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Cyberwarfare in the Maritime Domain and Strategic Stability in South Asia

Maryyum Masood, Amna Saqib, Anum A. Khan

Ripeness in the Middle East: Unpacking Iran-Saudi Arabia Rapprochement and China's New-found Role

Tayyaba Khurshid, Hassaan Malik

Understanding the Role of People's Primary Healthcare Initiative (PPHI) in Sindh

Sobia Abid

Managing the Crisis of Overpopulation in Pakistan: Need for Effective Population Management

Ajwa Hijazi

Understanding Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the World

Safia Malik



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Abstract

Islamophobia can be defined as an irrational fear of or hostility towards the religion of Islam in general and Muslims in particular. It is rapidly increasing in the world, and Western politicians widely adopted the term to link Islam with terrorism after the 11 September 2001 attacks. This research paper has applied the theory of the Clash of Civilizations by Samuel P. Huntington to understand the underlying factors behind the rise of Islamophobia and increasing anti-Muslim sentiment in the World. The paper is descriptive and exploratory and mainly uses secondary data sources that focus on rising Islamophobic incidents in the West and India in South Asia. The study reveals that the rise of populist political leaders in the world is one of the reasons that has led to the rise of Islamophobia. Populist leaders have been advancing their political agenda by promoting anti-Muslim sentiment and blaming Muslims for rising unemployment and terrorism in the West. This study also examines discrimination against Muslims in India through systemic policies, hate crimes, and majoritarian narrative fueled by Hindutva ideology, particularly under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government since 2014. Consequently, Islamophobia is reinforced by laws that ban certain Islamic practices and religious markers, leading to biases against Muslims in social, political, economic, educational and digital domains.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Digital domain, India, Anti-Muslim Sentiment, Clash of Civilizations

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Introduction

The fourteenth OIC Report on Islamophobia describes Islamophobia as hatred, racism and discrimination against Islam and Muslims in daily life, including on various social media platforms.² This prejudice is rooted in people's minds, which influences their behaviours. It is also expressed through violent actions such as destroying mosques, vandalizing properties of Muslims, harassing women who wear scarves, or disrespecting sacred symbols of Islam.³ Assuredly, no other religion has as negative an image in the eyes of the Western world as Islam.⁴

Islamophobia is not a recent phenomenon; it has a long history that spans many centuries. The early conquests of Europe by Muslims, which had begun in the year 711 when the Umayyad caliphate conquered the Iberian Peninsula, also known as the Arab conquest of Spain, had led to the development of anti-Muslim sentiment in the conquered territories.⁵ However, it was right after the September 11 attacks that Islamophobia became internationalized in the West and terrorism began to be associated with Islam. Notably, Muslims in the US were singled out and subjected to racial profiling, violence, and hate crimes.⁶

Germany, Britain, Switzerland and Austria adopted various discriminatory laws against Muslims, which included: (i) In 2009, Switzerland banned the construction of minarets on mosques; (ii) In 2011, Catalonia region imposed a ban on the construction of new mosques; (iii) In 2004, headscarf was banned in public schools and government institutions in France; (iv) In 2018, Denmark banned the Burqa and Niqab; and (v) Various US states, including Alabama, Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Tennessee, have implemented laws that forbid state court judges from considering Sharia law in their rulings. The burning of the Holy Quran in Sweden in July 2023 and the display of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad

² Fourteenth OIC Report on Islamophobia: December 2020 – January 2022, presented to the 48th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 22-23 March 2022, 1, https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2022/14th_Annual_Report_on_Islamophobia_a_March_2022_r2.pdf.

³ Fourteenth OIC Report on Islamophobia: December 2020 – January 2022

⁴ Carl W Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 11.

⁵ “Islamophobia, Its Past and Present (Advanced),” https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Islamophobia_its_Past_and_Present_Advanced.pdf.

⁶ Erik Love, *Islamophobia and Racism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 78.

(PBUH) on government buildings in France in October 2020 highlight how Islamophobia has increasingly become normalized in the West.⁷

Islamophobia has intensified in the digital age, with social media platforms becoming tools for spreading anti-Muslim narratives. The anonymity and global reach of platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are used for promoting hate speech, disinformation, and propaganda targeting Muslims. The digital landscape not only normalizes anti-Muslim sentiment but also perpetuates systemic discrimination, fostering a climate of intolerance across societies.

This research paper seeks to explore the rise of Islamophobia in the West in the light of Samuel P. Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* theory. Several important research questions arise which include: (i) how has Islamophobia evolved in the West since the 9/11 attacks, and what role has political discourse played in shaping anti-Muslim sentiment?; (ii) in what ways have populist political leaders contributed to the institutionalization of Islamophobia through laws and policies restricting Islamic practices and symbols; and (iii) how does the increasing anti-Muslim rhetoric impact the social, political, economic, educational, and digital spheres in the World? These research questions aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors fueling Islamophobia and its consequences for Muslims in the world.

Defining Islamophobia

The term Islamophobia was first documented in modern academic literature in 1918 when scholars Étienne Dinet and Sliman Ben Ibrahim used it in their book *The Orient Seen from the Occident*. Dinet described Islamophobia as a deliberately constructed threat aimed at fostering hostility toward Muslims for political and personal interests. Ben Ibrahim referred to orientalist scholars and researchers from the West who study Eastern cultures, particularly Islamic civilization and frame Islam in a negative or derogatory manner. They often focus on its perceived otherness to Western civilization.⁸

The concept of Islamophobia was first articulated by the British think tank Runnymede Trust in its report in 1997. The report defined Islamophobia as an irrational hostility towards Muslims or as a term used to describe the fear or

⁷ Al Jazeera, "Sweden Government Condemns 'Islamophobic' Quran Burning," *Al Jazeera*, 2 July 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/2/sweden-government-condemns-islamophobic-quran-burning>.

⁸ Todd H. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 53.

hatred of Islam.⁹ Islam and its values are considered to pose a threat to the Western culture and value system. The people living in Western countries consider Islam as opposed to modernity, freedom, and liberalism because it is seen as incompatible with contemporary liberal and democratic values.¹⁰

After the 9/11 attacks, Islamophobia became internationalized. Muslims living in the US and Europe were attacked verbally and physically. The media played a crucial role in dehumanizing Muslims and framing them as terrorists.¹¹ Various negative metaphors such as “animal”, “vermin”, and “metastatic disease” have been unfairly used to portray Muslims, which are propagated through media.¹²

Islamophobia in the West increased considerably following key events that have shaped public perception against Islam. Salman Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses* marked the rise of Islamophobia in Europe and the US, affecting millions of Muslims.¹³ Apart from this, in the wake of some terrorist attacks, such as the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the London bombings in 2005, Islam was portrayed as a threat to Western security. Meanwhile, events like the Danish cartoon controversy from 2005 to 2006 and the Charlie Hebdo attack in 2015 further intensified the divide, presenting Islam as being at odds with Western values of freedom of expression. In the digital age, various social media platforms, including X, Facebook, YouTube, and other communication tools, are being used to spread negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims globally.¹⁴

Islamophobia and Clash of Civilizations Theory

The clash between Christian and Islamic religious thoughts and practices have spanned approximately fourteen centuries, beginning with the

⁹ Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri, “Islamophobia and American History: Religious Stereotyping and out-grouping of Muslims in the United States,” in *Islamophobia in America*, ed. Carl W Ernst (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013), 53-74.

¹⁰ John O. Voll, “Islam and Democracy: Is Modernization a Barrier?,” *Religion Compass* 1, no. 1 (2007): 170–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2006.00017.x>.

¹¹ Khalid Sultan, “Linking Islam with Terrorism: A Review of the Media Framing since 9/11” *Global Media Journal: Pakistan* 9, no. 2(2016): 1–10.

¹² Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, “The Vermin Have Struck Again: Dehumanizing the Enemy in Post 9/11 Media Representations,” *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 2 (2010): 152–67.

¹³ Hamid Dabashi, “The Salman Rushdie Affair: Thirty Years and a Novelist Later,” *Aljazeera*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/2/19/the-salman-rushdie-affair-thirty-years-and-a-novelist-later>.

¹⁴ Erik Bleich, “Defining and Researching Islamophobia.” *Review of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 2 (2012): 180–89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940895>.

rise of Islam in the 7th century CE and continuing to the present day.¹⁵ In 1095 A.D., Pope Urban II initiated the Crusades, calling for a war against Muslims to recover lands that were under Muslim control. Since then, Islam has been wrongly associated with fundamentalism and perceived as the universal enemy of Europe and Christianity. It can be argued that the Pope sought an adversary to strengthen Papal authority to unite the Latin and Greek Churches in the East.¹⁶ The Pope employed various tools of propaganda to malign Islam by labeling Muslims as foreign occupiers of Christian lands. The Ottoman Empire's territorial expansion into Europe, especially the Siege of Vienna in 1683, is considered to have deeply ingrained in the minds of Europeans a lasting apprehension about the potential threat posed by Islamic countries.¹⁷

In his book *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West*, Todd H. Green, a former US State Department advisor on Islamophobia in Europe, has discussed the fundamental factors that contributed to the rise of Islamophobia in Europe. He mentions that Christians increasingly viewed Islam as a significant threat to Christianity's perceived superiority and dominance in Europe and beyond. Faced with Islam's strong religious beliefs, military successes, growing empires, and intellectual advancements, medieval Christian writers responded with criticism and hostility against Islam and Muslims.¹⁸

Multiple theories can help explain rising Islamophobia in the West, but the Clash of Civilizations theory better defines increasing Islamophobia and rising anti-Muslim sentiment in Western countries. In his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel P. Huntington argues that differences in cultural and religious identities are the real cause of conflict. He predicted that future wars would be fought among cultures rather than states. The Clash of Civilizations theory explains the growing Islamophobia in the West, where conflicts and differences in religion and culture are the main sources of tension.¹⁹ He mentioned that the world is divided into eight civilizations which include: Hinduism, Confucianism, Japanese, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American,

¹⁵ Cemil Aydin, "Pan-Islamic Narratives of the Global Order, 1870-1980" in *Debating Worlds: Contested Narratives of Global Modernity and World Order*, ed. et al., Daniel Deudney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 81.

¹⁶ Riley Smith and Jonathan, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 123.

¹⁷ Kennedy and Hugh, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), 123.

¹⁸ Todd H. Green, *The Fear of Islam: An Introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 53.

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 35.

African, Islam, and Christianity, with the last two conflicting with each other.²⁰

Rising Anti-Muslim Sentiment in Europe

Approximately 25 million Muslims reside in 27 states of the European Union (EU), where hate speech against Muslims has become a significant challenge. On 15 March 2024, the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, a group of UN independent experts expressed concern over the alarming rise of Islamophobia. They highlighted that incidents of harassment, intimidation, violence and incitement based on religion or belief had significantly increased worldwide in 2023, reaching distressing levels and fostering an atmosphere of fear and deep distrust. The experts urged states to base their responses to all forms of religious hatred, including Islamophobia, on the universal values, principles and legal frameworks of international human rights.²¹

The violent activities and cases of hate speech further increased after the 7 October 2023 conflict between Hamas and Israel. On 14 October 2023, an American Jew killed a six-year-old Palestinian Muslim boy by stabbing him 26 times with a dagger and left his mother with serious injuries.²² Furthermore, on 26 November 2023, three Palestinian Muslim students studying in the US were killed by an American.²³

Many scholars argue that the migration of Muslims to European countries is fueling the rise of Islamophobia. Renaud Camus in his book, *The Le Grand Remplacement* ('The Great Replacement'), theorizes that the growing Muslim population in Europe poses a threat to European civilization and identity. This notion of "replacement" or "white genocide" has become a recurring theme in the rhetoric of various far-right movements in the West.²⁴ As a result of these concepts, Muslims have become a target of hate speech in the West. In 2019, a Pew Research Center survey found that 82% of American

²⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*

²¹ "UN Experts Warn Islamophobia Rising to 'Alarming Levels,'" *OHCHR*, 2024,

²² Holly Yan et al., "A 6-Year-Old Palestinian-American Was Stabbed 26 Times for Being Muslim, Police Say. His Mom Couldn't Go to His Funeral Because She Was Stabbed, Too," *CNN*, October 16, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/16/us/chicago-muslim-boy-stabbing-investigation/index.html>.

²³ Celina Tebor Sottile et al., "3 People Shot in Vermont Identified as Palestinian College Students," *CNN*, November 26, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/11/26/us/palestinian-students-shot-burlington-vermont/index.html>.

²⁴ Eirikur Bergmann, "The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory," in *Europe: Continent of Conspiracies: Conspiracy Theories in and about Europe*, ed. Andreas Önnersfors and André Krouwel (London: Routledge, 2021), 36.

Muslim adults believe Muslims face at least some discrimination in the US and 56% feel that Muslims experience more discrimination than any other group in the country.²⁵ According to the 2022 statistics of the British Home Office, anti-Muslim hate crimes had increased by 42% to 3,459 in the UK. Many Western countries have institutionalized Islamophobia by depriving Muslims of their citizenship rights. Since 2010, the majority of individuals deprived of their citizenship have come from Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. Muslims who practice the Islamic faith in Europe face discrimination. For example, France imposed significant fines on women who wore veils in public.²⁸ In Catalonia, Muslims are restricted from constructing new mosques.²⁹

Moreover, along with right-wing conservatives, liberals and even leftists are using anti-Islam sentiment and arguments for political purposes. In 2007, Die Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP Schweiz), Switzerland's major anti-Islam political party, banned the construction of minarets while it was in power.³⁰ There has been a dramatic increase in the popularity of political parties that use anti-Islamic rhetoric in their political campaign in several European countries. The AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), an anti-immigration and anti-Muslim party in Germany, secured 15% of the vote in the 2014 European elections and 20% in the 2016 regional elections and became the third-largest party in the country in 2017.³¹ In the German federal election held on 23 February 2025, AfD emerged as the second-largest party in the parliament by securing 20.8% of the national vote.³²

²⁵ David Masci, "Many Americans See Religious Discrimination in U.S. – Especially against Muslims," *Pew Research Center*, May 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/05/17/many-americans-see-religious-discrimination-in-u-s-especially-against-muslims/>.

²⁶ "What Role Does Islamophobia Play in Migration Discourse?," *Migrants' Rights Network*, November 10, 2022, <https://migrantsrights.org.uk/2022/11/10/islamophobia-role-in-migration-discourse/>.

²⁷ "What Role Does Islamophobia Play in Migration Discourse?," *Migrants' Rights Network*, 2022.

²⁸ Tom Miles, "French Ban on full-face Islamic Veil Violates Human Rights: UN Panel," *Reuters*, October 23, 2018.

²⁹ Bianca Carrera, "Spain's Muslim Community Struggles to Find Space to Worship," *The New Arab*, June 26, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/features/spains-muslim-community-struggles-find-space-worship>.

³⁰ Fabio Perocco, "Anti-migrant Islamophobia in Europe. Social Roots, Mechanisms and Actors," *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* 26, no. 53 (2018), 25-40, <https://www.scielo.br/j/remhu/a/cKtRfYVWyHHrTvHdvRQzYZj/?format=pdf>.

³¹ Perocco, *Anti-migrant*, 32.

³² Jillian Kestler-D'Amours and Erin Hale, "German Election Results Updates: Merz Set to Be Chancellor, AfD Surges," *Al Jazeera*, February 23, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2025/2/23/german-election-results-live-cdu-afd-expect-to-make-gains-as-count-begins>.

A BBC report titled “Europe and Right-Wing Nationalism” stated that in 2016, far-right political parties made significant electoral gains in several European countries, including Switzerland, Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Finland, Italy, Sweden, and Germany. In 2018, France witnessed a 52% increase in Islamophobic incidents, while Austria saw a 74% rise, Germany 44%, Finland 62%, and Italy 53% respectively.³³

It is important to note that various Western organizations are providing funding to launch systematic campaigns of Islamophobia. The Center for American Progress disclosed that seven organizations provided over USD 57 million to the Islamophobic networks between 2001-2012 which flamed anti-Muslim hate in the US.³⁴ In January 2022, a report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) revealed that it had examined the tax records of 50 organizations that funded anti-Muslim causes. The report revealed that 35 groups donated a total of USD 105 million to this cause.”³⁵

It is important to note that Islamic symbols are being attacked by far-right activists in Europe. The 2022 report by the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs anti-discrimination office revealed that at least 35 mosques in Germany were attacked due to Islamophobia.³⁶ The 2023 European Islamophobia Report highlights that banning the construction of mosques and minarets and various religious symbols, including hijab and burka bans, are being normalized day by day.³⁷ Furthermore, France, Austria, and Denmark emerged as the most vulnerable countries to reside in for Muslims in 2022. Apart from this, in 2023, the Collective for Countering Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE) reported receiving 787 alerts about Islamophobic incidents in 2022.³⁸

³³ Narzanin Massoumi, “Why Is Europe so Islamophobic?” *The New York Times*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/06/opinion/europe-islamophobia-attacks.html>.

³⁴ Wajahat Ali et al., “Fear, Inc: *The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America*,” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011), https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_intro.pdf.

³⁵ Sanya Mansoor, “U.S. Charities Donated USD 105 Million to Anti-Muslim Groups,” *Time*, January 12, 2022, <https://time.com/6138552/charities-funded-anti-muslim-groups-report/>.

³⁶ Anadolu Staff, “Dozens of Mosques Attacked in Germany in 2022,” *AnadoluAjansi*, May 25, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/dozens-of-mosques-attacked-in-germany-in-2022-report/2905014>.

³⁷ Rabia Ali, “European Countries Legalizing Islamophobia, Limiting Religious Practices of Muslims, Says Expert,” *AnadoluAjansi*, March 17, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/european-countries-legalizing-islamophobia-limiting-religious-practices-of-muslims-says-expert/2846965>.

³⁸ Rabia Ali, “European Countries Legalizing Islamophobia, Limiting Religious Practices of Muslims, Says Expert,” *AnadoluAjansi*, March 17, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/european-countries-legalizing-islamophobia-limiting-religious-practices-of-muslims-says-expert/2846965>.

These included 527 acts of Islamophobia, 467 cases of discrimination, 128 provocations, 71 insults, 59 instances of moral harassment, 44 defamation cases, 27 physical attacks, and 33 incidents related to efforts against radicalization and separatism.³⁹ According to the Independent Group of Experts on Muslim Hostility (UEM) report 2023, many of the 5.5 million Muslims in Germany experience discrimination in everyday life including hatred and violence”.⁴⁰

Anti-Muslim Legislation in Western Countries

Anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim law-making in Western countries is increasing Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes. Institutionalized Islamophobia is manifested through discriminatory policies and legislation targeting Muslims, such as restrictions on religious symbols, attire and practices. Several states in the US have passed laws banning the application of Sharia law. These laws are based on the unfounded fear that Islamic Sharia law might somehow be imposed in the US courts. In 2011, Arizona passed a law preventing courts from applying foreign laws if they violate constitutional rights, with the clear intent to target Sharia law.⁴¹ In 2014, Alabama, through a constitutional amendment, banned the use of foreign laws in state courts, with Sharia law being the primary target.⁴²

Legislative and governmental actions in some other countries have also been aimed at advancing discriminatory objectives rather than addressing perceived threats. For instance, in 2021, the Austrian government launched an online platform called “Islam Map”, which provided the location of over 600 mosques, Islamic organizations, and community centers throughout Austria. It included detailed information about Islamic institutions, including their addresses and ideological affiliations. The map was publicly accessible, allowing anyone to view and potentially misuse the data.⁴³

³⁹ Feiza Ben Mohamed, “Rise of Islamophobia in Europe Related to Rise of Nationalism, Says Anti-Islamophobia Group,” *AnadoluAjansı*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/rise-of-islamophobia-in-europe-related-to-rise-of-nationalism-says-anti-islamophobia-group/2798376>.

⁴⁰ “Anti-Muslim Sentiment: Experts Urge Appointment of Federal Commissioner,” *The Teller Report*, June 29, 2023, https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2023-06-29-anti-muslim-sentiment--experts-urge-appointment-of-federal-commissioner.rkSOXnAq_n.html.

⁴¹ Will Smiley, “The Other Muslim Bans”. *Journal of Islamic Law* 1, no. 1, (2020), 2-38. <https://doi.org/10.53484/jil.v1.smiley>.

⁴² “Alabama Joins Wave of States Banning Foreign Laws,” *Governing*, November 5, 2014, <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-alabama-foreign-law-courts-amendment.html>.

⁴³ Antonia Noori Farzan, “Muslim Groups in Austria Fear Attacks after Government Publishes Map of Mosques,” *Washington Post*, May 29, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/05/29/austria-islam-map/>.

In Denmark, judges are prohibited from wearing headscarves and other religious symbols, while anti-Islamic political parties are attempting to impose a ban on the hijab for school teachers and medical staff as well.⁴⁴ The parliament of Austria also passed a law banning headscarves and hijab in educational institutions.⁴⁵

Islamophobia in India

The anti-Muslim campaign at the global level is also impacting the geopolitics of South Asia, where India is taking advantage of an already established negative perception of Islam and Muslims in the West. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has been in power since 2014, is closely associated with the Hindutva ideology, which advocates for the primacy of Hindu culture and religion in India. The Hindutva ideology often portrays Muslims as adversaries, both in India's domestic politics and in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

India has witnessed a disturbing rise in Islamophobia, manifesting through increased hate crimes and discriminatory policies against Muslims. This trend raised concerns about the rights of the Muslim population of India, which is approximately 14.2% of the country's total population.⁴⁶ According to the India Hate Lab, a Washington, DC-based organization that tracks hate speech against India's religious minorities, there were 668 documented cases of hate speech gatherings targeting Muslims in the first half of 2023 alone. The report, titled *Hate Speech Events in India*, noted that while 255 such events took place in the first half of the year, this number increased to 413 in the second half, reflecting a 62% rise. Around 75% (498) of these events occurred in BJP-ruled states. According to a 2017 report by IndiaSpend, between 2010 and 2017, Muslims were the victims of 51% of the violence in India.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁴ "Denmark: Proposition to Ban the Hijab in Primary Schools", *European Website on Integration*, August 27, 2022, https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/news/denmark-proposition-ban-hijab-primary-schools_en.

⁴⁵ Philip Oltermann, "Austria Approves Headscarf Ban in Primary Schools," *The Guardian*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/16/austria-approves-headscarf-ban-in-primary-schools#:~:text=Austrian%20MPs%20have%20approved%20a>.

⁴⁶ Stephanie Kramer, "Population Growth and Religious Composition," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/09/21/population-growth-and-religious-composition/>.

⁴⁷ Delna Abraham and Ojaswi Rao "86% Killed in Cow-Related Violence since 2010 Are Muslim, 97% Attacks after Modi Govt Came to Power," *Hindustan Times*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/86-killed-in-cow-related-violence-since-2010-are-muslims-97-attacks-after-modi-govt-came-to-power/story-w9CYOksvgk9joGSSaXgpLO.html>.

report further emphasized that 97% (64 out of 66) of beef-related violence and 53% (35 out of 66) of cow-related violence occurred in BJP-governed states between 2014-2017.⁴⁸

A 2021 report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) pointed out that the Indian government enforces policies that discriminate against Muslims. These policies fuel hate speech, destruction of mosques and homes in mainly Muslim areas, and acts of vigilante violence, including rape.⁴⁹ The practice of “bulldozer justice,” where Muslim homes and businesses are destroyed without proper legal process, has become more common in BJP-led states. This punishment is often carried out after communal clashes and further harms Muslim communities. In 2023, there were at least 28 reported attacks against religious minorities, resulting in several deaths.⁵⁰

In 2023, over 300 Muslim properties were demolished following communal violence in New Delhi. In 2021, a 100-year-old mosque was demolished in the Barabanki district of Uttar Pradesh, and in 2023, a 16th-century mosque was torn down in Prayagraj, also in Uttar Pradesh, as part of a road widening project. Additionally, Muslim homes and properties were demolished by bulldozers in Mumbai after communal violence erupted following the inauguration of the Ram temple by Prime Minister Modi in Ayodhya, located in northern Uttar Pradesh. The Ram temple was built on the site where the 16th-century Babri mosque once stood until it was demolished by Hindu mobs in 1992.⁵¹

The growing Islamophobia in India has been accompanied by policies and actions perceived as discriminatory against Muslims. In 2019, India passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which granted citizenship to illegal migrants who entered India before 31 December 2014, specifically focusing on six religious minorities—Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians—from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. However, it

⁴⁸ Delna Abraham and Ojaswi Rao, “86% Killed in Cow-Related Violence since 2010 Are Muslim, 97% Attacks after Modi Govt Came to Power,” June 28, 2017.

⁴⁹ “USCIRF Calls Attention to Prevalence of Anti-Muslim Hate around the World,” *USCIRF*, 2024, <https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-calls-attention-prevalence-anti-muslim-hate-around-world>.

⁵⁰ “Muslim Properties Unlawfully Demolished in India: Amnesty Shows How,” *Al Jazeera* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/7/why-is-amnesty-urging-india-to-halt-bulldozing-of-muslim-properties>.

⁵¹ “Too Much Poison: Attacks on Indian Muslims Grow after Ram Temple Ceremony,” *Al Jazeera*, January 26, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/26/too-much-poison-attacks-on-indian-muslims-grow-after-ram-temple-ceremony>.

excluded Muslims from these provisions, leading to the marginalization of the Muslim community. It is important to note that the UN Human Rights Office described the CAA as “fundamentally discriminatory.”⁵²

On 5 August 2019, India abrogated Articles 370 and 35A of its constitution, revoking the special status of occupied Jammu and Kashmir and incorporating it as two separate union territories – Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The annexation of the occupied Jammu and Kashmir is perceived as an Islamophobic measure aimed at altering the demographic balance of the Muslim-majority area in favor of Hindus.⁵³

Islamophobia in the Digital Age

Media is a powerful tool that shapes public opinion and manages perceptions, and its role in fueling Islamophobia in the digital age cannot be overlooked. Sensationalized reporting, biased coverage, and selective storytelling in the media have misrepresented Islam and Muslims, often unfairly connecting them with extremism and violence. Stephen Sheehi in his book titled *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* has pointed out that to justify the US’ war on terror and Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, millions of dollars have been spent to disseminate the negative image of Islam and Muslims through media.⁵⁴

In *Terrified: How Anti-Muslim Fringe Organizations Became Mainstream*, Christopher Bail discusses how anti-Muslim fringe organizations have gradually gained significant influence, not only within the media but also in shaping government policies and public attitudes. He emphasizes how these groups have managed to mainstream their rhetoric, making Islamophobia more prevalent in public discourse. Through strategic campaigns, these organizations have successfully framed Muslims as a threat, influencing political decisions and social perceptions on a broad scale. Bail explores how their ideas have infiltrated mainstream channels, altering the narrative around Islam and Muslims and contributing to the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment. The investigation conducted by American Progress Investigation⁵⁵ revealed that

⁵² United Nations, “New Citizenship Law in India ‘Fundamentally Discriminatory’: UN Human Rights Office,” *UN News*, December 13, 2019, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053511>.

⁵³ “Countering and Dismantling Islamophobia: A Comprehensive Guide for Communities and Individuals - ISPU,” ISPU, April 6, 2021, <https://ispu.org/countering-islamophobia/>.

⁵⁴ Stephen Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The Ideological Campaign against Muslims* (Atlanta, Ga: Clarity Press, 2011), 118.

⁵⁵ Wajahat Ali et al., “*Fear, Inc: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America*,” (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011), https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia_intro.pdf.

five organizations have been providing funding to various media groups to disseminate the negative image of Islam and Muslims including: (i) Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy; (ii) Daniel Pipes Middle East Forum; (iii) Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer's Stop Islamization of America; (iv) Steven Emerson's Investigative Project on Terrorism; and (v) David Yerushalmi's Society of Americans for National Existence.

Various social media platforms are being used to disseminate the negative perception of Islam and Muslims. These posts are causing more Islamophobic incidents and growing frustration in Western society. Islamophobia has become increasingly widespread on the internet. Experts say that the increase in digital Islamophobia is creating a harmful cycle where online hate speech leads to real-world attacks on Muslims, which then sparks more hate speech online.⁵⁶

The X is one of the most widely used tools to disseminate anti-Muslim and anti-Islam propaganda. One of the most troubling Twitter hashtags that appeared after the Paris shootings in January 2015 was #KillAllMuslims. This hashtag, which gained popularity in the UK, was followed by many provocative and racist comments aimed at Muslims and Islam. A 2021 report by TRT World found that the highest number of Islamophobic posts originated in India (871,379), followed by the US (289,248), the UK (196,378), Canada (36,902), and Nigeria (30,121).⁵⁷

Islamophobia has been a long-standing issue in the US, made worse by the inflammatory rhetoric used by President Donald Trump. For example, after the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani on 3 January 2020, his response resulted in a dramatic increase in hate speech, with 9,302 anti-Muslim tweets shared that day. Trump was the third most frequently mentioned figure in Islamophobic posts, many of which defended his Muslim immigration ban and promoted his theory that Democrats were collaborating with "Islamists" to undermine the West.⁵⁸

In 2005, George W. Bush's speech referred to Al Qaeda and Radical Islam, contributing significantly to the widespread use of the term "radical

⁵⁶ D Kayyali, "Anti-Muslim hatred and discrimination: Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief," *OHCHR*, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/Islamophobia-AntiMuslim/Civil%20Society%20or%20Individuals/DiaKayyali.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Umar Butler, *Islamophobia in the Digital Age: A Study of Anti-Muslim Tweets*, (Australia: Islamic Council of Victoria, 2022) <https://apo.org.au/node/318935>.

⁵⁸ Mohin Hassan Khan et al., "Trump and Muslims: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobic Rhetoric in Donald Trump's Selected Tweets", *SAGE* 11, no. 1 (2021):1–16.

Islam.” Such language has reinforced the negative perception that Islam is inherently connected to terrorism. This narrative has been reinforced by its adoption by officials and media outlets in public discourse. Consequently, terms like “kill,” “attack,” and “jihad” have become prevalent in anti-Muslim tweets, further solidifying the perceived association between Islam and violence. This rhetoric has amplified Islamophobia, shaping public perception and fostering hostility towards Muslims.

Muslims in the US, including those serving in public office, are facing hate speech and discrimination on social media platforms like X. A large portion of this hate has been directed at Ilhan Omar, US Representative for Minnesota’s 5th district, and Rashida Tlaib, US Representative for Michigan’s 12th district. On social media platform X, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib were labeled “The Jihad Squad” due to being the only Muslim members of the group of six Democratic politicians known as “The Squad.”

The 2022 report on Anti-Muslim Racism by the Austrian Documentation and Counseling Center for Muslims revealed that Austria experienced 1,300 racist attacks on Muslims, 81.6% occurring on digital platforms. Additionally, 92% of the hate speech was directed at Muslims and Islam in 2022.⁵⁹ The perpetrators of Islamophobic acts are using YouTube to live stream their gruesome activities to create fear in society. Brenton Tarrant, a radical, live-streamed the massacre of 51 New Zealand Muslims on YouTube in the mosques of New Zealand.⁶⁰ It is alarming to note that content based on hatred is not removed from various social media platforms. The 2022 report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) revealed that Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube were not effectively addressing anti-Muslim content reported to them. CCDH revealed that 530 posts had reached over 25.5 million views, but only one in ten posts was removed by the platforms.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Askin Kiyagan, “Austria saw over 1,300 anti-Muslim attacks in 2022,” *AnadoluAjansı*, May 23, 2023, https://www.mybib.com/#/projects/wv80Zl/citations/new?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.aa.com.tr%2Fen%2Feuropa%2Faustria-saw-over-1-300-anti-muslim-attacks-in-2022%2F2903419&source=article_newspaper.

⁶⁰ Graham Macklin, “The Christchurch Attacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, July 18, 2019, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/christchurch-attacks-livestream-terror-viral-video-age/>.

⁶¹ Stuart Lambon, “Big Tech Platforms Fail to Act on 89% of Anti-Muslim Hate Speech, New Study Finds,” *Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH)*, April 28, 2022, <https://counterhate.com/blog/big-tech-platforms-fail-to-act-on-89-of-anti-muslim-hate-speech-new-study-finds/>.

Addressing Islamophobia

Several international organizations have taken various initiatives in combating Islamophobia including: (i) The Alliance of Civilizations initiative by the UN to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue to address stereotypes and misconceptions that fuel Islamophobia; (ii) The Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) established an Observatory on Islamophobia to monitor and document incidents of Islamophobia around the world. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the widespread nature and impact of Islamophobia while also providing data that can support advocacy efforts; and (iii) The EU has implemented initiatives to tackle Islamophobia within its member states. This includes monitoring hate crimes and discrimination, promoting diversity and inclusion, and providing support to civil society organizations working to combat Islamophobia.⁶²

Pakistan's Role in Addressing Islamophobia

To combat Islamophobia, Pakistan has been raising the issue at the International level. Pakistan has played a crucial role in the adoption of resolutions on Islamophobia in both the OIC and the UN. Pakistan's Prime Minister raised this issue in his speech at the UN General Assembly in 2019. During his speech, he emphasized that terrorism had nothing to do with any religion. At the OIC Conference in Niger in 2020, Pakistan proposed March 15 as a day to combat Islamophobia. This date was significant because on March 15, 2019, a right-wing terrorist opened fire on two mosques in New Zealand, killing more than 50 Muslims. At the 2020 OIC Conference in Niger, Pakistan proposed March 15 as a day to combat Islamophobia. This date was chosen because on March 15, 2019, a right-wing terrorist attacked two mosques in New Zealand, killing over 50 Muslims.

In 2020, the Prime Minister of Pakistan wrote a letter to various leaders of Muslim countries to move a resolution in the UN. As a result, to combat Islamophobia, the UN adopted a resolution in March 2022 proclaiming 15 March as the day to combat Islamophobia. The UN General Assembly resolution was co-sponsored by 55 Muslim countries. The resolution condemns all kinds of violence and attacks against the religious beliefs of the individual and also their place of worship and calls for international cooperation, dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect for combating Islamophobia.

⁶² "Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred," *commission.europa.eu*, *n.d.*, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/combating-anti-muslim-hatred_en.

In March 2022, during the 48th OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held in Islamabad, the OIC Observatory on Islamophobia, based on Pakistan's Fourteenth Report on Islamophobia, defined it as a combination of fear, hatred and prejudice towards Islam, which leads to negative feelings, actions, racist and intolerant attitudes, as well as intentional discrimination against Muslims, insults directed at Islamic symbols and revered figures, and even violent attacks on people wearing Islamic clothing.⁶³

On 10 March 2023, the first-ever UNGA special event to commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia was held. It was co-convened by Pakistan. During his speech at the UNGA on the same day, Pakistan's Foreign Minister urged the international community to establish a legal framework and appoint a special representative to combat Islamophobia.

Pakistan has consistently championed global efforts to combat religious discrimination and intolerance, particularly in safeguarding the rights of marginalized religious communities. The UNGA adopted by consensus a resolution presented by Pakistan and the Philippines on the "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace". Initiated in 2004, the Pakistan-Philippines-sponsored resolution sought to foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue in promoting, understanding and cultivating a culture of peace.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The research on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment in the West and India in South Asia reveals a complex and deep-rooted issue that demands urgent attention from the international community, policymakers, and scholars. Examining the historical and socio-political impacts shows that Islamophobia is not merely the result of individual prejudice but rather a consequence of systemic policies perpetuated by various institutions and media platforms. Since 9/11, Muslims in the World have continued to face violence, discrimination, and racism. This anti-Muslim campaign has been systematically promoted by various Western state-funded organizations involved in disseminating anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiment. The rise of

⁶³ Islamic Republic of Pakistan presented 'Fourteenth OIC Report on Islamophobia' at the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, 22-23 March 2024, https://www.oic-oci.org/upload/islamophobia/2022/14th_Annual_Report_on_Islamophobia_March_2022.pdf.

⁶⁴ "UNGA Adopts Pakistan-Philippines Sponsored Resolution on 'Promotion of Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue,'" Mofa.gov.pk, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/unga-adopts-pakistan-philippines-sponsored-resolution-on-promotion-of-inter-religious-and-intercultural-dialogue>.

Islamophobia in India, particularly under the BJP-led government, has had severe social, political, and economic repercussions for the country's Muslim population. The increase in hate crimes, discriminatory policies in the West, and demolition of properties of Muslims through "Bulldozer Justice" in India have led to the systematic marginalization of Muslims. Additionally, social media users are being influenced by Islamophobic propaganda. The impacts of Islamophobia extend far beyond the Muslim community, affecting social cohesion, interfaith relations, and the very fabric of multicultural societies.

Recommendations

Countering Islamophobia requires a multifaceted approach, which may require international cooperation, education, legislation, and community engagement. The following recommendations could help promote efforts for achieving these objectives:

- i. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation-related initiatives should be aimed at uniting religious leaders, scholars, and activists from different faith communities to foster understanding, cooperation, and solidarity. These dialogues would help break down stereotypes and promote mutual respect and tolerance.
- ii. Grassroots-level initiatives must be supported for promoting community outreach, interfaith events, cultural exchanges, social cohesion and integration.
- iii. Evidence-based research by International organizations, think tanks and academic institutions could be helpful to decision-makers in formulating policies to effectively address Islamophobia.
- iv. As terrorism is a scourge and terrorists have no religion, concerted efforts must continue to be made at the global and regional levels to deal with it effectively.