



Summary



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While religious fundamentalism is forcefully spreading throughout our territory, controversies surrounding the display of Islamic symbols in public spaces are intensifying, leading to rising fears and tensions. Such anxiety is fuelled by a general lack of understanding of French Muslims, of what they aspire to, and of how they practice their religion.

Today, discourse on Islam and the image of Islam are largely controlled by Jihadists, Salafists and others who prone fundamentalist ideals. The vast majority of Muslims of France do not however identify with this form of Islam.

The portrait of this silent majority, as developed in this report by the Institut Montaigne, is the first of its kind in France. The misapprehension surrounding this population is in large part explained by a difficult access to sociological data on Muslims living in France. To address this issue, a large-scale survey of over 1,000 people of Muslim faith or culture was carried out together with Ifop (the French Institute of Public Opinion) using a rigorous and transparent approach.

In the face of a terrorism perpetrated by individuals claiming to represent Islam, the immediate reaction of the State was, and remains, to implement strict security measures. While this response is legitimate at a highly tense moment in time, it cannot suffice to preserve social cohesion and national harmony for generations to come. The speeches and proposals that are bound to emerge during the presidential campaign of 2017 will no doubt be fuelled by prejudice, fear, and even hatred. The hope is not only to provide knowledge in answering the challenges arising from the tragic events of 2015 and 2016, but also to illuminate future debates with concrete and objective elements.

The Institut Montaigne is convinced that it is possible to build a French Islam. But its organisation, its funding, its relations with the State as well as with the so-called 'countries of origin' must

"It is because distrust, ignorance, and the growing hostility of part of the population are threatening our national unity, that the Muslims of France must use knowledge to combat stereotypes and fundamentalism."

Hakim El Karoui, strategic advisor, essayist, founder of the Club du XXI^e siècle

be transformed; failing this, the social tensions which are heightened by each attack risk becoming unbearable.

Who are the Muslims of France?

The profile of Muslims of France is poorly understood today. In order to compensate for this knowledge gap, the Institut Montaigne, together with Ifop, led a pioneering survey of Muslims living in France, not limited to immigrants or those with an immigrant background. This study represents a critical advance in our understanding of their social characteristics, their attitudes and behaviours. These new data were analysed by Antoine Jardin, Doctor of Political Science and Researcher at the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research).

There are no official statistical data on the socio-demographics of the Muslim population. As such, Ifop resorted to using a very large and representative national sample of over 15,000 people. This method was intended to identify a sub-sample of individuals who identify as Muslim or who have at least one Muslim parent. By applying this method, we can accurately and reliably identify the proportion of people who are Muslim or of Muslim origin within the overall population.

From the original representative national sample of 15,459 individuals, a sub-sample of 1,029 people of Muslim faith or culture was thus extracted.

The individuals of Muslim faith or culture questioned for this study are divided as follows:

- 874 people declare themselves to be of Muslim faith (or 5.6% of the overall sample);
- 155 people declare themselves to be non-Muslim but have at least one parent of Muslim faith (or 1% of the overall sample).

The key findings:

- in mainland France, Muslims represent 5.6% of the population over 15 years of age;
- this group represents a population younger than the national average;
- more than 10% of young people under 25 identify as Muslim;
- sociological data on working-age Muslims highlights a high proportion of unstable forms of employment (short-term, temporary or part-time contracts), as well as an over-representation of low-ranking employees and labourers, but also of non-active individuals (who are not retired);
- however, we also note the emergence of a middle and upper class: among individuals of Muslim faith or culture, 10% are middle-ranking employees, and 5% are executives or highly-qualified professionals;

- two thirds of Muslims believe that a secular State allows for freedom of religious expression;
- a majority of Muslims in France adhere to a system of values and a religious practice which can seamlessly co-exist within the corpus of the French Republic and nation (46%);
- however, an ever-increasing number of young Muslims, although they remain in the minority, identify above all with a disaffected form of religious affiliation (almost 50% of 15-25 year-olds);
- 15% of respondents have at least one Muslim parent, but do not consider themselves Muslim. These “exit” trajectories from the Muslim religion - or disaffiliation - are in fact two times more frequent than “entry” trajectories, since 7.5% of respondents declare themselves Muslim while indicating that neither of their parents are Muslim.

Four widely shared traits distinguish Muslims of France from the rest of the population:

- 1 - A much more frequent religious practice:¹ 31% of respondents identifying as Muslim attend a mosque or prayer room once a week, compared to 8.2% among the wider population²;
- 2 - A noted respect of halal food preparation: *70% of respondents say that they “always” buy halal meat, 22% buy it “sometimes” and only 6% “never”*;
- 3 - Support for the hijab which remains a majority opinion despite major rifts: *around 65 % of those of Muslim faith or culture claim to be in favour of the hijab*,³
- 4 - A lack of overarching separatist tendencies among Muslim populations: *78% of respondents identifying as Muslim - and registered to vote⁴ - say that they do not always vote for a Muslim candidate in various elections*.

The portrait of Muslims in France is not limited to these common features. They are in fact best characterised by the diversity and differences of opinion among them. A methodical analysis of the survey results identifies three groups:

- **The silent majority**, a large group making up 46% of respondents.⁵ Their belief system allows them to adapt to French society, which in turn evolves thanks to specific aspects of their religion;
- **The conservatives**. They make up 25% of the sample and are at the heart of the political and ideological struggle that our report proposals aim to help tackle and overcome;
- **The authoritarians** make up the last group, 28% of the total sample. They are mostly young, low-skilled and facing high unemployment; they live in the working-class suburbs of large cities. This group is no longer defined by conservatism, but by its appropriation of Islam as a mode of rebellion against the rest of French society.

¹ “How often do you go to a mosque or prayer room?” • at least once a week; • every day; • several times a week; • once a week; • at least once a month; • only for religious festivals; • less often; • never; • refuses to answer; • does not know.

² European Social Survey (ESS). The question was worded as follows: “Apart from the occasions such as weddings or funerals, how often do you attend a religious service: 01) Every day - 02) Several times a week - 03) Once a week - 04) At least once a month - 05) Only for religious holidays - 06) Less often - 07) Never.”

³ “Personally, are you in favour of women wearing a headscarf - the hijab?” • Yes • No • It is her choice, everyone can do as they wish • Refuses to answer • Does not know

⁴ “During elections, if there is a Muslim candidate, would you always vote for them?” • Yes • No • Refuses to answer • Does not know

⁵ These figures give an order of magnitude.

French Islam: a fragmented and complex organisation

It is essential to build a French Islam which represents the world in a manner compatible with that of the French Republic. This French Islam, supported by French funding, must produce and disseminate religious awareness, and be able to rely on new women and men emerging from the silent majority of French Muslims.

Five major changes must take place:

- 1 - To build a French Islam, funded on truly representative authorities of Muslims in France: the results of our survey shows a deficit of Islamic organisation’s reputation and legitimacy. More than two thirds of the respondents don’t know what the French Council for the Muslim Cult is. Amongst the 300 respondents who actually know this institution, only 28% feel represented by this body.

Achieving this objective depends on two major factors.

- Putting an end to the authoritative influence - which has long been accepted and even encouraged by France - of foreign States, who would never tolerate on their own soil what they practice in France. Could we imagine France, or Italy, which has a concordat with the Holy See, financing Catholic worship in Muslim countries? Could we imagine the Prime Minister’s office sending off sermons every Sunday to French priests preaching in these countries? Yet this is what is taking place in France today. Ending this situation means ensuring that the influx of funds from these countries is no longer directed towards “their” community, but rather, in a clear and transparent manner, towards a recognised organisation whose resources will be used for the benefit of all Muslims in France, whatever their origin.
- Supporting new leaders - both religious and laypeople - who are born in France and who are eager to shape a budding community and meet the many challenges faced by French Muslims. A way to achieve this is to provide institutional legitimacy by offering them a role in the creation and administration of the Foundation for Islam in France and the Muslim Association for Islam in France, currently underway at the time of writing.

- 2 - Ensuring transparent financial resources for Islam in France intended for a collective use, in order to see a structured organisation of Islam, to pay the salaries of imams, and to respond to the undeniable social reality that is “the new Islamic pride” felt by many Muslims in France, for whom Islam has become a question of identity rather than religion. This solution will rely on a royalty on halal production as well as on established institutions that are capable of attracting funds.

- 3 - Contributing - as far as is permitted by the French Law of 1905 on the Separation of the Churches and State - to the fight against fundamentalist discourse, notably by funding cultural courses and the work of chaplains in all closed settings (schools, prisons, armed forces, hospitals, etc.), as well as through the teaching of Arabic in State schools. All of this in a context where such teaching is very present in mosques and Koranic schools, particularly because nothing of the sort is offered in schools.

4 - Giving due thought to the absence of Islam from the concordat which even today governs the relationship between religions and the State in the Alsace-Moselle region. It is also worth considering issues of social equality and the State's capacity to create a theological faculty that can quickly express religious interpretations consistent with the reality of France today.

5 - Eliminating ambiguities that affect certain local practices (long-term leases, denominational burial grounds, loan guarantees) to assure Muslims that such legal practices are compatible with the French Constitution.

These findings have led the Institut Montaigne to formulate a set of concrete proposals for the emergence of a French Islam.

The emergence of a French Islam: proposals from the Institut Montaigne

- **To allow funding of the religion (for the building of places of worship, the salary of imams and theological training) through the Muslim Association for Islam in France, which would utilise the royalties collected on the sale of halal production.** In order for French Islam to embrace a theology which is compatible with French society, and so that it may break away from the discourse spread by the puritanical ideologies of certain States, it is necessary to create institutions - administered by a new generation of Muslims - capable of producing and disseminating French ideals and values.
- **To elect a Grand Imam of France in order to conduct the intellectual and theological work required for preparing the ground for French Islam.**
- **To extend the 1905 concordat in the Alsace-Moselle region to Islam in order to ensure that Muslim religious leaders are trained in France.** Islam is not included in the concordat of the Alsace-Moselle region but is considered an "unrecognised" religion. As a result, the funding of Islam - and more broadly of any new religion - is not permitted under the agreement which only benefits the four recognised religions (Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Jewish).
- Since chaplains are employed by the public service, serving a "function" which by its very essence covers the religious and spiritual domain, we propose the **creation of a French Institute of chaplains to provide cultural training and recruit individuals to these positions.**
- **To legally equip local authorities to support an Islam which is well-integrated into local communities** (long-term leases, denominational burial grounds, loan guarantees, etc.). Although forbidden by Law, Muslim burial ground is supported by public authorities, which creates legal uncertainty.
- **To teach classical Arabic in State schools in order to lessen the draw towards Arabic classes in Koranic schools and mosques.**
- **To develop knowledge on Islam:**
 - By creating statistics on religion to foster a better understanding and assessment of the situation. Today, the French resistance

to religious censuses and the estimates of religious affiliation, do not allow us to closely track the evolution of religious communities within the population.

- By producing a school textbook in History, common to Italy, Spain, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, to put into historical perspective the mutual contributions and the religious and cultural areas of convergence between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

- **To create a Secretariat of Religious and Secular Affairs, reporting to the Prime Minister, and encompassing the Central Bureau of Religious Affairs.** This new office will not resolve the multiple questions raised by the current state of relations between the State and different faiths, but it will help to gain a better understanding, and will have the advantage of offering something other than the current security-based response⁶.

About the Institute Montaigne

A non-profit association, the Institut Montaigne is a think tank established in 2000. It formulates concrete proposals in four public policy areas: public action, social cohesion, competitiveness and public finances. Aimed at public authorities, its work is the product of a method of analysis and research which is open to cross-country comparison, rigorous and critical. The Institut Montaigne brings together business leaders, government officials, academics and leading figures from wide-ranging horizons. It is funded solely through private donations, with no one contribution exceeding 2% of an annual budget of 3 million euros. Through its publications and the events that it organises, the Institut Montaigne, a pioneering French think-tank, aims to play a strong role in democratic debate.

⁶ He would be responsible:

- for sending a strong, interministerial political signal by removing the link between religious affairs and security measures, a result of the current system in which the Bureau of Religious Affairs is under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior; for providing a response, concerning the Muslim religion, to the fractured administration of the Imamah, to the issuance of visas to foreign Imams, the training of chaplains, the creation of a French Institute of Chaplains, and the control over religious associations;
- for liaising between public authorities, the old-age and health insurance provider for religious groups (CAVIMAC), and religious groups themselves;
- for ensuring the application of the French Law of 1905 regarding the neutrality of public services, recognising no religion and treating all religious denominations equally;
- for enforcing the agreement concerning religious organisation and practice;
- for maintaining regular and constructive relations with religious authorities and associations in each department – especially by appointing a delegate to religious and secular affairs in each departmental or regional prefecture.