Islamophobia in France: A Struggle Between Religious and National Identity

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To Mike, thank you for putting up with the late nights of typing and keeping a smile on my face through the entire process. To Mom and Lolly, thank you for always encouraging me to achieve my goals and helping me along the way. I would not be where I am today without you. And thank you to all my friends and family who have supported me over the years.

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ABSTRACT

Islamophobia in France: A Struggle Between Religious and National Identity

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The purpose of this paper is to outline preexisting measures and current events in France that indicate the existence of anti-Muslim sentiment within the state. The ultimate goal of this paper is to determine the multifarious causes for Islamophobia in France while disposing of falsely perceived motivators for this phenomenon. This paper will specifically look at the roles played by Christian nationalism, French identity, and epistemic racism in helping to exacerbate religious discrimination in the form of Islamophobia. A coherent definition for Islamophobia will be outlined as a basis for understanding the phenomenon in more depth. Previous scholarship on Islamophobia will be cited in order to identify gaps within the existing literature. Additionally, datasets and public opinion polls will further support the overall contention of this piece.
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INTRODUCTION

“France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs. It shall be organized on a decentralized basis. Statutes shall promote equal access by women and men to elective offices and posts as well as to position of professional and social responsibility.” -An English translation of Article I in the 1958 French constitution

“L’immigration musulmane est le problème majeur auquel nos enfants seront confrontés. C’est un germe de guerre civile.”
(Muslim immigration is the major problem our children will face. It is a germ of civil war.)
-An anonymous survey respondent when asked to elaborate on their beliefs on Muslims in France

Rationale for Study

The purpose of this paper is to analyze certain preexisting measures and events in France that indicate the presence of anti-Muslim sentiment in the nation. The ultimate goal of this paper is to determine the likely causes of Islamophobia in France while disposing of falsely perceived motivators for this phenomenon. This paper will specifically look at the role played by Christian nationalism, French cultural identity, and epistemic racism in generating Islamophobia. A coherent definition of Islamophobia will be outlined as a basis for understanding the phenomenon in more depth. Previous scholarship on Islamophobia will be cited and used to identify gaps within the existing research. Along with historical research, datasets and public opinion polls will provide data to further examine the base causes of Islamophobia in order to support the overall contention of this piece.
France remains the primary geographic focus of this study, with references to other countries when appropriate. The time period of focus is twofold. First, the paper examines the Dreyfus Affair during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a demonstrated model of anti-religious sentiment in the state. Second, this paper will look at Islamophobia in France before and after the Charlie Hebdo attacks to determine if this phenomenon increased significantly in the days and weeks after this terrorist action. In addition, through opinion polls, this paper will look at current anti-Muslim sentiment as reflected by French-Catholics and French-heritage nationals in 2019. Finally, a brief examination of French Muslims, including French-Algerian Muslims, will be discussed in order to better understand the impact of discrimination and epistemic racism on these populations.

In recent years, an apparent rise in Islamophobic sentiment has swept across France. France’s National Human Rights Commission recently reported that, in 2015 alone, France experienced 429 anti-Muslim threats and attacks, “a striking 223 percent increase from the previous year.”\(^1\) Many of these attacks against the Muslim population can be linked to a backlash surrounding Islamist terrorist incidents in France; such as the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo shootings and the November 2015 terrorist attacks, which killed 130 people across Paris and injured many others. While the origins of Islamophobic sentiment in France is an issue of contention and widely debated among policy makers, politicians, and the media, this paper argues that Islamophobia is more deeply-rooted in the French culture and psyche than what is evident on the surface. In fact, the French brand of Islamophobia reflects the same discriminatory

attitudes toward perceived religious and ethnic “outsiders” in France as was evidenced by the
anti-Semitic nature of the Dreyfus Affair in the late 19th century.

A firm definition of Islamophobia and its origins are challenging to pinpoint because of
the broad range of answers found within the multidisciplinary body of academic literature that
closely examines the phenomenon. Definitions of Islamophobia differ widely within and
between disciplines. Many sources defend the incoherent nature of the term’s definition because,
they argue, the concept is conceptual and contextual in nature. Within academic and public
circles, usage of the term “Islamophobia” has varied over time according to the location, time
period, and social circumstances in which anti-Muslim behavior has been observed. Nonetheless,
most scholars would agree that Islamophobia presents itself as a form of religious intolerance or
fear of the Islamic faith. This definition, however, is inadequate because it fails to clarify the fact
that Islamophobia can also be understood as a form of racial profiling.

This paper argues that in France, Islamophobia is not a new phenomenon, but rather a
reiteration of anti-religious sentiment that can be seen in various forms throughout French
history. Thus, anti-Islamic sentiment can be understood more broadly as anti-religious
discrimination in France, which has risen dramatically in recent years. While anti-Semitism has
been expressed in various episodes of French history, the rise of Islamophobia in France suggests
that the laser focus of anti-religious discrimination has shifted to include the nation’s Islamic
communities. While a rise in anti-Muslim threats and attacks have occurred more recently, the
origins of anti-religious sentiment can be traced to the 1894 to 1906 Dreyfus Affair, which will
be outlined in more detail later in this paper.

The French Constitution presents the framework for French values and the nation’s
orientation toward citizenship and inclusion. This national document mandates that all
individuals within the French Republic will honor French identity in favor of any other ethnic, racial, or religious identities they might hold. Newcomers are expected to comply with the French Republican model; the French assimilationist system is meant to help foreigners shed their unique identities in order to integrate into the cultural homogeneity of the nation. This assimilationist Republican model is exclusionary, treating non-French cultures as illegitimate entities within the body politic and national culture of France. However, as religious and cultural pluralism in France increases with the influx of a diverse assembly of immigrant groups, the place of religion within the state has come into question. Historically, religion has held a paradoxical place in French society—both excluded from secular society and acknowledged as a deep-rooted Catholic cultural presence among the French heritage community. This juxtaposition of two contradictory values coexisting within the same borders has helped to motivate a model of a secular, yet ethnically Catholic, national identity that is highly exclusionary toward those who fall outside of these specific identity parameters.

A fundamental pillar of the French Constitution is its emphasis on the separation of religion and society, a value that regards religion as an illegitimate aspect of an individual’s public identity. Through the institution of laïcité (or “secularity” in English), French society has been able to enjoy the freedoms of a government void of any influence from religious law. As a result, however, individual religious freedoms in France have been suppressed through the imposition of secularism as a normative aspect of French identity. Instead, this secular identity is the only one recognized by the French state. As the state experiences increasing levels of religious pluralism, the imposition of a single, secular identity has left French citizens with little room to profess a religious identity that is not historically French Catholic. This dilemma has
created further complications for those who perceive religion to be an important aspect of their self-identity.

This complexity can be better understood when considering the place of Catholicism in the nation’s history. Although the state presents secularism as a key aspect of national identity, Catholicism remains the majority religion in the nation, with nearly 60 percent of French citizens identifying as Catholic. In fact, there continues today to be a reiteration of Catholic identity in the nation. Although the influence of Catholicism as an organized religious practice may be steadily decreasing, Catholic identity remains strong among the French people. When religion holds a place within the history of a nation’s majority, it often becomes entwined with the social identity of the people. A continued presence of Catholic identity creates an opportunity for Christian nationalism to exist within French society.

The French people may be politically secular, but the majority continues to draw on Catholicism as a form of ethno-religious identity. This has generated the possibility for an in-group mentality that French Catholics draw on to counter other religions represented within the nation. This in-group mentality has succeeded in motivating the possibility for epistemic racism to exist. Today, this otherization of minority religious groups, along with an emphasis on Catholic ethno-religious identity, creates a national cultural identity that is used against the Muslim population to highlight differences from those who are ethnically French. For this reason, it can be argued that Islamophobia in France is motivated by French national identity and Christian nationalism, which together results in a form of epistemic racism that marginalizes minority groups in the nation.

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Islamophobia can be recognized in many aspects of French society. Most recently, in the 2016 elections, anti-Muslim rhetoric became a popular platform for the proposition of anti-immigration laws. This rhetoric has been rampant among far-right political campaigns in France, including those of Marine Le Pen, Marion Marichal-Le Pen, and François Fillon. In recent years activists within this far-right movement have capitalized on terror attacks that were carried out by Muslim extremists. However, this thesis argues that terrorism is not the original or solitary cause of Islamophobia. Instead, terrorist incidents serve to legitimize and magnify already present discriminatory attitudes toward minority religious groups.

Scholar Robyn Torok believes a correlation exists between Islamophobia and the recruitment of Jihadist militants in the nation. According to Torok, “Terrorists gain support for this concept by exploiting Western spectacles of violence.” As anti-Muslim sentiment is reiterated by the media and politicians within French society, certain Islamist extremist groups react. This does not suggest that Islamophobia causes terrorism, but it does create a context of discrimination that may marginalize certain groups in society that react in oppositional ways. When terrorist groups enact violence, the destructive actions of these militants serve to confirm the beliefs of those who already have skewed perceptions of Islam.

Islamophobia in France presents itself as a highly complex phenomenon with numerous variables to be explored as possible explanations for its presence in France. There is no doubt that Islamophobia has a presence in France; however, this thesis explores the reasons as to why it is so prevalent in this nation. Currently there are gaps within the existing scholarship that might explain the variables that motivate Islamophobia in France. This paper is intended to add to the conversation. I argue that the primary causes for the presence of Islamophobia in France can be

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attributed to the exclusivity of French national identity, the place of Christian nationalism in the state, and the existence of epistemic racism within French culture that emerged on the public stage during the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906).

**Literature Review**

The concept of Islamophobia first emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was originally a widely used concept within public and scholarly circles to draw attention to anti-Muslim sentiment that generated harmful rhetoric and actions against the Muslim community. Typically noted as most prevalent within Western liberal democracies, the term “Islamophobia” was not a word coined by academics; it was first articulated by politicians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations. The term was used to describe any kind of anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic sentiment or actions found within society.⁴

The meaning of Islamophobia has evolved in more recent years, moving from a predominantly political concept to one that is used primarily for analytical and anthropological purposes. Today, it is employed by researchers as a means of identifying the various dimensions behind anti-Muslim or anti-Islamic sentiment. Many scholars look at contextual factors, such as a nation’s historical relationship to religion and pluralism; the density of Muslims within a particular population; the intensity of negative sentiments toward Muslims; motivating factors for those negative sentiments; and the potential consequences of anti-Islamic sentiment. Scholar Erik Bleich (2011) argues that the concept of Islamophobia has reemerged within the social sciences, but in a more holistic manner than was previously seen. However, there is no concrete

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or widely accepted definition of Islamophobia. Lacking a commonly held definition, it is
difficult to measure or compare levels of Islamophobia within or between nations over time. The
general idea of what constitutes Islamophobia has changed over the last 20 years, consequently
further complicating the meaning of the term. This creates difficulties in completing a
comparative analysis of Islamophobia. Because no specific causes or definitions for this term
have emerged, a comparative model is lacking within the social sciences. Therefore, a gap exists
in the scholarly understanding of the origins and motivations of anti-Islamic sentiment in the
West, which appears to be gaining traction in recent years.⁵

Lacking a widely accepted definition for Islamophobia, various understandings of the
concept have been generated.⁶ Oxford philosopher and expert on Islamophobia, Brian Klug
(2012), notes that Islamophobia was originally categorized as a form of religious intolerance.
This suggests that discrimination against Muslims is based on its faith practice.⁷ Academic
Fernando Bravo López (2011) proposes that the notion of Islamophobia, as a form of religious
intolerance, comes from the etymology of the word—aphobia or fear of Islam. However,
considering Islamophobia to be merely a fear of Islam is not a broad enough definition.
Islamophobia is not simply the fear of a religion, but rather an irrational fear of Muslims in
general. It is also considered to be a form of racial discrimination based on certain stereotypes

https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211409387. (p. 1583)
https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211409387. (p. 1583)
https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812450363.
that have been applied to those who practice Islam.\textsuperscript{8} Bleich attempts a broader definition, claiming “indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions directed at Islam or Muslims.”\textsuperscript{9}

Bleich provides a coherent understanding of the influences that anti-religious sentiment can have on society. Islamophobia relies on racial stereotyping of a minority group, Bleich argues, and this suggests the presence of discrimination towards Muslims. Typically, the negative sentiment generated within a society toward “outsiders” is based on certain underlying attitudes and emotions toward the in-group and out-group. These negative attitudes cultivated toward Islam have led to the low percentage of Muslims gaining access to public office, secure jobs, or elite schools, and may account for some of the socioeconomic disparities between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, discrimination is a less direct indicator of Islamophobia than other systemic values that appear more obvious.\textsuperscript{10}

To understand anti-Muslim sentiment within a culture, it is best to look at how this minority religious group is portrayed in pop culture and the media. A Pew study on Muslims in France suggests that media coverage impacts French attitudes toward Islam. As a 22-year-old Parisian architect explains, “When you see your Muslim friends on a daily basis you don’t think that relations with Muslims are bad. But if all you do is watch television, most of what you see are extreme examples of Islam.”\textsuperscript{11} Similarly, a Pew Research study in the United States indicates that with the last 10 years, “half or more of Muslims [surveyed] have consistently said that U.S.

media coverage of Muslims is unfair.”12 For example, examining ways in which Muslims and other minorities are depicted on television, in movies, cartoons, video games, novels, and music may illustrate underlying attitudes toward Muslims within a particular nation.

Examining indicators of Muslim integration into society, social relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, and oppressive public policies directed at Muslims are all ways to gauge how a nation’s cultural and political system treats its Muslim population. Another way to gauge Islamophobia is the level of prejudice or suspicion that can be noted within a society through opinion polls and other indicators. A recent study from Gallup noted that in the United States, “an efficient system of government prosecution and media coverage brings Muslim-American terrorism suspects to national attention, creating the impression—perhaps unintentionally—that Muslim-American terrorism is more prevalent than it really is.”13 When the media and government overindulge in publicizing the prosecution of Muslim terrorists, a perceived threat of the religion is more likely to spread within the society. These indicators, and others noted above, serve as measures providing information on the level of Islamophobia within a state. Even so, in order to fully understand the level of Islamophobia in a society, indicators must be holistically and critically analyzed in order to fully comprehend the dynamic between Muslims and non-Muslims in the nation.14

Some of the examples listed above tend to function as both coherent indicators of, as well as potential causes for, negative sentiment against the minority group. However, the hate speech

from far-right politicians or public figures serves to indicate a presence of Islamophobia as well. When politicians use anti-Muslims rhetoric, they typically encourage their own constituents to reiterate similar negative sentiments.\textsuperscript{15} A leading component of far-right rhetoric is the nativist discourse that can be found within nationalistic platforms. Nativism centers around the promotion of a homogenous nation. In this respect, nativist discourse is linked to two primary characteristics. The first is xenophobia, or the fear that non-native populations pose a threat to the homogeneity of a state. The second characteristic is the presence of nationalism as a component of nativist discourse. Ethnic nationalism maintains the notion that in order to best provide certain privileges to a nation’s citizens, a nation’s population must remain homogeneous to ensure a collectivistic mentality and fair distribution of public goods within a society.\textsuperscript{16}

Nativism is not necessarily considered to be a form of racism; however, it can be understood as a reactive response to ethnonationalism. This conservative response emphasizes homogeneity and the denial of multiethnic elements within the state. Political scientist, Cas Mudde, has defined nativism as “xenophobic nationalism,” and calls nativism “an ideology that wants congruence of state and nation—the political and the cultural unit. It wants one state for every nation and one nation for every state. It perceives all non-natives … as threatening.”\textsuperscript{17} For this reason, nationalist, far-right, political elites who use nativist lingo to build a political platform tend to oppose social integration of marginalized groups within a majority population.\textsuperscript{18} In France, nativist sentiments were noted when anti-Semitism began to spread in the early 20th

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\end{thebibliography}
century. With similar roots in discriminatory attitudes toward minority religions, Islamophobia is contemporary mirror of anti-Semitism that emerged publicly in France in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The more recent spread of Islamophobic rhetoric across the state is not unique to French society, as historically there have been similar discourses that demonize marginalized groups within nations.\(^\text{19}\)

**The Development of a Republican French Identity**

After the French Revolution of 1789, nationalism became a pivotal aspect to the development of the new nation. Creating a national identity was necessary in order to unite the revolutionaries against the monarchy. For this reason, the national identity, which was later encapsulated within the newly constructed political landscape, was initially built on the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity.\(^\text{20}\) However, these values only pertain to citizens who are viewed as falling within the cultural in-group of the nation. It is interesting to note that, although the French emphasize an ethnically inclusive culture today, there is still a presence of otherization within society. Their nation-state was initially built through the unification of a regionalized people with multiple identities and dialects (*patois*), including Breton, Corsican, Gallo, and Basque. Following the 1789 French Revolution, French authorities generated a strong national identity through internal colonization to standardize the culture and language of its people. Because the King and the Catholic Church were identified together as corrupt, both the monarchy and religious authorities were persecuted. The Republican movement attempted to

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\(^{19}\) Cazedepats, Armel B. “French Manifestations of Durkheim’s Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and Islamophobia,” 2016. (p. 38)

push religion out of the political sphere, off lands, and out of the hearts of French citizens. Secularism would be the new ideology to replace religion, and conformity was required.

Scholars Kivisto and Faist point out that the assimilationist nature of the French system continues with respect to incoming foreign races, ethnicities, and religions. When observing early attempts to standardize French national culture in the burgeoning French nation, it is clear that France was largely Catholic and racially white. Even though these traits are not emphasized by political institutions today, they are an unspoken aspect of an historical and current French national identity. Falling outside the white Catholic-heritage demographic, Muslim immigrants who arrived in France from North Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries were not grouped with the national population. Thus, they were labeled as “the other” within society.21 A rising immigrant population created a question around how the French people would perceive the new racial, ethnic, and religious mosaics entering the country.

**How does France Manage its Foreign-Born Population?**

The French Republican state emphasized an assimilationist model as its platform for the incorporation of over 4.3 million immigrants arriving between 1950 and 1914 alone.22 While integration is considered to be a larger process by which individuals of separate ethnic groups or races accommodate each other within the same societal setting, the assimilation model suggests a more hegemonic process in which the dominant culture forces cultural homogeneity in a nation.23 American sociologists Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess (1924) define assimilation

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as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memory, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common historical life.”

The assimilationist model of integration suggests a conformity of race, religion, and ethnicity in keeping with a nation’s historical identity. Newcomers with foreign ethnicities are placed in a position of conforming to the mainstream culture. Unlike the French model, some nations adopt a multiethnic or multicultural model, which allows for hyphenated identities and provides resources to unique ethnic groups. According to Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist (2009), “multiculturalism is a mode of incorporation and, as such, as an approach to inclusion, that either constitutes an alternative to assimilation, a complement to it, or a new version of assimilation.” In these cases, an entirely new form of national identity is created based on many cultures that share resources and citizenship. However, in assimilationist nations where the culture asserts a single ethnicity, race, or religion in order to generate homogeneity, there is a higher threat of an in-group/out-group mentality within that society.

This in-group mentality within the French society has placed an emphasis on maintaining a uniform alignment of the nation (people) with the state (political apparatus). The xenophobic nature of France today emanates from the desire to maintain a homogeneous national identity. However, for those on the political far right, this desire for a titular French nation has caused the exclusion of outside religious groups from the nation. This has occurred in two ways: first, secularism in the nation forbids public displays of religion. Second, with its historically Catholic

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majority, people practicing religions other than Catholicism have largely been viewed as outsiders in France. Anti-Semitism was initially the focus of many far-right and Catholic practitioners in hopes of maintaining homogeneity within in France. However, in recent years, anti-Semitism has been accompanied by anti-Muslim sentiment within certain circles in France.\(^{27}\)

The concept of liberty became one of the leading components of French nationalism. The notion of *liberté* was initially one of the core values of the French republic and symbolized the society’s freedom from an unjust ruling class. Along with liberty, secularism was originally generated in the state in order to ensure equality and remove religion from public institutions. Secularism was instated in order to remove the Catholic church’s involvement in the state. However beneficial to the French people, these components formed a model for the overall exclusion of religion from the state. While heavily sanctioned, Christianity remained widely understood to be an historical aspect of French identity. Nonetheless, any public expression of religious adherence in French society was not encouraged and often met with resistance. Today this anti-religious stance has galvanized a national debate over the Muslim headscarf, which was banned from public spaces in 2010. Originally, secularism in France emerged in response to the power the Catholic Church asserted within the political sphere. The monarchy was legitimized by the church, and relied on clergy to crown the nation’s kings. In turn, the church was given extensive lands and power. The relationship between the two entities was deeply entwined, allowing the church a hefty involvement in the socio-political sphere. In the Revolutionary era, secularism emerged in response to this unholy partnership between the state and religion, with laïcité serving as a vehicle and symbol of French discontent. Today this normative stance against public displays of religion continues to thrive. For Muslims who adhere to the Islamic tradition

\(^{27}\) Cazedepats, Armel B. “French Manifestations of Durkheim’s Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and Islamophobia,” 2016. (p. 38)
of donning the headscarf, secular laws automatically exclude them from complete acceptance in France.  

The banning of the Muslim headscarf is an example of the sort of religious intolerance that can be found in France today, although a retrospective look at France’s history of religious persecution in the years following the French Revolution, anti-Semitism emerged as another form of intolerance toward religious minorities. The Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906) proved to be the first example in which the French national identity responded to minority religious minorities within the nascent nation.

The Dreyfus Affair was an example of blatant anti-Semitism expressed by and within the state’s domain. “Early publicity surrounding the [Dreyfus] case came from anti-Semitic groups (especially the newspaper La Libre Parole, edited by Edouard Dumont), to whom Dreyfus symbolized the supposed disloyalty of French Jews.” Captain Alfred Dreyfus was a French-Jewish man brought up on charges for treason against the state. He was accused of selling secrets to the Germans in the Franco-German war, even though he was later proven to be innocent. Although evidence against another individual emerged, Dreyfus was still charged with treason and was ultimately exiled. As an outcome of the Dreyfus Affair, numerous cartoons were used as pieces of political propaganda against Dreyfus and those who supported them. Figure 1 shows an example of the cartoons used as vehicles for anti-Semitic rhetoric:

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In figure 1, Dreyfus is depicted as a snake with a knife through its stomach. The general public understood that Dreyfus was not guilty of the crimes in which he was charged; however, because he was Jewish, it was easier to frame him as a traitor of the state. In France at the time, public opinion had a certain level of fear surrounding Jews in the state. Dreyfus’s supporters largely consisted of the French Jewish population. This led the propaganda used to be highly anti-Semitic. This controversy brought out extreme anti-Jewish rhetoric in the state. It led to those supporting Dreyfus to highlight the nationalistic and xenophobic ways of the French. With
regard to French nationalists, they continued to refuse to let Jews assimilate into the nation, and ultimately mocked those who were supporters of Dreyfus.30

Each of these major controversies in French history—both recent and past—illustrate the nature of the collective consciousness within France. In debate over both the Muslim headscarves and the Dreyfus Affair, questions were raised about the nature of French identity, and called into question the issue of belonging. As Islamophobia has become more rampant over the past 20 years, a persistent denial to allow the expression of individual rights has come primarily from the far right. Groups holding these sentiments believe that the value of individual freedoms defies the principles on which the communal Republic was built. A common belief within the nation maintains that individuals must adapt and conform to the identity of the state, which emphasizes secularism. These religious controversies have triggered a reemergence of French identity as a Catholic nation and the unification of the “French people” against what they believe are “outside” groups that refuse to conform to French cultural norms.31

Recent terrorist incidents further complicate the idea of who belongs and who is an outsider. The 2015 attack on Charlie Hebdo proved to be one of the worst incidents of terror in France’s history. In this violent incident, two French-born brothers of Algerian heritage stormed the offices of the satirical journal, Charlie Hebdo, armed with assault rifles. They opened fire on employees of the newspaper, killing 11 people were injuring 11 others. In the global media coverage that followed, regrets for those lost were constantly reiterated, along with a chain of

Islamophobic rhetoric that not only spread through France, but was echoed throughout many other Western democracies as well.\(^\text{32}\)

*Charlie Hebdo* is a satirical newspaper known for publishing controversial cartoons and content. Islam became a primary target of Charlie Hebdo’s satire. Figure 2 is an example of one of the cartoons that French Muslims consider denigrating to the Prophet Muhammad. These sacrilegious publications were a motivating factor behind the attacks:

Figure 2

Charlie Hebdo Newspaper Cover: An example of how the Prophet Muhammad portrayed in the publication https://thinkprogress.org/the-controversial-cartoons-that-are-said-to-have-inspired-the-terrorist-attack-against-charlie-hebdo-a9a0bcd81d28/

The cartoon in figure 2 depicts a Muslim man, presumably the Prophet Muhammad, exclaiming “100 lashes if you don’t die laughing.” Those who defended *Charlie Hebdo* claimed that the publications were not Islamophobic, nor were they attempting to conduct hate speech against Muslims. Their publications were in fact an exercise of the newspaper’s right to free speech, and satire is their modus operandi.

It was what came in the aftermath of the shootings that ultimately led to the development of Islamophobic rhetoric. The people of France who lacked exposure to Islam viewed the *Charlie Hebdo* incident as being quintessentially tied to Islam rather than seeing it as a violent act perpetrated by French-born citizens who had little exposure to Islam before their conversion to a radical version of the religion. The *Charlie Hebdo* massacre generated waves of Islamophobia among those who knew little about Islam. And, as media coverage continued, their reports confirmed anti-Muslim biases.

Once again, Islamophobia can be seen as a product of the media subtly depicting stereotypes of Muslims and leaving the public to interpret them through their own understanding of the religion. However, in referring to liberty as one of the core beliefs of the French identity, freedom of speech becomes a pivotal component to the French culture. It can be noted as deeply entwined within French society as well as having great constitutional value. Historically, France has maintained highly anti-religious sentiment, which over the past ten years or so has been directed mainly towards Muslims in the state. While this anti-Muslim sentiment was seen in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, Islamophobia was present in the state preceding this

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event. Muslims have historically been viewed as lesser in the French state, even when they are native-born citizens. As citizens, Muslims receive fewer opportunities within France as compared to Christians and have remained marginalized within the state.\textsuperscript{35}

In France, there is a clear socio-economic class difference between Christians and Muslims. Christian households in France are placed in a significantly higher wage bracket than that of Muslims. Studies have shown that the typical Muslim household brings in an average, 400 euros less each month than can be seen in the typical Christian households in France. Figure 3 shows the total income difference of Christian versus Muslim households\textsuperscript{36}:

Figure 3


Figure 3 illustrates that Muslim households are more likely to fall into lower income brackets. Christian households, by and large, maintain a higher overall income. This can be

\textsuperscript{35} Cazedepats, Armel B. “French Manifestations of Durkheim’s Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and Islamophobia,” 2016. (p. 42)

\textsuperscript{36} Adida, Claire L., Laitin, David D., and Valfort, Marie-Anna. “Identifying Barriers to Muslim Integration in France.” \textit{Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences} 107, no. 52 (2010). (p.22388-22389)
caused in part by a difference in access to education for these two religious groups in France. Additionally, a lack of complete Muslim integration puts them at a disadvantage, leading to this income gap.  

The French often depict Muslims as the “other” and suggest they are inferior to French nationals. An epistemological understanding of Islamophobia suggests that it is not solely a social phenomenon in France, but a question of belief. Because the model of French nationalism is built on the secular values of the French Republic, French nationalism becomes a highly exclusive model that ignores religion and denies individual freedom with regard to the public expression of religion. I argue that the primary causes for the presence of Islamophobia in France can be attributed to the exclusivity of French national identity, the place of Christian nationalism in the state, and the existence of epistemic racism within French culture that emerged on the public stage during the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906).

Methods

The methodology for this paper will be twofold. First, academic sources in politics, history, and sociology will provide insights into the definitions and causes of Islamophobia, along with an overview of France’s historical relationship to religion. This thesis also draws on data sets, opinion polls, and survey data from sources such as the Pew research center, the World Bank, IMF, and other relevant databases. These findings will provide insights into the possibility of increasing levels of Islamophobia and its root causes in France. By examining public opinion polls gathered from the Pew research center, this thesis will assess the general sentiment toward

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Muslims within France and will surmise the primary motivators for anti-Muslim sentiment. Public opinion polls may also generate additional variables that motivate Islamophobia in France that have been considered in my previous research.

This thesis also draws on ethnographic research data in the form of a public opinion survey, based on a Pew model. This anonymous survey was distributed electronically in France through social media in the winter of 2019 with the permission of those who posted the invitation to participate. The survey consists of questions posed using a semantic differential scale as well as open ended formats. This survey provides both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate in more depth the current opinions of French people regarding Muslims in the nation. More specifically, it provides a focus on the role of religiosity and the place of Catholicism in the lives of French people today. This paper argues that French attitudes toward religion and Catholicism impact their views on Muslims in the nation.

Along with the analysis of datasets and opinion polls, analysis of existing scholarship as well as academic studies will form a baseline for the support of this paper’s contention. By using the already existing scholarship, I will be able to better understand the gaps within the current research done on the subject. They can also be used to provide certain case studies of the Muslim population in France. In this respect, some pieces of scholarship may be able to replace any kind of ethnographic research that I may not be able to conduct myself that would support my contention.

A number of academic sources add to the conversation on Islamophobia in France. A common theme within much of the literature compares France to other Western European nations that have had similar trajectories of Islamophobia. In scholarship that focuses on Islamophobia in France only, the overwhelming contention mentions the presence of nationalism
in the country. Other sources claim Islamophobia’s growing presence is a direct result of radical Islamic violence in France, both homegrown and through the infiltration of global terrorist groups, such as ISIS. Another aspect of nationalist, anti-immigration rhetoric is the focus on cultural differences between Islam and Christianity. Additionally, in a number of studies, class discrepancies between Muslims and Christians have been cited as measures of difference and discrimination. Each of these pieces of literature and research helps to weave together an understanding of the primary motivators of Islamophobia in France.

The methodology noted above will provide substance to ground the claims of this paper. Data gathered brings to light the interdependent nature of numerous variables understood to promote Islamophobia in France. Scholarship and previously conducted research studies will be a pivotal part of this research, however, public opinion polls taken within France will be the primary source of support for this paper’s contentions. By examining public opinion polls in France, as well as national and international datasets, this project will offer a better view of the general anti-Islamic sentiments within the state.

Parameters of Study

For the purposes of this paper, certain parameters are placed to limit the timeframe, population, and geographic location that will be studied. The geographic parameters of this study are defined as the French nation. Because this paper is primarily examining the causes of Islamophobia in France, the nation proves to be a fundamental aspect for research. However, other Western nations are highlighted to provide comparisons to France with regard to levels of Islamophobia demonstrated. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this paper France will be the primary geography of focus, with references to other nations and regions used to better understand the place of Islamophobia in France.
Multiple periods in French history will be highlighted to explore the presence of anti-Muslim sentiment in France. First, this paper looks at the timeframe shortly before the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, beginning with the *Charlie Hebdo* incident. The attacks on the offices of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* were considered the worst in French history. This attack was carried out by two French-born Algerians who were portrayed as Jihadist militants. This terrorist incident in France highlighted a clash of values between Islam and secular France, which promoted Islamophobic rhetoric in the aftermath of the shootings. A comparative analysis will be made between the period before the attacks and after to examine the apparent effect terrorism had on the rise of Islamophobia. This period will also be used as a means to analyze media involvement in the rise of Islamophobic sentiment including differences in the French media’s coverage of Muslims before and after the attacks. This data will help to determine how terrorist incidents and the media serve as possible mechanisms for promoting Islamophobia in France.

In addition to looking at modern day events, the Dreyfus Affair of 1894 to 1906 will be examined in order to form a rationale behind French nationalism as well as an explanatory model for French identity. The Dreyfus Affair showed the xenophobic and anti-Semitic nature of the French state as well as the exclusiveness caused by French nationalism. This historical event of anti-Semitism in the state will serve as a model for analysis of Islamophobia in France today. Another period that will be covered in French history is after the French Revolution of 1789. This period will be discussed to specifically address the values on which the French nation was found in order to obtain a coherent understanding of the nation’s constitution. Other periods in the national history will be mentioned in reference to each rebuilding of French Republic.
Lastly, parameters will be placed on the populations studied in this paper. French-Catholics and French-Atheists will be the primary groups of study. Within this group French nationals, those within the far-right campaign will also be considered. Each group and subgroup will be used to further understand the general sentiment of the French people and examine French nationalism and the French identity, as well as the existence of Christian nationalism and epistemic racism in the state.

In addition to these demographics, the Algerian population in France will be studied and used as a case study for French discrimination of Muslims within the state. Along with the Algerian population, French-Muslims will be the leading group studied in juxtaposition to French-Catholics in hopes of further comprehending both the epistemological dynamic and nationalistic reaction to Muslims in the state.

**Chapter Summary**

After this introduction, this paper will be broken into three chapters. The Introduction serves as a means to outline the literature review and discuss theories of importance to this paper. In addition, this introduction was also used to address the methods and parameters of this research project. Chapter One provides a historical overview of Islamophobia in France. Chapter Two outlines the findings of this study through existing opinion polls and ethnographic research. Chapter Three provides conclusions and reflections on the significance of this study.
CHAPTER I: Historical Overview

Context of Islam in France

The relationship between France and the nation’s anti-Islamic sentiment is highly complex in nature. On the surface, Islamophobic rhetoric appears to be a prominent theme in the public sphere, but the underlying causes for these negative attitudes towards Muslims remain unclear. For this reason, there are many misconceptions about the causes and levels of Islamophobia in France. However, this chapter will explain how preexisting historical values and conditions have laid the grounds for discriminatory sentiments towards France’s Islamic community, along with other minorities that fall outside the bounds of French culture.

In spite of the popular opinion, Islamophobia in France does not appear to have drastically increased over the years, but rather can be understood as an extension of certain commonly held beliefs about what it means to belong as a member of the French collective. Those in France who lack exposure to Islam often are influenced by sensationalized media depictions of Islam. These portrayals of French Muslims help to mold negative understandings of their place and role in society. However, the values at the root of anti-Muslim sentiments are highly complex and evolved over the course of French history. For this reason, those who believe terrorism is the cause of Islamophobia, are approaching the issue with too superficial a lens.
Eric Bleich explains that from its first emergence in scholarly nomenclature, the term “Islamophobia” was used “to draw attention to harmful rhetoric and actions directed at Islam and Muslims in Western liberal democracies. Many believe that Islamophobia is a form of religious intolerance.”

That is how Islamophobia was categorized; as a discriminatory attitude toward a group based on its faith practice. The notion of Islamophobia as a form of religious intolerance comes from the word’s etymology. It is a phobia of Islam, or fear of Muslims. However, this understanding of Islamophobia is simplistic and short-sighted. In fact, Islamophobia is not the fear of a religion; it is an irrational fear of those who practice Islam. In a more complex way, we can understand Islamophobia as a form of racial discrimination drawing on certain stereotypes ascribed to those who practice Islam.

Lacking proper exposure to Islam, individuals are more inclined to see this “foreign” religion in a negative light. In fact, the media reiterates many beliefs that French-heritage citizens hold—that Muslims are different from their Catholic-heritage peers and do not desire to integrate into French culture. Bombarded with media reports on violent Islamic extremism, French citizens with little personal exposure to Muslims struggle to relate to this minority population. Fernando Bravo López explains:

In place of this lack of information, people are left with a myriad of icons subtly alluding to the threat of Islam. As Geisser observed in his analysis of the emergence of a new Islamophobia in France, the sources of the mediatic Islamophobia are not so much explicit statements about the evils of Islam. At least in France, it is rather the case that journalists are very cautious in their statements and even explicitly deny the paradigm of the clash. The sources of what he calls the ‘media Islamophobia’ are the continual insistence on the ‘security ideology’ (‘idéologie sécuritaire’), i.e. the continual assertion of the need for more security, and the parallel – only at times related to the former – ‘media demonization of Muslims’ (Geisser, 2003: 25). As he observes, ‘the media

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portrayal of Muslimness is mostly constrained by the prism of a radical and conflictual otherness; it largely plays on the repertoire of threat, when not straightforwardly that of a catastrophe’ (2003: 24). In this sense, images such as the ‘Marianne voilée’, i.e. the female symbol of the French Republic wearing the Muslim veil, are much more powerful conveyers of the work on myth than any explicit statement about the threat of Islam. Through an unconscious association, images such as the veiled Marianne and the hooded Muslim with the Koran and the hatchet in his hand (Morgan, 2001) can come to coagulate and crystallize the fears and anguish that are typical of the epoch of uncertainties (Bauman, 1999).

In France, it is a popular misconception that Islamophobia is born from implicit anti-Muslim sentiment spread through news media. The role the media plays is perhaps more subtle in how they leverage anti-Muslim sentiment than is commonly understood. The media promotes fear through the use of icons or symbols that create inaccurate stereotypes of the religion and how it is spreading. In this sense, Islamophobia in the French media generates anti-Muslim sentiment among the French population solely based on their interpretation of the symbols used. Those who lack direct exposure to Islam are more likely to perceive these symbols as a basis for their own misconceptions and fears. However, the media is not directly creating more anti-Muslim sentiment in the state; rather they are confirming the pre-existing suspicions toward “outsiders” that lack exposure to religious pluralism. In fact, the media’s portrayal of Islam is generally more satirical than wrathful. Figure 4 provides an example of how Muslims and the Prophet Muhammad are portrayed in satirical news in France.


The French news media has a known bias in favor of minority groups within France.44 Typically, the more formal publications, such as Le Monde or Le Figaro, maintain a professional objectivity and avoid discriminatory portrayals of Islam. Mainstream newspapers attempt to take a non-biased approach to current events with regard to religion. In their coverage of Muslims, French news channels are on par with the levels of neutrality seen in the United States on CNN

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or PBS. However, what differentiates French news sources from those in America is a discernable bias against the Catholic Church.

If one were to look up the term “Musulman” (The French word for Muslim) on the website for the French newspaper Le Figaro, one would be met with articles titled “Fermeture d'une école musulmane clandestine à Marseille” (The Closing of a Clandestine Muslim School in Marseaille) or “Face à la montée de l'extrémisme, les Émirats arabes unis défendent un islam tolerant” (Faced with rising extremism, United Arab Emirates defends tolerant Islam).  

Each article provides a relatively neutral stance on the religion. Even the first one concerning the closing of the Muslim school explains “Cette structure des quartiers nord, qui accueillait une vingtaine d'enfants, est considérée comme «salafiste» par le ministre de l'Éducation nationale Jean-Michel Blanquer” (This structure of northern neighborhoods, which housed twenty children, is considered "Salafist" by the Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer). This article takes a very non-accusatory stance. Neither article outright condemns Islam but rather reports on the event it is involved in. The same cannot be said of the articles published centering around the Catholic Religion.

When searching the term “Catholique” on Le Figaro’s website, the results have a far more accusatory overtone. Article titles portray subjects, such as “La crise s'amplifie dans l'Église catholique” (The crisis in the Catholic church has amplified), illustrating a propensity to emphasize problems with Catholicism.  

The neutrality that can be noted in articles concerning Muslims is lacking in pieces on Catholicism. The first line of an article concerning sex abuse

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scandals within the Catholic church reads, “Combien de temps la stratégie du silence adoptée par le pape François sur les scandales des abus sexuels dans l’Église va-t-elle durer?”48 (How long will the strategy of silence adopted by Pope Frances on the sex abuse scandals in the Catholic church last?). The tone of this article and others that involve Catholicism tend to take a hard stance against the church. Counterintuitively, although France considers itself secular, it remains a Catholic-majority state.

Figure 5

![Largest Religious Groups (France)](http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_83_1.asp)


According to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), 59.6 percent of the French population identifies as Catholic or with the Catholic heritage. An additional 5.3 percent of the population affiliates with other Christian sects.49 Based on the prevalence of Christianity –

specifically Catholicism—within the state, it could be assumed that the media would have a certain level of bias in the direction of the Catholics. This, however, is clearly not the case. Instead, Catholicism is largely condemned in the public sphere, especially by the news media. Similar to the American media, many of the leading French publications contain content in support of the liberal side of the political spectrum.

Another misconception generated by international news media during the 2017 presidential campaign is that Islamophobia in France is spread through populism. While the populist movement of the 2017 campaign was wrought with Islamophobic sentiment, there was a notable decrease in recorded incidents of hate crimes in France. According to the OSCE Hate Crime Reporting database, from 2016 to 2017 the incidents of hate crimes in France decreased from 1835 to 1505 cases.\(^50\) Hate crimes did increase from 1662 to 1835 between 2014 and 2016\(^51\), however this rise was more likely based on the response to terror attacks in the nation than from a rise in populism.\(^52\)

The recent populist movement in France, headed by French politician, Marine le Pen, promoted an anti-immigration platform riddled with anti-Muslim hate speech.\(^53\) She expressed nationalistic feelings throughout the campaign in an attempt to unify her constituents. While her platform was highly state-centric and emphasized the Republic, her delivery of these messages was highly xenophobic and facilitated hate speech targeting immigrants and minority groups in the nation.\(^54\) However, the assumption that populism is the cause for an increase of Islamophobia

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in France may be overstated because there is little support for far-right populism in the state. The BBC reported that as of 2018, the far-right populist movement in France only had 13 percent national support.\(^{55}\)

Marine Le Pen represented \textit{Le Front Nationale} (The National Front), the far-right political party in France, in the last French elections. As the daughter of the party’s former leader and founder, she is a far-right nationalist known for her anti-EU and anti-immigration rhetoric on the campaign trail. Despite the growth in support of her campaign this past election, Emmanuel Macron won a sweeping victory, earning 66 percent of the national vote. In France, the populist movement only gained 34 percent of the national vote.\(^{56}\) Marine Le Pen’s Islamophobic rhetoric specifically targeted Muslim immigrants. The rhetoric she used to gain the support of her constituents brought attention to a preexisting anti-Muslim sentiment that already was in existence.

Marine Le Pen and the populist movement motivated a new sense of nationalism that has played out in both campaign rhetoric and in French society. This reiteration of nationalist ideology comes from a fear of immigration present within France that Le Pen was able to use during the campaign and emphasize the benefit of a homogeneous nation.\(^{57}\) That is to say nationalism in France is not something that is solely unique to the far-right campaign; it is something that is deeply rooted in the culture. Nationalism has given France and the native


French people a sort of exclusive identity and plays more of a role in anti-Muslim sentiment than populism does alone.\textsuperscript{58}

The model of French nationalism is highly exclusive to those who are believed to be outsiders. This is especially true when outsiders reside within the state. Nationalism is a form of identity that is based on ideology, movement, and symbolic language. Nationalism often draws on ethnicity to unify a population with qualities that are thought to define a people and determine who belongs.\textsuperscript{59} French nationalism, in many ways, is built on a very exclusionary platform. In the aftermath of the French revolution of 1789, during the creation of the First Republic, the French people were unified under a single, national identity.\textsuperscript{60} While this aided in providing a sort of collective consciousness during the building and then rebuilding of The Republic, it resulted in a form of cultural homogeneity that become deep rooted in the state. In some respects, French nationalism can be tied to outbreaks of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia,\textsuperscript{61} characteristics primarily associated with members of the far right.\textsuperscript{62} While this exclusionary form of nationalism is most prevalent among those on the far right politically, it has swept into other circles of society as well.

French identity became a magnetic force around which to build the nation following the fall of the monarchy. During the third republic, the solidification of French identity was crucial in holding the state together.\textsuperscript{63} During the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958, the

\textsuperscript{63} Cazedepats, Armel B. “French Manifestations of Durkheim’s Collective Effervescence: The Dreyfus Affair and Islamophobia,” 2016. (p. 20)
demographics of the French people were more culturally homogenic than they are now. Today in the midst of the Fifth Republic, the overarching qualities that were engrained in the culture do not necessarily reflect the current pluralism of the present. However, a strong sense of the collective identity remains among the French people, along with the presence of a durable secularist ideology.

Secularism is known to be a pivotal aspect of French identity. After the collapse of the French monarchy (1789), the French people were determined to remove religion from the state. After the corruption of the monarchy through the Catholic church, there was a movement to maintain a complete separation of church and state through the institution of laïcité (or “secularity” in English). Since the building of the First Republic, secularism has remained a defining aspect of France.  

The two leading examples that have shown the melding of secularization and nationalism in France are the Dreyfus Affair of 1894 to 1906 and the more recent banning of Muslim head scarves in 2011. France was the first European nation to ban the Islamic Burka which is a veil meant to cover an individual’s entire face. Even though only an estimated 2,000 of the 5 million Muslims in France wore this form of religious attire, the law set in place required a 150 euro fine to those who were found wearing the Burka in a public space. Data from 2015 showed that a total of 1,546 fines had been distributed at the time.

Nonetheless, the Dreyfus Affair and the Banning of Muslim head scarves each highlights the actions of the French and their tendency to prioritize the Republic before all else. According to Armel B. Cazedepats, these incidents illustrate collective effervescence, a theory outlined by

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Emile Durkheim that emphasizes certain shared beliefs among individuals that is successful in unifying a collective:

In these two major moments of collective effervescence in France, the origin of the exhilaration has come from a popular debate on the French identity. Throughout the last twenty years of Islamophobia in France, as well as during the Dreyfus affair, one group of nationalistic people, defenders of the French traditional values, have accused the “intellectuals” or the “pro-Islamic” to defend individual rights of some individuals over the principles of the French republic. These intellectuals are then considered to be a threat to the nation by accepting anything based on individual rights. Their vision of individual freedom does not fit with the most basic principles of the republic, which is that individuals must adapt themselves to the common, here secular, values. This difference of visions on what must be the French identity seems to be the key element triggering these moments of collective effervescence in France.66

Secularism plays a role in French identity and is the basis for French national identity. French nationalism can draw on its secular roots to unify the collective while simultaneously marginalizing those who are not fully secular. Those who practice religion therefore are defying one of the fundamental principles of French nationalism. To be fully accepted as a French citizen, one must maintain similar views of secularism. Meanwhile, France’s history of Catholicism leaves deep roots in the institutions and culture of French-heritage citizens. Thus, being ethnically Christian or Catholic has become an unspoken aspect of French nationalism and citizenship.

Even though France is a deeply secular nation, there is still a presence of Christianity within the national identity. Marion Le Pen, niece to Marine Le Pen and the next generation representative of Le Front Nationale, once declared that “‘France is a land that is culturally, and was for a long time spiritually, Christian’ and that ‘Muslims cannot be at the same exact rank as

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those who are Catholic.” The political right may be the biggest proponents of such messages, but France has historically been a predominantly Catholic nation for centuries. In this sense, Christianity has become a part of the primordial identities of those within the state. There appears to be at least some sort of correlation between Christianity and the French national identity. The connection between the two characteristics lies in the notion of having French ancestry. Typically, if one’s ancestral roots stretch far back in French history, it is assumed that those individuals practice Christianity, specifically Catholicism. Today, many in France, especially those who are still practicing Christianity, believe that Christian identity is still the basis for French identity.

Within countries, non-practicing Christians are less likely than churchgoing Christians to say that ancestry is key to national identity. And religiously unaffiliated people are less likely than both churchgoing and non-practicing Christians to say this. For example, in France, nearly three-quarters of church-attending Christians (72%) say it is important to have French ancestry to be ‘truly French.’ Among non-practicing Christians, 52% take this position, but this is still higher than the 43% of religiously unaffiliated French adults who say having French family background is important in order to be truly French.

An aspect to France’s exclusionary model for nationalism is based on religious exclusion: to be French is to be Christian. While practicing Christians in the state today are a minority, a general sentiment of being ethnically Christian remains. What can also be noted is the presence of institutionalized discrimination of non-Christians, specifically Muslims, in the state by the public. The Washington Post recently published research showing that French Muslims

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experience discrimination in the job market. It was seen that Muslims typically are less contacted by employers when compared to Catholics in the nation\textsuperscript{70}:

Figure 6

![Graph showing callback rates for practicing Catholics, Jews, and Muslims, unseparated by gender and broken down by gender.]


What can be noted from figure 6 is how large the gap is between Muslims receiving employment callbacks as compared to Catholics and Jews in France. This gap is even more extraordinary for Muslim men. Employment rates aside, according to the ECRI, Muslims have

additionally become common targets for racist discourse in France. However, what further complexes this dynamic is that media tends to side with minorities within the state more so than the French-Catholic people. As was noted above, the media is quicker to condemn Christian or Catholic groups in the nation. This could be a potential motivation for the discontent with the Muslim population form the French-Catholic side.

Whether this discrimination is acknowledged or not, there remains a class discrepancy between Christians and Muslims in the state. Christians are better educated, maintain a higher household income, and live in a higher social class. In a study conducted by Claire L. Adida, David D. Laitin, and Marie-Anne Valfort, the socio-economic status of Muslims and Christians in France was used to support this contention. The study showed that the probability of a French-Senegalese Christian having a secondary or post-secondary education was 36 percent whereas this same probability was only 27 percent for French-Senegalese Muslims. The same study showed that a higher percent of Muslims in France earned a household income of less than 2,300 euros a month whereas a higher percent of Christians earned more than 2,300 euros. In sum, this data shows Muslims to largely be in a lower income bracket in France while Christians remain in a higher one. This, for the most part, has created class discrepancies based on religious affiliation.

But what of the French-Algerian Muslims? While Muslims in France mainly come from Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, and Algeria, the Algerian population is most notable. Islamophobia

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in France presents itself as a conflict of identities. If we are to consider that the French primordial identity is Catholicism and a pivotal aspect to French nationalism, then it can be assumed that other religious identities within the state will not be fully accepted. Other religious groups may be viewed as outcasts even if they are considered legal citizens of the state. In looking at the case of Algerian Muslims in France, this notion of a clash of identities becomes evident. Algerian Muslims were promised rights to citizenship but have never been fully integrated into the state.

Algeria was France’s longest lasting colonized nation. When Algeria came under French colonization, many of the French ideals were imposed unto the Algerian society. As an extension of the French state, Algeria was viewed as a French-inspired nation. In this proto-French state, elites used the nationalistic French model to shape Algeria and those who lived there. The Algerians, or Colons (as they were known), were viewed has a denomination of the French people. They, “Enjoyed the rights of French citizens,” which would force them into the mindset of “France first”. The unique relationship between the two nations since the awarding of Algerian independence stems from this notion that they were citizens of the French Republic, which likely became ingrained in their own national identity.

Algerians initially migrated to France for job opportunities. In the latter half of the 20th century, Algerian migration to France occurred mainly for labor purposes. By “1945, the number of Algerian workers and their families in France numbered about 350,000.” In this post World War two-time period, France had recruited many Algerians as migrant workers, using them as aids to help rebuild the French nation post-German invasion.

Seeing Algerians as a form of cheap migrant laborers, they did not appear to hesitate in claiming these once “French citizens” as their own once more. Hein de Haas argues that there was a preconceived notion “that this migration would be temporary.”\(^{76}\) When migrant labor employment began to diminish in the early 1970s, French nationals did not expect Algerians to continue to live in France. Instead, de Haas explains, the French assumed that the Algerians would “return [to Algeria] after a certain amount of money had been saved to buy some land, construct a house, or start their own enterprise.”\(^{77}\) Instead, de Haas points out, many migrants from the Maghreb remained in France permanently. The French were left with something they had not considered: those who were initially granted legal working papers stayed and made France home for themselves and their families.

In the post-colonization period, many Algerians resented France’s colonialism of their homeland. Algerian-Muslims are known as “harkis” in France, which, according to Angelique Chrisafis, is “a loaded and often pejorative term for the Algerian Muslims who helped the French in the brutal eight-year independence war and faced discrimination and poverty in France.”\(^{78}\) Though not through the assurance of President Charles De Gaulle, Algerian Muslims were begrudgingly welcomed in France. However, the conditions in which they lived were terrible—they had little access to education, earned low wages, and some were placed in temporary

internment camps. With hundreds of thousands of harkis descendants still living in France today, the history of their heritage remains a taboo subject in the public realm.\textsuperscript{79}

Nonetheless, the French were ultimately left with second-generation Algerians born into the nation as French citizens. However, despite their French birthright, the Algerians in France were never truly accepted as being French. Algerians in France who are second and third generation citizens are often viewed as not really French. Initially, the process of colonization in Algeria was expected to cause some form of immigration and settlement to occur in France. However, de Haas explains, the “concomitant processes of state formation, capitalist penetration, infrastructure development and increased population in combination with the demand for migrant labor in European and, at a later stage, the Gulf countries, would soon create a counter–movement of emigration.”\textsuperscript{80} This has left French nationals reeling at the prospect of continued migration to France and the Algerians facing a broken promise for citizenship.

One aspect to consider in this case study is that the Algerians are predominantly Muslim. With Islam as a central aspect of their identity, it can be assumed that even secular Algerians perceive a sense of religious discrimination, making religion a component of their lack of integration. Practicing Islam has led the French-Algerian Muslim population to feel like outcasts for not fitting into the model of French secularity. Relating this back to the conversation on Islamophobia, Algerian integration may be stymied by anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Muslim discrimination.


Nationalism in France can be considered as highly prevalent due to the structure of the political system and the history of the nation. The French political system has a unique emphasis—not on individual rights— but on the right of the collective or Republic to exist. After the French revolution, nationalism appeared to be a leading aspect in the unification of the nation. That the platform for the national identity was relied on for holding the country together. Since the building of the first republic, it has been rebuilt four other times.

However, in an era where France faces public outcry from a diverse group of workers, the Fifth Republic appears to be on thin ice today. With the diverse French community uniting in defense of the rights of citizens, a new sense of collective is formed. But what of those who are not viewed as a member of the collective? Many French Muslims among the Gilets Juannes stand as members of the Republic, and protest together for their rights as citizens. Perhaps if the demographically diverse Gilets Juannes were to rebuild the Republic together with their French compatriots, a new understanding of citizenship might emerge. In other words, if another republic were formed led by the diverse French-Catholics, French-Muslims, and French-Jews within the nation, the understanding of who is counted as a citizen will be tied to activism and social change.

Chapter Summary

Islamophobic rhetoric stereotypes Muslims and generates negative attitudes towards the religion and its practitioners. This is especially true among those who lack exposure to Muslims or the Islamic religion. Because Muslims have been stereotyped in such a way that

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leads them to be discriminated against in France, there is a disconnect between their citizenship rights in the state, and their full acceptance in French society.

Because there is a heavy presence of French nationalism in the state, there is a highly exclusionary aspect to the French culture. With secularism being a pivotal aspect within the state, those who do not abide by the laws are viewed as defying the collective state. This issue was noted during the debate over banning the Muslim head scarf. Even with this emphasis on secularism in the state, there continues to be a religious component to the French identity that has manifested itself in the form of Christian nationalism. Christianity appears to be an aspect of the French primordial identity, which has helped in creating the exclusiveness within the culture. With these factors considered, along with the case study of the Algerians, it is evident that Islamophobia in France is more or less based on a mixture of historical context and a lack of exposure which has led to racist stereotypes coupled with both French and Christian nationalism.
CHAPTER II: Findings and Analysis

Scholarship and Opinion Poll Research

The findings of this paper will be drawn from existing scholarship, public opinion surveys, and ethnographic research. For the purposes of this paper, ethnographic research was gathered through anonymous public opinion surveys offered through open-source social media sites. Information was submitted by 15 anonymous individuals of French-Catholic heritage. The goal of the survey was to gauge the level of discontent expressed by the French-Catholic heritage community toward the French-Muslim population. The survey also sought to indicate age-related differences in opinions toward non-French heritage citizens.

First, existing scholarship and public opinion surveys on the subject will be addressed. Within the existing scholarship, this paper will discuss the French populist movement, the role media plays in fomenting Islamophobia, and the presence of epistemic racism within the French culture. Furthermore, this chapter will outline the French model of nationalism, government structure, and emphasis on laïcité. Meanwhile, French demographics and the nation’s trajectory since the First Republic was founded are viewed as additional variables contributing to discriminatory attitudes toward individuals with non-French heritage.
As noted previously, Christians and Catholic heritage make up about 64 percent of the French population.\textsuperscript{82} Christianity has historically been the majority religion in France. Initially, France had low levels of immigration from outside the nation. During the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, France’s population experienced periods of decrease caused by a dip in birth rates. There are numerous causes for the decrease in birth rate, including lack of economic growth in the interwar periods, but a predominant cause is the decrease in Roman Catholic observance within the state.\textsuperscript{83} The correlation between a decrease in birth rates and lower levels of Roman Catholic observance may be due to the Catholic Church’s disapproval of contraceptives. As influence from the Catholic church dissipated, birth rates fell in conjunction with the introduction of contraceptives.\textsuperscript{84} Immigration was eventually used to combat population decrease.

The French were historically very open to immigration. Until the post-World War II Era, immigrants to France were largely European.\textsuperscript{85} However, as a result of colonial relationships with the Maghreb and Northern Africa, Muslim immigrants began to arrive in France beginning in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{86} The immigration dynamic in France historically did not emphasize a desire for diversity in the nation, but was based on a need for labor and compensated for France’s declining birthrate. It was not until the 20\textsuperscript{th} century that the French became increasingly critical of immigration and the immigrant population in the country.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Gibson, Ralph. \textit{A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914}. Christianity and Society in the Modern World. London ; New York: Routledge, 1989.
\end{itemize}
In the 20th century, when immigration from Northern African countries spiked, the French became critical of the growing number of foreigners in the state.\textsuperscript{87} In 1950, the Muslim population of France was recorded as just over 230,000 people; however, ten years later, it had jumped to an estimated 913,500 French Muslims.\textsuperscript{88} As of 2016, the number of Muslims in France rose to 5.7 million. Comparing the French Muslim population to that found in Germany, France has a higher estimated proportion of Muslim citizens per capita than does Germany.\textsuperscript{89} According to a 2016 Pew Research Center report, Muslims represented 8.8 percent of France’s total population, while Muslims made up 6.1 percent of Germany’s population.\textsuperscript{90} Meanwhile Catholicism remains the majority religion in France, yet, the growing number of Muslims in the nation has become a concern for certain groups within the society, specifically those who are on the far right politically, or those who live in rural areas. These groups have created misconceptions about the Muslim population in France and how many Muslims actually have migrated there.

When measuring religious demographics in France, it is important to note that it is against the law to take a religious census within the state. So, because of the laws attributed to laïcité, or secularity, religious affiliation is not tracked by the French Government. For this reason, demographic statistics regarding religion are difficult to determine. Therefore, the actual


statistics are unknown, so social scientists are left to generalize the size of religious groups. A common indicator to determine the size of the Muslim population includes looking at the number of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East. The problem with this tactic is that Islam is not the only religion represented in the Middle East and North Africa. Public opinion surveys are also commonly used as an indicator of religious demographics; however, these polls can be manipulated based on who is surveyed and what demographics are examined. Nonetheless, the general size of majority and minority religious groups in the nation have been estimated. What is clear is that France, like most of Western Europe, is largely a Christian state, as is noted in figure 7:

Figure 7

[Image of a map showing religious affiliations across Western Europe, with France highlighted in red]


While figure 7 shows that the Christian population in France is 64 percent of the national population as of 2018, this number has remained stable for years prior. Other surveys or polls have been used to determine religious population estimates in France. Based on the 2015 compiled estimates from the World Factbook, it was determined that 63-66 percent of the French population affiliates with Christian based faiths; 7-9 percent affiliate with Muslim faiths; .5-.75 percent affiliate with Buddhist faiths; .5-.75 percent affiliate with Jewish faiths; .5-1 percent affiliate with other faiths; and 23-28 percent have no affiliation or preference to any faith.92

While these statistics may be loose indicators of religious demographic percentages in France, they do aid in understanding which groups are minorities versus which are the majority. It also illustrates population gaps between minorities such as the wide gap between Jews (who make up around 1 percent of the population) and Muslims (who again represent 7-9 percent of the population of France).93 What can be seen in the statistics above is that the Muslims are the largest minority religious group in France, not including those who claim no religious affiliation. While this may give them a significant presence within the nation, their actual population size is far smaller than is perceived by the public. The common public opinion shows that, “The average French estimate was that 31 percent of the population was Muslim – almost one in three residents. According to Pew Research, France’s Muslim population actually stood at 7.5 percent in 2010, or one in 13 people.”94 As of 2016, the Pew research center recorded the following Muslim population percentages for countries across Europe:

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A common sentiment has been articulated in France and other European Nations that Muslims are “taking over.” In 2004, when discussing Muslims in Europe, prominent public historian Niall Ferguson, currently at the Woodrow Wilson Institute in Washington, was quoted as saying: “There is no question that the continent is experiencing fundamental demographic and cultural changes whose long-term consequences no one can foresee.”95 Ferguson’s opinion is echoed by many other experts as well.

In France, similar anti-Muslim sentiments are often created by anti-immigration political rhetoric used to promote fear that Europe will dissolve into a Muslim state. This extreme rhetoric has clouded the reality and hindered the nation’s acceptance of Muslims. However, while this fear is present within more conservative circles in the nation, it is not as common within the society as a whole. In actuality, it is not solely the Muslim population that the French people have not accepted. Non-French ethnic groups, particularly those residing in rural areas, are often viewed as different from the French people and concerns abound about their ability to integrate. While these attitudes appear to be discriminatory toward minority ethnic groups, they are derived from communal values echoed in the French Constitution that emphasize a collective civic identity and prohibit the recognition of ethnicity, race, or religion in the state.

The American Constitution, on the other hand, places a greater emphasis on individual rights. While individualism may at times be problematic for American society as a whole (for example: social class gaps, greed, competition, etc.), by and large, individualism creates the opportunity for hyphenated identities and a pluralistic civic culture.

In France, however, the Constitution places an emphasis on the collective community, akin to French sociologist Émile Durkheim’s notion of le conscience collectif or collective consciousness. Émile Durkheim’s 1893 work, “The Division of Labor in Society,” describes the collective consciousness as the following:

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience. No doubt, it has not a specific organ as a substratum; it is, by definition, diffuse in every reach of society. Nevertheless, it has specific characteristics which make it a distinct reality. It is, in effect, independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed; they pass on and it remains. It is the same in the North and in the South, in great cities and in small, in different professions. Moreover, it does not change with each generation, but, on the contrary, it connects successive generations with

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one another. It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them. It is the psychical type of society, a type which has its properties, its conditions of existence, its mode of development, just as individual types, although in a different way. Thus understood, it has the right to be denoted by a special word.\textsuperscript{95}

As a member of the Jewish community in France, Durkheim developed a theory of society’s collective consciousness, understanding it to be formed from the collective effervescence of the French people. Though he remained secular in his beliefs, during the time of the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), Durkheim became an advocate for the Jewish community and believed the affair served as proof of anti-Semitism and social crisis in France.\textsuperscript{98} For Durkheim, French society served as an illustration for the collective consciousness, with its emphasis on the collective community. This collectivist spirit serves as the basis of French nationalism and provides a rationale for France’s cultural exclusivity with respect to outsiders. The collective consciousness of French society has undermined the opportunity for the nation to acknowledge internal diversification.\textsuperscript{99} France’s attempt to maintain a culturally homogeneous nation can be seen from the time of the French Revolution, as the nation sought to assimilate diverse regional groups into the collective. The constitution has motivated far more than a collective community or a national identity, as it has also generated the conditions for epistemic racism to develop in the nation.

The first article of the French Constitution exclaims: “France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion.”\textsuperscript{100} By disregarding race and religion in the nation,
the constitution has successfully created a nation in which the emphasis is placed on French citizenship and communal culture rather than on unique ancestral cultures that may be represented in its history. Those who added this amendment in 1958 were acting under the assumption that all citizens would identify first and most importantly as French. As the nation becomes increasingly diverse, numerous ethnicities are represented in the society, many of which do not identify as singularly French. An increase in the “hyphenated identity” has been observed in the latter half of the 20th century, a concept that challenges the French collective.

The hyphenated identity is essentially the mixing of two cultures when assimilating to a new society. It is a mechanism to represent attachment to one’s homeland or heritage culture while integrating into a new receiving culture. Emmanuelle Bélanger and Maykel Verkuyten provide an explanation of classifications within acculturation theory:

Acculturation theory proposes a bi-dimensional framework of cultural change among immigrants, taking into account their orientation toward both the maintenance of minority culture and social contact with the majority group. The framework outlines four acculturation profiles, namely, separation with an emphasis on cultural maintenance and low contact; assimilation with high levels of contact and low cultural maintenance; integration with high scores on both dimensions; and last, marginalization with neither contact nor cultural maintenance.

Bélanger and Verkuyten understand assimilation to represent high levels of contact with the host culture and low levels of contact with the home culture. This one-way process is the government ideal for newcomers to France, yet it does not necessarily represent reality.

In a pluralistic nation such as the United States, hyphenated identity is both highly common and even welcomed within the society. Hyphenated identities provide individuals who

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have newly immigrated to maintain strong ties to their heritage culture while embracing their new homeland. It allows them to claim, for example, “I am Irish-American,” or “I am Chinese-American,” or “I am Muslim-American.” While this level of pluralism may be welcome in historically immigrant-receiving nations such as the United States or Canada, the hyphenated identity in France motivates racism because it threatens the collective with “inauthentic” cultural identities.\textsuperscript{103}

In France the only identity that is officially recognized by the state is that of French identity. By prohibiting the acknowledgement of race, religion, or ethnicity by the state, the only marker left is French identity.\textsuperscript{104} Foreign-born French citizens can identify only as “French” if they hope to fully be considered integrated. For this reason, the hyphenated identity cannot exist because the very act of saying, for example, “I am Irish-French” is perceived to mean that the individual has denied complete acceptance of the French identity.\textsuperscript{105} Cultural heritage aside, what has caused more of an issue in France is actually an issue of race and religion.

To reiterate what was noted previously: although France is a highly secular nation, there is still a presence of the Catholic identity within the nation. As of 2017, the Pew Research Center was able to conclude the following on Christian identity in Western Europe:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
As can be seen in Figure 9, as of 2017, 83 percent of the French population had been baptized. While the population decreased from being raised Christian to ultimately identifying with it, the total outcome of those who identify as Christians in the France was around 64 percent. While many in the nation take a secular stance on religion, they uphold a Christian, specifically Catholic, identity. As this religious identity has merged with the national one, it has become an aspect of their nationalist platform. While the National Front political party originally took a stance in support of Republican values under leadership of Marine Le Pen, the newer generation of the far-right movement has pushed for a reclaiming of the Catholic identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Baptized</th>
<th>Raised Christian</th>
<th>Currently Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marion Marechal-Le Pen, mentioned previously as Marine Le Pen’s niece, has appealed to what is known as the “Catholic right.” In her public persona, she has expanded on the importance of the Catholic values among the French people. She additionally warns against the growing population of Muslims in the nation calling this growth “the development of an Islamic counter-society in France.” Her movement has brought about a revival of the Catholicism which is already engrained within the cultural identity. Especially in the rural areas and smaller villages, church has become a symbol within the local identity. Many view Catholicism as upholding traditional family values and as a means to maintain moral order in society. The Pew Research Center conducted a study showing how the Christian identity continues to impact European society:

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While the statistics above are taken from all of Western Europe, the sentiments can be found within the Christians in France. Under the indicator “immigration and religious minorities,” it can be seen that nearly half of practicing Christians and of non-practicing Christians believe that “Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their national culture and values.”

felt by both practicing and non-practicing Christians. What can be noted is that the Christian identity has generated a sense of otherness, specifically in regard to Islam. It can be determined that a higher level of religiosity among Christians or those who identify with the religion would be more prone to exhibiting Islamophobic sentiment. This conception does not escape sentiments in France and perhaps is even made worse by the exclusive model of the national identity and community.

In merging the Catholic identity and the place of religion in France with the exclusivity of the culture, Islamophobia can be better understood as a being a product of the two. In order to further support this contention, an ethnographic study was conducted in conjunction with the findings of this research in order to gauge their reality.

**Ethnographic Study**

In studying Islamophobia in France, an ethnographic study was conducted through a public opinion survey. This was an optional survey shared via social media and taken anonymously. The responses in this survey are in no way traceable nor forced. Most questions included in the survey were closed ended, and in the form of a semantic differential scale. The survey also included several open-ended questions in an attempt to comprehend the context of surveyed responses. The survey was taken by only French citizens or individuals living in France. Fifteen individuals were surveyed; the age demographic varied, spanning from 24 to 76 years of age. Additional demographics included place of residence (spanning French regions from the Paris area to Provence and even French citizens who are now expats); where those surveyed were born (most in France, if not inhabitants of France now); as well as parental birthplace, language spoken at home, and religion. These question helped to better understand the heritage of the individuals surveyed.
As the first question was dedicated to gauge the demographics listed above, the remainder of the questions used (translated in both French and English) read as followed:

Q2: (Pratiquez-vous cette religion, ou vous-en identifiez seulement. (Sélectionnez) (Do you practice this religion or only identify with it (chose one))
Q3: Nationalité (Citizenship)
Q4: Sur une échelle de 1 à 5, pensez-vous que la population algérienne est importante en France. (1 pour pas du tout, et 5 pour très importante) (On a scale of 1 to 5, how prevalent do you believe the Algerian Muslim population is in France? (1 being not at all, 5 being very prevalent)).
Q5: Sur un e échelle de 1 à 5, comment trouvez-vous que la population musulmane est acceptée en France? (1 pour pas du tout, et 5 pour bien acceptée) (On a scale of 1 to 5, how accepted do you believe the Muslim population is in France? (1 being not at all, 5 being very much accepted)).
Q6: Sur une échelle de 1 à 5, comment voyez-vous la population musulmane en France? (1 pour très négativement, et 5 pour très positivement). (On a scale of 1 to 5, how do you view the Muslim population in France? (1 being very negatively, 5 being very positively)).
Q7: Sûr une échelle de 1 à 5, trouvez-vous qu' les algériens de nationalité française se sont intégrés et adopté les mœurs des français? (1 pour pas du tout, et 5 pour complètement). (On a scale of 1 to 5, would you say French Algerian Muslims completely embrace the French identity? (1 being not at all, 5 being very much so)).
Q8: Pensez-vous qu'il existent certaines tensions pre-existantes entre les français et la population musulmane? (Do you find that there are certain preexisting tensions between the French and Muslim populations?)
Q9: Si « oui », d'où proviennent ces tensions, et comment peuvent-elles être décrites? (If yes, what tensions can be noted?)
Q10: Prière d’ajouter tout autre commentaires dans l’espace ci-dessous. (Please provide any further comments you have in the space below.)

As is seen from question 2, religion was then explored further to gauge whether the surveyed practiced or only identified with the religion. Of the 15 respondents, 11 responded as affiliating with Catholicism and 4 as Atheist or of no affiliation, which better drew the surveyed into obvious religious groups. In questioning their choice to practice or identify with their religious preference (and in considering those who are Atheist or have no religious affiliation) respondents answered as the following:
What can be seen in figure 11 is the popularity of using Catholicism as an identity more so than a faith practice. When breaking down these findings and specifically looking at the Catholic respondents, of these 11 surveyed, 8 (or 53 percent of the surveyed population) identify with the religion and 3 (or 20 percent) practice it. In this respect, the findings in this study correlate to those discovered in the research as noted above. Yes, the majority of the French population is Catholic, but the percent of those who practice the religion has decreased over the years. France remains a highly secular nation, but the Catholic identity is still prevalent within the culture. While there are some who practice Catholicism in the country, using it as an ethnic marker has become more common.

Based on the place of religion or religious beliefs among those surveyed, there appeared to be trends in responses to some of the remaining questions based on which of the three
religious indicators individuals fell into. The first most obvious indicator of the divide that is caused by religious sentiment among the surveyed appeared in question four:

Figure 12

In figure 12, a clear difference between Catholics and Atheists exists in their estimation of the size of the Algerian Muslim in France. On average, the overall Atheist response was a 1.75, which indicates their common belief was that the Algerian population is not very prevalent. This is far lower than was expressed by those who practice Catholicism. Catholic practitioners on average responded with 4, while those who identify as culturally Catholic tended to have the highest estimation of the size of the Algerian Muslim population, 4.5. The place of Catholicism in the lives of those surveyed appears to impact their perceptions of the size of the Algerian Muslim population. These findings are consistent with the Pew research survey data on Christian nationalism outlined above.
In Questions six and seven, Catholic religious affiliation appears to impact respondents’ positive or negative attitudes toward the Muslim population:

Figure 13

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 6 on a scale of 1 to 5, with Atheist/No Affiliation having the highest average score.]

Figure 14

![Bar chart showing responses to Question 7 on a scale of 1 to 5, with Atheist/No Affiliation having the highest average score.]

In question six, which asks personal views on the Muslim population in France, Atheists responded with an average of 3.5—leaning towards a more positive view. Those who affiliate
with the Catholic religion on average responded with far more negative views— with those who identify with Catholicism responding 1.75 and Catholic practitioners 1.67 falling into similar patterns. Responses to question seven display a similar outcome to that of six. In asking whether or not the French Algerian Muslims completely embrace the French identity, Atheists responded with an average of 3—suggesting they believe that French Algerian Muslims do embrace the French identity to some extent—while those who affiliate with Catholicism again responded more negatively regarding the attitudes of Muslims toward French identity (a score of 1.75 for those who identify as Catholic and 1.67 for those who practice Catholicism). While these responses may not be as drastically different based on religious affiliation—as had been noted in question four—a sizeable gap between these groups remains. Nonetheless, in looking at question seven and connecting this question on identity back to findings within research, the place of epistemic racism in the state is reiterated.

As earlier remarked in this chapter, the issue of the hyphenated identity has created conditions for epistemic racism in the nation. What becomes apparent from this survey question on identity is the general sentiment, specifically among Catholics, that the French-Algerian Muslims do not embrace the French identity. However, the very use of the term “French-Algerian Muslim” would motivate discrimination because that identity falls outside of the collective. Though, it is apparent that those who are perceived as “the French people” continue to use the hyphenated identity in referring to the Algerian or Muslim population in France. What these findings show is that Muslims are not viewed as completely embracing the French identity. The use of ethnoreligious and racial labeling of minorities makes the French fail to see Muslims and other ethnoreligious groups as embracing the French identity. Some Catholic respondents provided further comments.
• “I believe the cultural and religious differences between French and Arab French are too vast to ever result in a harmonious integration. I find that the French population is overall quite lenient and accepting of those differences, but the reverse is seldom true.”

• “Could have been worse. Today, more than preexisting issues, the issue is mainly religious (From the Algerian side). The French are mainly Catholic but do not practice and know very little about the religion. Muslims practice far more and are taught by people who are not as pro-integration. There are many Muslims in France who are anti-Islamist but you never know. Every recent attack on Paris, those who are meant to represent the Muslim community are weak in their addressing of the terrorists. Even so, there are many people are integrated in France.”

• “Les tensions proviennent selon moi de plusieurs facteurs : - l'histoire qui lie ces deux pays (colonisation, guerre, non reconnaissance des harkis, retour massif des pieds-noirs après la guerre d'Algérie). - L'influence des médias sur l'opinion public - La non possibilité du débat public - Les attentats (Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan, etc.) - La présence de nombreux délinquant d'origine musulmane - L'attitude protectionniste et nationaliste d'une grande partie de la population due, entre autre, à une pression due à la mondialisation (In my opinion, the tensions come from several factors: - the history that links these two countries (colonization, war, non recognition of the Harkis, massive return of the Blackfoot after the Algerian war). - The influence of the media on public opinion - The lack of public debate - Attacks (Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan, etc.) - The presence of many Muslim offenders - The protectionist and nationalist attitude of a large part of the population due, among other things, to pressure from globalization)”

While others responded with a harsher tone:

• “The problem is not that the Muslim population is not excepted in France; it is the reverse. The Muslim population does not except French way of life. I am the daughter of immigrant parents who abided by French law their whole life, and we’re happy to be accepted in this country. In comparison, Muslims install their own rules, such having the right to wear veils, and not serve pork in schools, and to try and forbid the wearing of the cross in schools as well. Many young Muslims are instrumental in drug dealing and organized.

• “[Les tensions peuvent être] Liées à la place de la femme dans l'islam, exprimé très visiblement par les hommes musulmans (ex: ne se détournent pas sur un trottoir si une femmes arrive en face, c'est à la femme de se déplacer, manque de respect des élèves garçons vis à vis des enseignantes, prolifération des voiles et niqab dans les rues, attitudes des jeunes garçons dans la rue insolentes...), aux différences d'attitudes morales, à un manque de confiance réciproque tout cela étant extrêmement accru depuis les attentats.” (“[Tensions can be] Linked to the place of the woman in Islam, expressed very visibly by the Muslim men (ex: do not turn on a sidewalk if a woman comes in front; it's up to the woman to move. Disrespect boys pupils with respect to teachers, proliferation of sails and niqab in the streets, attitudes of young boys in the street insolent ...), differences in moral attitudes, a lack of mutual trust, all this being extremely increased since attacks.)”

• “L'immigration musulmane est le problème majeur auquel nos enfants seront confrontés. C'est un germe de guerre civile.” (“Muslim immigration is the major problem our children will face. It is a germ of civil war.”)

Atheists and non-Catholics responded somewhat in defense of Muslims in the nation:
• After the recent events in France there is considerable evidence of anti-Muslim sentiments in France. Muslims face a range of discrimination from the labor market to suspicion and hostility in daily life.

• Few examples:
  - low percentage of Muslim in my work's environment (0.5/1%) - difficult to access to central apartment for Muslim family, creates a strong ghettoization in the city
  - “La peur de la population musulmane est créée pour des raisons d'identité par tous les mouvements d'extrême droite en Europe - alors qu'il est prouvé que l'immigration est bénéfique économiquement dans ces pays la mixité et le métissage ne font pas peur à tout le monde, heureusement!” (“The fear of the Muslim population is created for reasons of identity by all far-right movements in Europe - while there is evidence that immigration is economically beneficial in these countries mixing and miscegenation do not fear to everyone, thankfully!”)

The French-Catholic people do not seem to be aware of the exclusionist attitudes persisting within their culture. Additionally, it appears that certain misconceptions about Islam have circulated in the society. While some French people take a lenient tone toward the Muslim population, others are far more condemning. Nonetheless, there is predominantly negative sentiment directed toward Muslims. What can be noted from these anonymous responses is that Atheists and non-Catholics in France are more likely to speak in defense of the Muslim population than Catholic-affiliate respondents. Some French respondents recognized discrimination in French society along with the exclusion of Muslims. Even though non-Catholics may present as more accepting of the Muslim population, the Catholics in France remain the majority– thus holding the majority opinion. For this reason, Muslim acceptance in the nation has been set back, generating Islamophobia in the culture. These findings show the impact of Catholicism on Islamophobia. However, of all the questions, Question five proved to not be impacted by religious sentiment:
Religious sentiment did not divide respondents in their answers to this inquiry. Though the gap appears large between Atheists and Catholics, Atheists on average responded with 2.25 while those who both identify and practice Catholicism responded with 2. What can be determined from these findings is that no matter the religious affiliation, among the French people, the Muslim population in the nation is not viewed as accepted. This lack of acceptance creates issues with integration and a problem in identity for Muslims who have lived in the France for many generations. At the core of the issue, this lack of acceptance for other ethnicities, religions, and races in the nation has motivated exclusivity in the culture and serves as a basis for Islamophobia in the nation.

**Chapter Summary**

Based on the findings in this research survey, it is apparent that Islamophobia in France is primarily motivated by communalism and exclusivity within the culture, which has been bred through the construction and reproduction of national values found within the Republican Constitution. These cultural norms promote an exclusive French culture and the expectation that
newcomers should assimilate in order to become part of the collective. When religious groups fall outside normative boundaries of citizenship, discrimination transpires. Anti-Muslim racism is a common outcome. French culture rejects any possibility of a multicultural society; instead, its emphasis is on maintaining cultural homogeneity in the nation. This has fueled controversy around how the French people interact with other cultural and religious mosaics in the country. The place of Christian Nationalism has been a topic explored with regard to broader Western Europe; however, this breed of ethnoreligious nationalism appears to have a strong presence in France.

Christian nationalism has succeeded in generating "otherization" in France—specifically in marginalizing Muslims in the nation. Though France has become increasingly secular since the 19th century, French society continues to maintain a Catholic identity that guides many individuals to have anti-Muslim sentiments in believing that they do not fit with the French people’s values. What can be drawn from this ethnographic study and analysis of the Pew Research Center is that those who affiliated with Catholicism presented a higher level of Islamophobic sentiment when compared to those who were Atheist or had no religious affiliation. In these findings, a correlation can be seen between Christian nationalism and Islamophobia.
CHAPTER III: Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research project, Islamophobia and other discriminatory sentiments toward religious minorities have a clear presence in French society and reflect three realities: the exclusionary model of French national identity, the role of epistemic racism within the nation, and the reactive reemergence of Christian nationalism in this highly secular state. A closer look at French national identity unveils specific values that are consistently reiterated within the French Constitution and echoed in French culture, creating an exclusive French society. These values are mutually exclusive; on one hand the constitution preaches the importance of the French collective community, on the other hand it simultaneously prohibits the acknowledgement of racial, ethnic, or religious identities within the nation. This paradox motivates society to ostracize identities that fall outside the overwhelming secular French-heritage majority. This in turn provokes epistemic racism in the state against identities that fall outside the French national culture.

Moreover, the current literature on Islamophobia points to the roles played by the media and populist movement in promoting anti-Muslim sentiment in France. The satirical media’s modus operandi is to portray Muslims and other religions in a negative light. Although protected by the right to free speech, the satirical media’s misappropriation of sacred Islamic symbols creates
significant tensions between secularists and the French Muslim population and generates negative stereotypes in the process. Additionally, the populist movement has capitalized on the population’s ignorance of Islam by representing Muslims in distorted and biased ways. Although the media and populists are not singlehandedly responsible for fueling increasing levels of Islamophobia in France, their constant reiteration of negative and alarmist sentiments toward French Muslims certainly contributes to these outcomes.

It is ironic to note that the French news media takes a less biased tone toward the Muslim minority than it does toward French Catholicism. However, beginning in 2012, dramatic coverage of a series of terrorist incidents perpetrated by Islamic extremists created ripples of anxiety throughout the French population. The news media generates anti-Islamic sentiment simply through the broadcasting of such terrorist incidents, which, in turn, legitimizes anti-Islamic sentiment fanned by the populist movement.

Economics is another factor at play in this case study. It is important to note that the Muslim population, by and large, falls within a lower socio-economic class much more broadly than the Christian population of France. French Muslims are generally paid at lower rates than their French peers for similar types of work, and Muslims, particularly Algerian Muslims, are more highly represented in government housing in France than other demographic groups. As such, Muslims report feeling excluded from French society and the many benefits afforded to French citizens who enjoy greater socio-economic assets. This economic disparity compounds the impact of Islamophobia, creating stereotypes wherein class, ethnicity, and religion become fused.

When analyzing the role of terrorism in generating Islamophobia, scholars claim that terrorist incidents alone are not responsible for the rise of Islamophobia in France; discrimination against religious minorities has had a quiet presence within French society for generations and is provoked to higher levels by the behavior of radicals.\footnote{Gessier, Vincent. “Islamophobia: A French Specificity in Europe?,” 2010, 9.} For instance, after the Charlie Hebdo attacks of 2015, a surge of anti-Islamic sentiment rippled through the French population; however, it eventually dissipated. It appears that lingering discrimination against Muslims may help to promote the conditions that lead to radicalization, while radical Islam heightens the fears of those already inclined toward anti-Islamic sentiment. The causes and effects are iterative, leaving social scientists unable to clearly define independent or dependent variables leading to terrorism and Islamophobia.

France’s assimilationist emphasis on a unified and secular French identity has created a push for cultural homogeneity and the exclusion of minority groups. Because France has historically been a religiously and racially homogeneous nation, any foreign religion, ethnicity, or race stands out. When individual identities push up against the communal French identity, the result is not a hyphenated identity, as seen in Canada. Instead, individual identities are overshadowed by the only essential identity recognized by the state—that of a secular French citizen. While this process has created an entire culture of individuals loyal to their French roots, it has also insured the rejection of a multicultural model of society that recognizes ethnic, racial or religious differences.

Islamophobia in France can be tied, in part, to the missed opportunity to create a form of multiculturalism in the nation. Many pluralistic nations, such as the United States, have historically been likened to metaphorical melting pots. In these cases, different cultures come
together to form a single identity rooted in diversity, with individual freedom to express
hyphenated identities. For other nations, the analogy of the salad bowl is given to illustrate how
cultures can co-exist separately to form an overarching multi-cultural national identity. This
multicultural model can be seen in Canada, where the English and French communities are given
recognition by the state. Based on the findings of this paper, neither the analogy of a melting pot
nor the salad bowl can be applied to assimilationist France. The French people have created a
society in which there is only one overpowering cultural identity. When other cultures attempt to
assert influence within the nation, they are denied membership in the French cultural community.
Individuals who present non-French identities are faced with the choice of keeping their personal
identities marginalized, or shedding them in order to gain acceptance as a French citizen.
Expressing a hybrid identity would not be viewed as being authentically French.

The French identity has historically been viewed as highly complex, focused on the
collective, and exclusive to others. Though the collective consciousness of the nation is
extraordinarily strong, the French people distinguish themselves as being exclusive and unique
with respect to other cultures. Foreign cultural mosaics that attempt to integrate into French
culture are in many ways rejected as being non-French. In this way, French cultural identity
legitimizes the exclusion of cultural minorities, including the 7-9 percent of Muslims within the
nation’s population. This assimilationist system results in a type of epistemic racism that forces
conformity to “mainstream” secular values and simultaneously “others” those who fail to
conform. In this way, religion in France has become a racialized characteristic attributed to the
growing number of French Muslims in the nation.

Perhaps, counterintuitively, this emphasis on religious intolerance has promoted a
counter-movement against secularism that emphasizes aspects of French Christian nationalism.
In highly secular France, the concept of laïcité continues to represent a central aspect of French Republican identity. Yet, a fear of the growing Muslim population has promoted new forms of Christian nationalism as citizens turn back to their Catholic historical roots. However, rather than representing a faith practice, Catholicism has presented itself as a form of ethno-religious identity. Considering the exclusive nature of French society in the presence of a significant Muslim minority, a growing number of French citizens seem to be drawing on Christian cultural identity as a measure of who belongs and who is excluded from society. Moreover, through this study’s ethnographic research and analysis of preexisting opinion polls prior to May of 2018, it is clear that French citizens who affiliate with Catholicism are more likely to view French Muslims as “the other.” Within the context of Catholic nationalism, an exclusive French cultural identity, and epistemic racism emanating from the French assimilationist model, Islamophobia rapidly emerges in the presence of media and populist narratives emphasizing Muslim extremism.

Islamophobia in France is not simply an issue of the French community’s blatantly disregard for its Muslim population. Rather, Islamophobia represents a clash of ideologies and a problem of conflicting identities. It is not uncommon to hear the native-born French declare, “It is not that I don’t want Muslims in the country; the problem is they don’t want to integrate.” The French do not comprehend how the exclusivity of their culture may cause a reactive identity formation among the Muslim minority. These strengthened Muslim identities are more easily labeled and excluded by fellow nationals. This exclusion reinforces the Muslim population’s relatively lower socioeconomic status and economic disparities, which are passed along generationally. Marginalization and economic isolation produce outcomes of poverty, crime, and reactive religious identities. This oppositional response toward French culture serves as proof to those who are critical of Muslims that this religion is harmful to the Republic. In this way,
Islamophobia in France has become an iterative and evolving clash of identities. To place responsibility on either the French Catholics or Muslims for these tensions is not helpful in solving the problem. While the future of anti-Islamic sentiment in France remains unclear, the trajectory of the body politic will determine whether Islamophobia in France continues to exist at current levels.

Nationalism in France can be considered to be highly prevalent due to the structure of the political system and the history of the nation. As noted, the French political system has a unique emphasis— not on individual rights, but on the rights of the collective Republic as a whole. After the French Revolution, nationalism and communalism were leading aspects of national unification. That platform of national identity held the country together through five Republics. Since the First Republic emerged in 1792, it has been rebuilt four other times. The Fifth Republic, which emerged under Charles de Gaulle in 1958 with a highly centralized authority, remains on thin ice today. With the current gilets jaunes (yellow vest) movement, French people across many demographic groups have been mobilized to demand a Sixth Republic.

In this Sixth Republic, the people are asking for a less powerful executive branch of government and a stronger parliamentary system. The notion of a Sixth Republic has been increasingly emphasized by the gilets jaunes movement, which has dubbed the Fifth Republic a “Republican Monarchy.”111 With the support of over three quarters of the French population, the gilets jaunes draw from all demographic groups and political affiliations. However, the movement mirrors that of the nation’s demographics, with French Catholics in the majority, and Muslims as a minority. What can ultimately be drawn from these findings is that the issue of

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French identity also shows up within the gilets jaunes movement, yet in different forms from those of populists. Unlike the far-right populists, the gilets jaunes are not focused on issues of race or religion; instead their movement emphasizes what is essentially an issue of social class and declining socioeconomics. In this movement, French Muslims, who struggle socioeconomically, have a strong presence. Even though French Muslims continue to be viewed as “not authentically French,” they stand in defense of their rights as citizens within the nation.

In France, the people are concerned for their own welfare and for that of the collective body. But what of those who are not viewed as a member of the collective? In the twenty-first century, who now fits the model of the “authentic French citizen,” collectively protesting in defense of the Republic? Clearly, those actively participating in civic culture are a diverse group, expressing a spectrum of ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. Perhaps the demographically diverse gilets jaunes might promote a new Republic that will complicate the definition of who belongs to the nation. If a new Republic were prompted by the gilets jaunes– a movement led by a multifarious population of citizens, including French-Catholics, French-Algerians, French-Muslims, and French-Jews– the understanding of French identity may expand to include the diverse citizens who have fought for the rights of the French people and, in the process, captured the attention of the world.


Goldberg, Chad Alan. *Introduction to Emile Durkheim’s “Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis”*, 2008.


