



## The Paradox of Secularism and The Construction of Structural Islamophobia in France: A Study of Public Policy, Media Representation, and Muslim Identity

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis paradoks sekularisme Prancis atau *laïcité* yang menjanjikan kesetaraan universal tetapi justru menghasilkan eksklusi struktural bagi komunitas Muslim. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kepustakaan, riset ini menerapkan kerangka teori sekuritisasi Philippe Bourbeau untuk menelaah berbagai dokumen hukum, teks kebijakan publik, dan wacana media dari tahun 1905 hingga 2023. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa prinsip *laïcité* telah mengalami transformasi fungsi dari landasan netralitas negara menjadi instrumen sekuritisasi yang melegitimasi Islamofobia terlembaga. Analisis data mengungkapkan bahwa aktor negara dan media secara sistematis membingkai identitas Muslim serta atribut keagamaan mereka sebagai ancaman eksistensial bagi nilai republikan yang berujung pada alienasi sosial. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kohesi nasional hanya dapat tercapai melalui perubahan paradigma dari pendekatan keamanan menuju model sekularisme inklusif berbasis hak asasi manusia yang mengakomodasi pluralisme tanpa diskriminasi. Kebaruan dari pendekatan ini terletak pada pengintegrasian kritik pascakolonial dengan konsep sekuritisasi Bourbeau untuk menjelaskan Islamofobia berbasis gender dalam sekularisme Prancis.

**Kata Kunci :** *Laïcité*, Islamofobia Struktural, Prancis

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the paradox of French secularism or laïcité, which promises universal equality but instead results in structural exclusion for Muslim communities. Using a qualitative approach with a literature review, this research applies Philippe Bourbeau's securitization theory framework to examine various legal documents, public policy texts, and media discourse from 1905 to 2023. The main findings show that the principle of laïcité has undergone a transformation of function from a foundation of state neutrality to*

*an instrument of securitization that legitimizes institutionalized Islamophobia. Data analysis reveals that state and media actors systematically frame Muslim identities and their religious attributes as an existential threat to republican values, leading to social alienation. This study concludes that national cohesion can only be achieved through a paradigm shift from a security approach to an inclusive model of secularism based on human rights that accommodates pluralism without discrimination. The novelty lies in integrating postcolonial critique with Bourbeau's securitization to explain gendered Islamophobia in French laïcité.*

**Keywords :** *Laïcité, Structural Islamophobia, France.*

## PENDAHULUAN

The French Revolution period (1789-1799) marked an institutional turning point that laid the foundations for modern secularism through the separation of the state from the Catholic Church. Prior to this era, the Church played a central role in the power structure, education, and social life, and enjoyed economic privileges and land ownership. This transformation was consolidated into law in 1905 through the Law on the Separation of Church and State, which affirmed the principle of *laïcité* as the foundation of the republic. This principle demanded state neutrality towards religion, the cessation of religious subsidies, and restrictions on the role of religious actors in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> *Laïcité* was originally designed to protect individual freedoms and guarantee universal equality from the domination of religious institutions, but its institutional journey throughout the twentieth century became more complex due to postcolonial demographic and political dynamics. Post-decolonization demographic dynamics and waves of immigration from former colonial territories brought diverse religious practices and demands for cultural recognition that tested the limits of *laïcité's* interpretation. The application of these claims of neutrality often created tension between the enforcement of republican values and the protection of minority rights, especially when public policies restricted certain religious expressions. Contemporary policies targeting Muslim expression, such as the 2004

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<sup>1</sup> Andi Setiawan, "Sejarah Laïcité, Dasar Falsafah Sekularisme Prancis," in *Sejarah Laïcité, Dasar Falsafah Sekularisme Prancis* (Historia.id, 2020), <https://www.historia.id/article/sejarah-laicite-dasar-falsafah-sekularisme-prancis-pmkxx>.

ban on headscarves in schools, the 2011 restrictions on the burqa and niqab in public spaces, and the 2023 regulation of religious clothing in educational institutions, demonstrate the potential for the interpretation of *laïcité* to become an asymmetrically restrictive tool. Mainstream media further exacerbates the situation through representations that tend to associate Islam with radicalism and failed assimilation, thereby shaping a public discourse that marginalizes Muslim communities and provides covert legitimacy for discriminatory norms.<sup>2</sup>

Previous literature reviews show consistent findings regarding structural discrimination and social exclusion, but there are significant gaps in the integration of in-depth postcolonial analysis. Explanations regarding the influence of colonial legacies and Eurocentric biases on the formation of domestic policy practices remain inadequate. Recent literature is also limited in reconstructing state policies towards immigrants using a securitization framework capable of capturing the framing of threats and the political mechanisms of *gendered Islamophobia*, particularly those affecting women who wear the hijab.<sup>3</sup>

These theoretical and empirical gaps prompted this study to analyze the paradox of French secularism, which claims universal

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<sup>2</sup> A. Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 39, no. 4 (2019): 569–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2019.1688514>; A. Nugier et al., “Secularism in France and Normative Pressure against Muslim Minorities,” *International Review of Social Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2016): 15–30, <https://doi.org/10.5334/irsp.11>; E. Wiles, “Headscarves, Human Rights, and Harmonious Multicultural Society: Implications of the French Ban for Interpretations of Equality,” *Law and Society Review* 41, no. 3 (2007): 699–736, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5893.2007.00318.x>.

<sup>3</sup> J. Gilbert and D. Keane, “Equality versus Fraternity? Rethinking France and Its Minorities,” *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 14, no. 4 (2016): 883–905, <https://doi.org/10.1093/icon/mow059>; J. G. Reitz, P. Simon, and E. Laxer, “Muslims’ Social Inclusion and Exclusion in France, Québec, and Canada: Does National Context Matter?,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 15 (2017): 2473–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1313105>; F. Roger, “Unrepresentative Representatives: What It Takes to Be a ‘Muslim’ Commentator in France Following the Example of Mohamed Sifaoui and Chahdortt Djavann,” *Modern and Contemporary France* 29, no. 1 (2021): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2020.1831462>; P. Statham, “How Ordinary People View Muslim Group Rights in Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany: Significant ‘Gaps’ between Majorities and Muslims?,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 2 (2016): 217–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1082288>.

equality through *laïcité* but results in systematic exclusionary practices against Muslim communities after 2010. This investigation traces how state policies manifest and impact women's rights and the process of social integration. The main focus of the research is directed at three crucial aspects: mapping the points of convergence and tension between Islam and the French state, describing patterns of Islamophobia in public policy and the media, and reconstructing the orientation of immigrant policy through Philippe Bourbeau's securitization theory framework. This approach enables a critical analysis of the mechanisms of threat framing and policy legitimization.<sup>4</sup>

This research offers a dual contribution to the academic and practical spheres. Theoretically, this study bridges secularism studies and postcolonial analysis through the perspective of securitization to provide a comprehensive reading of the production of Islamophobia in the context of the republic. Empirical findings on the impact of public regulations on access to employment, housing, and education, as well as their implications for women's rights, are expected to form the basis for practical policy recommendations. A more inclusive and rights-based model of pluralistic secularism is needed to reduce gender discrimination and suppress the conditions that drive radicalization. The spotlight on the contradiction between the rhetoric of emancipation and paternalistic practices in the discourse on *the veil* (cadar/hijab) aims to enrich the discourse on the adaptation of secularism in the era of migration while reforming the relationship between secularism, colonialism, and human rights.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies”; Nugier et al., “Nouvelle Laïcité En France et Pression Normative Envers Les Minorités Musulmanes”; Statham, “How Ordinary People View Muslim Group Rights in Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany: Significant ‘Gaps’ between Majorities and Muslims?”

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Ridha Basri, “Dilema Negara Sekuler Prancis: Di Antara Tarikan Islamofobia Dan Fundamentalisme Agama,” *Zawiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 8, no. 1 (July 2022): 143, <https://doi.org/10.31332/zjpi.v8i1.3127>; Gilbert and Keane, “Equality versus Fraternity? Rethinking France and Its Minorities”; Marta Panighel, “Unveiling (Post)Colonial République: Gendered Islamophobia in France,” *AG About Gender - International Journal of Gender Studies*, June 14, 2022, V. 11 N. 21 (2022): 20122022. A decade debating AboutGender, <https://doi.org/10.15167/2279-5057/AG2022.11.21.1321>; Roger, “Unrepresentative Representatives: What It Takes to Be a ‘Muslim’ Commentator in France Following the Example of Mohamed Sifaoui and Chahdort Djavann”; Setiawan, “Sejarah Laïcité, Dasar Falsafah Sekularisme Prancis.”

## METODOLOGI PENELITIAN

This research design uses a qualitative approach with *library research* as the main methodological basis. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on the need to explore and understand the meaning behind complex social phenomena, namely the transformation of French secular policy and its impact on Muslim communities.<sup>6</sup> The library research method is considered most relevant because the main objects of study in this research are textual and historical in nature, including legal documents, public policy manuscripts, and media discourse that cannot be accessed through direct field observation. This strategy allows for an in-depth genealogical tracing of policies to reveal the shift in the meaning of *laïcité* from a principle of statehood to an instrument of social exclusion.

The data collection process relies on the search for carefully curated primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources include official state documents that record the evolution of secular regulations, including the text of the 1905 Law on the Separation of Church and State, the 2004 Law on religious symbols in schools, and the 2010 regulation on the prohibition of full face coverings in public spaces. The selection of these authoritative documents aims to authentically dissect the "language of the state" and examine how formal legal narratives are used to legitimize civil rights restrictions. Meanwhile, secondary data sources were obtained from reputable journal articles, reference books, and research institute reports discussing postcolonial studies, the sociology of religion in France, and gender analysis. This secondary literature served as a cross-verification tool (*triangulation*) and provided interpretive context for understanding how Eurocentric bias and colonial legacies still operate in modern policy structures.

Data analysis was conducted using the securitization theoretical framework developed by Philippe Bourbeau. This theory was chosen because it offers a precise analytical lens to explain the mechanisms by which issues of migration and religious identity are constructed as *existential threats* by state actors. Bourbeau's perspective is crucial to this study because it not only looks at the end results of policy, but also highlights the framing process that transforms socio-cultural issues into national security issues that demand extraordinary measures. The use of

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<sup>6</sup> Zuchri Abdussamad, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Makassar: Syakir Media Press, 2021), 34.

this theory helps to elucidate how the rhetoric of protecting republican values actually masks gendered Islamophobia, while also answering the problem formulation regarding the paradox of secularism that was presented in the introduction. The connection between historical-legal data and this analysis of securitization is expected to produce solid conclusions regarding patterns of systematic exclusion in contemporary France.

## HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

### Islam and France: Common Ground, Social Tensions, and Demographic Landscape

The relationship between Islam and France is the result of complex historical interactions that not only began in the colonial era of the 19th century but are also closely related to the foundations of the state's secularism through the 1905 Law. The presence of a large Muslim community, mostly from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, and their contribution as immigrant labor during the post-World War economic reconstruction period initially created a relatively stable shared social space.<sup>7</sup> This development placed social relations within a framework of instrumental adaptation, where practical coexistence often preceded systematic public conflict.

The principle of *laïcité*, which emphasizes the strict separation of religion from the state, often clashes with public and collective expressions of Islam, creating an ambivalent narrative in which harmonious coexistence is mixed with perceptions of threats to national identity.<sup>8</sup> Historical studies show that this relationship is not static but rather a dynamic process influenced by the political context, including the response to post-2015 terrorism, which has contributed to increasingly strong social polarization.<sup>9</sup> This clash of values has resulted in a dual narrative: a tendency to accept the presence of Muslims as part of social life and, at the same time, a perception of threat to national identity. Contemporary political dynamics reinforce this pattern as the

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<sup>7</sup> Setiawan, "Sejarah Laïcité, Dasar Falsafah Sekularisme Prancis"; Udjang Tholib and Saiful Umam, *Sejarah Islam Di Eropa Dan USA* (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Basri, "DILEMA NEGARA SEKULER PRANCIS."

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Alfareza Romadhoni, Aditya Rahmadani, and Agung Yudhistira Nugroho, "Sekularisme Dan Islamophobia Dalam Kebijakan Publik Prancis Terhadap Muslim," *Globalization and Foreign Affairs Journal* 1, no. 2 (2024).

intensification of security rhetoric in the wake of terrorist attacks has implications for social alienation.<sup>10</sup>

The demographic landscape enriches our understanding of Islam's position in French society with more concrete data. Official data and sociological surveys show that the majority of the population, estimated at 34 million adults, identify as non-religious, while Catholics remain the largest religious group, estimated at around 20 to 26 million.<sup>11</sup> The Muslim community is present in this landscape with a population of around 5 to 6 million, a figure that reflects growth due to migration patterns and a relatively higher fertility rate compared to the national average.<sup>12</sup> This growth is geographically uneven, with significant concentrations in urban areas such as Paris and Marseille, leading to variations in integration experiences at the local level.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, public perception often exaggerates the size of the Muslim community far beyond the actual figure of 5 to 6 million people, a distortion that significantly influences public policy discourse.

Interpersonal attitudes toward Muslims show positive aspects in everyday social relations and often contrast with tensions at the state policy level. International surveys place the level of *favorability* toward Muslims in France at a relatively high level compared to other countries, an indication that the majority of citizens do not harbor direct hostility toward Muslim individuals and support forms of coexistence through shared access to education and economic participation.<sup>14</sup> Efforts at spatial accommodation by local governments, although often limited to

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<sup>10</sup> Basri, "DILEMA NEGARA SEKULER PRANCIS."

<sup>11</sup> Franck Frégosi, "Being Muslim in a Secular State: History, Sociological Realities, and Institutional Issues—the French Case," in *Muslims in Europe*, ed. Rauf Ceylan and Marvin Mücke, Islam in Der Gesellschaft (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2024), 3–22, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-43044-3\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-43044-3_1).

<sup>12</sup> Dalibor Đukić, "Impact of Migration on the Demographic and Religious Landscapes of Central European Countries: Legal Perspectives," in *Studies of the Central European Professors' Network*, ed. Anikó Raisz (Central European Academic Publishing, 2024), 261–84, [https://doi.org/10.54237/profnet.2024.armace\\_6](https://doi.org/10.54237/profnet.2024.armace_6).

<sup>13</sup> J. G. Reitz, P. Simon, and E. Laxer, "Muslims' Social Inclusion and Exclusion in France, Québec, and Canada: Does National Context Matter?\*", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43, no. 15 (2017): 2473–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1313105>.

<sup>14</sup> Roger, "Unrepresentative Representatives: What It Takes to Be a 'Muslim' Commentator in France Following the Example of Mohamed Sifaoui and Chahdortt Djavann."

suburban areas, demonstrate constructive initiatives to provide space for religious practice without violating public secular norms. The contribution of Muslim communities in the labor and cultural sectors is increasingly recognized as part of the French social mosaic, although this form of acceptance remains vulnerable to shifts in public opinion and political pressure.<sup>15</sup>

Widespread individual ambivalence has become a collective attitude reflecting anxiety about long-term integration, particularly with regard to public expressions of religion. The construction of places of worship and the use of religious symbols are often perceived by some groups as a challenge to public secularism, triggering a defensive response from the majority.<sup>16</sup> The image of Islam in the mass media exacerbates the situation when negative representations associate the religion with radicalism and an inability to assimilate, which then reinforces institutional stereotypes.<sup>17</sup> Empirical research on discrimination confirms higher levels of official and social restrictions on Muslims compared to other minority groups, including denial of group rights and incidents of anti-Muslim violence, reflecting the tension between the principle of religious freedom and republican assimilation pressures.<sup>18</sup>

Claims of universal equality through institutional secularism often result in systematic exclusion of certain groups in practice, making the paradoxical relationship between *laïcité* and Muslim communities a central point of debate. 's policy responses and public discourse on various sensitive issues, including cases of statements deemed offensive to religion, reveal the dilemma between freedom of expression and

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<sup>15</sup> Statham, “How Ordinary People View Muslim Group Rights in Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany: Significant ‘Gaps’ between Majorities and Muslims?”

<sup>16</sup> C. Trizis, “Secularism and the Role of the Chaplain in a Public Healthcare Facility,” *Aide Soignante* 39, no. 271 (2025): 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aidsoi.2025.08.005>; Abdessamad Belhaj, “Secularism as Equality: French Islamic Discourses on Laïcité,” *Religions* 13, no. 10 (October 2022): 927, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100927>.

<sup>17</sup> Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies.”

<sup>18</sup> Emily Laxer, “‘We Are All Republicans’: Political Articulation and the Production of Nationhood in France’s Face Veil Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 4 (October 2018): 938–67, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000348>.

diplomatic consequences and global reactions that further deepen polarization.<sup>19</sup> The political arena has also heated up as assessments of organizations or movements associated with certain agendas, such as *the Muslim Brotherhood*, have triggered a security discourse that reinforces concerns about national cohesion.<sup>20</sup>

The dynamics of the relationship between Islam and France essentially confirm the existence of a structural ambivalence that is deeply rooted in the republic. The increasingly diverse demographic reality now clashes directly with the rigidity of a secular ideology that has not fully adapted to the presence of postcolonial entities. The social friction that occurs goes beyond a mere debate on the legality of religious symbols; rather, it reflects a crisis of recognition of hybrid identities in the public sphere. This paradox proves that claims of republican universalism without accompanying cultural reform actually perpetuate imaginary boundaries that separate citizens based on the visibility of their beliefs rather than uniting them in bonds of equal citizenship.

### **Portraits of Secularism, State Fear, and Structural Islamophobia**

The Constitution of the Fourth Republic of 1946 and the Constitution of the Fifth Republic of 1958 affirmed the principle of *laïcité* as the foundation of the state's neutrality towards religion. Article 1 of the Constitution guarantees the equality of citizens without discrimination based on origin, race, or religion.<sup>21</sup> This doctrine is rooted in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which emphasizes freedom of opinion and expression as long as it does not disturb public order. The legal framework was originally intended to respect individual beliefs while limiting religious influence in the realm of the state.<sup>22</sup> The evolution of *laïcité* throughout the 20th century unfortunately shows a shift from inclusive principles to a mechanism of surveillance as the state grapples with the dynamics of globalization and migration, which accelerate the clash between religious identity and

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<sup>19</sup> Nugier et al., “Nouvelle Laïcité En France et Pression Normative Envers Les Minorités Musulmanes.”

<sup>20</sup> Panighel, “Unveiling (Post)Colonial République”; Gilbert and Keane, “Equality versus Fraternity? Rethinking France and Its Minorities.”

<sup>21</sup> Raphael Cohen-Almagor, “Indivisibilité, Sécurité, Laïcité: The French Ban on the Burqa and the Niqab,” *French Politics* 20, no. 1 (March 2022): 3–24, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-021-00164-8>.

<sup>22</sup> Basri, “DILEMA NEGARA SEKULER PRANCIS.”

republican nationalism.<sup>23</sup> This transformation reflects a fundamental paradox in which secularism, designed to protect freedom, has instead become a tool for regulating the religious expression of minorities, particularly Islam, as a reactive response to perceived external threats.

The state's institutional fear of Islam manifests itself through the process of securitization. The government actively frames Muslim religious practices as a risk to republican identity, even though the root of the problem actually stems from colonial legacies and responses to post-2001 terrorist attacks.<sup>24</sup> This approach, analyzed within *the Copenhagen School's* securitization theory framework, transforms religious issues into national security threats that legitimize restrictive policies. This legitimization is evident in the 2021 anti-separatism law, which expands the scope of surveillance of mosques and Muslim organizations.<sup>25</sup> The state's response often exceeds the ambivalent public perception, given that surveys show a relatively high level of interpersonal acceptance of Muslims. Administrative policies, on the other hand, reinforce the narrative of threat through restrictions on religious symbols in the public sector.<sup>26</sup> This structural strategy ultimately integrates *laïcité* as an instrument for maintaining national coherence, despite its potential to exacerbate the alienation of minority communities.

The paradox of Muslim religious expression is increasingly prominent in a divided social space. The practice of wearing the hijab or building mosques is relatively socially safe thanks to majority support for equal rights, but it remains vulnerable to restrictive legal and administrative intervention.<sup>27</sup> Empirical findings confirm the tendency of

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<sup>23</sup> Christina Lienen and Samir Sweida-Metwally, “French Islamophobia: How Orthopraxy Is Conceptualized as a Public Peril,” *Religions* 16, no. 1 (January 2025): 64, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010064>; Romadhoni, Rahmadani, and Nugroho, “Sekularisme Dan Islamophobia Dalam Kebijakan Publik Prancis Terhadap Muslim.”

<sup>24</sup> Panighel, “Unveiling (Post)Colonial République.”

<sup>25</sup> M. Dazey and V. Gay, “The Mosque Nearby: Visible Minorities and Far-Right Support in France,” *Comparative Political Studies* 58, no. 9 (2025): 2000–2048, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241283015>.

<sup>26</sup> A. G. Hargreaves, “Lop-Sided Laws: French Muslims and Laïcité,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 27, no. 2 (2023): 171–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2023.2185404>; Reitz, Simon, and Laxer, “Muslims’ Social Inclusion and Exclusion in France, Québec, and Canada: Does National Context Matter?\*,” 2017.

<sup>27</sup> F. Curinier et al., “Gendered Islamophobic Securitisation and the Headscarf Conundrum in France and the Netherlands,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered*

French society to accept daily interactions with Muslims, while state policies such as the 2010 ban on the niqab and the 2023 ban on the abaya create structural imbalances. Freedom of religion is formally protected but restricted in practice to prevent alleged separatism.<sup>28</sup> These tensions reinforce the narrative of *laïcité's* transformation into an *illiberal* tool that restricts public expression and hinders substantive integration, as seen in the increase in institutional discrimination against Muslim women.<sup>29</sup> The republic's internal contradictions are clearly revealed when claims of universal equality clash with exclusionary practices based on perceived threats.

State-institutionalized structural Islamophobia is becoming increasingly concrete through public policy and educational regulations. *Laïcité* in this context serves as a justification for restricting the collective rights of minorities, making Muslim communities seemingly invisible in statistics and constitutional law.<sup>30</sup> The 2020 policy to dissolve *the Collective Against Islamophobia in France* (CCIF) and the strict surveillance of 76 mosques on charges of separatism reflect the use of *laïcité* by administrative officials as a legitimization of stigma. The roots of this discrimination actually stem more from the dynamics of the political elite than from the sentiments of the general public.<sup>31</sup> Political rhetoric exacerbates this phenomenon, such as President Macron's statements after the Charlie Hebdo incident and the murder of Samuel Paty in 2020, which reinforce the narrative of Islam as a threat. This

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*Islamophobia* (2024), 55–70, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-52022-8\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-52022-8_4); Dazey and Gay, “The Mosque Nearby: Visible Minorities and Far-Right Support in France”; Mayanthi Fernando, “Exceptional Citizens: Secular Muslim Women and the Politics of Difference in France: EXCEPTIONAL CITIZENS,” *Social Anthropology* 17, no. 4 (October 2009): 379–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8676.2009.00081.x>.

<sup>28</sup> Wiles, “Headscarves, Human Rights, and Harmonious Multicultural Society: Implications of the French Ban for Interpretations of Equality”; Trizis, “Laïcité et Place de l’aumônier Dans Un Établissement Public de Soins.”

<sup>29</sup> Nugier et al., “Nouvelle Laïcité En France et Pression Normative Envers Les Minorités Musulmanes”; Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies”; Frégosi, “Being Muslim in a Secular State.”

<sup>30</sup> Gilbert and Keane, “Equality versus Fraternity? Rethinking France and Its Minorities.”

<sup>31</sup> Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies”; Dazey and Gay, “The Mosque Nearby: Visible Minorities and Far-Right Support in France.”

narrative triggered a 72% increase in anti-Muslim acts in early 2025, according to a report by the French Human Rights Commission.<sup>32</sup> These structural implications increase social tensions and hinder reform because the strict interpretation of *the Conseil Constitutionnel* continues to reject international recommendations for a more inclusive approach.

The long-term impact of this structural Islamophobia deepens Muslim communities' distrust of state institutions. The 2021 anti-separatism policy, which includes a ban on home schooling and the termination of subsidies for organizations, effectively functions as a securitization tool that exacerbates marginalization despite being rhetorically intended to strengthen social cohesion.<sup>33</sup> Comparative analysis shows similarities between this approach and dynamics in other European countries, but French *laïcité* provides a unique dimension that combines revolutionary heritage with a contemporary response to globalization. This combination creates a cycle of sustained fear.<sup>34</sup> The transformation of *laïcité* into an instrument of state fear ultimately not only reinforces structural Islamophobia but also challenges the very essence of the republic itself. This situation demands an urgent reevaluation to balance the imperatives of national security with the protection of fundamental human rights.

### **Media Representation, Construction of the "Other," and Legitimization of Securitization**

Mainstream media in France systematically reinforces Islamophobia through reporting that associates Islam with radicalism, security threats, and an inability to assimilate into republican values. An analysis of major newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* reveals that Islam is portrayed as a homogeneous entity that is either radical or *inassimilable*, while Muslim communities are positioned as groups that

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<sup>32</sup> Roger, "Unrepresentative Representatives: What It Takes to Be a 'Muslim' Commentator in France Following the Example of Mohamed Sifaoui and Chahdortt Djavann."

<sup>33</sup> Saïla Ouald Chaïb, Saïla Ouald Chaïb, and Eva Brems, "Doing Minority Justice Through Procedural Fairness: Face Veil Bans in Europe," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 2, no. 1 (2013): 1–26, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-12341248>.

<sup>34</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, "Passive and Assertive Secularism: Historical Conditions, Ideological Struggles, and State Policies toward Religion," *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (July 2007): 568–94, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2008.0005>.

require moderation and discipline in order to adapt to *laïcité*.<sup>35</sup> This approach not only reflects editorial bias but also reinforces the dominant discourse that objectifies Muslims, particularly through the excessive highlighting of issues surrounding women and religious symbols such as the hijab.<sup>36</sup> Linguistic studies show that this media rhetorical strategy involves the use of language that racializes public discourse when Islam is portrayed as an external element that disrupts social cohesion, thereby reinforcing the cycle of Islamophobia from 2001 to 2022.<sup>37</sup>

The pattern of negative representation deepened when the media linked Islam to national security issues, especially after terrorist events such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks in 2015. The coverage tended to equate extremist acts with the entire Muslim community without adequate differentiation. Systematic research on global representation shows that French media often amplifies Islamophobic sentiments through anti-immigration policy *framing* that shapes public perceptions of Muslims as a source of instability.<sup>38</sup> The construction of discourse on the inability to assimilate reinforces this element when narratives about Islamist separatism dominate and ignore the socioeconomic contributions of Muslim communities.<sup>39</sup> Such representations ultimately not only shape public opinion but also reinforce power relations that position Muslims as subjects who need to be monitored and controlled.

The paradox of this dynamic lies in the discrepancy between relatively positive public opinion toward Muslims on an interpersonal level and the narrative of threat that continues to be reproduced by the media. The public, which does not actually harbor direct hatred, is exposed to discourse that triggers collective anxiety. Surveys show that media exposure to the issue of radicalism increases the perception of threat and multiplies social tensions without a strong empirical basis,

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<sup>35</sup> Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies.”

<sup>36</sup> Cohen-Almagor, “Indivisibilité, Sécurité, Laïcité.”

<sup>37</sup> Fairclough Norman, “Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language,” New York: United States Of America, 1995.

<sup>38</sup> Ait Abdeslam, “The Representation of Islam and Muslims in French Print Media Discourse: Le Monde and Le Figaro as Case Studies.”

<sup>39</sup> Đukić, “Impact of Migration on the Demographic and Religious Landscapes of Central European Countries.”

even though the majority of society supports equal rights.<sup>40</sup> Through biased news selection, the media creates a symbolic distance between the majority and the minority when Muslims are portrayed as *Liyan* or foreign entities that threaten national identity.<sup>41</sup> Social alienation worsens because media discourse does not reflect an inclusive reality but rather reinforces existing institutional biases.

The state's use of media discourse further strengthens the republican position in legitimizing securitization policies. Media narratives of threat form the basis for regulations such as the 2021 anti-separatism law. Political rhetoric often adopts media *framing* that links Islam with security to justify restrictions on religious symbols such as the niqab or abaya in the name of national protection and *laïcité*.<sup>42</sup> This process demonstrates the symbiotic interaction between the media and the state, where negative representations legitimize administrative intervention and state policies provide new material for sensationalist reporting.<sup>43</sup> This discourse has implications for the strengthening of structural Islamophobia and the obstruction of inter-community dialogue, as the media acts as a biased mediator in power relations.

The framing of Muslim identity as *Liyan* in the media creates unequal power relations. The majority society is positioned as the republican norm, while Muslim minorities are portrayed as deviants who need to be forcibly assimilated. Critical analysis shows the involvement of modern Orientalism in this *framing* when issues of violence against women or youth radicalization are selectively linked to Islam to reinforce symbolic and social distance.<sup>44</sup> Negative events dominate media coverage in the aftermath of terror, while positive narratives about integration rarely appear, thus contributing to the production of exclusionary discourse. This overall dynamic reinforces the state's position in

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<sup>40</sup> Statham, "How Ordinary People View Muslim Group Rights in Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany: Significant 'Gaps' between Majorities and Muslims?"

<sup>41</sup> Roger, "Unrepresentative Representatives: What It Takes to Be a 'Muslim' Commentator in France Following the Example of Mohamed Sifaoui and Chahdortt Djavann."

<sup>42</sup> Romadhoni, Rahmadani, and Nugroho, "Sekularisme Dan Islamophobia Dalam Kebijakan Publik Prancis Terhadap Muslim."

<sup>43</sup> Frégosi, "Being Muslim in a Secular State."

<sup>44</sup> Panighel, "Unveiling (Post)Colonial République."

justifying restrictions, as *the Other* discourse functions as a tool for defending republican hegemony over religious pluralism.

The long-term implications of such media representation deepen the paradox of French secularism as claims of universal equality clash with the production of exclusive discourse. Critical intervention is needed to decolonize this skewed media narrative. Empirical research emphasizes the urgency of an intersectional framework that acknowledges the *gendered* impact of *Islamophobia* in the media, given that Muslim women are the primary targets of *negative framing* that exacerbates structural inequality.<sup>45</sup> Inclusive media reform with an emphasis on balanced representation is essential to reduce symbolic distance and support true social cohesion in a multicultural society.<sup>46</sup>

### **Reconstructing Muslim Immigrant Policy through the Securitization Framework Philippe Bourbeau**

The paradox of French secularism is increasingly evident in policies toward immigrants and Muslim communities as the originally neutral principle of *laïcité* has transformed into an instrument for regulating religious expression as a potential threat to republican unity. This evolution is rooted in the postcolonial wave of migration from Muslim-majority countries, which has created tension between claims of universal equality and the practice of restricting the collective rights of minorities. This situation creates a real contradiction between the revolutionary values of 1789 and contemporary adaptations to pluralism.<sup>47</sup> Philippe Bourbeau's securitization theory framework provides an analytical lens for understanding this process when state actors use *speech acts* to frame migration and Islamic practices as existential threats. This threat framework then justifies extraordinary measures such as strict surveillance and restrictive legislation.<sup>48</sup> Bourbeau's approach emphasizes that securitization is not merely a

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<sup>45</sup> Nugier et al., “Nouvelle Laïcité En France et Pression Normative Envers Les Minorités Musulmanes.”

<sup>46</sup> Wiles, “Headscarves, Human Rights, and Harmonious Multicultural Society: Implications of the French Ban for Interpretations of Equality.”

<sup>47</sup> Gilbert and Keane, “Equality versus Fraternity? Rethinking France and Its Minorities”; Romadhoni, Rahmadani, and Nugroho, “Sekularisme Dan Islamophobia Dalam Kebijakan Publik Prancis Terhadap Muslim.”

<sup>48</sup> Philippe Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration: A Study of Movement and Order*, Security and Governance Series (London: Routledge, 2011).

reactive response but a discursive and institutional process involving actors and audiences as well as the context in which Muslim migration in France was forcibly shifted from a social issue to the domain of national security.<sup>49</sup>

The mechanism of framing threats in Bourbeau's theory is clearly evident in the 2021 Law Reinforcing the Principles of the Republic, which expands surveillance of religious organizations and foreign funds under the pretext of preventing Islamic separatism. Key securitization actors such as President Macron and parliament issued *speech acts* that marked political Islam as a risk to *the referent object* of republican unity. The public audience is then convinced through media narratives to accept extraordinary measures such as the republican commitment contract obligation and restrictions on *homeschooling*.<sup>50</sup> The institutionalization of securitization reinforces the paradox because policies that are claimed to be neutral have a disproportionate impact on Muslim communities, as seen in the closure of mosques and associations on charges of radicalization. These actions ultimately exacerbate alienation rather than promote integration. Bourbeau's comparative analysis of Canada and France shows that the historical context of *laïcité* accelerates this process when migration is seen as a destabilizing element demanding a security response.<sup>51</sup>

The 2023 ban on abayas in public schools further illustrates these securitization dynamics. Education Minister Gabriel Attal used *speech acts* to frame traditional Muslim clothing as a symbol threatening educational neutrality, thereby transforming an identity issue into a threat to national identity security. The audience, including the majority of the public who supported the ban according to surveys, accepted this *framing*, which was then institutionalized through administrative decisions and confirmation by *the Conseil d'État*. This process reflects Bourbeau's stage of institutionalization, where extraordinary measures become legal norms.<sup>52</sup> The policy exacerbates *gendered Islamophobia* as

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<sup>49</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*.

<sup>50</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*; Reitz, Simon, and Laxer, "Muslims' Social Inclusion and Exclusion in France, Québec, and Canada: Does National Context Matter?\*", 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*.

<sup>52</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*; Wiles, "Headscarves, Human Rights, and Harmonious Multicultural Society: Implications of the French Ban for Interpretations of Equality."

Muslim women become the primary target, making the paradox of *laïcité* even more apparent when formal equality actually results in substantive discrimination, as analyzed in a study on the impact of securitization on the daily lives of French Muslims.<sup>53</sup> Bourbeau's approach reveals that the post-terrorism context reinforces this process as Muslim migration is shifted to the realm of security without proportional empirical evidence.<sup>54</sup>

The most dominant paradox lies in the state and its legal apparatus rather than in society at large, which shows a more moderate attitude toward Muslims on an interpersonal level. Surveys indicate support for equal rights despite collective anxiety at the surface level. State institutions, through strict interpretations of the constitution, reject the recognition of minorities and use *laïcité* to legitimize exclusion, creating an imbalance where reactive regulation dominates inclusive approaches.<sup>55</sup> Bourbeau emphasizes that this securitization results in the production of subjects when Muslims are positioned as potential threats that exacerbate polarization. This polarization stems more from the political elite than from the grassroots.<sup>56</sup> The layer of paradox becomes even more complex because the socio-economic context in which structural discrimination against Muslim immigrants reinforces the cycle of securitization, even though society tends to accept integration when it is not framed as a threat.

Policy reconstruction requires desecuritization, as proposed by Bourbeau, which is to return the issue of Muslim migration to the normal social realm through inclusive dialogue and the rejection of threat *framing*. This strategy aims to integrate human security with substantive equality. Concrete steps involve establishing an independent body to evaluate human rights impacts and consult with Muslim communities, as well as empowerment programs such as multicultural education to

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<sup>53</sup> Kar- Gupta and Richard Lough, “Beheaded Teacher Was ‘Quiet Hero’ Who Incarnated French Values, Macron Says.,” *Reuters*, Oktober 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*.

<sup>55</sup> Gilbert and Keane, “Equality versus Fraternity? Rethinking France and Its Minorities”; Statham, “How Ordinary People View Muslim Group Rights in Britain, the Netherlands, France and Germany: Significant ‘Gaps’ between Majorities and Muslims?”

<sup>56</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*; Nugier et al., “Nouvelle Laïcité En France et Pression Normative Envers Les Minorités Musulmanes.”

strengthen social cohesion without sacrificing pluralism.<sup>57</sup> This approach, as seen in comparative studies, can reduce structural Islamophobia by prioritizing social resilience over security responses, thereby restoring *laïcité* to its original essence as a protector of religious freedom.<sup>58</sup>

## KESIMPULAN

This research confirms that the application of the principle of *laïcité* in France has undergone a radical transformation from its original function as a guarantor of state neutrality to an instrument of securitization that systematically marginalizes Muslim communities. Through an analysis of public policy and media discourse after 2010, a fundamental paradox is revealed in which the rhetoric of republican universalism actually legitimizes practices of structural exclusion, especially against visible expressions of religion such as the wearing of the hijab. These findings prove that the state does not act as a neutral arbiter but rather as a key actor that produces and perpetuates institutionalized Islamophobia through regulations that frame Muslim identity as an existential threat to national cohesion. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in demystifying the assumption of French secularism's neutrality by showing how colonial legacies and Eurocentric biases still operate latently in contemporary legal architecture, creating second-class citizenship for Muslim minorities.

The policy implications of these findings demand urgent reform of France's assimilationist approach to integration towards an inclusive model of secularism that accommodates pluralism without sacrificing the republic's fundamental values. Policy reconstruction must shift from a security paradigm to a human rights-based approach that recognizes the agency of Muslim women and separates the issue of terrorism from everyday religious practices. In practical terms, this requires revising discriminatory laws and public education interventions to deconstruct the negative narratives produced by mainstream media. Further research is recommended to expand the scope of analysis on the long-term psychosocial impact of securitization policies on young French Muslims

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<sup>57</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*; Panighel, "Unveiling (Post)Colonial République."

<sup>58</sup> Bourbeau, *The Securitization of Migration*; Roger, "Unrepresentative Representatives: What It Takes to Be a 'Muslim' Commentator in France Following the Example of Mohamed Sifaoui and Chahdortt Djavann."

and to conduct comparative studies with models of secularism in other liberal democracies in order to enrich the global discourse on the management of religious diversity in the public sphere.

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