



European Approaches to Stopping Islamophobia are Inadequate: Lessons for Canadians Combating Anti-Muslim Racism and Hatred

ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

The United Kingdom, France, and Spain have in common a large and growing Muslim population. The influx of immigrants and refugees has left many European states fearful of Muslim migrants because they perceive potential increases in terrorism and job insecurity, which would have significant social and economic policy implications. European governments have sought to strengthen security measures and immigration laws, often with consequences that disproportionately and negatively affect Muslims. At the same time, European governments have increased their efforts to address Islamophobia and improve Muslim integration, partly in response to the growth in the reporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes. Each of the aforementioned states has adopted different approaches to tackle issues affecting Muslim communities. Although some of the countries (e.g., Spain) have taken positive approaches in the fight against Islamophobia, others (e.g., France) pave the way for social disintegration and segregation by entrenching low socioeconomic status, passing discriminatory laws, and blaming violent attacks on Muslims as a whole. It appears that the European nations examined in this comparative analysis have failed, to varying degrees upholding values of equitable diversity and encouraging meaningful dialogue with Muslim organizations. Their approaches demonstrate a clear lack of adequate governmental response to growing levels of Islamophobia.

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Islamophobia is proliferating alarmingly worldwide, particularly in Western states, permeating the institutional, judicial, and societal arenas. Legal changes following catastrophic, terrorism-labeled events such as 9/11, the 2004 Madrid train bombing, the July 7 London bombings, the 2015 Paris bombing, and the 2017 van attack in Barcelona have marginalized Muslims in European countries and exacerbated anti-Islamic rhetoric (Cesari, 2006). Governments seemingly view the potential for extremism and terrorism as being of greater importance than the reality of Islamophobia, despite the former's being a disproportionately lesser threat (cite). Politicians make timely statements about Islamophobia, as a means to further their own agendas, often to get Muslims "on their team" in tackling homegrown extremism. Politicians in the UK even refer to Islamophobia as a "form of extremism" and link Islamophobia to security, counterterrorism, and extremism policy agendas (Allen, 2017, p. 19). Incidents labeled as terrorism have raised questions about whether European governments have failed to promote the socioeconomic integration of Muslim communities into mainstream society, leading to severe "othering" and, in some cases, permitting radicalization to develop (Angenendt et al., 2007). This tendency to view Muslims in Europe through the lens of national and global security is itself dehumanizing (Angenendt et al., 2007). Economic challenges and anti-immigrant sentiments coupled with an influx of Muslim immigrants from conflict-zone countries has exacerbated anti-Muslim sentiments disproportionately, allowing for Islamophobic narratives to persist and reinforce themselves (Abdelkader, 2017; Allen 2017; Cesari, 2006; Kaya, 2015).

Harmful tropes and Islamophobic narratives are chronically perpetuated by the mainstream media, political discourse, far-right groups, and academics (Zine, 2006). Prevailing Islamophobic narratives construct Muslims as monolithic, inherently violent third-world citizens who are morally incompatible with, and unable to assimilate into, Western society (Cesari, 2006). Many Western intellectuals (e.g., Bleich, 2011; Kaya, 2015; Sayyid & Vakil, 2010) and politicians are still refuting and denying the very existence and validity of the concept of Islamophobia; therefore, one of the important tasks in anti-Islamophobia work is to make the hate-imbued realities and experiences of Muslims visible and recognized as a form of racism permeating the social fabric (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018). The legal and political recognition of Islamophobia would, ideally, lead to policies and interventions that would prevent the manifold manifestation of this phenomenon (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018). We must recognize the multifaceted and varying spheres in which Islamophobia exists, ranging from everyday discrimination and rhetoric in the media, to physical attacks on Muslims and mosques (Sobotová et al., 2019). In other words, Islamophobia can occur in implicit and explicit forms. Islamophobia is a by-product of unequal power relations supported through discriminatory political policies, institutional practices, and biased media discourses to maintain cultural dominance in relation to Islam and reproduce racial logic (Zine, 2006).

The effects of Islamophobia are visible and measurable in individual behaviors and institutional processes. For this reason, comprehensive policy responses and action plans adopted at the national and local levels to address structural and systemic Islamophobia are essential. Some governments have taken effective measures to address Islamophobia. For instance, Spain has adopted a regional action plan that includes educational outreach and hate crimes prosecution. Other European Union states such as the United Kingdom promote dialogue and facilitate reporting of Islamophobic incidents (Archick et al., 2011). Given the prevalence of structural Islamophobia and the rise in overt anti-Muslim hatred and escalating waves of violence in Canada, this article aims to identify, analyze, and assess approaches to addressing Islamophobia that have been developed and implemented in other Western countries at both the governmental policy and the community levels. Examples of both successes and failures will be examined where available. The multicultural idyll masks the lived reality of Islamophobia and racism in Canada. In 2017, a terror attack in a Quebec City Mosque claimed six lives and five years later, a Pakistani-Canadian family were targeted due their Muslim faith in a truck attack. In addition to the acts of violence, a 2016 Forum Poll revealed that 28 per cent of Canadians harbor negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims (Zine, 2021). Canada's discriminatory policies and practices (e.g., in 2015 the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, racialized second-class citizenship was legislated

during the Harper era, Quebec's religious symbols ban, auditing of Muslim charities, and security policies leading to religious profiling) have arguably contributed to the climate of Islamophobia. Through these policies and practices, Liberal member of Parliament Iqra Khalid was subjected to death threats after introducing a motion to tackle Islamophobia and calling a parliamentary committee to study and recognize the issue. In other words, Islamophobia and human rights violations do not occur in a vacuum; although Canadians may be shocked by the recent mass murder of a Muslim Canadian family, the attack was not an isolated event—the ingredients of Islamophobia have long been in the making, creating a breeding ground for such violence (Zine, 2021).

This paper employs a qualitative case study approach, which compares the tactics in the United Kingdom, France, and Spain to assess their influence and impact. Examination of these efforts, of their successes and setbacks, can inform advocacy efforts for Muslim Canadians. These countries were selected because they have substantial Muslim communities in proportion to the wider population and because they vary in their treatment of Muslims and levels of Islamophobia. They also share similarities with Canada in terms of their historical and ideological foundations—namely, Christian-form secularism. The comparative case studies examine secondary data, drawn from analysis of archival documents, on the trajectory of anti-Islamophobia advocacy organizations in the selected states, at both the governmental and community levels. This article builds on the findings of existing studies and literature concerning Islamophobia.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN STATES: FRANCE, UK, AND SPAIN

Western European states vary in terms of their policies and approaches to countering Islamophobia. At the same time, Islamophobic practices have become widely normalized, which creates climates of exclusion and mistrust—Muslims often feel a sense of cultural alienation and as if they belong to “suspect communities” (Cesari, 2006). The influence of national contexts must be considered in the analysis of varying approaches to Islamophobia.

Western Europe has experienced significant influxes of Muslim immigrants, and the number of Muslims is continuously increasing (Archick et al., 2011; Hackett, 2017). France is home to Europe's largest Muslim population (9% of the total population), followed by the United Kingdom (6% of the total population.) A significant Muslim population also exists in Spain, constituting 2%–3% (Hackett, 2017).

According to Archick et al. (2011) “Europe's Muslim populations are ethnically and linguistically diverse” (p. 3). Different European nations have tended to attract immigrants from certain nationalities because of colonial legacies and historical ties. Most Muslims in Britain and France migrated from former colonies. Similarly, many French Muslims originate from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. In Britain, South Asians (e.g., from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) constitute the major Muslim minority. Spanish Muslims are particularly diverse. Many have their origins in North and West Africa (especially Morocco), South Asia, and the Middle East, while others are from South America (Colombia, Ecuador, and Dominican Republic) and Eastern Europe (Romania and Ukraine). Muslim populations are concentrated primarily in Catalonia, particularly in the city of Barcelona, and concentrations are also present in Madrid and other regions, such as Almeria, Murcia, Valencia, and Andalusia, that border the Mediterranean Sea (Archick et al., 2011; Romero, 2022).

A debate among politicians and scholars (e.g., Werner Schiffauer and Stefano Allievi) has emerged over the implications of Europe's growing Muslim communities for European society and politics; some are foreseeing the “Islamification” of Europe and a loss of national identity¹ (Vaisse, 2010), with many Europeans viewing Muslims as a threat to their values (Abdelkader, 2017). The post-9/11 narrative of America reinforced a clash of civilizations (Islamic versus Western) trope and Eurabia writers purposely exclude the social and economic conditions of Muslims – Islamophobia

1 This is a common Islamophobic myth called “Eurabia.” See Justic Vaisse (2010), *Eurobian follies*, *Foreign Policy*.

and poverty. While the Muslims in Western Europe constitute 4.5 percent of the population, it is unlikely that Europe will reach the 10 percent mark (Vaïsse, 2010). A Pew Research poll from 2016 determined that Muslims had only reached 4.9% of the European population after all and predicted that with zero migration, populations would only attain 7.4% by 2050. (Pew Research, 2017)

MEASURES TO COMBAT TERRORISM – SECURITY POLICIES

Islamophobia in Europe is driven by a series of discriminatory policies and practices toward ethnic minorities, particularly anti-terrorism policies, anti-integration policies, and changes to immigration law. Muslim integration in Europe is complicated by anti-immigrant sentiment, overt racism, and Islamophobic laws and policies that prevent socioeconomic blending (Archick et al., 2011). Numerous European states such as the UK, France and Spain have responded to perceived security threats by adopting coercive policies against anyone whom they label as Islamist and by reframing immigration and asylum policies (de Londras, 2021). Many European governments have failed to strike an appropriate balance between combating terrorism and upholding the civil liberties of ethnic minorities. Counterterrorism legislation and policies have become “permanent modes of governance” in Western Europe (de Londras, 2021).

In the wake of 2015 terror attacks in Paris, France has passed several pieces of legislation and declared a State of Emergency – Law on Everyday Security (Archick et al., 2011). These measures include criminalizing the dissemination of terrorist propaganda, providing the ability to expand police powers with minimal judicial oversight, allowing stop and search of vehicles, giving the ability to search unoccupied premises with a warrant but without notification, and allowing electronic transactions and activity at mosques to be monitored and recorded much more extensively (Archick et al., 2011). Subsequently, French Muslims have reported widespread abuse in the name of security. France’s 2011 immigration law also made it easier to deport those who incite hatred and individuals who “have committed acts justifying a criminal trial” or whose behavior “threatens public order” (Cesari & McLoughlin, 2005, p. 24). As well as, increasing penalties for illegal immigration, temporary detention centres, and new limits on family reunification (Cesari & McLoughlin, 2005). It is important to note that such vaguely defined offenses may be arbitrarily applied by the state and in its own extremism, French “laïcité” often exaggerates or distorts the “offenses” of Muslim individuals and groups. Prohibitions on the hijab in the name of secularism, for example, reveal some of the racist, sexist, and Islamophobic prejudices that underlie the notion of “preserving” French national identity.

Following the Madrid attacks in 2004, the Spanish government swiftly reformed its internal security structures. Despite these changes, political observers have noted that Spain has not made significant changes to its security and anti-terrorism laws, a choice that has an impact on the everyday Islamophobia Muslims face in Spain (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018).

After the 2005 London subway bombings, the British government introduced an updated Prevention of Terrorism Act and proposed stripping citizenship of those accused of terrorism (Cesari & McLoughlin, 2005). The 2001 Anti-Terrorism bill, introduced in the wake of 9/11, allowed the indefinite detention of foreign nationals and the detention and interrogation of individuals in “anticipation” of violence (Cesari & McLoughlin, 2005). The term “anticipation of violence” is overly broad, lacking in legal precision; it is also in contravention of international human rights laws. The UK’s counterterrorism measures are constantly evolving and have become inscrutable, extending both special powers and exemption from following international law.

There is a critical need to examine the differentiated impact of counterterrorism policies on diverse Muslim communities. The disproportionate focus on (counter)terrorism in media, scholarship and government policy while neglecting the impact of lived experiences of Islamophobia has greatly contributed to the stigmatization of Muslim communities in public discourse and to a climate of fear and resentment.

European countries have historically pursued different policies with respect to integrating minority populations and promoting tolerance and equality (Archick et al., 2011; Beswick, 2020). The separation of church and state has become a key part of France's political fabric and national identity since the Separation Law of 1905. Relatedly, the interpretation of secular values has become more pronounced and divisive in recent years. The 1905 Separation Law was designed to reduce the powers of the Catholic Church, but the complete separation of religious identity and affiliation from the public sphere limits French Muslims' ability to practice certain aspects of their faith. Strict application of the law has become a pretext for exclusion and Islamophobia. In one of the most notable recent examples of application of French secular principles, the French legislature passed a ban on religious symbols—including face veils or the niqab—in public spaces (Abdelkader, 2017). Such integration policies (or lack thereof) have been criticized for targeting Muslims. President Emmanuel Macron acknowledged that France has failed its immigrant citizens by creating ethnic enclaves and “our own separatism with ghettos of misery and hardship” (Beswick, 2020).

In contrast, Spain has undertaken more efforts to integrate Muslims. Since the Madrid bombings and increased immigration, the government has stressed the need to better integrate the Muslim population, with mixed results. Spain has adopted a model of integration inspired in a seemingly contradictory manner—by both UK and Dutch multiculturalism and French assimilation. Whereas multiculturalism facilitates preservation and expression of cultural or religious identity, the assimilation model seeks to integrate immigrants by repressing differing cultural or religious identity (Nogales & Medina, 2014). Examination of the current reality of Muslims in Spain reveals that this apparently “perfect model of integration” is not even close to ideal and does not resemble true equity. Official representation of Islam is artificial because of assimilation with the Catholic Church. The model also embraces the concept of separation between church and state, producing limitations on practice similar to those in France (Nogales & Medina, 2014). However, some commenters assert that Muslims in Spain experience discrimination more often as a result of their poverty rather than of religious or ethnic identity (Sobotová, et al., 2019).

Islamophobia is less widespread in Spain than in other European countries. Unlike in many European countries, the Madrid attacks did not produce any significant increase in Islamophobic hate crimes; nor have there been any reports of police abuse of Muslims in Spain (Sobotová, et al., 2019). The tolerant climate has been acknowledged by Muslims. Far-right parties have not gained the same traction in Spain as in other European nations, as most Spaniards are tolerant of Muslims. Prime Minister Zapatero (2004–2008) implemented lenient immigration policies and authorized mass legalization of many undocumented immigrants working in Spain, thereby further liberalizing eligibility requirements for temporary residence and work permits. While the second phase of the Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (PECI) was updated in 2011, it seems that the strategy had not been further developed since 2015 until 2022. Changes were made to make it easier for student visas to transfer to work visas, and importantly, for workers who have worked illegally in the previous 6 months to obtain a residence permit. This change is significant because unlike previous policies (like the *arraigo laboral*) this new stream will not require that they have lived in Spain for two years prior to apply. That said, the domestic political debate in Spain continues to form around integration and immigration policies, and Spaniards view Muslim issues as an immigration issue (Archick et al., 2011).

Similarly, the UK has a strong tradition of religious liberty and a policy of multiculturalism—permitting ethnic minorities to maintain and practice their customs and religion, rather than legislating assimilation. Critics charge that the multicultural policy has entrenched insular Muslim communities through exclusion and that the integration approach fails to address the deep social divisions that affect many aspects of Muslims' lives in the UK (Archick et al., 2011). Many young British Muslims reportedly persist in feeling a sense of “cultural alienation” and express feeling less attached to their host country (Archick et al., 2011, p. 7).

European Muslims are mostly immigrants and socioeconomically disadvantaged and underemployed underclass. Immigrants face exclusion through discrimination in the labor market, particularly in France (Khan, 2020). In France and Spain, Muslims have substantially poorer educational outcomes, high unemployment rates, and high imprisoned populations; they reside in slums, impoverished areas, or enclaves. Many Muslim French youth reside in public housing projects or “banlieues,” which exacerbates their exclusion. These disparities are often reflected in employment rates, access to housing, and education levels (Angenendt et al., 2007). The unemployment rate among immigrant Muslim groups in France is estimated to be double that of the overall population. In the United Kingdom, Muslims have outcomes more equivalent to those of non-Muslim citizens (Angenendt et al., 2007). Although some Muslim communities live in isolation in the UK, the claim by some politicians that “no-go zones” exist in Muslim majority neighborhoods is false (Abdelkader, 2017). Research indicates that despite having an increased level of education compared with the national UK average, British Muslims tend to be more economically disadvantaged and concentrated in low-paying sectors than the national average and to have much higher rates of unemployment. Many Muslim communities in the UK reside in the deprived districts (Khan, 2020). Muslims in Spain also tend to be concentrated in deprived residential areas in cities. Experts assert that addressing the socioeconomic disadvantages experienced by Muslims is key to promoting better integration (Abdelkader, 2017).

None of the approaches described above have successfully integrated Muslims into mainstream society in terms of true equity or sense of belonging. It is widely reported that Muslims in Europe are experiencing social exclusion and Islamophobia, which has led to a sense of alienation (Fekete, 2008). Spatial marginalization and the significant socioeconomic disparities between Muslims and native Europeans, which will be expanded upon below, raise the question of how effective these varying models of integration are. The reason for the failure of integration across models may be that there is little systematic reflection on the term *integration* itself. The discourse ‘integration’ is used as a tool to stigmatize and construct Muslims as the social problem. There is inherent violence in the concept of integration, which is underpinned by an assimilationist logic (Fekete, 2008). Therefore, integration cannot be the desired outcome of anti-Islamophobia work; the target of anti-Islamophobia work should be “deep social equity” (Beaman, 2017, p. 6).

CONFRONTING ISLAMOPHOBIA

In the context described above, some notable local and regional organizations and political initiatives are addressing Islamophobia in France, England, and Spain.

SPAIN

Barcelona Municipal Plan to Fight Against Islamophobia

In 2017, Barcelona City Council launched a comprehensive municipal plan to combat Islamophobia by guaranteeing social cohesion and protecting human rights. This trailblazing municipal plan was a response to rising hate crimes and was born out of the conviction that government is responsible to act as Islamophobia threatens “co-existence and social cohesion” (Ajuntament de Barcelon, 2017, p. 3). Lola López and Amparo Sánchez, chairs of the Citizens’ Platform Against Islamophobia (PCI), stated, “We’re mistaken when we think Islamophobia is something which just affects Muslims. It affects us all, and society as a whole because it breaks social cohesion” (Ajuntament de Barcelon, 2018).

The 18-month plan sets out 28 measures to achieve the goals of enhancing prevention (e.g., establish the Hate Crime and Hate Speech Observatory); raising awareness of Islamophobia as a form of discrimination (through, e.g., public education campaigns, school workshops, a “Day against Islamophobia”); and improving data collection on hate crimes. Issues addressed include social exclusion of young hijabi girls; challenges in opening prayer centers; discrimination on public transport; and labor market discrimination against young, visible Muslim men. The plan was co-designed in consultation with experts and community members (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.).

The Office for Non-Discrimination (OND), which receives human rights complaints, provides specialized legal advice on hate crimes and hate speech, monitors and prosecutes Islamophobic practices, provides training, and collates data. The OND also identifies structural racism and proposes strategic recommendations. The action plan against Islamophobia is part of the fight against hate speech following van attacks at tourist destinations in Barcelona and Cambrils in Tarragona (Proctor & Prior, 2019). The Office for Religious Affairs in Barcelona also supports “guaranteeing equal treatment for religious bodies holding occasional activities in public places” and providing “clear guidelines on the relevant needs and use of public space and facilities by religious groups” (Proctor & Prior, 2019, p. 14).

In the 18-month timeline, 22 of the 28 measures were implemented (Ajuntament de Barcelon, 2018). The first report on Islamophobia in Barcelona was published jointly between the City Council and human rights activists. The subject of Islamic religion has been incorporated into curricula albeit gradually and with some resistance from parents (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2018). The OND has also prosecuted several cases, and the BCN Anti-Rumours Network has disseminated information on religious diversity to prevent and counter discrimination. Municipal employees, including the city police, have received internal training on Islamophobia and multiculturalism (Ajuntament de Barcelon, 2017). The OND has also broadened the scope of its anti-Islamophobia work (Ajuntament de Barcelon, 2018).

FRANCE

French Council of the Muslim Faith

In recent years, Islam has become hyperpoliticized, but Muslims are largely kept out of the debate. There is a strong need for Muslim representation in state institutions that develop laws and policies that affect them. Before the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), the institutional needs of Muslims were primarily served by the “patronage” of foreign countries or organizations (Fredette, 2014). The French government, required that an official interlocutor be present and emphasized the establishment of a dialogue between official Muslim representatives and the government (Archick et al., 2011). The resulting creation of the CFCM aimed to create an “Islam of France”—independent from foreign countries and embracing the values of the Republic (Fredette, 2014, p. 164). The creation of the CFCM is considered an important step toward the institutionalization of France’s second-largest religion and improving the relationship between French Muslims and the state, and the organization provides a forum to discuss specific issues such as construction of mosques, funding and training of imams, observance of religious holidays, and the ensuring of appropriate food for Muslims in the prison system (Venel, 2005).

The CFCM is increasingly called upon by political leaders to speak on behalf of all Muslims in France and to speak to Muslims. This centralized and elitist approach frames Muslims as a monolithic entity and requests that a single organization represent and impartially speak for the interests of all Muslims in France. Very few Muslims believe that CFCM is a functional apparatus that can have any real impact on Islamophobia or contribute to the integration of Muslims (Fredette, 2014). France’s highly diverse Muslims, whose understanding and practice of Islam varies widely, are unlikely see themselves reflected in this organization (Venel, 2005). Additionally, there have been concerns about the role and the legitimacy of the CFCM. Dounia Bouzar, a former member of the CFCM, has complained that the institution failed to make any progress on key issues—it takes no interest in the “second and third generations” of youth and focuses on irrelevant procedural questions (Heneghan, 2005). She further said that the body is heavily dominated by men and stated that “as long as there is not a majority of French-born Muslims on the board, the CFCM will suffer from rivalries that divide its members according to their countries of origin” (Heneghan, 2005, para. 7). Although an institution like the CFCM is a step forward in terms of official representation of Islam in France, the organization will continue to be plagued by legitimacy concerns because of the gap between its official objective and the varied expectations and interests of Muslims (Fredette, 2014).

The French government has recently (on February 16, 2021) introduced an Anti-Separatism bill to uproot violent extremism,² and it urged the CFCM to accept the devised “Charter of Principles.” The Charter states: “From a religious and ethical point of view, Muslims are bound to France by a pact. This compels them to respect national cohesion, public order and the laws of the Republic” (Valentin & Lantier, 2021, para.7). The killing of teacher Samuel Paty who had shared blasphemous drawings of the Prophet Muhammed to students, by an 18-year-old Chechen refugee), along with other attacks in France, provided a backdrop for the bill (Valentin & Lantier, 2021). This is happening while increasing attacks on mosques and anti-Muslim violence against veiled women has not provoked immediate actions or support. The Anti-Separatism bill is intended to eradicate “radicalized” influences that encroach on France’s secularism and strengthen the core values of the French Republic. Again, the terminology being deployed is subtle and obscures the true impact on French Muslims. The bill seeks oversight of mosques and expands governmental powers to dissolve organizations on the basis of the ambiguous concept of “radicalization.” The CFCM received an ultimatum to sign the Charter and was asked to include in the text recognition that Islam is not a political movement and a prohibition against “foreign interference” in Muslim groups, and to create a register of imams in France. Although Macron’s new law has been criticized by domestic Muslim communities, international organizations and Muslim organizations were “keeping a low profile” as the debate over the bill opened (Ganley, 2021). Concerns have arisen about the ramifications of the legislation, because it violates religious freedom and will be employed as a tool to legalize Islamophobia in France. The tension between the state and France’s Muslims will deepen, and fear of collective punishment will grow.

Collective Against Islamophobia (CCIF)

The Collective Against Islamophobia (CCIF) is a non-profit organization created in 2003 by activist Samy Debah with the aim of combating discrimination and violence toward Muslims in France at the judicial level (CCIF, 2016). Despite being dissolved in 2020, the work of the organization focusing on religious freedom and Muslims’ rights in France is worth examining. CCIF released an annual report cataloging Islamophobic incidents in France, divided into five sections:

- Watchdog – Monitoring Islamophobic acts and speech
- Communication – Producing press releases, articles, and testimonies
- Legal – Investigating hate crimes to initiate legal proceedings and supporting victims with free legal support
- International relations – Maintaining and strengthening relations with international bodies, such as Council of Europe
- Psychological support for victims (CCIF, 2016).

The CCIF did achieve remarkable success in curtailing Islamophobia, from defending thousands of Muslim individuals targeted by unfair measures, to investigating and publishing media accounts, to contesting legislation. The CCIF successfully challenged the city of Villeneuve-Loubet’s Burkini ban by appealing to France’s highest administrative court (Dawes, 2020). The court’s decision could set a legal precedent for appeals of similar laws (Nashrulla & Pojzman-Pontay, 2016). In 2011, the CCIF became a consultant with the United Nations and a member of the Economic and Social Council (Dawes, 2020). Its professionalism and expertise were recognized by international institutions, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The CCIF also collaborated with various civil society groups and organizations, such as the Union of French Jews for Peace (UJFP), associations addressing anti-Roma racism, the Representative Council of France’s Black Associations (CRAN), the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights, and the Defender of Rights (CCIF, 2016).

² The terms such as radical Islam, Islamist extremism, and jihadist attacks do not often refer to an actual dystopian ideology or perversion of Islam, but rather deploy loaded terms to demonize regular Muslims. This characterization is a form of internalized colonization and is how the French are parsing their racist and Islamophobic bill; repeating the right-wing terminology sends an implicit message of condoning its use which we absolutely reject.

Despite its achievements, the organization faced backlash for its definition of Islamophobia (Çakmak, 2020). According to the CCIF, Islamophobia is an offense and an action, not a negative attitude or an opinion, and not freedom of speech. The persistent demonization of Muslims arguably triggers people with violent impulses to act. In particular, Islamophobic comments online are fueling the surge in Islamophobic hate crimes and vice versa, leading researchers to reject viewing them in isolation from one another (Awan & Zempi, 2020).

The CCIF then experienced an escalation of state repression as well as targeted hate messages and death threats (Çakmak, 2020). In the wake of the murder of Samuel Paty, the Minister of the Interior launched a campaign vilifying Muslims and has announced its intention to dissolve CCIF, along with 51 other antiracist civil society organizations (Çakmak, 2020). The Minister of the Interior labeled the organization as an “enemy of the Republic” and a “backroom of terrorism,” without evidence to substantiate such claims or to justify the dissolution of CCIF (Amnesty International, 2020, p. 1). However, the current French law does not require judicial scrutiny of the proposed dissolution, posing an imminent danger to basic human rights and having a chilling effect for all human rights defenders, and ultimately leading to its demise. This is an attempt to silence dissenting views, criminalize Muslim leaders, and shut down their valuable efforts through state regulation. The group gave the following statement in 2020: “As an organization, we no longer feel we can conduct our work in a safe environment, as our lives are threatened and the government designates us as an enemy” (Çakmak, 2020, para. 2).

Without the CCIF, there will be no further investigation and data collection on Islamophobic incidents in France. Currently, no comprehensive Europe-wide data on Islamophobia is collected. Without data, policymakers cannot make a comprehensive assessment of the phenomenon and therefore cannot adopt efficient measures to prevent it. The Ministry of the Interior’s hate crime reports reflect only hate crime-related incidents recorded by the police and overlook the wide-ranging reality of Islamophobia that results in discrimination at the workplace, difficulty in accessing services and housing, and so forth. This silencing of a crucial antiracist organization reflects institutional racism and remnants of imperialism in the French state.

UNITED KINGDOM

All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Islamophobia

Sayeeda Warsi, the first female Muslim cabinet minister and co-chair of the Conservative-led Coalition government, was a catalyst in prioritizing Islamophobia on the political agenda and demanding an inquiry into the character of Islamophobia within the government (Allen, 2017). The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was launched in 2010 and is composed of members of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords. Despite England’s being the first Western country to acknowledge the importance of Islamophobia in the 1996 Runnymede Trust report,³ its government at the time largely dismissed Islamophobia as an urgent concern.

Warsi’s advocacy prompted the establishment of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Islamophobia (Allen, 2017). Two primary factors induced the government to address Islamophobia in Britain: the 2005 terrorist attack on the London public transport system and street-level hate crimes against British Muslims. Although the prevalence of such hate crimes was difficult to quantify because of the lack of formal monitoring mechanisms (Hargreaves, 2014), anecdotal evidence suggested that anti-Muslim racism was significant enough for politicians to act (Allen 2013). However, government action was also motivated by a conception of Muslims as homogenous “Other.” Chris Allen (2010), a British sociologist and professor, he has been at the forefront of research on Islamophobia and held a number of advisory role, including the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Islamophobia and cross-government Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group; he noted that Islamophobia is seen to be the fault of Muslims and that Muslim identities are viewed as inherently problematic, so the onus of eradicating the issue of Islamophobia also falls

³ The Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia established Runnymede Trust in 1996. The Commission’s report described the nature of Islamophobia and recommended practical actions for tackling Islamophobia.

upon Muslims. The APPG was established to inform Parliamentarians, policymakers, and the wider society by:

- Investigating the forms, manifestations, and extent of discrimination against Muslims
- Examining a broad range of issues that affect British Muslims
- Celebrating the contributions of Muslim communities to Britain
- Reviewing the effectiveness of relevant legislation and existing mechanism for recording anti-Muslim hate crimes
- Investigating the role of the media in propagating Islamophobia. (Awan & Zempi, 2021, para. 2)

The APPG appointed iENGAGE—a London-based Muslim organization—and became “dogged by controversy” prompted by media allegations that members of iENGAGE were affiliated with “Islamist sympathizers”—a term that is used in a disparaging way in the British context (Allen, 2013). These concerns damaged the credibility of the APPG, and its political agenda to tackle Islamophobia dissipated (Allen, 2013, p. 6). Muslim identities and organizations appear to attract disproportionate levels of scrutiny—a function of Islamophobia itself—and this might be the reason the APPG decided to remove iENGAGE from its mandate. The APPG was relaunched in 2011 with the support of MPs from across the political spectrum to keep Islamophobia on the national agenda; yet the group showed marginal signs of improvement to its leadership and strategy—its activities became “sporadic,” lacked “coherence” or strategy, and failed to produce a single output (Allen, 2017, p. 8). Chris Allen (2021) stated that “since its launch in November 2010, the APPG on Islamophobia has been little more than a sideshow: an unhelpful, unwanted and unnecessary distraction from giving Islamophobia the rightful, timely and necessary attention it so desperately needs” (p. 115). The APPG had a unique opportunity to tackle Islamophobia, namely by collecting evidence and making recommendations; however, it appeared to offer little more than a cursory nod to those campaigning for action on this phenomenon (Allen, 2013).

The APPG contended that the lack of an official definition was impeding its efforts to counter Islamophobia and put forward the first working definition of Islamophobia in 2018. According to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims (2018) report, Islamophobia is “rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expression of Muslimness and perceived Muslimness” (p. 11). The APPG’s proposed definition has not been broadly accepted and was met with criticism, some of which has misrepresented the definition. The APPG offers a broad definition – it must be specific in its formulation, and it precludes expressions or tangible manifestation of Islamophobia (i.e., physical attacks on Muslims or those perceived to be Muslims) that which is evident in the public and political sphere (Allen, 2020). The process of establishing a working definition was a culmination of almost two years of consultation and evidence gathering and initially gained traction with the main political parties (Allen, 2020). The critics, such as Quilliam Foundation, a recently dissolved government-funded counterextremism think tank, claim that the vague and expansive definition would have a negative consequence for freedom of expression because—some might see criticism of the tenets of Islam as a racist hate crime, which would potentially undermine antiterrorism measures (Bouattia, 2021). Such critics often politicize the term “Islamophobia” to serve their respective agendas. The Quilliam Foundation has a long history of anti-Islamic views and no longer operates, but its “toxic legacy remains” and the impact will continue to be felt by the Muslim community in the United Kingdom (Bouattia, 2021).⁴ Some organizations portray themselves as experts on Islamic affairs while they are fueling Islamophobia (Rifai, 2016). There are also leftist think-tanks, such as the national security-focused Henry Jackson Society, that are guided by anti-Islamic agendas. The Islamophobia industry propagates Islamophobic ideologies – it gives rise to hate crimes and Islamophobic legislation (Rifai, 2016).

⁴ For 13 years, the Quilliam Foundation worked toward the institutionalization of Islamophobia—pushing damaging narratives and stereotypical tropes about Muslims—and was being funded primarily by the leaders of the global Islamophobia industry (prominent media figures, White nationalist groups, and others who perpetuate Islamophobic rhetoric) in the US and the UK (Bouattia, 2021).

Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group (AMHWG)

The Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, which is composed of representatives of Muslim communities, independent experts, and academics, along with various government departments was launched by the UK in 2012 to work collaboratively with the APPG. The Working Group is the government's main forum for discussion of issues affecting Muslim communities; it aims to make recommendations, respond to local and international events, and improve reporting mechanisms by engaging with Muslim communities and inviting their input on key priority issues ([Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, 2019](#)).

In contrast to the APPG, the Working Group appeared more structured and coherent. The Working Group established a program that included various subgroups focused on the media, data collection, research evidence, and so forth. However, a "strategic remit" was lacking; more specifically, a lack of agreed "terms of reference" affected internal dynamics and external activities ([Allen, 2017, p. 9](#)). The issue of public versus private figures was another cause of discord among the group's members. For instance, some members advocated for a "public profile" to raise awareness of Islamophobia and offer a more informed and objective voice to the media, while other members feared becoming a target of criticism or losing political favor and preferred to engage with politicians without making public appearances or statements ([Allen, 2017](#)).

Consequently, the Working Group remained silent and invisible both inside and outside of government and was reluctant to hold politicians accountable. Such an approach is quite peculiar, given that the Working Group was appointed as a public group. The Group needs to add its voice and exercise its privileged position to tackle Islamophobia in all its forms and manifestations. Chris Allen played an independent advisory role on the Working Group but resigned from the position, stating that "three years on and having personally submitted around half a dozen briefing papers to the group and associated politicians, I have now resigned my position, disillusioned by both group and government's shared inability to even begin to move forward the issue of tackling Islamophobia" ([Ismail, 2014, para. 3](#)). The resignation of Chris Allen who is a prominent and leading scholar in the field of Islamophobia prompts us to question the efficacy of this group. The government and organization's lack of commitment is an alarming revelation, and it has enabled a culture of bigotry and intolerance to fester.

The only output from the Working Group is simplistic interventions such as promoting the Big Iftar (inviting non-Muslims in the month of Ramadan to participate in the meal) and We Remember Too (raising awareness about Muslims that fought as part of the Allied Forces during WWII) or participating in social media workshops. The extent to which the Big Iftar or other events had any tangible impact in addressing Islamophobia is questionable ([Allen, 2017](#)). In fact, no academic research relating to anti-Muslim hate has emerged from the Working Group ([Allen, 2014](#)). Nonetheless, the Group continues to operate, albeit in a largely "invisible" manner and with little tangible effect. The Working Group and the government collectively failed to create forward "momentum" and had no influence or impact due to lack of political buy in and had been denied or rejected by several key governmental departments, including department of health and education. Islamophobia is prevalent at all levels – the current prime Minister, Boris Johnson has been accused of being Islamophobic and Lady Warsi has demanded an inquiry into endemic Islamophobic within the party's membership. The issue is systemic, from its "leadership to its grassroots" ([Allen, 2021](#)). Political rhetoric or discourse normalise the cultural production of bigotry and can create permission to spew hate.

Tell Mama (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks)

Tell Mama, or Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks (MAMA), was established in 2012 with government support and funding but later became an independent nongovernmental interfaith organization. The organization is a reporting service for anti-Muslim hate crimes and provides advice and support for the victims of anti-Muslim hate via a telephone helpline. The group aims to quantify anti-Muslim hatred and reports annually on the nature, extent, and geography of anti-Muslim hate

crime. Tell Mama collaborates with the central government to raise the issue of Islamophobia at a policy level, through systematic recording, monitoring, and measuring of anti-Muslim incidents and crimes. This project also provides both training for local authorities and safety and security advice to mosques. It has worked with police forces locally and regionally to ensure victims have adequate access to the justice system (Riegert, 2013). Furthermore, the organization aims to inform policymakers about the extent of Islamophobia and where intervention is required. For instance, the group observed that, although street-based assaults and extreme violence have been increasing, online anti-Muslim prejudice has become more significant.

Systematically collecting disaggregated data is paramount for gauging levels of Islamophobia. Few EU member states (six of the EU's 28 states) are collecting statistical data on anti-Muslim incidents (Riegert, 2013). The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has been calling for European governments to collect and publish such data. That being the case, many have applauded MAMA's systematic monitoring of anti-Muslim attacks. However, MAMA was scrutinized and attacked shortly after its launch by the same individuals who had previously scrutinized iENGAGE. Such criticism is part of a pattern in which Muslims and their organizations are over scrutinized and dismissed by being branded as "Islamist" or an "Islamist ally." Subsequently, the organization experienced an incessant campaign of abuse and harassment on its helpline. Furthermore, critics questioned the validity of its data, which led to claims of falsified data. While the investigation was ongoing, the government announced it would cease its funding to MAMA (Allen, 2017). Thus, the Working Group is no longer affiliated with MAMA and does not use its data. The government's decision to cease its funding was premature, given the impact and importance of MAMA's recording and monitoring.

The UK government's initiatives over the last decade have clearly failed to effectively address Islamophobia, but both the New Labour and the Coalition government adopted a markedly different approach and established a significant shift. Warsi's 2011 speech at Leicester University was a watershed moment, affording Islamophobia unprecedented political recognition (Allen, 2017). The extent to which the Coalition government had genuine intent and commitment to address Islamophobia is questionable (Allen, 2017). Although all governmental departments were represented at the Working Group, little evidence suggests that cross-governmental awareness transformed into political leadership. The function of the organizations is determined and managed by political actors and not by Muslims and their organizations, their communities, or individual actors. External actors, in particular journalists and media commentators, also have significant influence on public opinion, and thus on political decisions related to government interventions. In this respect, an observation made by Chris Allen in the APPG's investigation appears relevant:

Questions (need) to be asked about some of the issues they [the media] pursue, some of the criticisms they posit, some of the language and terminologies they employ also ... it is also right to highlight and consider the use and attribution of value-loaded terminologies and language, to ask whether the criticisms and accusations that were made within such value-loaded frames were employed deliberately to bring down iENGAGE, the APPG or both. (Allen 2011, p. 47)

In conclusion, the United Kingdom, France, and Spain have in common a large and growing Muslim population, which has left non-Muslims feeling insecure about Muslims' role in "their" society. The influx of immigrants and refugees has left many European states fearful of Muslim migrants because they anticipate increases in terrorism and job insecurity, an attitude that has had significant social and economic policy implications for European governments. European governments have sought to strengthen security measures and immigration laws, often with consequences that disproportionately negatively affect Muslims (Archick et al., 2011). At the same time, European governments have increased their efforts to address Islamophobia and improve Muslim integration, partly in response to the growth in the reporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes. Each of the aforementioned states has adopted a different approach to tackle issues affecting Muslim communities. Although one of the countries (i.e., Spain) has taken positive approaches in the fight against Islamophobia, another (i.e., France) paves the way for social disintegration and

segregation by entrenching low socioeconomic status, passing discriminatory laws, and blaming violent attacks on Muslims as a whole.

It appears that the European nations examined in this study have failed, in varying degrees, to uphold the values of diversity or to encourage meaningful dialogue with Muslim organizations. Governmental response to growing levels of Islamophobia has been inadequate. In France and Britain, counterterrorism policies and Islamophobic bias in the media reinforce the public's fears about Muslims and thus government approaches to Islamophobia. Spain, on the other hand, remains cautious about surveillance and security policies that could impede the rights of religious freedom and privacy. Perhaps given its lower levels of Islamophobia overall, the country's approach has been more appropriate than that of the others.

Despite an increase in the public's awareness, Islamophobia continues to be a challenge for Western nations. The exponential rise of far-right groups and hate organizations has contributed to rising Islamophobia, which is further disseminated in the media. Islamophobia is the function of anti-Muslim industry – the Islamophobia industry in North America and in Europe is a well-financed and interconnected network of individuals and institutions that includes media outlets, political leaders, donors, and far-right groups (Zine, 2021). According to Jasmin Zine, a Canadian scholar of Islamophobia studies, Islamophobia in Canada is a “home grown,” issue (Zine, 2018, para.11). Canada has a breeding ground for Islamophobia – there are networks of Islamophobic hate groups (approximately 300 white supremacist groups) operating in Canada with impunity (Zine, 2018).

Well-intentioned and meaningful interventions and anti-Islamophobia work are thwarted by concerted efforts to dismiss and discredit Muslim organizations, even when activists are working in tandem with the government. The lack of progress combined with base-level rhetorical efforts creates the impression that Islamophobia can't be beaten. Deeper investigation shows that surface level interventions, political appeasement, and Muslim fear of losing governmental ears by pushing too hard, rather than inherent intransigence of Islamophobia, account for the failure to effectively counter the problem. Perhaps most significantly, Western governments continue to (Islamophobically) view Muslims through the lenses of securitization and radicalization and to make anti-Islamophobia efforts through this lens, ignoring actual Muslim needs and lived experiences. This approach also makes the governments' working relationships with anti-Islamophobia Muslim working groups conditional. Critical reflection on the political approaches and the lived experiences of Muslims reveals the gap between the anti-Islamophobia policies versus what is extended to the Muslim community in practice.

Preliminary lessons are available for other Western countries implementing anti-Islamophobia interventions. In the past five years, Canada has witnessed three deadly Islamophobic attacks and countless others including assaults on Black Muslim women in Alberta in particular, making Canada the top G7 nation for Islamophobic violence, yet the rising Islamophobia impacted Muslims long before these tragedies. In 2021, the Government of Canada convened an Emergency National Action Summit on Islamophobia in response to repeated acts of violent Islamophobia that have painted a narrative that contradicts Canada's inclusive national self-image (Alhmidi, 2021). Important work has been set in motion, but given the findings of this comparative analysis, both skepticism and optimism about the government's capacity and political will to make tangible changes are appropriate responses. Weaponizing Islamophobia for partisan gain is a common political tactic, and Canada's election is approaching. Canada has its own legacy of racist and Islamophobic policies to confront as mentioned above, and Islamophobia in Canada has only recently been acknowledged at the government level.

Systematically fighting against Islamophobia requires social, political, and legal policies from multidimensional perspectives to make anti-Islamophobia efforts more tenable and legitimate. It is important to acknowledge that laws alone do not change public anti-Muslim sentiments; however, their impact should not be understated. Islamophobia is manifested in various forms—it comprises religious, social, political, and economic discrimination. Islamophobia operates in

everyday life and is reproduced institutionally. Islamophobia is culturally, structurally (namely in education, housing, and employment), and politically rooted in racism. Meaningful and actionable Islamophobia intervention requires the following measures:

- A clear definition of Islamophobia, informed by various community consultations
- anti-Islamophobia education and training for educators
- Dismantling of White supremacist groups and White nationalist groups by monitoring online platforms where hate groups incite hate and spread harmful propaganda against Muslims
- Specific legal provision penalizing hate-motivated crime (Criminal Code amendments)
- Include key experts and various voices, including the Muslim community/leaders of Muslim organizations (Allen, 2017, 2020; Awan & Zempi, 2021; Zine, 2018).

The culture of Islamophobia in politics must also be examined. Waging campaigns against Islamophobia and promoting the political engagement of Muslims have been instrumentalized by various factions in the purposeful pursuit of self-serving and divisive goals. Islamophobia is embodied by the institution of the state, particularly through security measures. The increased political participation of Muslims is evidently perceived as a threat to the interests of certain groups and individuals. For that reason, a concerted effort is made by some right-wing groups and sections of the media to undermine government efforts by over scrutinizing Muslim organizations, using techniques of sensational media coverage, and spouting methodologically flawed data. Muslim organizations that are not publicly funded and that therefore can pursue the interests of Muslim communities without being tied to other political agendas are perceived as particularly threatening and are therefore vulnerable to such attacks.

Ultimately, confronting Islamophobia in Canada requires an honest undertaking to examine previous approaches, successes and failures of other, comparable jurisdictions, with particular attention paid to the different socio-political discourses at play in each of those areas. This analysis sought to sift through some of the work done elsewhere to track Canada's own trajectory in the fight against Islamophobia and inform that fight for the future.

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