, vulnerable, and anxious about their safety and belonging.⁴ In many ways then this report reflects how the deep fracture that opened up in October 2023 created two largely separate before-after stories for Muslims in the UK.

Discussion of Islamophobic Incidents and Discursive Events

Physical and Verbal Attacks

Across the UK the officially reported overall hate crime figures remained broadly similar to the previous year. Data from England and Wales follows a different reporting period (ending in March and published in the following October) and therefore does not provide a snapshot of the situation for most of 2023, not to mention any increase recorded after the situation flared up in the Middle East. By contrast, of-

4. 'British Muslims 'too Scared to Leave Home' as Islamophobic Incidents Skyrocket 365%'. *The Independent*. 4.3.2024 - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/islamophobia-britain-report-israel-palestine-b2499913.html>.

ficial figures from Scotland and incremental data from various police forces across the country offer a clearer picture of the situation pre- and post-October. The usual caveat that (1) all these figures refer to *officially reported* and recorded cases and (2) there is a significant overlap of racial and religious motives and targets means that the actual number of hate crime incidents is significantly higher than what the official figures show.

In the year ending March 2023, there were 145,214 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales (excluding data from Devon and Cornwall police due to a system change). This represents a 5% decrease compared to the year ending March 2022 and marks the first annual fall of the headline figure since 2013. Racially motivated hate crimes accounted for the majority of recorded hate crimes (70% or 101,906 offences) - a 6% decrease compared to the previous year. Religious hate crimes decreased by 4%, with 8,241 offences recorded in the year ending March 2023. Nevertheless, even during the census period that covers only the first three months of 2023, 44% (3,400 offences) of religiously aggravated hate crimes affected people perceived as Muslims, with Jewish victims involved in 19% of cases (1,510 offences).

Statistics for Scotland are more difficult to disaggregate by religious group. While the headline hate crime figure for hate crime for 2023 was 10% lower than in the previous year and the number of religious attacks recorded by the police somewhat decreased as well on a year-on-year basis,⁵ the number of recorded anti-Muslim attacks increased exponentially in the last three months of the year, showing a 230% increase between November and December.⁶ The alarming rise in hate crime affecting both Muslims and Jews in the last months of the year prompted the Council of Scotland's capital city Edinburgh to issue a statement to coincide with the Islamophobia Awareness Month in November, reaffirming the city's diversity and bemoaning the devastating impact of the wave of hate crime attacks recorded after early October.⁷

The exponential rise in cases as a result of the conflict in the Middle East was eloquently recorded by data published by various police forces in England. Data from the Metropolitan Police (London) showed 58 anti-Muslim incidents and 54 anti-Muslim offences in London between 29 September and 12 October of 2023, an 87% rise in incidents and a 58.8% rise in offences compared to the same period the previous year. West Yorkshire Police recorded the most significant increase in Islamophobic offenses. Between 7 October and 7 November, 2023, Islamophobic offenses rose to 49 from 29 in 2022. West Midlands Police reported a decrease in Is-

5. 'UK Public Opinion toward Immigration: Overall Attitudes and Level of Concern'. *Migration Observatory*. 28.9.2023 - <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/uk-public-opinion-toward-immigration-overall-attitudes-and-level-of-concern/>.

6. "European Officials 'deeply Concerned' for Muslims amid Surge in Attacks"

7. 'City of Edinburgh Council and Police Scotland issue joint statement for Islamophobia Awareness Month 2023'. 24.10.2023 - <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/13843/city-of-edinburgh-council-and-police-scotland-issue-joint-statement-for-islamophobia-awareness-month-2023>

lamophobic offenses from 7 October to 7 November 2023. They documented 25 offenses compared to 33 in 2022. Merseyside Police saw an increase in Islamophobic offenses from 7 October to 7 November 2023, rising from 6 to 10, while Thames Valley Police saw its numbers rise from 1 to 21.⁸ The British Transport Police noted 87 antisemitic offences, up from 8 over the same period in 2022. Tell MAMA recorded 291 cases of anti-Muslim hate between 7 and 19 October, a five- to sixfold increase from the same period in 2022.⁹ Of those, 2 in 5 were in London. The trend continued in the remaining months of 2023, reaching 1,432 by mid-December, a figure that was seven times higher than in the same period in 2022 and the largest rise ever recorded by their service.¹⁰ Tell MAMA also noted a tenfold increase in cases at schools and universities.¹¹

It was the volume and intensity of the Islamophobic attacks rather than their nature that changed dramatically after early October. Typically, they involved death threats, physical assaults, abusive behaviour, threats, vandalism, and hate speech. A report published by Tell MAMA covering the 2012-22 period was published in 2023, painting a picture of steadily increasing Islamophobia with the number of reported cases doubling over the last decade.¹² Just over half of the incidents were hate speech on social media. In the wake of the 7 October attacks and the subsequent conflict in Israel and Gaza, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (IDS) conducted research that found a fourfold increase in language associated with anti-Muslim hate on the platform X.¹³ More broadly, social media platforms have been instrumental in facilitating a coordinated culture of misinformation, whereby online fake rumours develop their own traction through sharing and generate a wave of Islamophobic online attacks.¹⁴

The majority of the c. 2,000 recorded Islamophobic offline attacks recorded by Tell MAMA in the four months following the October attack in Israel involved cases

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8. 'Police record rise in religious hate crimes after Israel-Gaza war'. *BBC*. 29.12.2023 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67836607>
 9. 'Five-Fold Increase in Anti-Muslim Cases to Tell MAMA between October 7 and 16'. TELL MAMA. 16.10.2023 - <https://tellmamauk.org/five-fold-increase-in-anti-muslim-cases-to-tell-mama-between-october-7-and-16/>; 'British Muslims 'too Scared to Leave Home' as Islamophobic Incidents Skyrocket 365%'. *Independent*. 4.3.2024 - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/islamophobia-britain-report-israel-palestine-b2499913.html>.
 10. 'A Decade of Anti-Muslim Hate'. *TELL MAMA*. 21.7.2023 - <https://tellmamauk.org/a-decade-of-anti-muslim-hate/>.
 11. 'Punched and Told to Leave Britain': Islamophobia Reaches Record High." *ITV News*. 20.7.2023 - https://www.itv.com/news/2023-07-20/punched-and-told-to-leave-britain-islamophobia-reaches-record-high?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1689879393
 12. 'Reading Mosque 'broken into' and 'over £1200 Stolen' Police Say'. *Reading Chronicle*. Reading Chronicle. 23.10.2023 - <https://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/news/23873307.reading-abu-bakr-islamic-centre-vandalised-break-in/>.
 13. 'Use of Words, Phrases and Hashtags Associated with Anti-Muslim Mobilisation Surges amid Israel-Gaza Conflict'. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. 2.11.2023 - https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/use-of-words-phrases-and-hashtags-associated-with-anti-muslim-mobilisation-surges-amid-israel-gaza-conflict/
 14. Ismail, Aymann. 'We Can All See the Horrors of War Now'. *Slate*. 13.10.2023 - <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2023/10/decapitated-babies-claim-intent-dehumanization.html>

of verbal abuse. Muslims have been particularly vulnerable while using public transport and walking in public areas. Tell MAMA's reporting indicates that linking Muslims to terrorism is the most common form of Islamophobic abuse - and this trend increased exponentially after October. Additionally, as always, there were instances of non-Muslims of South Asian descent being mistakenly targeted due to their appearance. Some indicative incidents were:

- A man repeatedly shouting " Hamas terrorist " at a Muslim woman walking down the street.¹⁵
- Muslims being told to "f*** off back to Palestine" or called "bombers" for expressing support for Palestine.
- A Muslim teacher wearing a headscarf was insulted by a group of students at a school.
- Harassment and abuse directed at Muslims wearing clothing or colors in support of Palestine, with some being told to "cover it up".
- Racist slurs, including the P-word, directed at Muslims while shopping or leaving supermarkets.
- Bournemouth Islamic Centre & Central Mosque, on St Stephen's Road, was repeatedly attacked, vandalised, and robbed.¹⁶

Places of worship remain primary targets of Islamophobes: in a major report published by Tell MAMA, almost 90% of 117 mosques surveyed experienced anti-Muslim hate crimes. These crimes ranged from threatening letters and violence to vandalism, including graffiti, broken windows, and even feces smeared on walls.¹⁷ Some of the attacks are listed below:

- A cyclist threw a petrol can with "IDF" (Israel Defense Forces) scrawled on it into the car park of the Oxford Mosque and Islamic Cultural Society on 28 October.
- Attempted arson attack against Molesey Islamic Cultural Centre, Surrey on 18 October.¹⁸
- A pig's head was left outside a proposed mosque site on Mosley Street in Barnoldswick, Lancashire, on 8 October, prompting a hate crime investigation by Lancashire Police.¹⁹

15. 'Death Threats, Graffiti and Verbal Abuse as Islamophobia Increases in Britain'

16. 'Mosque Calls for New Security Measures after Spate of Reported Attacks'. *Bournemouth Echo*. 21.9.2023 - <https://www.bournemouthcho.co.uk/news/23803126.bournemouth-mosque-calls-new-security-attacks>

17. 'Spate of what are believed to be Islamophobic incidents in the area'. *Acton W3*. 16.11.2023 - <https://www.actonw3.com/default.asp?section=info&page=concrime441.htm>

18. 'CCTV appeal ongoing following attempted arson at Islamic Centre in Surrey'. Tell Mama. 6.11.2023 - <https://tellmamauk.org/cctv-appeal-ongoing-following-attempted-arson-at-islamic-centre-in-surrey/>

19. 'Hate crime investigation ongoing after pig's head left outside proposed mosque'. Tell Mama. 11.10.2023 - <https://tellmamauk.org/hate-crime-investigation-ongoing-after-pigs-head-left-outside-proposed-mosque/>

- The Abu Bakr Islamic Centre, Reading was broken into and vandalised, resulting in extensive damage and robbery on 21-22 October.²⁰
- A number of attacks on Islamic places of worship across West London, including Hammersmith, Fulham, and Ealing on 11 occasions between 16 October and 18 November, linked to a single attacker who was subsequently arrested.²¹ These included Acton Central Mosque in West London that was splashed with red paint on five separate occasions in a two-week span,²² and the Palestinian Mission to the UK that was attacked and vandalised on 13 November.²³

Employment

Muslims in the UK continued to face significant challenges in the workplace. These have been highlighted in a number of reports published in recent years and include a number of significant challenges in terms of career progression, under-representation, discrimination, and overall hostile workplace environment. Access to employment remains a chronic challenge: 68% of Muslims in England and Wales live in areas with the highest unemployment rates, while the unemployment rate for Muslims aged 20-24 was 13% in 2021 and Muslims had the lowest percentage of working-age individuals (16-64) in employment at 51.4%, compared to 70.9% of the overall population.²⁴ But it is also the workplace as environment that remains challenging. Over two-thirds of working UK Muslims reported experiencing Islamophobia in their workplaces.²⁵ Muslims were also among the least likely religious groups to hold management positions and experienced a persistent wage gap.²⁶ A study focusing on social workers in the UK found that only 3.6% of social workers in England identified as Muslim, highlighting a significant disparity compared to the 6.5% representation in the general population of England and Wales.²⁷ Examples of Islamophobia experi-

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20. 'Reading Mosque 'broken into' and 'over £1200 Stolen' Police Say'. *Reading Chronicle*. 23.10.2023 - <https://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/news/23873307.reading-abu-bakr-islamic-centre-vandalised-break-in/>.
 21. 'Man Charged over Spate of 'anti-Muslim' Incidents at London Mosques and Businesses'. *Evening Standard*. 16.5.2023 - <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/west-london-muslim-mosque-palestine-red-paint-man-charged-b1158139.html>
 22. 'Spate of what are believed to be Islamophobic incidents in the area'
 23. 'Ealing Man Arrested after Vandalism of Palestinian Mission and Local Mosques - Chiswick Calendar News'. *The Chiswick Calendar*. 1.12.2023 - <https://chiswickcalendar.co.uk/ealing-man-arrested-after-vandalism-of-palestinian-mission-and-local-mosques/>
 24. '68% of Muslims in England and Wales live in areas with high unemployment'. *The Guardian*. 14.3.2024 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/mar/14/from-left-to-far-right-which-groups-could-end-up-on-the-uk-extremism-list>
 25. Wazir, Burhan. "More than Two-Thirds of UK Muslims Have Experienced Islamophobia in the Workplace." *Hyphen*. 14.6.2024 - <https://hyphenonline.com/2022/06/07/exclusive-more-than-two-thirds-of-uk-muslims-have-experienced-islamophobia-in-the-workplace/>
 26. Welsby, Mike and Evans, Tom. 'Religion, Education and Work in England and Wales: February 2020'. *Office for National Statistics*. 26.2.2020. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioneducationandworkinenglandandwales/february2020>
 27. 'Social work in England: State of the nation 2023'. *Social Work England*, 9.3.2023 - <https://www.socialwork-england.org.uk/about/publications/social-work-in-england-state-of-the-nation/>

enced by social workers included being called derogatory names, facing inappropriate questioning about appearance, and being mocked for religious practices. Some Muslim social workers believed that their career progression was deliberately hampered to prevent them from reaching leadership positions. The rhetoric from political leaders, particularly regarding Muslim women, contributed to a hostile environment and emboldened Islamophobic behaviour in workplaces.²⁸

The 'Religion At Work Report 2023' has highlighted extensive religious discrimination in the workplace, with various forms of discrimination reported by employees of different faiths. Nineteen per cent had witnessed a colleague having suffered religious discrimination, with the discriminatory conduct ranging from so-called jokes (32%), to barring the wearing of religious attire (22%) and symbols (19%), rejecting holiday request relating to religious events (22%), being subjected to ridicule regarding diet (20%), and being excluded from work events and subjected to other forms of isolation (23%). Muslims also faced the highest rate of rejected holiday requests at 31%. The report emphasised the need for organisations to improve inclusivity and create a more open environment for individuals of faith.²⁹

The so-called Muslim penalty in employment continues to cast a shadow on Muslims' access to and experience of the workplace in the UK. Recent research has highlighted that people who identify as minority ethnic are at a disadvantage in the labour market compared to the British white majority. The existence of a Muslim penalty does not in itself indicate that discrimination is taking place - 'cultural norms' may be playing a key role in this respect, meaning that Muslims, and Muslim women in particular, are less likely to be working because the values of their own communities hold them back. However, the research found compelling evidence suggesting that discrimination is a significant barrier to Muslims looking for work.³⁰ Advocacy groups have repeatedly highlighted the need for stronger measures to address workplace discrimination, including increased representation of Muslims at all levels, the development of comprehensive anti-Islamophobia training, and zero-tolerance policies against discrimination. Special attention has been drawn to the intersection of religion and gender that affects Muslim women's access to employment. The current legal framework in the UK - the 2010 Equality Act - has failed to adequately protect Muslim women in the workplace, resulting in challenges such as high unemployment rates and limited career opportunities. The separation of religion and gender in laws may hinder the recognition of discrimination, and a broader interpreta-

28. 'I Was Called "Mr Taliban" by a Colleague': One Social Worker's Experience of Islamophobia'. *Community Care*, 12.9.2023 - <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/09/08/i-was-called-mr-taliban-by-a-colleague-one-social-workers-experience-of-islamophobia/#:~:text=Why the stark contrast in,was going to the mosque.>

29. 'New Report Finds That Religious Discrimination In The Workplace Is Pervasive'. *Employment Law Solicitors*, 12.12.2023 - <https://www.theemploymentlawsolicitors.co.uk/news/2023/12/12/religious-discrimination/>

30. See, among others, 'Scotland's Islamophobia - Update 2023' - https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Scotlands_Islamophobia_2023_Update.pdf

tion of anti-discrimination laws is advocated for. Proportionality and consideration of the broader impacts of discriminatory measures are important in addressing intersectional discrimination. An intersectional analysis is crucial in determining financial loss resulting from discriminatory actions, particularly for vulnerable groups like older women in the labour market.³¹

Education

The educational sphere remains a primary, real as well as symbolic, arena of the ongoing fight against Islamophobia in the UK. For different reasons schools and universities have long been challenging environments for students with a Muslim background. Research published in 2023 highlights the challenges facing university students with Muslim background, ranging from hate incidents on campus to discrimination in the learning and teaching spaces to an often hostile environment in university accommodation.³²

Especially since the ‘Trojan Horse’ episode back in 2014, schools have been central to the Conservative government’s discourse of ‘Islamist radicalisation’ and have attracted the attention of right-wing media in order to reinforce and institutionalise anti-Muslim tropes. At the same time, initiatives to combat Islamophobia have recognised the importance of schools in shaping societal attitudes and combating prejudice from an early age, with positive longer-term dividends for society as a whole.

A number of persistent challenges remain. Racial and religious discrimination continue to play a role in the recruitment and training of teachers, impacting Muslim teachers. Individuals from white ethnic backgrounds have higher success rates progressing through teaching stages than those from other ethnicities.³³ While this gap has slightly decreased, the consistently lower acceptance rates for specific ethnic backgrounds, including those of Asian ethnicity (many of whom are Muslim), suggest systemic disadvantages prevent some aspiring teachers from entering the system. Teacher training programmes reinforce this trend as they often lack inclusivity and diversity, failing to consider the cultural and religious needs of trainees from minority backgrounds, including Muslims.

Additionally, Muslim trainees and qualified teachers experience ‘environmental racism’, which refers to witnessing racism directed towards students and a lack of di-

31. Cannon, Catriona. ‘Muslim women in the workplace and the Equality Act 2010: Opportunities for an intersectional analysis’. *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, 23/3 (2023): 185-215.

32. Allen, Chris. ‘Everyday experiences of Islamophobia in university spaces: A qualitative study in the United Kingdom’. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, - published online 24.11.2023 - <https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979231210996>

33. Tereshchenko, Antonina, Mills, Martin, and Bradbury, Alice. ‘Employment and Retention of BAME Teachers in England’. UCL Institute of Education, 2020 - https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10117331/1/IOE_Report_BAME_Teachers.pdf.

versity in leadership teams. This, coupled with the fear of being labeled ‘difficult to work with’ when addressing racism, creates an unwelcoming and hostile environment, especially for Muslim women who often face a ‘triple penalty’ due to their intersecting identities of being Muslim, female, and from an ethnic minority. Structural discrimination also hinders the career progression of Muslim teachers and contributes to lower retention rates. As BAME teachers continue to face significant unfair disadvantages when seeking promotions, senior leadership teams are often white-dominated. This lack of representation in leadership reinforces an ‘invisible glass ceiling’ for Muslim teachers, making them feel undervalued and dissatisfied, further contributing to their lower retention rates.³⁴

When it comes to physical spaces, schools often fail to adequately accommodate the religious needs of Muslim teachers, creating a sense of exclusion and impacting their well-being. Lack of facilities, such as designated prayer spaces, forces Muslim teachers to find alternative, often non-private, areas to practice their faith. Meanwhile prayer bans are contributing to a hostile environment for Muslim students. The ban on prayer introduced by the Michaela Community School in North London was challenged by one of the its students, with the case considered by the UK High Court.³⁵

The well-known challenges that the PREVENT Duty poses for schools and universities have been repeatedly stated in previous years’ version of this annual review. Government data for PREVENT in 2023 indicate that the education sector supplied the large number of referrals to the programme (39% of overall cases). Although ‘Extreme Right-Wing Concerns’ have overtaken ‘Islamist Concerns’ as the largest category of referrals (19% and 11% respectively), it is telling that the government campaigned strongly in 2023 to reinforce the perception that not enough emphasis is currently being placed on the supposed ‘Islamist threat’.³⁶

The conflict in Gaza since October has exacerbated all these tensions. There was a tenfold increase in cases at schools and universities, according to reports collated by Tell MAMA, a charity which records anti-Muslim incidents in the UK.³⁷ An expo-

34. Community Policy Forum. ‘Written Evidence’ submitted to the UK Parliament. 15.5.2023 - <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/120870/pdf>

35. ‘Religion: Pupil Takes School to Court over Alleged Prayer Ban’. *BBC News*. 16.1.2024 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68000098>

36. ‘Suella Braverman Says Risk of Terrorism ‘rising’ as Review Says Islamist Terror Is Primary Threat’. *Sky News*. 18.7.2023 - <https://news.sky.com/story/risk-of-terrorism-rising-says-home-secretary-suella-braverman-as-government-launches-review-of-counter-terror-12922821>.

37. ‘I Was Terrified’: Islamophobic Incidents up by 600% in UK since Hamas Attack’. *ITV News*. 9.11.2023 - <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-11-09/i-was-terrified-islamophobic-incidents-up-by-600-in-uk-since-hamas-attack>; ‘Responding to the Rise in Antisemitism and Islamophobia on University Campuses, Following Conflict in the Middle East’. *Student Minds*. 11.12.2023 - <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/latestnews/responding-to-the-rise-in-antisemitism-and-islamophobia-on-university-campuses-following-conflict-in-the-middle-east>.

mental increase in discrimination, vandalism, graffiti, and abusive behaviour was recorded in education settings since the outbreak of Israel-Hamas war.³⁸

Indicative incidents recorded during 2023:

- Teachers at the Michaela Community School reportedly interrupted praying students and banned the use of prayer mats.³⁹
- Four students at Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, were suspended after a copy of the Quran was damaged. The incident occurred when a Year 10 student brought the Islamic text to school as a dare during a video game challenge. The school suspended the students involved and planned to educate them on the importance of respecting all religions. A public meeting was held to address concerns, and West Yorkshire Police confirmed they were working with the school to address the situation.⁴⁰
- Following the Kettlethorpe incident, the Home Secretary Suella Braverman announced that new guidance would be drawn up that outlined children's protection from punishment over actions perceived to be blasphemous. After the refusal of the Department of Education to support this initiative, the Home Office subsequently backed down.⁴¹
- In early November, in the Woodford County High School for Girls in the London borough of Redbridge, police were called in to investigate a vandalism incident that caused significant distress to Muslim students, after Islamophobic graffiti was found in a toilet. According to images posted on social media, the graffiti said: "Death to Gaza, death to Arabs, death to Muslims, death to you".⁴²
- Apex Primary School in Ilford, London received a threatening letter referencing the Israeli bombardment of Gaza and targeting children. The school denounced discrimination and urged the community to report any suspicious behaviour.⁴³

38. 'Charities Report Rise in Antisemitism and Islamophobia at Schools in England'. *The Guardian*. 9.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/nov/09/charities-report-rise-in-antisemitism-and-islamophobia-at-schools-in-england>.

39. 'Michaela Petition Now at 4,323 Signatories. No Comment from School or Brent Council yet. Petition Call for Michaela School to Provide a Prayer Room for Students amid Allegations of 'disturbing' Treatment of Muslim Students'. *Wembley Matters*. 28.3.2023 - <https://wembleymatters.blogspot.com/2023/03/petition-call-for-michaela-school-to.html>.

40. 'Four Wakefield Pupils Suspended after Quran Damaged at School'. *BBC News*. 24.2.2023 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64757799>.

41. "We do not have blasphemy laws in Britain": Home Secretary Suella Braverman says 'everyone must 'accept this country's freedom of speech' after four pupils suspended after they caused 'slight damage' to a copy of the Quran. *The Daily Mail Online*. 4.3.2023 - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11819099/Suella-Braverman-wades-row-pupils-suspended-slight-damage-copy-Quran.html>; 'Home Office U-turn on blasphemy guidance'. *Schools Week*. 11.3.2023 - <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/home-office-u-turn-on-blasphemy-guidance/>

42. 'Charities Report Rise in Antisemitism and Islamophobia at Schools in England'. *The Guardian*. 9.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/nov/09/charities-report-rise-in-antisemitism-and-islamophobia-at-schools-in-england>.

43. Carter, Olivia. 'Ilford Islamic School Pleads for Help after Receiving Threatening Letter'. *Ilford Recorder*. 14.12.2023 - <https://www.ilfordrecorder.co.uk/news/23987514.ilford-islamic-school-calls-help-threatening-letter/>.

- A report published by Cage International has revealed that Muslim-background students face increasing repression in schools after October when they express support for the Palestinians. These involve the “forced removal of Palestine symbols or clothing in schools and workplaces”.⁴⁴

Politics

In 2023, the UK political debate was dominated by the issue of immigration. The government made the twin goals of overall drastic reduction in in-flow migration numbers and the barrier to ‘illegal’ immigration central tenets of its political discourse and programme. The publication of the official figures on immigration for 2023 showed that net migration increased significantly in 2023, driven overwhelmingly by arrivals from outside the EU. The overall level of migration remains well above pre-COVID levels and runs counter to the Conservative government’s long-term goal of drastically reducing migration to the UK. Predictably, however, the shift of the political mainstream to an anti-immigration rhetoric has benefited mostly the radical and extremist right, if not in strict electoral terms at least in terms of agenda-setting power and normalisation of its overall message.

A report published by HOPE not hate (HNH) found evidence that far-right engagement on migration has been steadily increasing as the government’s ‘Stop the Boats’ campaign ramped up. HNH found a 149% increase in messages on anti-migrant far-right channels on Telegram from 2021 to the first months of 2023. Far-right activity - especially online - spiked around key government announcements about immigration. In an example from May 2022, an announcement by Boris Johnson that 50 asylum seekers had been told they would be sent to Rwanda led to a 72% increase in messages about migration in far-right groups on Telegram. At the same time, far-right engagement with the debates on migration escalates in volume and intensity when media coverage increases. Articles in widely read tabloid newspapers like *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express*, *The Sun*, and local media outlets were shared in far-right anti-migrant discussions on Telegram, often alongside extreme, racist language. There is also a clear connection between off- and online activity: from anti-migrant activists filming people arriving on small boats along the south coast to the harassment of asylum seekers housed in hotels to anti-migrant demonstrations attended by hundreds of people, the far right is drawing crowds and building community support to a degree it has not managed in years. The anti-immigrant noise driven by the far right maps onto existing embedded prejudices against racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, fanning the flames of social conflict that have a significant effect on Islamophobic activity.⁴⁵ The

44. ‘New Report Exposes Scale of Palestine Repression at UK Schools and Workplaces’. *CAGE International*. 21.12.2023 - <https://www.cage.ngo/articles/new-report-exposes-scale-of-palestine-repression-at-uk-schools-and-workplaces>.

45. See ‘Stoking the Flames’. *Hope Not Hate*. 1.5.2023 - https://hopenothate.org.uk/2023/05/21/stoking_the_flames/

escalation of the war in Gaza has only made the situation worse, with fears about a potential displacement of refugees from the Middle East fuelling pan-European anti-immigration and Islamophobic trends.⁴⁶ This kind of lower-level and more locally based mobilisation in the UK has not benefited the Conservative Party electorally, which continues to lag behind in polls, but has strengthened support for radical right-wing parties like Reform UK. More alarmingly, there is evidence that the growing mobilisation of the far right on racist and Islamophobic platforms has been making steady inroads into mainstream constituencies, “winning the battle for the soul of the Conservative party” in particular, as more than half of the surveyed party members believe that Islam is a threat to British life and ‘no-go’ zones have proliferated in cities across Europe.⁴⁷ Therefore, more than even before, the rise of Islamophobia spans the mainstream-radical-extremist fault lines in UK politics and society, with the political mainstream increasingly embracing and normalising the rhetoric of the far right and the latter ‘piggybacking’ on mainstream anti-migrant rhetoric and hostile policy proposals to strengthen its presence and drive Islamophobia.

The UK Conservative government entered its thirteenth continuous year in power in 2023, in the shadow of a long history of serious concerns about its political stance vis-à-vis the country’s Muslim communities. Back in 2019, an independent review by Swaran Singh found that frequent leadership changes and instability within the Conservative Party hindered its progress in addressing Islamophobia. The 2023 follow-up update on the progress of actions to combat Islamophobia within the ranks of the Conservative Party found that, in spite of some progress made in the direction of implementing recommendations from the original 2021 report on handling allegations of anti-Muslim abuse within the party, the party continued to be plagued by a chaotic internal landscape that has reduced its capacity for more effective action.⁴⁸ These criticisms of insufficient progress and apparent lack of commitment to real change were echoed by Conservative MP Rehman Chishti, who accused the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of “writing off” engagement with British Muslim voters and failing to approach the challenge of Islamophobia in similar terms to other forms of racism, like antisemitism. Chishti claimed that Sunak broke one of his key leadership campaign promises to collaborate on tackling Islamophobia (in response to well-founded accusations that one of his predecessors, Boris Johnson, had fuelled Islamophobia with his ‘insensitive’ descriptions of veiled Muslim women as ‘letterboxes’ and ‘bank robbers’ dating back in 2018).

46. Rauhala, Emily. ‘As crisis unfolds in Gaza, Europe talks about tightening borders’. *Washington Post*. 2.11.2023 - <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/11/02/gaza-europe-migration-right>

47. Knowles, Nick. ‘Think Tories Are Islamophobic? You Don’t Know the Half of It – We Have the Figure’. *Guardian*. 28.2.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/28/tories-islamophobic-conservative-party-members-hope-not-hate>

48. James Smith. ‘The Labour Party Is Ignoring Britain’s Muslims. A Judge-Led Inquiry Won’t Change That’. *Jacobin*. 12.12.2023 - <https://jacobin.com/2023/12/labour-party-islamophobia-britain-muslims-judge-led-inquiry>

He also accused the prime minister of “writing off” engagement with British Muslim voters for political reasons.⁴⁹

The dark clouds of Islamophobia continued to linger over the Conservative Party. In April, the prime minister was cleared of breaching the ministerial code after an inquiry found “inconclusive evidence” about whether Mark Spencer, former Conservative chief whip, told MP and former minister Nusrat Ghani that her “Muslimness” played a role in her sacking in a reshuffle. Allies of Ghani have accused the Conservatives of a “cover-up” that gave the impression of failure to tackle Islamophobia.⁵⁰ The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) condemned Conservative London mayoral candidate Susan Hall’s remarks, who insinuated that London’s Jewish community is “frightened” of Mayor Sadiq Khan and reposted a social media post made by far-right commentator Katie Hopkins that referred to London as “Londonistan”, as “dog whistle Islamophobia”.⁵¹

The party has also faced criticism for embracing divisive ‘culture war’ rhetoric that brings it dangerously close to embracing the inflammatory rhetoric more akin to the country’s radical-right parties and far-right extremist groups. The pronounced anti-migrant discourse that has become a central plank of the government’s political platform under Sunak (a prominent example being the slogan ‘Stop the Boats’, referring to the flow of ‘illegal’ migrants crossing from France to the UK) was also highlighted by the anti-fascist and anti-racist advocacy group Hope not hate (HNN) as deeply objectionable language that “doubled down on a divisive agenda with dangerous consequences”.⁵² The HNN report made uncomfortable reading for everyone concerned about the growth and institutionalisation of racist tropes in the UK mainstream. It found that far-right engagement on migration was steadily increasing due to the government’s ‘Stop the Boats’ campaign, with a 149% increase in anti-migrant messages on the social platform Telegram in the period 2021-22 period. Moreover, there was clear evidence that far-right online activity spiked around key government announcements. Media coverage in tabloid outlets was also shared in far-right anti-migrant discussions on Telegram, often accompanied by extreme racist language. The Conservative politician Suella Braverman played a key role in normalising this hostile environ-

49. Adam Payne. 2023. ‘Tory MP Says Rishi Sunak Has Broken Promise To Tackle Islamophobia’. *Politics Home*, 7.12.2023 - <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/rishi-sunak-written-off-muslim-voters-says-tory-mp-rehman-chishti>

50. ‘Rishi Sunak says no further action against Mark Spencer over Nusrat Ghani sacking’. *The Guardian*. 6.4.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/apr/06/rishi-sunak-says-no-further-action-against-mark-spencer-over-nusrat-ghani-sacking>

51. ‘MCB Responds to Conservative London Mayoral Candidate Susan Hall’s Dog-Whistle Islamophobia’. *Muslim Council of Britain*. 3.10.2023 - <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-responds-to-conservative-london-mayoral-candidate-susan-halls-dog-whistle-islamophobia>

52. Nadeine Asbali. ‘UK: How Braverman’s Comments on ‘grooming Gangs’ Will Fuel Islamophobia’. *Middle East Eye*. 6.4.2023 - <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/uk-islamophobia-braverman-comments-grooming-gangs-fuel-how>

ment through her sustained anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric that marked her tenure as home secretary. The catalogue of Braverman's Islamophobic infractions is depressingly long (see also below). Commenting on a case of desecration of the Quran in a school (the incident is discussed below), she made public references to a community meeting captured on video as "more like a sharia law trial".⁵³ In April, she was heavily criticised for her comments suggesting that "grooming gangs" are overwhelmingly comprised of "British Pakistani males" who target "white English girls".⁵⁴ Her attacks on pro-Palestinian protesters following October 2023 were unremitting too: she referred to the protesters as "hate marchers" and "Islamists". Her comments were condemned as inflammatory, especially after a group of far-right protesters associated with the extremist Tommy Robinson used anti-immigrant slogans to disrupt the anniversary commemoration ceremony for the victims of WW1 at the London Cenotaph on 11 November.⁵⁵ Meanwhile the party's vice-chairman, Lee Anderson, repeatedly mixed xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric in his numerous outbursts in defence of an allegedly threatened Britishness.⁵⁶ All these alarming incidents coming from the very top of the government or the Conservative Party and many more from local politicians and activists, coupled with a more general lack of progress in the fight against Islamophobia among the party ranks identified by Singh's follow-up report, have resulted in calls for an investigation by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to shed further light on the Conservative Party's handling of Islamophobia, similar to its investigation into allegations of antisemitism within the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn.⁵⁷

The opposition Labour Party has fared better by comparison. Traditionally Muslim communities across the country have backed the party in elections and while this is unlikely to change in the forthcoming election of 2024, the number of Muslims who are considering voting for other parties has increased significantly in recent years, especially after the recent conflict in Gaza.⁵⁸ The party has formally adopted the APPG definition of Islamophobia and published a new Islamophobia complaints handbook

53. Lambert, Harry. 'Once upon a Time in Wakefield.' *New Statesman*. 25.3.2023 - <https://www.newstatesman.com/the-weekend-report/2023/03/inside-wakefield-koran-incident>

54. 'Suella Braverman Accused of Fuelling Far-Right Violence near Cenotaph'. *The Guardian*, 11.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/11/suella-braverman-accused-of-fuelling-far-right-violence-near-cenotaph>

55. 'Lee Anderson's Culture Wars: How the Conservative Party Is Flirting with Far-Right Hate to Appeal to Its Base'. *Byline Times*. 15.2.2023 - <https://bylinetimes.com/2023/02/15/lee-andersons-culture-wars-how-the-conservative-party-is-flirting-with-far-right-hate-to-appeal-to-its-base>. On Anderson's xenophobic stance see, for example, 'Lee Anderson Tells Migrants Refusing to Board Bibby Stockholm: 'If They Don't like Barges They Should F*** off Back to France'. *Daily Mail Online*. 8.8.2023 - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12383795/Lee-Anderson-migrants-Bibby-Stockholm-barges-France.html>

56. Shah, Naz. 'We Will Not Tolerate Islamophobia within Labour – as Our New Handbook Shows'. *LabourList*. 16.3.2023 - <https://labourlist.org/2023/03/we-will-not-tolerate-islamophobia-within-labour-as-our-new-handbook-shows>

57. Ford, Rob. 'Does the Israel-Gaza War Create Problems for Labour with Muslim Voters?'. *UK in a Changing Europe*. 29.11.2023 - <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/does-the-israel-gaza-war-create-problems-for-labour-with-muslim-voters>

58. 'Labour Are 'Institutionally Islamophobic', Says Labour MP'. *The National*. 20.11.2023 - <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23934912.mp-zarah-sultana-says-labour-institutionally-islamophobic/>.

to provide members with a comprehensive overview of their complaints system and how it works. This includes details on what constitutes Islamophobic behaviour and common Islamophobic tropes. The party has also introduced a new independent complaints process and a code of conduct on Islamophobia developed with organisations representing Muslim groups.⁵⁹ Nevertheless the party has faced criticism for its handling of issues related to British Muslims, particularly regarding Islamophobia within the party and its stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Critics have argued that despite Labour's efforts to address antisemitism under previous leadership, similar efforts have not been made to tackle Islamophobia. There are allegations that the party operates on the basis of a 'hierarchy of racism', placing more emphasis on antisemitism than Islamophobia or anti-black racism. This impression, highlighted in a 2022 report commissioned by the party, has been shared by many Muslim-background members of the Labour Party who express feeling unwelcome and often subject to dehumanising rhetoric.⁶⁰ Predictably all these feelings have grown stronger since October 2023, with one party MP claiming that Labour remains 'institutionally Islamophobic'.⁶¹ Concerns over the approach of the party leader, Keir Starmer, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and perceived indifference to the suffering of Palestinians have been prevalent among Muslim Labour MPs and MPs representing constituencies with significant Muslim populations. Many within the party, including the Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf, have advocated for an immediate ceasefire to halt the violence. Others went further in their criticism, expressing concern with Starmer's handling of the Israel-Palestine conflict, arguing that he has not adequately addressed concerns regarding Islamophobia within the party and has failed to strike a balance between supporting Israel's security concerns and acknowledging the suffering of Palestinians. In November, there was a significant number of resignations from the cabinet or even from the party over Starmer's approach to the conflict, and a notable number of Labour MPs defied party leadership to support a parliamentary amendment brought by the Scottish National Party (SNP) calling for an immediate ceasefire.⁶²

Scotland continued to buck the general UK trend in many respects. In March, the country elected the first Muslim prime minister in the history of the UK, Humza Yousaf, who also became the first Muslim leader of a western country.⁶³ Yousaf joined

59. 'Labour Accused of Still Not Engaging with 'hierarchy of Racism' Claims'. *The Guardian*. 18.3.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/17/labour-accused-still-not-engaging-hierarchy-racism-claims>

60. 'Keir Starmer Faces Growing Labour Rebellion over Stance on Gaza'. *The Guardian*. 8.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/08/keir-starmer-labour-rebellion-resignation-watch-gaza>.

61. Akhtar, Parveen and Peace, Timothy. 'Humza Yousaf: Scotland Gets a Muslim Leader in a Moment of Extraordinary Change for British Politics'. *The Conversation*. 1.3.2024 - <https://theconversation.com/humza-yousaf-scotland-gets-a-muslim-leader-in-a-moment-of-extraordinary-change-for-british-politics-202687>

62. 'Keir Starmer Faces Growing Labour Rebellion over Stance on Gaza'. *The Guardian*. 8.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/08/keir-starmer-labour-rebellion-resignation-watch-gaza>.

63. 'Humza Yousaf Is the First Muslim Leader of Scotland—or Any Western Democracy. Here's What to Know'. *Time Magazine*. 29.3.2023 - <https://time.com/6266199/humza-yousaf-scotland-leadership-vote/>

Anas Sarwar, leader of the Scottish Labour Party since 2021, as representative of the country's Muslim communities at the very top of Scottish politics. In addition, for years, the Scottish Parliament has an impressively active Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice, producing over the years a number of important reports on the state of Islamophobia and the measures needed to address it. Still, in its 2023 update on the fight against Islamophobia, the CPG found that three-quarters of Muslims in Scotland consider Islamophobia a regular or everyday issue in Scottish society. This emphasises the widespread nature of Islamophobia in Scotland, affecting a significant portion of the Muslim population. The report also highlighted the impact of Islamophobia on individuals and communities, particularly Muslim women, who are more likely to be targets of Islamophobia compared to men. A significant 79% of Muslim respondents expressed fear of experiencing Islamophobia. Adding to the concern, 78% of Muslim respondents believe that Islamophobia is worsening in Scotland. This perception is even more pronounced among Muslim residents of Glasgow, with 82% believing Islamophobia is on the rise in their city. Finally, the report highlighted the role of media in perpetuating Islamophobia, with 85% of Muslim respondents believing that broadcast media contributes to Islamophobia. This sentiment was echoed in the case of print media, with 89% of survey respondents and 93% of Muslim respondents feeling that print media promotes Islamophobia.⁶⁴ A separate study of attitudes to Islamophobia in smaller urban settlements across Scotland found that Islamophobia follows distinct local patterns and is not directly related to the density of Muslim settlements in each area.⁶⁵

On 15 March, the UN-designated International Day to Combat Islamophobia was marked by a variety of organisations and political figures across the UK. The day coincided with the fourth anniversary of the Christchurch attack in New Zealand, as a poignant reminder of how much work remains to be done to combat anti-Muslim racism in the fight against all expressions of Islamophobia. This was the first time that the occasion was observed, following the recent UN resolution sponsored by 60 states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation⁶⁶ that has been nevertheless opposed by a coalition of western and other states and organisations.⁶⁷ The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) led calls to the government to recognize formally the annual occasion: at an event organized at the UK Parliament and co-hosted by the Labour MP Afzal Khan, political figures from across the political spectrum (including the 'father of the House of Commons' Conservative MP Sir Peter Bottom-

64. Hopkins. 'Scotland's Islamophobia - Update 2023', 2.

65. Bagheri, Reza. 'Islamophobia in Scottish Towns and Small Cities'. *Identities* 31/3 (2023): 369–87 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1070289X.2023.2254572>

66. UN General Assembly. 'Resolution 76/254 adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2022: International Day to Combat Islamophobia' - <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/288/70/pdf/n2228870.pdf>

67. 'France, EU and India opposed creation of UN day to combat Islamophobia. *Middle East Eye*. 17.3.2022 - <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/un-islamophobia-combat-day-india-france-eu-opposed>

ley) declared their determination to make “a bold statement of unity and recognised that we must all work together to tackle Islamophobia at its root”.⁶⁸ The Aziz Foundation joined the calls for officially enshrining the day in UK law and followed it, in April, with the launch of a campaign to end Islamophobia.⁶⁹ It came as no surprise that the UK government, so persistently opposed to the adoption of an official definition of Islamophobia, chose not to mark the event.



Figure 2: Event at the UK Parliament to mark the UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia (15 March 2023)
Source: Muslim Council of Britain, <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-co-hosts-event-in-uk-parliament-to-mark-1st-un-international-day-to-combat-islamophobia/>

Media

The persistent negative portrayal of Islam and Muslim life across UK traditional and new media has been highlighted in a report published in 2023. The report outlined how UK media have vilified and demonised Muslim communities for decades through inaccurate reporting, misleading headlines, inflammatory language, and the reproduction of harmful stereotypes. It called for a stronger representation of Muslims in British journalism (currently at a lamentable 0.4%) and for new positive narratives that pay tribute to the positive contribution of Muslims to UK society. But it also found that, even Muslim journalists have faced considerable pressure to conform to a ‘white gaze’ in order to cater to a non-Muslim audience when reporting on their communities, rather than being allowed to present authentic perspectives.⁷⁰

Similar findings were included in the 2023 update on Islamophobia in Scotland. This report showed that 85% of Muslim respondents believed that broadcast media promoted Islamophobia and 89% believed print media did the same. Not only have these findings been corroborated by independent research over the past years, but they have also shaped a negative media perception among Muslims that results

68. ‘MCB co-hosts event in UK parliament to mark 1st UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia’. *MCB*. 15.3.2023 - <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-co-hosts-event-in-uk-parliament-to-mark-1st-un-international-day-to-combat-islamophobia/>

69. ‘The Aziz Foundation supports UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia’. *Aziz Foundation*, 20.5.2023 - <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/the-aziz-foundation-supports-un-international-day-to-combat-islamophobia/>; ‘Asif Aziz: We must enshrine the UN day to combat Islamophobia in law’. *The Times*. 20.3.2023 - <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/article/asif-aziz-we-must-enshrine-the-un-day-to-combat-islamophobia-in-law-3b6g9k36h>

70. Abdi, Sundus. ‘Islamophobia In The British Media: It’s Time To Tell New Stories’. *Journo Resources*. 18.3.2023 - <https://www.journoresources.org.uk/islamophobia-british-media-muslim-journalists/>

in deep(ening) distrust among British Muslims towards the media's portrayal of their communities. The Scottish Parliament Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Challenging Racial and Religious Prejudice recommended that all journalists receive mandatory training on the media's role in perpetuating Islamophobia, with particular focus on the use of visual imagery. The CPG also urged editors to consult regularly with the Muslim communities to ensure accurate and respectful representation.⁷¹

The lack of balanced and accurate reporting on issues affecting Muslims, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has further contributed to Islamophobia in the media. Anti-Muslim bias manifests as hostility towards Palestinians and attempts to silence pro-Palestinian voices. Sayeeda Warsi, a member of the House of Lords and former Conservative Party chair, criticised what she perceives as the suppression and demonisation of Muslim perspectives in the UK, particularly regarding Middle Eastern conflicts. In a keynote speech delivered at the University of Leeds, Warsi highlighted incidents where Muslim voices were silenced or discredited when expressing opinions on the Israel-Palestine conflict.⁷²

The critical role of mass media in shaping public perceptions about Muslim communities, values, and lives is of course well-documented. Evidence provided by numerous reports in the previous years has shown that most news outlets in the UK have demonstrated significant bias against Islam and Muslims.⁷³ Bias typically predominated in right-wing media, both tabloid and broadsheet, with the *Spectator* topping the list.

One particular example of Islamophobia in the UK media concerned the coverage of the 'grooming gangs' issue. The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) complained to the media regulator Ofcom about GB News' related coverage, reiterating conspiracy theories about alleged suppression of the coverage in mainstream media. In September, the CfMM published an extensive report on how media engaged with the government discourse on 'grooming gangs'. The report contained a long list of Islamophobic tropes promoted by various news outlets on the issue, coupled with misleading information and anti-Muslim stereotypes.⁷⁴ Braverman's decision to lend support to this trope and announce a 'grooming gang' taskforce in April⁷⁵ was prefaced by her contentious statements about British Pakistanis and these 'gangs' in GB News and BBC

71. Hopkins. 'Scotland's Islamophobia - Update 2023' - https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Scotlands_Islamophobia_2023_Update.pdf

72. 'Former Conservative Party Chair Baroness Sayeeda Warsi to Argue 'Muslims Don't Matter' to Politicians and Media in Damning Speech'. *Byline Times*. 19.10.2023 - <https://bylinetimes.com/2023/10/19/former-conservative-party-chair-baroness-sayeeda-warsi-to-argue-muslims-dont-matter-to-politicians-and-media-in-damning-speech/>

73. Hanif, Faisal. 'British Media's Coverage of Muslims and Islam (2018-2020)'. *Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM)*, 2021 - <https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CfMM-Annual-Report-2018-2020-digital.pdf>

74. CfMM. 'British TV Reporting On The 'Grooming Gangs' Taskforce'. September 2023 - <https://cfmm.org.uk/resources/publication/cfmm-british-tv-reporting-on-the-grooming-gangs-taskforce-2023>.

75. 'PM to Clamp down on Grooming Gangs'. *GOV.UK*. 2.4.2023 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-to-clamp-down-on-grooming-gangs>.

News. It was both preceded and followed by her penning of a series of controversial articles on outlets such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Spectator*, in which she made a direct link between these ‘gangs’ and the Pakistani origin of the perpetrators.⁷⁶ Subsequent complaints about the factual basis of Braverman’s statements that the alleged perpetrators of this crime were “almost all British-Pakistani” resulted in a correction published by the newspaper in September.⁷⁷ Braverman’s views and the way they were covered by particular sectors of the media were widely criticised, including from the Conservative MP Rehman Chishti, who found them irresponsible and deeply insensitive.⁷⁸

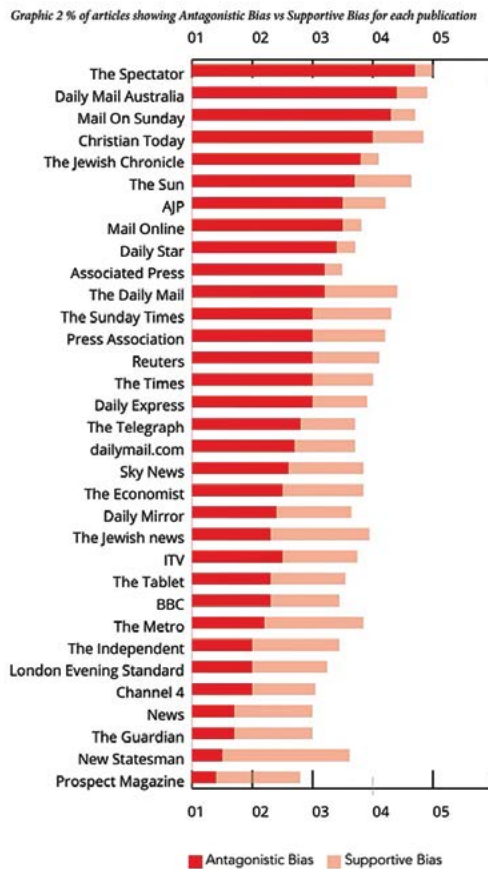


Figure 3: Percentage of antagonistic-versus-supportive bias vis-à-vis Muslims and Islam in articles published by British media (2018-20). **Source:** Hanif, Faisal, ‘British Media’s Coverage of Muslims and Islam (2018-2020)’, Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM). 2021, 39-40, <https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CfMM-Annual-Report-2018-2020-digital.pdf>

76. Braverman, Suella. ‘The Truth Can’t Be Racist’. *The Spectator*. 19.4.2023 - <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-truth-cant-be-racist/>; ‘Suella Braverman: My mission to ensure there really is no hiding place for the evil gangs grooming our vulnerable young girls’. *Mail on Sunday*. 1.4.2023 - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-11928629/SUELLA-BRAVERMAN-mission-ensure-really-no-hiding-place-gangs-grooming-young-girls.html>

77. CfMM. ‘British TV Reporting On The ‘Grooming Gangs’ Taskforce’. September 2023, 8.

78. Chishti, Rehman. Calling out Braverman’s Views on Race and Abuse Is a Vital Part of My Conservative Values’. *The Guardian*. 30.4.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/apr/30/calling-out-suella-braverman-views-on-race-and-abuse-vital-part-of-my-conservative-values>.

Justice System

Justice has been another pivotal area at the heart of the debates on Islamophobia in the UK. Long-standing trends have continued to frame the debate - among them, anti-Muslim institutional bias inside police forces; over-representation of Muslims in the prison system (18% of all inmates according to data published in 2023) and concerns about the conditions of their detainment; disproportionate impact of stop-and-search powers on Muslims populations. A report on the experience of young Muslims in the UK criminal justice system published by the Osmani Trust in October provided invaluable insights into the backgrounds and drivers of those convicted, as well as the challenges facing them in detention and after release.⁷⁹

The publication of the much-anticipated review of PREVENT, the government's controversial anti-radicalisation programme, did nothing to address the long-standing concerns of Muslim communities. In the past, PREVENT was accused of multi-faceted anti-Muslim bias (its referral system disproportionately affecting young Muslims in particular; its disproportionate focus on 'Islamist terrorism'); and normalising and embedding anti-Muslim discrimination in key public services, such as education and health.⁸⁰ When the government announced the programme's review in 2021, it appointed William Shawcross, a former director of the Henry Jackson Society who has repeatedly made negative comments about Islam, to head the review process.⁸¹ This decision shattered any remaining illusions that the review would deliver anything positive for the Muslim communities in the UK. Consequently human rights organisations boycotted the process.⁸² However, when the review was published in February 2023, its content confirmed some of the worst fears of PREVENT's critics. In line with the government's recent efforts to whip up a narrative of an existential security threat to the country, the review claimed that the UK had "failed to tackle the ideological beliefs behind Islamist extremism" and recommended a shift of government focus away from far-right extremism and towards 'Islamist extremism', even though, as mentioned earlier, far-right ideologies have consistently generated a higher number of referrals.⁸³ The review also concluded that the PREVENT duty was particu-

79. 'Rebuilding Lives: Young Muslims from the Criminal Justice System to Community Resettlement'. *Osmani Trust*. October 2023 - https://www.osmanitrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/OT_Rebuilding-Lives-Report_Final-PDF-version.pdf

80. 'This is the thought police: The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights'. *Amnesty International*. 22.5.2024 - <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/prevent>; 'Written evidence' submitted by the Community Policy Forum, May 2023 - <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/120870/pdf>

81. 'William Shawcross's Selection for Prevent Role Strongly Criticised'. *The Guardian*. 26.1.2021 - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jan/26/william-shawcross-selection-for-prevent-role-strongly-criticised>.

82. 'Hundreds of Islamic Groups Boycott Prevent Review over Choice of Chair'. *The Guardian*. 17.3.21 - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/17/hundreds-islamic-groups-boycott-prevent-review-william-shawcross-protest>.

83. 'Review of UK Prevent Strategy to Call for More Focus on Islamist Terrorism'. *The Guardian*. 7.2.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/07/review-of-uk-prevent-strategy-to-call-for-more-focus-on-islamist-terrorism>; Mortimer, Gavin. 'Will the Prevent Review Change Our Fear about 'Islamophobia'?'. *The Specta-*

larly effective in schools, citing the successful integration of radicalisation awareness into safeguarding efforts and robust support from Home Office and Department for Education leaders. This assertion flew in the face of evidence of PREVENT’s detrimental impacts on educational and public health settings, many of which have been reviewed in past iterations of this report. In a damning judgement of the review, Amnesty International argued that the findings did nothing to reverse PREVENT’s record of “specifically targeting Muslim communities and activists fighting for social justice and a host of crucial international issues”. Amnesty reiterated the programme’s “disastrous consequences for many people; eroding freedom of expression, clamping down on activism, creating a compliant generation and impacting on individual rights enshrined in law”.⁸⁴

One further aspect of the Shawcross review merits mention. The final report dutifully reproduced biased narratives that have for long formed the basis of the government’s discourse on Islamophobia.⁸⁵ The text of the review is replete with references to alleged connections between blasphemy narratives in the UK and hard-line ‘Islamist’ groups, highlighting the ‘violence associated with accusations of blasphemy and apostasy’ as an area of particular importance in countering extremism’. The review also claimed that “the ideological threat of blasphemy’ needed to be addressed due to the “serious challenge it poses to our national culture of free speech” and to public safety.⁸⁶ The case of the grammar school in Batley, Yorkshire, where, in 2021, a teacher had to receive police protection after he showed his class a cartoon of Mohammed during a lesson on free speech, was raised by Shawcross as being of particular concern. One of his review’s 34 recommendations, which the Home Secretary predictably accepted, was to improve the understanding of ‘blasphemy’ as part of the broader Islamist threat. This recommendation proposed that the Homeland Security Group conduct research into understanding and countering Islamist violence, incitement, and intimidation linked to ‘blasphemy’, and incorporate a pro-free speech narrative into counter-narrative and community project work. Using the slogan of ‘free speech’ to stifle debate on Islamophobia or indeed to block the adoption of the APPG definition has been the government’s favourite trope for years – a trope that

tor. 8.2.2023 - <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/will-the-prevent-review-change-our-fear-of-being-seen-as-islamophobic/>

84. ‘UK: Shawcross Review of Prevent Is ‘Deeply Prejudiced and Has No Legitimacy’. *Amnesty International UK*. 8.2.2023 - <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-shawcross-review-prevent-deeply-prejudiced-and-has-no-legitimacy>. See also Amnesty’s report ‘This is Thought-Police: The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights’. *Amnesty International*, November 2023 - [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2023-11/Amnesty%20UK%20Prevent%20report%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/2023-11/Amnesty%20UK%20Prevent%20report%20(1).pdf)

85. Campbell, Alastair. ‘Alastair Campbell’s Diary: Suella Braverman Got the Prevent Report She Wanted’. *The New European*. 15.2.2023 - <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/alastair-campbells-diary-suella-braverman-got-the-prevent-report-she-wanted/>.

86. ‘Prevent Review Calls for Greater Focus on ‘blasphemy’ Accusations’. *National Secular Society*. 16.2.2023 - <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2023/02/prevent-review-calls-for-greater-focus-on-blasphemy-accusations>.

has been sustained by a chorus of sympathetic think tanks (e.g. Policy Exchange), organisations (e.g. National Secular Society), and media (e.g. *Telegraph*, *Spectator*). It now seems that the Shawcross review has aligned the debate on PREVENT with this same insidious narrative.

The distressing irony is that, since October 2023 the same narrative of ‘free speech’ has flown in the face of compelling evidence of orchestrated suppression of protest when it came to support for the Palestinian cause. An analysis by Cage International found that, of the 214 cases handled by the group between October and December 2023, spanning 118 school and college cases, 35 workplace cases, 35 protest and related cases, 13 university cases, and 13 mosque cases, the overwhelming majority involved clampdown of pro-Palestinian activity.⁸⁷ The Home Secretary Suella Braverman waded in the debate, calling the pro-Palestinian demonstrations ‘hate marches’ and announcing a hardening of the UK’s laws about ‘disruptive protest’.⁸⁸

Internet

The effects of the ever-closer interaction between digital and physical spheres⁸⁹ was felt even more strongly in 2023. Especially after the outbreak of the conflict in the Middle East in the autumn, where the local, national, and global realms also converged, social media became one of the major sources of anti-Muslim hate campaigns, with more than half of the recorded hate crime incidents occurring online.⁹⁰ The way that on- and offline Islamophobia is mutually reinforced was highlighted in the case of the Quran desecration at the Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield (for the incident see above, ‘Education’). The incident took place on Wednesday, 22 February and on the following Friday an open meeting took place at the local mosque (Jamia Masjid Swafia) to discuss the incident and relieve community tensions. Clips and stills from that meeting showing the mother of the boy initially accused of the act wearing a headscarf and sitting new to community leaders allegedly pleading for her son’s safety against the backdrop of death threats, soon spread across social media and was picked up by Islamophobic outlets, where it morphed into something that it was not.⁹¹ Accusations of a ‘Maoist show trial’ and of ‘Sharia law’ gathered mo-

87. ‘New Report Exposes Scale of Palestine Repression at UK Schools and Workplaces’. *CAGE International*. 21.12.2023 - <https://www.cage.ngo/articles/new-report-exposes-scale-of-palestine-repression-at-uk-schools-and-workplaces>.

88. Mureithi, Anita. ‘How the UK Government Rebranded Protesters as Extremists’. *OpenDemocracy*. 11.3.2024 - <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/uk-palestine-protesters-extremism-islamophobia-gove-makram-ali/>.

89. Ahmanideen, Gabriel, & Iner, Derya. ‘The interaction between online and offline Islamophobia and anti-mosque campaigns: The literature review with a case study from an anti-mosque social media page’. *Sociology Compass*, 18/1 (2023) - <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/soc4.13160>

90. ‘Greatest Rise in Reported Anti-Muslim Hate Cases to Tell MAMA since Oct 7th’. *Tell Mama*. 21.2.2024 - <https://tellmamauk.org/greatest-rise-in-reported-anti-muslim-hate-cases-to-tell-mama-since-oct-7th/>

91. ‘Boy Who ‘accidentally Dropped a Copy of the Quran at Wakefield School’ Receives ‘Death Threats’: Teenager Is Left ‘absolutely Petrified’ by Messages, Says Mother’. *Daily Mail Online*. 2.3.2023 - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11809601/Boy-dropped-copy-Quran-Wakefield-school-left-petrified-death-threats.html>.

mentum, transcending the mainstream-extreme divide. Once again the Home Secretary Suella Braverman rode the wave of engineered online outcry: she reiterated Islamophobic tropes about a show that ‘looked more like a sharia law trial’ held ‘in front of an all-male crowd’.⁹²

The conflict in Gaza provided the power keg for an explosion of online disinformation targeting Muslims. The noise war across social media platforms, whereby more sensational stories spreading faster and shared by the highest number of users in order to set the agenda of the public debate, spiked in the weeks and months after the October attacks. A study conducted by the Centre for Media Monitoring about media coverage of the conflict for the period between October and November 2023 found that both on- and offline news outlets were three times less likely to present Palestinian perspectives on the conflict than Israeli ones. Anti-Muslim biases abounded in the coverage of atrocities, with emotive terms like ‘slaughter’ or ‘massacre’ eleven times more likely to be used to describe Israeli victims, compared to Palestinians.⁹³ In the era of peak-social media and instant online sharing, stories such as the one regarding the alleged beheading of forty babies by Hamas travelled fast and wide, promoted by news outlets and shared by individuals, groups and bots on all social media platforms. The particular story made it swiftly to the pages of widely read newspapers⁹⁴ and was even quoted by the US President Joe Biden.⁹⁵ Not only UK social media users but also media outlets picked up on the story⁹⁶ and used it to reinforce their familiar Islamophobic tropes about alleged left-wing pro-Palestinian activists eager to support ‘terrorist’ Hamas while also subscribing to the elimination of Israel.⁹⁷

The slippage between on- and offline hate was clearly demonstrated in the case of the Labour MP Apsana Begum. Begum, the first and only member of parliament wearing the hijab, was forced to leave the Labour Party conference in October on personal safety grounds after a coordinated campaign of misinformation regarding her support for Palestine. The Conservative Party weaponized the matter, with its chairperson Greg Hands writing to the Labour Party demanding that Begum be expelled because she allegedly expressed her ‘solidarity++with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

92. ‘We Do Not Have Blasphemy Laws in Britain’: Home Secretary Suella Braverman Says ‘everyone Must ‘Accept This Country’s Freedom of Speech’ after Four Pupils Suspended after They Caused ‘Slight Damage’ to a Copy of the Quran’. *Daily Mail Online*. 3.3.2023 - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11819099/Suella-Braverman-wades-row-pupils-suspended-slight-damage-copy-Quran.html>.

93. ‘CfMM Report ‘Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24’. *Centre For Media Monitoring*. 6.3.2024 - <https://cfmm.org.uk/resources/publication/cfmm-report-media-bias-gaza-2023-24/>

94. ‘Hamas Slaughtered Babies and Children in Kfar Aza Kibbutz Massacre’. *The Telegraph*. 10.10.2023 - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/10/10/babies-killed-hamas-attacks-kibbutz-israel/>.

95. ‘Biden Reportedly Ignored Staff Caution on ‘Beheaded Israeli Babies’’. *Al Jazeera*. 27.11.2023 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/biden-ignored-staff-warning-on-hamas-beheading-babies-claim-report>

96. ‘Fake UK News Reports about Gaza to Be Reported to Press Regulator.’ *Islam Channel*. 3.4.2023 - <https://islamchannel.tv/fake-uk-news-reports-about-gaza-to-be-reported-to-press-regulator/>.

97. ‘Appeasing Hamas: Why We Need Muscular Liberalism’. *TheArticle*. 16.10.2023 - <https://www.thearticle.com/appeasing-hamas-why-we-need-muscular-liberalism>

on social media. Later, Hands used X to launch a public attack against the Labour Party for not taking action to remove Begum – an attack that was followed by a torrent of Islamophobic and misogynistic comments directed at Begum that continued well after the incident.⁹⁸ That an MP felt threatened enough to cancel their appearance at the annual conference of their party and that the online attack was instigated by the chair of the governing party highlight how little the current government has done to support the fight against Islamophobia and to control online misinformation.



Figure 4: Conservative attack on Labour Party for not suspending MP Apsana Begum. **Source:** X, October 9, 2023.

X has steadily emerged as the platform of choice for the dissemination of anti-Muslim comment. Formerly known as Twitter, it had already for years topped the charts in this respect before it was taken over by Elon Musk and rebranded as a supposed crusade of ‘free speech’; and the UK has always been one of the main sources of such disinformation.⁹⁹ Only a month after the October attack, the number of anti-Muslim content on the platform increased more than fourfold.¹⁰⁰ The hashtag

98. ‘MP: I’m facing serious death threats and torrent of Islamophobic abuse’. *The Independent*. 7.11.2023 - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/government-islamophobic-david-amess-labour-muslim-b2443429.html>

99. ‘Werleman, CJ. 2022. “Twitter Hate: 86 Percent of Anti-Muslim Content Comes from US, UK, India”. *TRT World*. 15.9.2023 - <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/twitter-hate-86-percent-of-anti-muslim-content-comes-from-us-uk-india-12784562>.

100. ‘Increase in the number of anti-Muslim keywords in posts on X (formerly Twitter) between October 7 and 13, 2023’. *Statista*. 22.5.2024 - <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1465692/growth-anti-muslim-hate-speech-on-x/>

#DayofJihad was weaponised by far-right Islamophobic trolls in mid-October to unleash a new wave of global disinformation targeting Muslims and Islam.¹⁰¹ In November, the platform took the decision to reinstate Katie Hopkins and Tommy Robinson as users, two stars of the UK's extreme Islamophobic scene previously permanently banned by Twitter.¹⁰²

X is by no means the only platform to have singularly failed to moderate dangerous fake news that feeds into spikes in hate crime.¹⁰³ Yet it has been singled out for criticism for its increasing failure to do so in the past year or so. Research by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate found that 96% of inflammatory anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish posts remained on the platform even a week later.¹⁰⁴ Alternative social media platforms favoured by far-right activists also recorded a massive spike in Islamophobic content following 7 October and, while the number of posts have since decreased, it remains well above the pre-October levels and has already generated significant traction in terms of fake news, not to mention the devastating impact it has had on offline hate crime and violent attacks.¹⁰⁵

The year 2023 saw the approval of the long-awaited Online Safety Bill, which became an act in October.¹⁰⁶ Touted by the government as the legislation that would make the UK the 'safest place in the world to go online', it was heavily criticised for doing nothing to protect Muslim communities and individuals from online hate and abuse. Criticisms focused on the lack of transparency and accountability of the scrutiny mechanisms, on the multiple exceptions that it introduced in the case of 'established news media' (including their online 'Comments' sections which in the past have functioned as hotbeds of hate campaigns), on the significant powers granted to the Secretary of State, and, of course, on the lack of clarity regarding what would be considered anti-Muslim online content given the government's refusal to accept an official definition of Islamophobia.¹⁰⁷

101. Gilbert, David. 'Rumors of a 'Global Day of Jihad' Have Unleashed a Dangerous Wave of Disinformation'. *Wired*. 13.10.2023 - <https://www.wired.com/story/day-of-jihad-disinformation-israel-palestine/>.

102. 'Katie Hopkins and Tommy Robinson Thank Elon Musk for Reinstating Them on X'. *The Guardian*. 6.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/nov/06/x-elon-musk-reinstating-katie-hopkins-tommy-robinson>.

103. 'Lambon, Stuart. 2022. "Big Tech Platforms Fail to Act on 89% of Anti-Muslim Hate Speech, New Study Finds". *Center for Countering Digital Hate*. 17.5.2022 - <https://counterhate.com/blog/big-tech-platforms-fail-to-act-on-89-of-anti-muslim-hate-speech-new-study-finds/>

104. 'X Fails to Remove Antisemitic and Islamophobic Hate Speech - Report.' *Euronews*. 15.11.2023 - <https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/11/15/x-is-failing-to-moderate-antisemitic-and-islamophobic-hate-speech-according-to-a-new-repor>.

105. 'Use of Words, Phrases and Hashtags Associated with Anti-Muslim Mobilisation Surges amid Israel-Gaza Conflict'. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. 2.11.2023 - https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/use-of-words-phrases-and-hashtags-associated-with-anti-muslim-mobilisation-surges-amid-israel-gaza-conflict/

106. 'Britain Makes Internet Safer, as Online Safety Bill Finished and Ready to Become Law'. *GOV.UK*. 19.9.2023 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/britain-makes-internet-safer-as-online-safety-bill-finished-and-ready-to-become-law>.

107. 'Online Safety Bill: Divisive Internet Rules Become Law'. *BBC News*. 26.10.2023 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-67221691>; 'The Online Safety Bill: Insufficient Measures Against Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Content'. *Muslim Engagement and Development*. 22.6.2023 - <https://www.mend.org.uk/the-on>

Central Figures in the Islamophobia Network

Not so much a ‘network’ as an orchestra made up of important willing soloists, the mainstream Islamophobic scene in the UK came of age because it found its undisputed maestro. Suella Braverman, became home secretary in September 2022 having served as Attorney General before. She was eventually sacked in November 2023, but not before having succeeded in dominating the political debate on immigration, Islamophobia, and human rights. Her thirteen-month tenure as home secretary was as controversial and inflammatory as she would have no doubt wished it to be. With combative zeal and taboo-breaking insouciance she intervened in almost all debates touching on the rights of UK Muslims, took a dizzying number of contentious decisions and initiatives; defied criticisms from the left but also from more moderate voices from within her party; and received the accolades of the radical right for her stance on immigration, deportation, public order, international law, and foreign policy.¹⁰⁸

Braverman has already fared prominently in many sections of this year’s report. She made controversial statements about the ethnicity of grooming gang members, claiming that they are “almost all British-Pakistani”. She defended these comments as “unfashionable facts” and argued it was not racist to speak “plain truths”. She has been a prominent critic of what she perceives as ‘woke’ ideology in the UK. In an article for the *Daily Mail*, she claimed that diversity, equality, and inclusion have become a new ‘religion’ in Britain, whereby self-appointed ‘witch-finders’ feel entitled to conduct public inquisitions.¹⁰⁹ She defended vigorously the government’s ‘Stop the Boats’ policy platform and lent full support to the so-called Rwanda plan’ for deporting ‘illegal’ immigrants. Her stance brought her into direct conflict with the UK courts and especially the European Court of Human Rights, all of which rejected the plan as violating international human rights law. Braverman has repeatedly expressed her strong support for the long-standing campaign of radical pro-Brexit Conservatives for the UK to leave the European Convention on Human Rights and the jurisdiction of the ECHR, seeing this as necessary to restore ‘full sovereignty’ to the UK that would allow the government to address issues related to illegal migration and asylum seekers. In her last dramatic act as home secretary before being sacked from the government, she took a hard line against pro-Palestine demonstrations. She called for ‘further action’ to be taken against these marches, describing them as

line-safety-bill-insufficient-measures-against-islamophobia-and-anti-muslim-content/. Cf. ‘Press ‘Release: Online Safety Bill Will Fail to Protect Muslim Communities’. *Community Policy Forum*. 31.5.2022 - <https://communitypolicyforum.com/press-release-online-safety-bill/>

108. ‘Suella Braverman Has Gone, but She Proved That Hateful Xenophobia Is Never Far from the Surface in Britain’. *The Guardian*. 13.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/13/suella-braverman-islamophobia-britain-muslim-home-secretary>.

109. ‘The Absurdities of Suella Braverman’s ‘War on Woke’. *New Statesman*. New Statesman. 12.6.2022 - <https://www.newstatesman.com/comment/2022/08/suella-braverman-war-on-woke>

tainting “the streets of London... with hate, violence, and antisemitism”.¹¹⁰ She also openly accused the police of ‘double standards’ and favouritism towards what she called ‘pro-Palestinian mobs’.¹¹¹ But her taboo-breaking knack reached its terrifying crescendo when she addressed a side-event at the Conservative Party conference in Manchester in September. In a controversial speech likened to the infamous 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech delivered by the firebrand Conservative MP Enoch Powell, she focused on what she called an ‘existential challenge’ posed by a ‘hurricane’ of refugees and asylum seekers, claiming that 100 million people around the world qualify for asylum in the UK and ‘they are coming’. She also attacked multiculturalism, ‘woke’ culture, and even the UN’s 1951 Refugee Convention, making a stream of misleading claims.¹¹²

Braverman’s tornado-like pass from the Home Office would have made very little sense without a wide audience of sympathetic media pundits, political colleagues on the right of the UK political spectrum, and disparate campaign groups who have adopted Islamophobic stances to promote their own - very different - agendas. Her political priorities, discourses, and the ideas that underpinned them had little original content. But Braverman broke new ground *in spite of* the banality of her xenophobic, nationalist, and anti-Muslim platforms because she managed to align effectively, if not partially, the ‘free speech’ brigades, the secularist coalition,¹¹³ the populist ultranationalists (even within the Conservative Party) who at least for a decade have campaigned on a platform of sovereignty and xenophobia, and sectors of the radical right whose anti-Muslim views intersected with her weaponisation of Islamophobia as a personal vehicle for a future party leadership campaign. Whether her extreme views are genuine or mere political positioning, her inflammatory language and taboo-breaking demeanour have given a sense of united purpose to the otherwise disparate political and social forces that have supported her views. If she is not destined for a new round of political supremacy in the ranks of the Conservative right, she has definitely succeeded in normalising, embedding, and reinforcing an anti-Muslim narrative that fits her vision of anti-woke Britain. No wonder that her views received enthusiastic endorsement from the Policy Exchange right-

110. ‘Suella Braverman Calls for ‘further Action’ against pro-Palestine Marches’. *The Guardian*. 12.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/12/suella-braverman-calls-for-further-action-against-pro-palestine-marches>.

111. ‘Suella Braverman Accuses Police of Double Standards on Rallies’. *The Guardian*. 8.11.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/nov/08/suella-braverman-accuses-police-of-double-standards-on-rallies>.

112. ‘Suella Braverman Claims ‘hurricane’ of Mass Migration Coming to UK’. *The Guardian*. 3.10.2023 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/oct/03/suella-braverman-claims-hurricane-of-mass-migration-coming-to-uk>.

113. The anti-Muslim activities of secular organisations such as the National Secular Society (NSS) were amply demonstrated this year when a campaign against the government’s decision to fund the Green Lane Masjid and Community Centre for its Youth Investment Fund was successful in cancelling the grant in August - see ‘Government Funding to Charity Halted after Problematic Videos Emerge’. *Civil Society*. 25.8.2023 - <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/government-funding-to-charity-halted-after-problematic-videos-emerge.html>.

wing think tank (which authored reports on ‘blasphemy’ in schools, on the legality of the government’s immigration policy, and on ‘Islamist’ views on religious clothing in the UK).¹¹⁴ No wonder her views found enthusiastic outlets in parts of mainstream right-wing media, one of which claimed that she represented the views of the ‘silent majority’.¹¹⁵ No wonder her ‘freedom of expression’ critique of the APPG Islamophobia definition has been applauded by pro-secular organisations, who embraced Braverman’s ‘blasphemy’ guidance and aligned with her attacks on ‘Islamist’ influence on British society.¹¹⁶ Within a very short period of time, Braverman gave official voice, aligned politically, and supercharged a broad network of mainstream Islamophobia. The dawn of 2024 found her (temporarily perhaps) on the political margins, but her shadow is still widely felt.

Observed Civil Society and Political Assessments and Initiatives

The contribution of Muslim civil society to Britain was acknowledged in its full diversity in the ‘British Muslim Society Report’ for 2023. Muslim civil society organisations play a central role in combating Islamophobia in the UK, in campaigning for policy changes on the local and national levels alike, and in promoting social cohesion. They form hubs of community life on the local level, but also provide the all-important bridge between government and Muslim community. Although engaging in very different range of activities, they are all united by sharing a faith and a cultural background that motivates them to engage in civil society work.

The 2023 report captures the full range of positive initiatives undertaken by civil society organisations across the political, cultural, socioeconomic, and charitable domains.¹¹⁷ Acknowledging their work is even more important now than ever before, as the UK government is increasingly using its ‘Islamist extremism’ narratives to discredit groups with significant contribution.¹¹⁸

As always, capturing the contribution of Muslim civil society in the ongoing fight against Islamophobia is an impossible task. The largest, most diverse, and successful Islamophobia Awareness Month was marked in November with more than 300

114. ‘The ‘symbolic power of the veil’’. *Policy Exchange*. 22.9.2023 - <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/the-symbolic-power-of-the-veil/>; ‘Blasphemy’ in schools’. *Policy Exchange*. 20.11.2023 - <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/blasphemy-in-schools/>

115. ‘Denham, Annabel. ‘Like It or Not, Suella Speaks for the Silent Majority’. *The Telegraph*. 9.11.2023 - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/09/like-it-or-not-suella-speaks-for-silent-majority/>.

116. See, for example, ‘Freedom of Religion or Belief Must Include the Freedom to ‘Blaspheme.’’ *National Secular Society*. 29.9.2023 - <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2023/09/freedom-of-religion-must-include-the-freedom-to-blaspheme>

117. Usaama al-Azami. ‘The British Muslim Civil Society Report’. January 2023 - <https://britishmuslim.org/>

118. ‘We Can’t Allow Extremists to Make the Truth Taboo’. *National Secular Society*. 21.2.2024 - <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2024/02/we-cant-allow-extremists-to-make-the-truth-taboo>

events across the country.¹¹⁹ The VisitMyMosque 2023 days on 23-24 September - the eighth year that this important initiative is taking place - provided opportunities for celebrating and bringing inter-faith communities closer, as well as for drawing attention to the importance of local mosques as community hubs and community service providers, such as food banks and support for domestic violence.¹²⁰ But there were many more initiatives, national as well as local, that deserve to be mentioned in this year's report, such as:

- The campaign to push for the recognition of the UN-supported International Day to Combat Islamophobia in UK law was launched in London in March. The event, organised by the Aziz Foundation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, featured various speakers, including politicians and creative personalities. Labour MP Naz Shah and Baroness Sayeeda Warsi spoke at the event, as did YouTube personality Chunkz who shared his experience as Muslims in the entertainment industry and called for positive Muslim representation to combat misconceptions.¹²¹
- Waqas Hussain, a trainee solicitor, campaigned for a Muslim Employment Charter, aimed to help Muslim professionals balance their faith with their careers by addressing challenges such as finding time for prayers and navigating alcohol-centric events. The charter focuses on workplace facilities, social policies, and training to create an inclusive environment for Muslim employees.¹²²
- The Muslim Mind Collaborative aims to help schools understand British Muslim life, improve mental well-being of Muslim students, and promote inclusiveness in schools.¹²³
- London celebrated its first ever Ramadan lights event in 2023, with 30,000 colored lights illuminating Coventry Street - the first such event in a major European city.¹²⁴
- The Shia Ithna'ashari Community of Middlesex in Harrow is engaging in a wide range of activities in the local community and beyond, actively promotes

119. 'Islamophobia Awareness Month - 2023 Highlights' - <https://www.islamophobia-awareness.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/IAM-Highlights-2023.pdf>

120. 'MCB Visit My Mosque 2023 Launch Event: Faith, Food and Friendship'. *Muslim Council of Britain*. 5.12.2023 - <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-visit-my-mosque-2023-launch-event-faith-food-and-friendship/>.

121. Turki, Tamara. 'Famous British Muslims show their support for anti-Islamophobia campaign in UK'. *Arab News*. 30.3.2023 - <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2273561/world>

122. 'The Muslim Employment Charter: Helping faith and work go hand-in-hand'. *Islam Channel*. 21.12.2023 - <https://islamchannel.tv/the-muslim-employment-charter-helping-faith-and-work-go-hand-in-hand>

123. 'The 'Muslim problem' is actually an opportunity for schools'. *Schools Week*. 23.8.2023 - <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/the-muslim-problem-is-actually-an-opportunity-for-schools/>

124. Tahar, Farouq. 'Why London's First Ramadan Lights Celebration Has Been so Important for Muslims Everywhere'. *The Conversation*. 21.3.2023 - <https://theconversation.com/why-londons-first-ramadan-lights-celebration-has-been-so-important-for-muslims-everywhere-202545>

inter-faith work, and has a strong relationship with a local Sunni mosque, promoting Shia-Sunni concord.

- The Dream Chaser Youth Club in Birmingham provides Muslim girls and boys with the opportunity to play football, promoting gender equality within the community. The club was created seven years ago by Asha Rage, who received the TSB Community Hero award at the Pride of Birmingham awards ceremony in March.¹²⁵
- Star Academies manages over thirty schools around the UK, often in areas with a high number of Muslims, and has achieved remarkable success in improving educational attainment in deprived areas.
- Faith groups in Manchester united to combat the concurrent rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks since 7 October. They came together in Hale to hold a silent vigil on 29 November 2023, organised by Altrincham Interfaith, and declare their yearning for peaceful coexistence and collaboration at this time of crisis, emphasising the need for mutual respect and an end to hate and violence.¹²⁶



Figure 5: Aziz Foundation's 'End Islamophobia' inaugural event, 20 March 2023. **Source:** X

125. 'Muslim Female Football Coach Honored with Community Hero Award'. *About Islam*. 13.3.2023 - <https://aboutislam.net/muslim-issues/europe/muslim-female-football-coach-honored-with-community-hero-award>

126. 'Silent vigil for peace - 29 November 2023'. *Altrincham Interfaith*. 30.11.2023 - <https://www.altrincham-interfaith.org.uk/2023/11/30/silent-vigil-for-peace-29th-november-2023/>



Figure 6: The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, tweets about the first Ramadan lights display in London. Source: X, 21 March 2023.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The year 2023 was a year when the different facets of Islamophobia in the UK converged dramatically. As always, there is the anti-Muslim hatred perpetrated by extremists off- and online: targeting Islamic religious spaces and symbolic spaces for local Muslim communities but also flooding social media platforms and internet news with misinformation, stereotypes, and crushing abuse. On the other hand, there is the Islamophobia of mainstream culture, geared to normalisation of anti-Muslim tropes and to ever-deepening social engineering. Different though they are, they both constitute forms of Islamophobia and in many ways reinforce each other - and they came dangerously together in 2023. The drama surrounding Lee Anderson, former Conservative MP and deputy chair of the party, who was sacked in February 2024 after failing to apologise for a torrent of Islamophobic statements on GB News and then joined the radical Reform UK party, illustrates once again how porous mainstream and radical right-wing politics are.¹²⁷ But the hardening of the government's official discourse on immigration, multiculturalism, and Islam, reached new and dangerous heights in 2023. The dramatic escalation of the conflict in the Middle East made an already challenging situation even more difficult, with huge increases in hate crime.

127. 'Lee Anderson: Why Is the Tory MP and GB News Host Being Accused of Islamophobia?' *The Independent*. 27.2.2024 - <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/lee-anderson-islamophobia-racism-khan-sunak-b2503076.html>

For a government so keen to redefine ‘extremism’ in legal terms, the stubborn refusal to adopt an official definition of Islamophobia is one more case of double standards. But recent government narratives emphasising the alleged threat of ‘Islamist extremism’ illustrate how much this government views the fight against Islamophobia through multiple ideological lenses - anti-woke, freedom of speech, etc. - that have diminished its political commitment to it. To put it bluntly, there is very little to expect from this government and this ruling party. As elections loom in 2024, changes may (or may not) be on the horizon.

In addition to focusing on targeting and countering Islamophobia as, where, and when it occurs, as well as protecting and supporting Muslim communities in their everyday lives, we need to invest more in long-term strategies of inoculating society against false narratives, misinformation campaigns, and divisive tropes. This is more important than ever in an era of dizzying technological innovation and digital penetration of the news scene in a global information environment. It is also a longer-term, costly, and complex approach that may not deliver immediate dividends. Still the battle against Islamophobia will be eventually won on the basis of ideas and on the back of profound cultural change. All recommendations featured below assume the need for a deeper synergy between short- and long-term action and a focus on a multi-pronged approach in order to avoid constantly reacting to adverse developments and make progress towards a sustainable future of diversity, inclusiveness, and community cohesion.

Policy Recommendations

- **Education:** Education is a powerful tool to combat Islamophobia. Integrating an understanding of Islamophobia into compulsory components of the education curricula and all teacher training education, providing regular, compulsory training to counter Islamophobia for all teachers and lecturers, and requiring schools to establish dress-code policies that are sensitive to the needs of Muslims.
- **Youth:** There is a need for more youth-focused initiatives within the Muslim community, as the current youth sector is relatively small and lacks coordination. To address this, strategic investment in media projects and career pathways for Muslim journalists is a priority area for intervention, with more incentives and career paths provided for young Muslims.
- **Stronger Muslim representation in the media:** Representation and inclusion in the media are crucial. Journalists should participate in regular training on the media’s role in fostering Islamophobia. Additionally, all editors should consult regularly with the Muslim community to promote understanding and prevent misrepresentation. One further important action area concerns the active promotion of careers in journalism to Muslim graduates.

- **Intersectionality:** Addressing gendered and more broadly intersectional Islamophobia is essential, both at data-gathering and action levels. The government must work to address the shortfall in data about Islamophobia; fund research and projects that adopt an intersectional approach; and provide funding for initiatives, organisations, and agencies that challenge Islamophobia and racism.
- **Workplace:** Maintaining the pressure for measures to encourage a culturally sensitive workplace that promotes gender, race, and religious equality.
- **Safety:** Campaigning for adequately resourced campaigns to enhance the safety and well-being of Muslim communities and their important spaces (especially mosques and cultural centres), helped by less cumbersome and more transparent instruments of state support.
- **Online safety:** Applying pressure for a more effective, transparent, and accountable system of content filtering in social media, embracing the power of algorithms alongside active human curation of content for the benefit of social cohesion.
- **Co-operation:** Pursuing international co-operation in the fight against hate crime, disinformation, and extremism, especially with regard to online hate messaging and abuse.
- **Visibility:** Promoting Muslim visibility as a myth-busting strategy by drawing positive attention to the full diversity of communities with a Muslim background in the UK, highlighting their historic and contemporary contributions to British society and culture while also increasing awareness of the challenges facing them in their efforts to combat institutional Islamophobia and marginalisation.
- **Demanding significant improvements in the official data reporting mechanisms and instruments for Islamophobia (government and police) in order to provide a more granular overview of anti-Muslim hatred and racism in the UK, while also drawing attention to the complex intersectional dimensions of Islamophobic experiences.**
- **Expanding current Islamophobia-awareness events (such as Islamophobia Awareness Month but also adoption of UN Day for Combating Islamophobia).**
- **Maintaining the pressure on government and authorities to accept a legally binding definition of Islamophobia, especially by forging partnerships with local and regional institutions eager to formally adopt it.**
- **Media monitoring:** Building on and expanding the excellent work already underway in terms of independent monitoring work on media and social media platforms, updating the reporting mechanism for failures and abuses as part of a regular cycle.

- Campaigning for a root-and-branch review of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy, with critical feedback from civil society/grassroots organisations and academic/professional expertise.
- Demanding a revision of the government’s working concept of ‘extremism’ and the way that it is applied to protect against harmful anti-Muslim content online.
- Demanding a significantly more robust regulation of traditional media, accompanied with revised official guidelines and more effective intervention powers by regulators and watchdogs; and campaigning for a more agile system of investigation and correction in cases of misinformation.

Chronology

- **8 February:** The Independent Review of PREVENT, the UK’s anti-radicalisation strategy, was published. Although the report was widely and strongly criticised as “riddled with biased thinking, errors and plain anti-Muslim prejudice”, its 34 recommendations were fully adopted by the Conservative government.
- **22 February:** An incident of Quran desecration at the Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield, followed by an open community meeting became a major instance of ‘culture war’, with accusations of ‘Sharia law’ flooding social media and becoming embraced by Suella Braverman.
- **15 March:** UK organisations joined with others across Europe and the world to mark the first anniversary of the UN International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Together they launched an appeal to all countries to recognise officially the occasion.
- **21 March:** London held its first Ramadan lights celebration event.
- **3 April:** The Home Secretary Suella Braverman made inflammatory comments suggesting that “grooming gangs” are overwhelmingly comprised of “British Pakistani males” who target “white English girls”.
- **8 August:** Conservative Party Chairperson Lee Anderson commented on the protests about the government’s plans to house asylum seekers in a repurposed floating barge by saying, “If they don’t like barges then they should f*** off back to France”. His comments were defended by the Justice Secretary Alex Chalk. This was only one of the serious of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim infractions by Lee Anderson.
- **23-24 September:** The 2023 occasion of the very successful annual campaign VisitMyMosque took place, with more than 200 mosques opening their doors to visitors.
- **2 October:** Conservative London mayoral candidate Susan Hall insinuated that London’s Jewish community is “frightened” of Mayor Sadiq Khan and

reposted a social media post made by far-right commentator Katie Hopkins that referred to London as “Londonistan”.

- **7 October:** A significant rise in anti-Muslim incidents and offenses was recorded in London and across the country following the Hamas attack on Israel and the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza.
- **8 October:** A pig’s head was left outside a proposed mosque site on Mosley Street in Barnoldswick, Lancashire.
- **9 October:** Apsana Begum, the MP for the London constituency of Poplar and Limehouse and the first hijab-wearing parliamentary deputy, was forced to leave the Labour Party conference after receiving a deluge of online Islamophobic attacks and threats.
- **16-18 October:** Eleven attacks on Islamic places of worship across West London, including Hammersmith, Fulham, and Ealing.
- **26 October:** Controversial Online Safety Bill became law. It has been criticised for doing too little to force internet companies to remove illegal content and thus effectively protect vulnerable groups.
- **27 October:** Scotland’s first minister, Humza Yousaf, wrote to all UK party leaders calling them to support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.
- **4 November:** Vandalism incident in the Woodford County High School for Girls in the London borough of Redbridge, involving Islamophobic graffiti (“Death to Gaza, death to Arabs, death to Muslims, death to you”) was found in a school toilet.
- **6 November:** Social media platform X reinstated the accounts of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) and Katie Hopkins. The two had been banned from the platform (then Twitter) due to their hateful anti-Islam comments in 2018 and 2020 respectively.
- **8 November:** The Home Secretary Suella Braverman referred to pro-Palestinian protesters as “hate marchers” and “Islamists”. She also condemned the protests as “an assertion of primacy by certain groups – particularly Islamists – of the kind we are more used to seeing in Northern Ireland”.
- **16 November:** A parliamentary rebellion of 56 of Labour MPs questioned the party’s stance on the Gaza conflict, siding with a proposal to call for an ‘immediate ceasefire’.
- **7 December:** Parliamentary debate on ‘Tackling Islamophobia’. Labour MP Naz Shah criticised the government for failing to take concrete actions to address Islamophobia, its limited engagement with mainstream Muslim organisations, and its failure to provide sufficient funding to tackle Islamophobia. This was the second such debate of 2023, the first having taken place in May.

By gathering 33 local scholars and experts specialized in racism and human rights, the ninth edition of the *European Islamophobia Report* addresses the state and development of Islamophobia across Europe in 2023. All 28 national reports included in this year's annual edition invite policymakers, civil society, scholars, and all people interested in anti-Muslim racism to gain insight and knowledge on the most important incidents and data regarding Islamophobia in Europe in 2023. Since the first publication of this report covering the year 2015, the *European Islamophobia Report* has become a cutting-edge source for information on Islamophobia in the fields of politics, media, employment, education, and justice. The annual report also exposes European Islamophobia networks and highlights initiatives to counter anti-Muslim racism. The present report investigates in detail the underlying dynamics that directly or indirectly contribute to the rise of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This extends from Islamophobic statements spread in national media to laws and policies that restrain the fundamental rights of European Muslims and ultimately threaten society as a whole. The *European Islamophobia Report 2023* discusses the impact of anti-Muslim racism on human rights such as freedom of association, freedom of speech, and religious freedom, and the state of law in Europe. The ninth edition of our report discusses the effects of the ongoing war in Gaza, the negligence of European governments regarding the UN resolution on the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, and how anti-Muslim legislation and measures have developed and have been fought by civil society. The 28 national reports demonstrate how governments, political parties, and media participate and counteract in reproducing discourses that put the fundamental rights of European citizens in jeopardy. This compendium of useful insights and data aims to provide European policymakers, institutions, and NGOs with recommendations on how to tackle anti-Muslim racism in Europe both effectively and systematically.

