

## Examining the Securitization of Muslim Immigrants in France Under the Anti-Separatist Act of President Emmanuel Macron

Meylan Zhara Astira

Universitas Andalas

[Meylanzharaastira@gmail.com](mailto:Meylanzharaastira@gmail.com)

### *Abstract*

*The entrance of Muslim immigrants in France in search of employment gave rise to the problem of Muslim immigration in France. The French government initially welcomed the entrance of Muslim immigrants because it required laborers to complete post-war reconstruction. Due to the growing immigrant Muslim population, these individuals have gathered, constructed mosques, established Islamic organizations, and formed groupings, increasing the visibility of Muslim identity. This is viewed as an outsized challenge to Islamic ideology in terms of French secularist philosophy. The attack on the WTO building, which worsened the already negative perception of Muslims, made this situation worse. In addition, President Macron manipulates the debate over Muslim immigration to further his political agenda. Macron enacted anti-separatist laws and anti-immigrant policies, which further marginalized Muslim immigrants. Macron became a securitization actor and actively declared that Islam was a radical, terrorist, and separatist religion to further his interests. The overwhelmingly Islamophobic French society endorses Macron's remarks. Thus, by embracing Macron's proposal, the problem of Muslim immigration has reached the securitized point, at which point the government must address the problem by enacting anti-separatist legislation.*

**Keywords;** Actor securitization, Speech Act, Islamophobia, Muslim Immigrants

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Muslim immigration has long been a contentious topic in Europe (Ahmed, 2013). This is due to the unfavorable perception that Muslims and Islam bear in Europe and the West. The attack on the WTO building in the United States by Islamic terrorist organizations is the cause of this unfavorable connotation. Because of this occurrence, Muslim immigrants are stigmatized as being Islamophobic in Europe and the West. so that the government and society in their lives as Muslim immigrants in Europe and Western countries criticize and discriminate against them.

Muslim immigrants were first welcomed by the French government and society as they came to work on post-war reconstruction projects (Maillard, 2010a). But as the number of Muslim immigrants in France increased. By founding Islamic organizations, giving sermons, and erecting mosques, these immigrant Muslims are progressively claiming their identities. The government and society viewed this as a threat since it contradicted Islam by undermining their secular values. This marked the start of the marginalization of Muslim immigrants in France. The terrorist attack on the WTO building in the United States exacerbated this. The

international community, as well as the French government and society, were shocked by this catastrophe. There are a lot of Islamophobic French citizens (Kamal, 2021)

The fact that President Macron used his speech to achieve his political goals has made this worse. Macron declared and branded Islam as a religion of terrorism and separatist, acting out a speech act and turning into a securitization actor (Berger, 2022). Macron's conduct was even endorsed by the majority of the Islamophobic French society. Consequently, by acknowledging the threat posed by Muslim immigration. The government needs to pass anti-separatist legislation to address the problem of Muslim immigration. This study focuses on the political elites who are President Macron's securitization actors. How a political elite can turn a non-security problem into a security concern that calls for immediate government intervention.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

The French immigration problem is examined using the Immigration Securitization Theory. Securitization theory is one of the security theories that pushes the ruling class to declare a pressing matter a national emergency (Williams, 2015). The political class and the government accomplish this by generating and bringing up issues that initially do not relate to security but later do. Therefore, the problems that the government and the political class have caused need to be addressed right away.

The immigration issue can be viewed from two angles: first, the state acknowledges the presence of immigrants. Immigrants are now seen as a threat by the state. The process by which non-security issues are turned into security issues is called desecuritization. There are various steps involved in this securitization process: A topic is deemed non-political if it is still debated in public and society, An issue is said to have become politicized when it enters the public policy and political spheres. And the last, securitized refers to the requirement that the government take prompt action on matters that it and society perceive as posing a threat to the state (Wæver, 1993).

The Securitization process includes Speech Act processes as well, in which a political actor or figure takes up the topic and pushes for it, finally designating it as a threat to the state. After this Speech Act procedure, the matter will also proceed through intersubjective phases (Wæver, 1993). A problem moves into the intersubjective stage if the public accepts it as a threat that was raised by the political elite. This securitization process in society will lead to social construction. The community's social construction—which at first did not see the issue as a concern—becomes a threat.

There will be other factors in this securitization procedure that define the problem (Nyman, 2013).

- a) Referent object: an item for which emergency action is taken because it is perceived as posing a genuine threat to public safety.
- b) Securitization actors can formulate a problem and execute the Speech Act procedure.

- c) Players who play a functional role in the social production of a problem.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The Critical Issue of Muslim Immigration in France**

The terrorist attack on the WTO building in the United States on September 11, 2001, brought the subject of Muslim immigration to France to a critical point (Akram, 2002). Because of this attack, the public's perception of Muslim immigrants—which had previously been positive—turned negative. The sentiment of the Americans who started to forbid Muslims served to support this sentiment. As a result of this attack on the WTO building, the French people are also impacted by this feeling as well as the stigma of a society that has started to view Muslim immigration differently and views Muslims as terrorists. The ideological divide between the French government and the Muslim immigrants there exacerbates the sentiment of the French people even more. This intellectual divergence stems from French society's secularism, which is at odds with Islam.

#### **Context of the Muslim Immigration Wave**

Initially, Muslim immigrants came to France for work following World War I (Lucassen & Laarman, 2009). Because of the post-war devastation, Muslim immigrants picked France as their destination for employment. The origins of these Muslim immigrants were diverse. A total of 70,000 people immigrated from Algeria. Similarly, seventy thousand laborers were Muslim immigrants to France from Morocco. The Muslim immigrant population in France is increased by the entry of Muslim immigrants from the African continent, whose numbers are still rising (Saunders, 2012).

Owing to the significant Muslim immigrant population in France, these immigrants started to express their identity through the formation of Muslim da'wah groups, the construction of mosques, the wearing of religious symbols like headscarves, and other religious pursuits. Based on the available statistics, there were over a thousand mosques and prayer rooms at that period. These Muslim associations started to operate more assertively and ventured to create French organizations with a religious focus. Furthermore, these Muslim immigrants started to influence French trade by opening stores with the label "Halal" and networking to influence other stores to carry the same raw materials (Stambouli & Ben Soltane, 2010).

Furthermore, people from the Arab Spring-affected nations relocated to France and looked for jobs after the event because of the precarious political, social, and economic conditions at the time. It is estimated that 10% of French citizens are immigrants who practice Islam (Gurfinkiel, 1997). The burgeoning Muslim immigrant population in France has infuriated the country's citizenry because of the dearth of job prospects and the rising number of homeless and jobless people.

**The Response of French Society to Immigrant Muslims**

At first, France was open to Muslim immigration as a way to compensate for low salaries and manpower scarcity that were impeding post-war reconstruction efforts in France (Maillard, 2010b). However, as the number of Muslims in France increased, Islamic organizations and groups publicly declared their identity as Muslims, preaching, erecting mosques, dressing in headscarves, and opening halal stores.

The French government and society view this as a threat. Because Islamic doctrine is in opposition to French secularity, which keeps religious matters apart from social, political, and economic matters, it is viewed as a threat (Freedman, 2004). This is made worse by the tragic attack on the WTO building in the USA, which increased people's anxiety, and the government of France, which believes that Muslims are a terrorist organization. Severe Islamophobia is a result of the French government's and the public's fear of Muslim immigration. The rise of this Islamophobia has made the French people's anxieties even more intense. The Western attitude (western subordination) towards Eastern countries, which presumes that the inhabitants of Eastern countries are savage, harsh, primitive, and irrational, exacerbates Islamophobia in France. Due to this subjugation by the West, Muslim immigrants are now the target of racism and discrimination in France, according to both the government and society.

**Fear of the Government of France**

The French government is concerned about this because of the sizeable Muslim population and influence in France. As the number of Muslim immigrants who establish associations and display their identity rises, these organizations' actions become increasingly active as they join in the political and religious activities of international organizations. The French government is concerned about the increasing number of Muslim immigrants entering the global society. The government worries that as French Muslims grow more involved in the global society, they will create transnational networks that would fuel acts of radicalism, terrorism, separatism, and extremism that could endanger the French state's sovereignty (Savage, 2004).

**The Reaction of Emanuel Macron Before Securitizing the Muslim Immigrant Problem**

Early in his presidency, President Emanuel Macron established a policy aimed at eliminating prejudice towards immigrants and the Muslim population. President Emanuel Macron's support for Muslim immigration and the European Union is indicative of this. According to President Emanuel Macron, one of the advantages of the French state is its ability to accommodate immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (Akyol, n.d.).

Macron's commendable handling of the Muslim immigration issue, however, was short-lived as his rival Marine garnered 33.9% of the French public vote (Startin, 2022). The rival of Macron received more French votes than Marine because of his xenophobic and anti-Muslim immigration policies as well as his support for nationality. The French, who generally have anti-Islamic sentiments, support the Marine's actions.

Because of the worry that Macron will lose to Marine, his rival. President Macron started to shift his perspective on immigration (Macron, 2018). President Macron started enforcing anti-immigrant laws and made immigration a top priority, ranking it among France's top four concerns (Izak, 2021). These four French priorities include jobs, pensions, the environment, and anti-immigration problems.

**The analysis of Macron's actions on the issue of Muslim immigrants through social construction actions and securitization of migration.**

In the beginning, Muslims who came to France to work were tolerated since the country needed laborers to finish the post-war reconstruction. Likewise, President Emmanuel Macron ended the discrimination against Muslim communities and immigrants by praising their existence in France. President Emmanuel Macron's support for Muslim immigration and the European Union is indicative of this. According to President Emmanuel Macron, one of the advantages of the French state is its ability to accommodate immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Following their admission, Muslim immigrants faced rejection from French society because they had compromised secular values and reduced job possibilities, leading to high rates of unemployment and homelessness. In this instance, the topic of Muslim immigration has been debated in public, coinciding with the WTO incident that caused islamophobia in French society. As a result, the immigration question has moved past the non-politicized stage.

Additionally, President Macron started bringing up the subject of Muslim immigration to further his political goals, as his rivals were able to win over French voters by doing so. President Macron therefore started to veer off course to further his political goals by enacting anti-immigrant laws that confined immigrants to France.

In this instance, the government of France first greeted immigrants with open arms, but subsequently came to view them as a threat (Threat). The notion of Securitization of Migration is now being applied to the problem of Muslim immigrants in France.

Securitization is a concept that encompasses multiple factors:

- The presence of Muslim immigrants is seen as a danger to France's secularity principle (referent object).
- To forward his political agenda, President Emmanuel Macron brings up the subject of Muslim immigration as a securitization player.

Given these two elements, the problem of Muslim immigration may be viewed as an existential danger to the French government. Speech Acting as a securitization actor, President Emmanuel Macron declares that the problem of Muslim immigration poses a threat (Khan et al., 2022) . The assassination of Samuel Paty by Muslim immigrants as a result of the Prophet Muhammad caricature supports President Macron's claim even more. Macron also underlined his mistrust of Islam and Muslim immigration, calling Islam a dangerous religion that can undermine the security of both society and the French state. Macron also claimed in his Speech

Act that Islam and Muslim immigration constitute a separatist religion and a very extreme society. Macron's remarks align with the contents of his speech, which include:

*"And there is in this radical Islamism... a methodical organization to contravene the laws of the Republic and create a parallel order..."*

*"What we must tackle is Islamist separatism ..... separate communities"* (Macron, 2020)

Macron's speech effectively mobilized public opinion and social construction by asserting that Islam is a separatist religion and that the Islamic community is a violent separatist organization.

Furthermore, Macron declared that Islam is a terrorist religion in response to the US attack on the WTO building (Damarrosybi et al., 2024). Macron receives assistance from L'express Media, a functional actor that disseminates his remarks on Muslim immigrants (Macron, 2019). In this instance, the subject of Muslim immigration has moved into the political and public policy spheres, where Macron's speech act has entered the second Politized stage. Macron was able to turn the issue of Muslim immigration into a national security issue by his actions and threat designations. Macron succeeded in turning the immigration problem into a hazardous one that might jeopardize French society's security, necessitating an urgent response.

Additionally, Macron's remarks have shaped society in a way that has made the problem of Muslim immigration a societal reality. People started to doubt Islam and the presence of Muslim immigration. Macron's remarks incited fear of Islam and Muslim immigration among the French populace as well (Khan et al., 2022). This concern has evolved into animosity towards immigrants who are Muslims and Islam. Macron, as a securitization actor, has successfully crossed the intersubjective stage where the public starts to see the issue of Muslim immigrants as a threat and starts to detest Muslim immigrants, as the public's response to the immigration issue has converted into hatred against Muslim immigrants. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged that the immigration of Muslims poses a threat to the country. President Macron thus started introducing laws and initiatives to address the problem of Muslim immigration.

### **Passage of a Law Prohibiting Separatism**

Macron's anti-separatist bill has advanced to the point in the securitization process where society and the government concur that a problem poses a threat to the state and that the government must resolve it as soon as feasible. The Anti-Separatist Law, which targets Muslim immigrants, is one way that the problem of Muslim immigration is being handled (Joshi, 2021).

The anti-separatist law penalizes Muslim immigrants through several limitations (Dakroub, 2022).

- Muslim immigrants are compelled to attend public schools and are prohibited from homeschooling. This is because Muslim immigrants typically attend Islamic educational institutions.
- Hate speech is forbidden, and sharing one's personal information is forbidden.
- The government keeps an eye on religious organizations and activities.
- Forcible marriage, polygamy, and the granting of virginity certificates as prerequisites to marriage for Muslim immigrants in France are all forbidden.
- Every institution, group, and community needs to uphold the secularity concept.

The Anti-Separatist Law's rules help lower the amount of terrorism and extremism cases that are linked to immigrants and Muslims.

### Securitization's Effect on Immigrants

In the past, the French society's reaction to the problem of Muslim immigration was confined to Islamophobia. However, the Anti-Separatist Law justifies the French people to treat Muslim immigrants unfairly (BLACKMER & RECTOR, n.d.). Thus, there has been a rise in bigotry, prejudice, and intolerance towards Muslim immigration since the passage of this law. Furthermore, a great deal of mosques and Islamic faith-based groups were compelled to cease their religious operations. Furthermore, the number of prejudiced and intolerable French citizens against Muslim immigration has increased.

## 4. CONCLUSION

When Muslims came to France in quest of work, the problem of Muslim immigration in France got underway. The French government initially welcomed the entrance of Muslim immigrants because it required workers to complete post-war reconstruction. Muslim immigrants came together, established mosques, formed groups, and founded Islamic organizations as their numbers grew. This increased the visibility of Muslim identity. The French idea of secularity, which is inversely correlated with Islamic doctrine, is perceived as being threatened by this. Furthermore, President Macron manipulates the debate over Muslim immigration to further his political agenda. Muslim immigrants are now in a difficult situation due to Macron's anti-immigrant policies and anti-separatist legislation. Macron has become an actor in securitization by assertively claiming that Islam is a radical, terrorist, and separatist faith to further his agenda. Macron's remarks are backed by the majority of the racist French society. As a result of Macron's ideas being accepted, the problem of Muslim immigration has thus reached a securitized stage, requiring the government to address it by enacting anti-separatist legislation.

## 5. REFERENCES

- Ahmed, I. (2013). Muslim Immigrants in Europe: The Changing Realities. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 69(3), 265–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928413489468>
- Akram, S. M. (2002). The aftermath of September 11, 2001: The targeting of Arabs and Muslims in America. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 61–118.

- Akyol, E. Y. (n.d.). *THE IMPACT OF EMMANUEL MACRON'S POPULISM ON THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION*.
- Berger, L. (2022). Securitization across borders—commonalities and contradictions in European and Arab counterterrorism discourses. In *Collective Securitization and Crisification of EU Policy Change* (pp. 195–212). Routledge.
- BLACKMER, P., & RECTOR, J. (n.d.). *DETROIT BEYOND BANKRUPTCY*.
- Dakroub, Z. (2022). *Laïcité in public political discourse, between securitization and desecuritization of Muslims: The Case of France*.
- Damarrosybi, H. D., Ayusinta, N. K., Ade'tya, Y. R., & Dos Santos, L. C. D. C. (2024). ANALYSIS OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS ON FRANCE GOVERNMENT'S SPEECH ACT AND POLICIES RELATED TO ACTIONS OF TERRORISM 2020. *Jurnal Pena Wimaya*, 4(1).
- Freedman, J. (2004). Secularism as a barrier to integration? The French dilemma. *International Migration*, 42(3), 5–27.
- Gurfinkiel, M. (1997). Islam in France: The French way of life is in danger. *Middle East Quarterly*.
- Izak, K. (2021). Changes in the perception of immigration, integration, multiculturalism and threats of Islamic radicalism in certain EU member states. *Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego*, 13(24), 375–403.
- Joshi, R. (2021). Religious Radicalization in France: Contextualizing the 2021 'Anti-Separatism' Bill. *Strategic Analysis*, 1–6.
- Kamal, H. (2021). Rising Islamophobia in Europe: The French Case. *Pakistan Horizon*, 74(4), 79–110.
- Khan, M. H., Akhtar, S., & Hassan, A. (2022). Countering the Hate Speech: An Analysis of Muslim Countries Response to Macron's Speech Against Muslims After the Charlie Hebdo Incident. *International Journal of Media and Information Literacy*, 7(2), 473–486.
- Lucassen, L., & Laarman, C. (2009). Immigration, intermarriage and the changing face of Europe in the post war period. *The History of the Family*, 14(1), 52–68.
- Macron, E. (2018). The Public Eye. *The Public*.
- Macron, E. (2019). Emmanuel Macron. *Our House Is Burning. Literally. The Amazon Rain Forest-the Lungs Which Produces*, 20.
- Macron, E. (2020, October 16). *Building an Islam of the Enlightenment*. The Spectator.
- Maillard, D. (2010a). The Muslims in France and the French model of integration. *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 4(4), 1–24.
- Maillard, D. (2010b). The Muslims in France and the French model of integration. *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, 4(4), 1–24.
- Nyman, J. (2013). Securitization theory. In *Critical approaches to security* (pp. 51–62). Routledge.



- Saunders, D. (2012). *The myth of the Muslim tide: Do immigrants threaten the West?* Vintage.
- Savage, T. M. (2004). Europe and Islam: Crescent waxing, cultures clashing. *The Washington Quarterly*, 27(3), 25–50.
- Stambouli, J., & Ben Soltane, S. (2010). Muslim immigrants in France: religious markets and new mechanisms of integration. *Gender, Religion, and Migration. Pathways of Integration*, 147–166.
- Startin, N. (2022). Marine Le Pen, the Rassemblement National and breaking the ‘glass ceiling’? The 2022 French presidential and parliamentary elections. *Modern & Contemporary France*, 30(4), 427–443.
- Wæver, O. (1993). *Securitization and desecuritization* (Vol. 5). Centre for Peace and Conflict Research Copenhagen.
- Williams, M. C. (2015). Securitization as political theory: The politics of the extraordinary. *International Relations*, 29(1), 114–120.