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Response of Muslims in Indonesia, particularly the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) as well as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, to the social discrimination against Muslim communities in France

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ABSTRACT

A report by a global human rights organization, found that violations against Muslim groups in France were widespread and all the acts committed were based on the name of state security. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was prepared by representatives of countries with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world which was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 in Paris, France. This declaration then signifies that fundamental human rights must be universally protected. In this research, researchers aim to find out what social discrimination has occurred against Muslim groups in France, and researchers also want to know what are the reactions of Muslims in Indonesia in general and their responses, especially Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI) and Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah as representatives of Muslims in Indonesia against social discrimination against Muslim groups in France by using a qualitative approach method whose data collection techniques are through internet-based research, literature studies, and interviews. In their research results, researchers found that Indonesian society in general, especially MUI, NU, and Muhammadiyah continue to guard against Islamophobia in France and France as the country where the rules regarding international human rights were declared still have a high rate of discrimination, especially against Muslim minority groups.

Keywords: France, Islamophobia, MUI, Social Discrimination

ABSTRAK

Laporan organisasi hak asasi manusia global menemukan bahwa pelanggaran terhadap kelompok Muslim di Prancis meluas dan semua tindakan yang dilakukan didasarkan atas nama keamanan negara. Universal Declaration of Human Rights yang merupakan tonggak sejarah

Hak Asasi Manusia, disusun oleh perwakilan negara-negara dengan latar belakang hukum dan budaya yang berbeda dari seluruh wilayah di dunia yang diproklamasikan oleh Majelis Umum PBB pada tanggal 10 Desember 1948 di Paris, Prancis. Deklarasi ini kemudian menandakan bahwa Hak Asasi Manusia yang mendasar harus dilindungi secara universal. Dalam riset ini, periset bertujuan untuk mengetahui apa saja diskriminasi sosial yang telah terjadi terhadap kelompok Muslim di Prancis, lalu periset juga ingin mengetahui apa saja reaksi Muslim di Indonesia secara umum dan respons mereka, khususnya MUI serta NU dan Muhammadiyah sebagai representasi Muslim di Indonesia terhadap diskriminasi sosial atas kelompok Muslim di Prancis dengan menggunakan metode pendekatan kualitatif yang teknik pengumpulan datanya melalui internet-based research, studi kepustakaan, dan wawancara. Dalam hasil riset, periset menemukan bahwa masyarakat Indonesia secara umum, terutama MUI, NU, dan Muhammadiyah terus mengawal Islamofobia di Prancis dan Prancis sebagai negara tempat dideklarasikannya aturan mengenai Hak Asasi Manusia internasional ternyata masih memiliki angka diskriminasi yang tinggi, terutama terhadap kelompok minoritas Muslim.

Keywords: *Diskriminasi Sosial, Islamofobia, MUI, Prancis*

INTRODUCTION

Following the 9/11 attacks, it was reported that the phenomenon of Islamophobia increased and was officially recognized by the Stockholm International Forum and the United Nations (Cfcti, 2012). This phenomenon is closely associated with globalization, which plays a significant role in its development. In its report on the potential for anti-Islamic reactions in 15 European Union countries, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) indicated that Muslims, Islamic communities, and other vulnerable groups have been targeted for discrimination, prejudice, hostility, violence, and aggression (Huda, 2015).

The EUMC focuses on acts of violence or changes in attitudes towards ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities in the European Union, particularly Muslims, and reactions to anti-Islamic actions, including those in France (Huda, 2015). The resurgence of Islamophobia in France has reportedly influenced some regulations, including the final decision on laws regarding the hijab (Kilinc, 2019). The Runnymede Trust, an independent think tank on ethnic and cultural diversity based in the UK, first defined Islamophobia as an unfounded hatred and/or fear of Islam, Muslims, and Islamic culture (Bukhari, Ali, Khan, & Ali, 2019).

Furthermore, according to a report by a global human rights organization, violations against Muslim groups in France are widespread, and all actions are taken in the name of security. France itself has approximately 3.5 to 5 million Muslim populations, constituting 6 to 8.5% of the total population. Most Muslim communities live in areas with social and economic inequalities (Abdelkader, 2017).

Discrimination against Muslims in France has spread across various sectors, from the smallest in housing to the job market. According to government data, about 42% of Muslims (according to other studies, reaching 58%) have reported experiencing discrimination based on their religion. This figure increases to 60% for women wearing hijabs (Francois, 2020).

One of the experiences felt by Muslim minorities in France is the difficulty in providing worship facilities. In June 2012, a French court received an appeal for the provision of large-scale worship facilities for Muslims, specifically in the southern part of Marseille. However,

there was opposition from the surrounding community (Abdelkader, 2017). Investigations into 76 mosques suspected of separatism also potentially led to the closure of several mosques (Francois, 2020).

Different attitudes towards European immigrants and Muslim immigrants, especially those from North Africa, can be measured by the percentage of high employment rates. European immigrants have an employment rate of 79%, while North African immigrants struggle and face unemployment. This forces about 4.4 million people of African or Arab descent to live in slums with high poverty and crime rates. Studies have shown that 3 out of 5 children in these areas grow up in poverty (Abdelkader, 2017).

France itself has a population that values the religious heritage of their interlocutors. In the job sector, human resource departments also take this into account and can systematically discriminate against religious heritage different from the majority. A study titled "One Muslim is Enough!" Evidence from a Field Experiment in France, explains that significantly, Muslim families have lower incomes compared to Christian families (Adida, Laitin, & Valfort, 2016).

Furthermore, a study at Stanford University explains that there is high job discrimination against Muslims in France, with a comparison twice as small as Christians with similar potential and classification criteria. A more recent study in 2015 stated that Muslim applicants have much less chance of being accepted compared to Catholic and Jewish counterparts. Male applicants have even less chance, with only about 5% of Muslim male applicants receiving interview requests (Abdelkader, 2017).

It is even more interesting that they experience little discrimination when indicating that they are secular. In 2008, a Muslim woman was reportedly fired from her job after refusing to remove her hijab. The court ruled that this constituted discrimination unless the job was classified as a public service. In other words, if the job is classified as public service, the company has the right to restrict its employees' clothing (Abdelkader, 2017).

Women can be said to be the primary victims of discrimination. This is because 78% of women wearing hijabs are the main targets of Islamophobic and discriminatory acts. Moreover, violence often threatens women's safety, as seen in a case in 2013 when a pregnant woman on the outskirts of Paris, Argenteuil, suffered a miscarriage after an attack (Wolfreys, 2018).

UuestFrance, a regional daily newspaper, also reported that 84% of the public oppose the use of hijabs for private sector employees involved in public services, while 83% of the public support a complete ban on different religious attire or symbols in all companies. President Hollande, who was in office at the time, responded to this by calling for public laws restricting the use of hijabs and reactivating the Secularism Observatory to design other laws (Abdelkader, 2017).

In 2015, the Human Rights Court also upheld a public hospital's decision not to renew the employment contracts of employees who refused to remove their hijabs. Unanimously, the court ruled that this did not violate the religious freedom of Muslim women protected by Article 9 of the French Constitution. According to the Supreme Court, this decision is based on the need to protect the rights and religious freedoms of others, especially hospital patients, from undue religious influence. Social workers must adhere to neutrality and secularism principles established in the French Constitution (Abdelkader, 2017).

Not only in employment, but educational institutions also prohibit the wearing of hijabs in public schools. This is based on the 2004-228 law on religious neutrality (French secularism law). This law prohibits the use of conspicuous religious symbols in educational environments.

However, the use of small crosses and Star of David necklaces is still allowed. The existence of such exceptions has led to significant tension in France. The uneven implementation of the Secularism Law in each school district has also added controversy and confusion about the ban (Abdelkader, 2017).

In educational institutions, at least 73 mosques and private Islamic schools have been closed by authorities (Francois, 2020). The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNC DH) report added that Muslims have consecutively occupied the most stigmatized minority positions (Wolfreys, 2018).

Recently, in October 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute to Samuel Paty, a history teacher in France who was killed for showing caricatures of Prophet Muhammad in his class. The speech contained statements that France would not remove caricatures of Prophet Muhammad as it is part of freedom of speech in the French secular ideology. Macron also declared war on Islamic separatists who took over some French Muslim communities (Anggraeni, Citraresmana, & Koeshandoyo, 2021).

Several Muslim-majority countries responded to Macron's statement by boycotting French products. Indonesia, as a country with a Muslim majority population, also responded to the statement. Indonesian President Joko Widodo expressed Indonesia's position on this matter. He strongly condemned the terror attacks in Paris and also criticized President Macron's statement that the incidents were Islamist terrorist attacks (Mazrieva & Wardah, 2020).

President Jokowi argued that terrorism should not be associated with any religion, as it has hurt Muslims and could damage inter-religious unity (Rizqo, 2020). Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi also condemned this and instructed the delivery of diplomatic notes to France (Mazrieva & Wardah, 2020).

Campaigns and boycott policies against French products were also carried out in some Muslim countries. However, the Indonesian government firmly stated that it would not take similar measures. The Director-General of Foreign Trade of the Ministry of Trade, Didi Sumedi, explained that this policy was taken because the issue at hand is beyond the context of trade (Makdori, 2020). However, on the other hand, the Leadership Council of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Anwar Abbas, responded by urging Muslims in Indonesia to boycott all products originating from France to urge President Macron to apologize to all Muslims worldwide (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

In addition to the MUI, the Secretary-General of PBNU, Ahmad Helmy Faishal Zaini, responded to and regretted Macron's statements and actions. He added that radicalism and extremism have no religion because they can be perpetrated by anyone (Rochmat, 2020). As reported by BBC News on November 2, 2020, thousands of Muslims also protested outside the French Embassy in Jakarta. Protests on a smaller scale also occurred in several districts and cities, such as Makassar, Bandung, Bekasi, Medan, Kuningan, Solo, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Bandar Lampung, and Karawang (BBC, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the occurrence of the 9/11 attacks, identity, culture, ethnicity, and religion have emerged as significant issues in International Relations. This can be observed from the multitude of studies and articles on identity published during that time. In other words, the concept of identity has become central to International Relations theory. Contrary to the assumption of rational actors, identity scholars (constructivists) argue that the preferences and interests of

actors are linked to their identity. Thus, identity can explain their actions. Identity scholars conceptualize identity causally with methodological explanations (Bucher, 2016).

Aligned with identity studies, Alexander Wendt (1999) in his book "Social Theory of International Politics," outlines that the constructivist approach holds three factors that influence human actions in international relations, one of which is identity (Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics, 1999). In International Relations, there are at least two key concepts in constructivism that are relevant, namely the belief that shared ideas constitute a structure that unites humanity and that actor interests and identities are determined by these ideas. In other words, constructivism believes that all actions are constructed through individual interactions with their environment within a mutually agreed-upon or intersubjective idea, which is not inherently given but constructed (Pramono & Purwono, 2010).

According to Wendt, identity is crucial for constructivists because it can determine how actors behave based on how they perceive themselves and how other actors perceive them (both internally and externally) (Wendt, 1994). Clear identification leads to actor goals and motivations. Identity formulates who the actors are, and interests determine what they desire. According to Wendt, without recognizing themselves, actors cannot possibly know their goals or desires (Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics, 1999).

Religion, as one element of identity, has influenced international politics in various ways. Religious views are considered to exist and can influence the decisions of policymakers, both domestically and internationally. These policies often provoke international situations and issues, which cannot be ignored. Religious rebellions mostly have international implications, as does the use of religion as a source of public legitimacy highlighted by religious leaders (Fox J., 2001).

In Islamophobia, there are four aspects divided into discrimination, prejudice, exclusion, and violence (Jaber, 2022). In this subsection, the social discrimination referred to is discrimination against Muslims. Discrimination has long been an important issue for civilization. In this modern era, discrimination against minorities has become a major moral and political issue, one of the leading causes of the worst human rights violations and humanitarian crimes (Ameli, Elahi, & Merali, 2004).

Every human being inherently has the right to be treated equally. According to Amnesty International, discrimination is an act that deprives someone of their human rights and other rights (subjecting them to unequal treatment) established in laws, policies, or practices. The essence of discrimination itself is prejudice based on the concept of identity, which can lead to hatred, division, and even dehumanization (Amnesty International, 2022).

METHOD

In this research, the researcher employed a qualitative approach guided by Christopher Lamont's book (2015) titled "Research Methods in Politics and International Relations." The qualitative research method was deemed more appropriate for this study because it allows researchers to delve deeper into specific events, provided that researchers have a clear idea of the data to be collected before the study commences (Lamont, 2015). Quoting Mohajan (2018), research must utilize an explicit, disciplined, systematic approach (planned, orderly, and general) in its writing to achieve the most accurate results (Mohajan, 2018).

Cresswell (2009) in Mohajan (2018) also explains that qualitative research is inductive and can be used as an effective model that enables researchers to develop their research in more detail (Mohajan H. K., 2018). The qualitative approach can also be employed to understand the

meaning and processes that shape international politics (Lamont, 2015). In this regard, the researcher attempted to examine and elucidate the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the sector of social discrimination in France influencing the Indonesian Ulema Council as a representation of Muslims in Indonesia using a qualitative approach.

The descriptive-analytical method is a standalone method. Its use can be applied when identifying phenomena or patterns in previously unrecognized data. Data description is conducted to explain the analysis of previously collected data. A combination of causal analysis with description is necessary to understand why an issue may occur. Effective description can then identify the most relevant characteristics, implementation, and background in interpreting findings.

The application of this scientific method has also helped advance knowledge through observing phenomena, identifying questions, hypothesis generation, and hypothesis testing, which subsequently contribute to generating new observations, questions, and hypotheses. Descriptive-analytical analysis is a fundamental component of this research process because of its role in observing the world with occurring phenomena, which also aids in identifying research questions, thus generating hypotheses based on the observations made (Loeb, et al., 2017).

The researcher then employed the descriptive-analytical method as a tool to facilitate source examination with data processing and also to ease the identification and search for the most relevant implementation in interpreting findings.

In social scientific research, the historical method is used as preparatory research that provides a foundation as evidence for the subsequent use of secondary methods. This descriptive data serves as the basis for subsequent research processes to draw conclusions, extract, and explain presumed cause-and-effect relationships. Researchers use historical narratives to describe documentation of what happened and the characteristics present in that phenomenon (Sager & Rosser, 2015).

The historical method is employed because it has long contributed significantly to political studies. Interpretation is always a key element of this method, where researchers need to give meaning to highly subjective and contextual actions and events (Sager & Rosser, 2015). Its benefits for International Relations scholars lie in its contextual understanding, serving as a tool to measure themes and patterns of state interactions over time. Additionally, it can analyze long-term trends and patterns and regional differences in viewing global political issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

France is a secular country with the motto *Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité* (Rizal Fadillah, 2022). This motto first emerged during the French Revolution (MINISTERE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRS ETRANGERES, 2022). In the *Liberté* point, which means freedom, carries a broad meaning, including freedom in religious values, which is also considered both an impediment to their revolution (Rizal Fadillah, 2022) and a factor supporting freedom (Rafani Akhyar, 2022).

Historical events in France have ended the monarchy based on divine rights. Since then, France no longer sees itself as the "Eldest Daughter of the Church." France has solidified itself as a benchmark for other nations in upholding human rights, embracing the concept of secularism as one of its protective frameworks (MINISTERE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRS ETRANGERES, 2022).

French secularism is not used as a weapon against religion but rather to relegate all religions to the private sector and solidify state secularism in the public sphere (MINISTERE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES, 2022). Essentially, religion is considered a private matter that should not be brought into the public sphere. For instance, wearing a hijab in public places is seen as bringing religion into the public sphere, as is the use of loudspeakers for the call to prayer (Rafani Akhyar, 2022).

Emmanuel Macron is a French banker and politician who was elected president of France in 2017. Macron is the first person in the history of the Fifth Republic to win the presidency without the support of either the Socialist or Gaullist parties. He is also the youngest French president since Napoleon I's tenure ended. Furthermore, President Macron was re-elected in 2022, becoming the first French president to win a second term in the last two decades (Ray, 2022).

In his early political career, Macron worked with former French President François Hollande on his candidacy for the 2012 elections as a representative of the Socialist Party. The election was eventually won by Hollande, who assumed the presidency. In Hollande's government, Macron served as deputy chief of staff and economic advisor before being appointed finance minister in 2014. However, as Hollande's government weakened due to economic and migrant crises in Europe, Macron gradually distanced himself and resigned (Ray, 2022).

Following his resignation, in April 2016, Macron announced the formation of La République en Marche, a popular movement characterized as a democratic revolution designed to challenge the rigid and unadaptive political system (Ray, 2022). Instead of starting a party with a pre-existing set of policy proposals, Macron decided that LREM should start with broad public engagement (Chwalisz, 2018).

In this project, known as the Grande Marche, over 5,000 volunteers interviewed 25,000 people across France for about 45 minutes each about their views on France, issues affecting them, their families, and their cities, as well as their hopes and dreams for the future. All this information was then filtered by policy experts within the movement.

Many voters were touched by Macron's language during the campaign and the topics he chose to emphasize because his efforts were supported by a strong understanding of why people are happy or unhappy and what changes they want. The fact that people believed they had a meaningful voice in politics likely contributed to Macron's victory (Chwalisz, 2018).

Furthermore, LREM also incorporated several ideas from other parties and transcended party divisions to create a new voter coalition in the previously empty political space, appealing to voters committed to social protection, pro-Europeanism, economic liberalism, and staunch opposition to the populist right-wing National Front (Chwalisz, 2018). Then, when President Macron sought to secure a governing majority in parliament for his second term, La République en Marche changed its name to Renaissance to confront opposition from a new coalition of left-wing parties and secure a legislative majority (Chrisafis, 2022).

François Burgat, a senior researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research, highlights President Macron, who initially came to power with support from the left and center but, after three years of leading with liberal policies, lost that support. Therefore, to secure re-election, President Macron had to court the right and far-right, which focused primarily on terrorism. This is what then made Macron tougher on French Muslims and blamed French Muslim groups for the country's security (The Brookings Doha Center, 2020).

In is evident that France itself has made efforts to impose strict boundaries to prevent Muslims from entering French political policies, hence the emergence of Islamophobia as it is feared that Muslims may enter into the policymaking institutions in France. This is why Islamophobia can be seen as a political program (Dindin Nurdin, 2022).

In each policy decision, President Macron tends to be biased and provocative. As such, heads of state should not be the instigators of conflict among their citizens, especially since the Muslim community in France is also legitimate citizens (Dindin Nurdin, 2022). The terms used by President Macron stigmatize Islam and its community in France (Alsaafin, 2022).

President Macron tends to passively understand Islam, unlike, for example, other superpowers like America, which have opened up perspectives for all potential civilizations. Amel Boubekeur, a researcher at the University of Grenoble specializing in French Islam, says that heated debates like these indicate a lack of information about Islam in France, which ultimately dominates the airwaves, leading to tension (Dodman, 2020).

Julien Talpin, a political science researcher at the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), says that President Emmanuel Macron's first term has been bleak for Muslim groups in France. This is because, in early 2021, President Macron implemented a separatism law. While the government claimed the law aimed to strengthen France's secular system, critics argued that the separatism law unfairly targeted the Muslim community and restricted their religious freedoms (Alsaafin, 2022).

The separatism law was introduced after the murder of Samuel Paty. The consequences of this law for the Muslim community include the closure of dozens of mosques, the dissolution of several Muslim charities, and the closure of the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF). Additionally, when Muslims collectively form an organization without following government steps, it is deemed suspicious. In the National Assembly debate, it is clear that the target is the Muslim community, with the idea that there has been widespread separatism and communitarianism in society that France must combat using legal rules. Analysts also add that Muslims are increasingly portrayed as a threat to French society under President Emmanuel Macron's presidency (Alsaafin, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Muslims are one entity, like one body; if there are Muslims suffering out there, then other Muslims will stand shoulder to shoulder to help each other. Structurally, France is reluctant to acknowledge and engage with religious pluralism. The colonial legacy of France tends to persist in its view of Muslims as a homogeneous bloc with an immigrant background. The presence of Muslim communities accepted in general actually has a more complex reality. The treatment of Muslims by politicians and the media often puts Islam in France in the forefront of public attention. Indonesia's governmental response to social discrimination against Muslim minorities in France is no more than condemnation. The Indonesian Council of Ulama, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah promptly moved to represent the Muslim community in Indonesia so that the French government could formulate policies regarding social discrimination there.

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