

Islamophobia in Europe and its Global Impact

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Abstract: Europe is the region with the highest incidence of anti-Muslim discrimination worldwide, primarily driven by policy issues, according to the 14th report on Islamophobia by the OIC, which documents Islamophobic attacks and anti-Muslim hatred between December 2020 and January 2022. The influence of European Islamophobia extends globally, contributing to what is known as the globalization of Islamophobia. This trend is significant as it illustrates the spread of anti-Muslim sentiment across the political spectrum on a global scale. This study aims to explore the development and manifestation of Islamophobia in Europe and analyze its impact on the rise of global Islamophobia. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research was conducted from August 2023 to August 2024, with data gathered through a literature review. The paper argues that Islamophobia in Europe is expanding and manifests through six key indicators: discrimination, hate speech and online hatred, Islamophobic policies, right-wing political movements, verbal and physical attacks, and insults directed at the niqab, hijab, and burqa. Key factors influencing the global spread of Islamophobia include the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, white supremacist manifestos, right-wing parties promoting Islamophobic discourse, and the adoption of Islamophobic policies by other countries.

Keywords: Islamophobia; Europe; Manifestations of Islamophobia; Global Islamophobia; Great Replacement Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia gained significant prominence following the tragedy of September 11, 2001 (9/11). The attack was a traumatic event not only for America but for the entire world. In response, the United States declared a War on Terror, targeting those held responsible for the 9/11 incident. The impact of this declaration quickly spread internationally, influencing the policies and attitudes of countries around the globe. The War on Terror reshaped global dynamics, introducing new identities, norms, behaviors, and interests within international relations and the global community (Kedang, 2017). This period also saw a dramatic escalation in what is now recognized as Islamophobia—a phenomenon characterized not only by fear, hatred, and contempt for Islamic values but also by hostility, intimidation, discrimination, and persecution directed at Muslims.

Beyond political rhetoric, Muslims in Europe, as a minority group, have become particularly vulnerable to Islamophobia. European Muslims often find themselves feeling threatened and targeted, with violations of civil liberties and human rights justified under the banner of the War on Terror. This Muslim minority is haunted by the fear of Islamophobic attacks, with their rights as members of a distinct community being infringed upon by the broader society (Rehman, 2005).

The concept of Orientalism, introduced by American scholar Edward Said, describes the pattern of negative stereotypes against Muslims and other colonized peoples. These prejudices are prevalent across Europe, manifesting not only in discrimination but also in increasing incidents of violence (Guardian.com, 2020). According to the 14th report on Islamophobia by the OIC, which documents Islamophobic attacks and anti-Muslim hatred between December 2020

and January 2022, Europe is the region with the highest incidence of anti-Muslim discrimination worldwide, largely driven by policy-related issues.

The European Islamophobia Report is an annual publication that meticulously investigates the underlying dynamics, both direct and indirect, that contribute to the growth and emergence of anti-Muslim racism in Europe. This report covers a wide range of issues, from Islamophobic statements propagated through national media to laws and policies that restrict the fundamental rights of European Muslim citizens. The 2019 report, which covers 32 countries, highlights how governments and mainstream media play a significant role in producing Islamophobic discourse that jeopardizes the basic rights of Muslim communities (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2019).

Islamophobia is not only spread through the media but is also exploited to promote discriminatory policies that serve the interests of various political actors (Bridge, 2018). For example, in France, President Emmanuel Macron used hostile rhetoric against Muslims during his election campaign, turning the issue into a cultural conflict. The marginalization of Muslims is evident in policies such as the ban on the hijab in France, which began under the leadership of Jacques Chirac in 2004 and has since been adopted by other countries with similar Islamophobic policies. Another concerning trend is the rise of right-wing movements in European countries that support and amplify Islamophobia. The persistence of Islamophobia in Europe, along with the implementation of policies that fail to counteract this trend, remains a significant and troubling issue (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2022).

The influence of European Islamophobia extends beyond the continent, impacting the spread of Islamophobia in other countries. For example, attacks on Muslims in India and the hijab ban in southern Karnataka are clear instances where anti-Muslim sentiment, modeled after European trends, has taken root. Beyond India, the Islamophobic trends seen in the U.S. and Europe have also spread to other regions, including the Asia-Pacific. This phenomenon is referred to as the Globalization of Islamophobia, which is significant as it demonstrates how anti-Muslim sentiment is proliferating across the global political spectrum (Nursalikhah, 2022).

One example of Islamophobia's spread across the political spectrum is the global response to the May 15, 2022, movement, which emerged from the United Nations' decision to designate the day as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Although all UN member states eventually accepted the resolution after extensive discussions, it faced harsh criticism from several countries, including India. Notably, representatives from France and the European Union (as an observer) also voiced concerns. While France did not outright oppose the resolution, its criticism highlights the limited commitment of some European powers, particularly France, in actively combating Islamophobia. This reluctance reflects a broader normalization of Islamophobia in France (Hernandez, 2022).

This situation underscores how countries with Islamophobic policies may even influence efforts to combat Islamophobia globally. The increasing prevalence of Islamophobia in Europe—manifested through negative public perceptions, widespread media narratives, discriminatory policies, and right-wing political movements—can significantly influence the spread of Islamophobia in other parts of the world. This global spread is facilitated by the process of globalization, through which anti-Muslim sentiments and policies originating in Europe are disseminated and adopted elsewhere.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted from August 25, 2023, to August 5, 2024, using a qualitative approach to describe and explain the development of Islamophobia in Europe and its influence on the spread of Islamophobia globally. This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives, which aim to describe the data. The data used are secondary data derived from 70 sources in the form of scientific journals, articles, books, and reports from related

institutions, as well as official websites and online news that are relevant to the research topic. The data collection technique used is a literature study that reviews literature from various electronic and non-electronic media. Data analysis is carried out qualitatively by describing the problem and analyzing the data obtained to produce arguments or precise analytical descriptions. The writing method used is deductive; the problem is generally described based on theory, facts, and data, which are then concluded specifically in the data analysis to explain the research results.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

• Manifestations and Development of Islamophobia in Europe

The perpetrators of Islamophobia that are in the mind and reflected in attitudes and can be manifested through violent actions change into manifestations of Islamophobia. There are several types of manifestations with indicators through the Islamophobia report by the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation). These manifestations show indicators, incidents, and events that occurred in various countries during the review period. The manifestations that are classified are divided into six parts, including Discrimination, Islamophobic Policies, Right-Wing Groups, Verbal and Physical Attacks, Hate Speech, and Online Hate and Insults against the hijab, niqab, and burqa. The manifestations classified through the OIC's latest report on Islamophobia are the newest classification and are different from the manifestation categories in the previous report (OIC, 2022).

– Discrimination

The act of making distinctions based on groups, classes, or other categories due to different origins. A person can experience discrimination based on race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and other categories. Discrimination occurs when individuals or groups are treated unfairly, such as worse than others in their membership or certain social groups and categories. The EIR data specifically shows that this unreasonable distinction is directed at Muslim individuals or groups based on their beliefs or religion (OIC, 2022). Survey data released by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in June 2020 showed that 22% of the EU population felt uncomfortable having a Muslim neighbor, 31% felt uncomfortable if their family member married a Muslim and 21% felt it was okay not to accept or employ a Muslim woman because she wore the hijab. In addition, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe also said that Europe is facing a shocking reality: anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim and other racist crimes are increasing and worrying. An example is the extremist shooting in Hanau, Germany, which killed 9 people and injured several others (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020).

– Islamophobia Policies

Policy is a deliberate system of guidelines designed to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. It is typically expressed and implemented as procedures or protocols. Policies can be established by governments, public sector organizations, groups, or individuals, unlike legal rules, which can compel or prohibit certain actions, policies primarily direct actions toward achieving specific goals. However, some countries have used policies to institutionalize Islamophobia. The Observatory on Islamophobia presents these policies as empirical examples in its reports during the review period (OIC, 2022).

France has become one of the most concerning examples of state-sponsored Islamophobia, according to the Observatory's findings. The French Interior Minister has openly advocated for a campaign to defend the rule of law against what is termed "Political Islam" and "Islamic Separatism." In 2021, President Macron's anti-separatist bill made headlines, raising concerns that it could be used as a basis for dissolving Islamic organizations without due process, effectively depoliticizing Muslims in France. Additionally, the bill has led to the

imposition of coercive controls on anti-racist civil society organizations and the expansion of the headscarf ban. Moreover, Islamophobia has also gained traction within the European Parliament. For example, the political group Identity and Democracy, with 76 seats, has been particularly successful in advancing an anti-Muslim agenda (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020). This reflects the broader influence of Islamophobic policies and rhetoric across Europe, contributing to the institutionalization of Islamophobia at both national and continental levels.

– **Right-Wing Politics**

Identity politics refers to the idea that political positions are primarily shaped by ethnicity, race, or religion rather than by broader policy concerns. Right-wing politics, also known as far-right or right-wing extremism, is characterized by political views that are more extreme than traditional right-wing positions on the left-right political spectrum, particularly in their anti-communist, authoritarian, ultranationalist, and nativist ideologies.

Traditionally, politics in the Western world has been centered around economic issues, such as the extent to which the state should intervene to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens. However, global politics has shifted over the past decade, with identity increasingly overshadowing ideology. This shift is characterized by a strong emphasis on group identity and belonging, and it has been linked to recent widespread populist revolts against globalization and its perceived disruptive cultural impacts (OIC, 2022).

In Europe, the rise of populist movements is driven not only by dissatisfaction with the unequal economic consequences of globalization but also by perceived threats to traditional national identities posed by high levels of migration. This has led to the emergence of anti-immigrant populism and the rise of white nationalism. In this context, anti-Islamic sentiments have grown alongside debates on contentious issues such as immigration, non-European foreigners, assimilation and integration, and national identity. These tensions have been further exacerbated by waves of refugees fleeing civil wars in several Muslim-majority countries, as well as by recurring terrorist attacks on European soil (OIC, 2022).

– **Verbal and Physical Assaults**

Verbal assault refers to threats or offensive messages directed at someone, which can include written communications. Such attacks are intended to make the recipient feel worried, uncomfortable, or harassed and can involve excessive taunts, bullying, or other forms of verbal abuse. For example, bomb threats directed at school buildings, whether concerning property or events taking place at the school, are considered verbal assaults.

Physical attacks, on the other hand, involve intentionally inflicting or attempting to inflict physical harm through violence. In the context of Islamophobia, Muslims are often targeted by both verbal and physical attacks due to their religious beliefs or any object associated with Islam (OIC, 2022).

The role of white supremacist militant groups in Europe is particularly concerning. One example is a right-wing militant who killed nine people of immigrant background, including his mother, before taking his own life. According to Aristotle Kallis, as detailed in his report on the UK, Muslim places of worship are vulnerable not only to vandalism but also to physical attacks. Most of these incidents in the UK were reported following the easing of pandemic restrictions. For instance, in July, a mosque on Aylsham Road in Norwich was targeted by an arson attack.

In response to physical intimidation tactics by far-right groups, community initiatives have been launched to protect mosques and Islamic centers. Additionally, violent symbols such as swastikas have been documented across Europe. In Åstorp, Sweden, swastikas accompanied by graffiti reading "Blood Muslims" were found not on a mosque or Muslim institution but on a private home belonging to a Muslim family (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020).

– **Hate Speech and Online Hate**

Hate speech refers to any form of expression used by the speaker to denigrate, insult, or incite hatred against a group or class of people based on attributes such as race, religion, skin color, sexual identity, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, or national origin. Online hate speech is specifically defined as hateful expression that occurs on the internet or through social media platforms, targeting individuals or groups based on similar attributes.

In the context of Islamophobia, both types of hate speech target Muslims or Islam as a religion (OIC, 2022). The rise of anti-Muslim attitudes is reflected in data on hate crimes, which show an increase in Islamophobic incidents across many European countries. However, many European countries do not record Islamophobic incidents separately from other hate crimes, making it difficult to fully understand the extent of Islamophobia and develop effective strategies to address it.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) notes that only a small minority of Muslims—around 12%—report cases of discrimination. This significant underreporting creates a substantial gap in the documented data, complicating country comparisons. For instance, Germany reported 31,472 hate crimes in total, including 901 anti-Muslim hate crimes, while France recorded 1,142 hate crimes, with 235 being anti-Muslim (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020).

– **Insults against the Hijab, Niqab and Burqa**

As categorized in the OIC report, Insults refer to false or misleading statements directed at a group or individual that can damage their reputation or demean them. For Muslim women, the niqab, hijab, and burqa are garments worn to cover their hair and adhere to Islamic teachings on modesty. Despite being integral to their religious practice, these garments often face criticism and are not recognized as valid forms of dress by some observers. This leads to negative sentiments and intolerance towards Muslim women who wear these garments in public spaces.

The OIC introduced this category following a 14-month period of supervision by the Observatory (OIC, 2022). For instance, the Belgian Constitutional Court's ban on political, philosophical, and religious symbols, ostensibly based on principles of neutrality, disproportionately affects Muslim women who wear the hijab. Such regulations contribute to the narrowing of public space available to Muslims and reflect a significant manifestation of Islamophobia. This is often seen in administrative regulations that are not subject to democratic debate and are controlled by the ruling bureaucracy (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2020).

• **The Influence of Islamophobia in Europe on the Development of Global Islamophobia**

This section will explore how the previously described manifestations of Islamophobia impact its global spread, extending beyond Europe. This analysis builds on the six indicators of Islamophobia identified in Europe and examines how these manifestations contribute to the international dissemination of Islamophobic attitudes and actions.

– **The Great Replacement Theory & The White Supremacy Manifesto**

The Great Replacement is a white supremacist conspiracy theory first propagated by French writer Renaud Camus. Camus claimed that European elites were secretly working to replace white Europeans with dark-skinned Muslim immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Before becoming associated with this theory, Camus was known for his pioneering work in gay literature. The Great Replacement Theory (GRT) posits that different ethnic groups—black, white, and Muslim—are in competition for power and resources, and that each group seeks to establish its culture as dominant (Iftikhar, 2021).

According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), a think tank specializing in extremism, right-wing networks globally are actively promoting the GRT. The number of online references to the theory has surged in the past five years, with mentions on Twitter alone increasing from 120,000 in 2014 to over 1.5 million in 2019. GRT has become a central ideological doctrine for European far-right parties, fueling racial paranoia and convincing some white Europeans that non-white Muslims are displacing them. The theory has also gained traction in mainstream Western politics, with references from figures such as US President Donald Trump, Italian far-right politician Matteo Salvini, and others in Germany (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2019).

The impact of GRT extends beyond Western countries; it has influenced Islamophobic sentiments globally. In some Asian countries, such as China and Myanmar (formerly Burma), state-led efforts to eradicate Islam have resulted in severe human rights abuses, including genocide and ethnic cleansing. These extreme actions reflect the fear of being replaced by Muslims as a motivating factor behind such atrocities (Iftikhar, 2021).

The reach of GRT is evident in the actions of individuals like Renaud Camus, who continues to spread his white supremacist views while living freely in France. His influence is further highlighted by the manifesto of the Christchurch shooter, who explicitly cited GRT as a motive for targeting Muslims. The shooter described non-whites as "colonizers" and aimed to incite global conflict through his attacks. This event inspired other white supremacists and underscored the dangerous potential of conspiracy theories to incite violence against Muslims (Iftikhar, 2021).

The spread of such conspiracy theories is a significant threat to Muslims. Daniel L. Byman's 2022 book on the rise of white supremacist terrorism reveals that this movement has become a global and transnational phenomenon. Despite being overlooked for two decades since 9/11, white supremacist terrorism has metastasized and contributed to violence in places like New Zealand, Norway, and South Carolina. These groups are highly active and utilize advanced technology, such as social media, to propagate their extremist ideas (Byman, 2022).

– **European Right-Wing Parties Spreading Islamophobic Discourse**

After World War II, racist and far-right parties across Europe, particularly in France, lost political influence and were marginalized in major national elections. However, as the twenty-first century approached, a political shift to the right began, and many previously isolated far-right parties started gaining traction. This shift was partly driven by perceptions that Europe was becoming less "white" and more "brown" (Iftikhar, 2021).

Currently, one of the most notorious anti-Muslim figures in the Netherlands is Geert Wilders, described as an "opportunistic Islamophobe" by former US Ambassador to the Netherlands, Cynthia Schneider. Wilders has been a prominent political force in the Netherlands for years, leading the anti-Muslim party known as the "Party for Freedom," which he founded in 2005. The party has grown to become the fourth-largest political party in the Netherlands and serves as a platform for spreading Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments. Wilders, once considered a fringe figure, has now gained significant influence in mainstream Dutch politics (Iftikhar, 2021).

The rise of politicians like Wilders and Marine Le Pen reflects a broader trend within the European Union, where xenophobic and anti-Muslim movements are gaining mainstream support. These movements, no longer confined to the "radical right," are becoming increasingly influential across Europe. The British think tank Demos highlights that anti-Muslim political parties, once on the fringes, now wield significant influence in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, Latvia, and Slovakia, as well as in the European Parliament.

This growing political market share suggests that racist and Islamophobic far-right groups are likely to remain a prominent part of the European political landscape. Politicians across Europe have recognized that inciting hatred against vulnerable minority groups can be a pathway to electoral success. Despite the difficulty of countering such hatred, there remains hope for restoring the tolerance and openness that has historically characterized Europe. The core issue is that many politicians exploit anti-Muslim sentiment for electoral gain, even though such fears do not align with Europe's potential for a more inclusive future (Iftikhar, 2021).

– Islamophobic Policies Adopted by Other Countries

The hijab ban, which prohibits Muslim women from wearing the hijab, burqa niqab, or burkini without regard to religious freedom, is a phenomenon that continues to spread to many European countries and Western societies today. Politicians from all over the spectrum are using Muslims as a political tool to further their xenophobic ideological platforms. Despite its strange origins, the proposed hijab ban is just a series of anti-Muslim laws proposed by European countries (including France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Bulgaria, and others). In Norway's hijab ban, any Muslim female employee who insists on wearing the hijab could risk losing their job. Furthermore, many Muslim female students could be expelled from their colleges and universities if they are found to have violated this ridiculous law (Iftikhar, 2021). Through the book *Global Islamophobia in the New World Order*, Arsalan Iftikhar reveals that the ban that existed in Europe in 2017 made the Australian continent make its international headlines shortly after the incident. Politicians are using Muslims as their political tools (Iftikhar, 2021). The viral incident then was in August 2017; the head of the Australian right-wing political party One Nation Party, Pauline Hanson, entered the Australian parliament wearing a black burqa dress, promoting the ban. While saying, "I'm quite happy to remove this because it should not belong in this parliament. I call on the Government to ban full-face coverings in public places". Australian lawyer George Brandis scolded Hanson then and said there would be no Burqa ban.

The context of this ban policy surprised many people who knew little about Islam, whether they were extremists who claimed to be devout Muslims or right-wing Islamophobes who sought to exploit anti-Muslim fears politically in their own political world (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2022). What made these policies worse was that \$144 million came from funding for right-wing parties. These Islamophobic "traders" have succeeded in pushing hatred of Muslims towards the Western mainstream. These ideological extremists competing for funding from supportive right-wing multimillionaires and billionaires are having real, real-world impacts. The conclusion is clear. Islamophobia affects democracy in at least three ways, according to Dalia Mogahed. First, the anti-Sharia legislative movement is actually part of a larger problem because the same lawmakers who target Muslims are also targeting other minority groups. Second, Islamophobia hurts democracy by making people afraid, and fear makes people more accepting of authoritarianism, conformity, and prejudice. And third, Islamophobia manipulates people into agreeing with policies they would otherwise not agree with.

4. CONCLUSION

Islamophobic events and conditions in Europe are highlighted in the 13th OIC report, which identifies several European countries as Islamophobia hotspots. In recent years (2018-2022), Islamophobia in Europe has manifested in six key forms: (1) Discrimination: Muslims face discrimination in various aspects of daily life, including public spaces, education, media, and politics. (2) Islamophobic Policies: Several European countries have implemented policies that institutionalize Islamophobia; (3) Right-Wing Politics: Anti-Islamic sentiment has been fueled by right-wing politics, which often links negative opinions to immigration issues, and

the assimilation and integration of Islamic and European societies. (4) Verbal and Physical Attacks: Muslims are targeted by both verbal and physical attacks; (5) Hate Speech and Online Hate: The rise of technology and globalization has intensified hate speech and online hostility against Muslims; (6) Insults Against Religious Attire: Muslim women wearing the hijab, niqab, or burqa face criticism and intolerance in public spaces.

The spread of Islamophobia extends beyond Europe due to several factors: (1) Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory: This European-origin theory claims that elites are replacing white Europeans with non-white Muslim immigrants. It has inspired violent attacks, such as the 2019 Christchurch Mosque shooting in New Zealand by a white supremacist; (2) Right-Wing Political Influence: Right-wing parties promote Islamophobic discourse, often targeting Muslim identity and portraying Muslim immigration as a threat. This rhetoric has substantial influence due to the broad support and connections of these parties; (3) Islamophobic Policies: The hijab ban, initially enacted in France, has influenced other European countries and even inspired similar policies in places like Australia; (4) Media Amplification: The European right-wing has used media to spread the Great Replacement theory, further exacerbating Islamophobia on a global scale. These factors collectively demonstrate how Islamophobia in Europe significantly impacts the global spread of anti-Muslim sentiment.

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