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Perpetuum Mobile *of Radicalism – Islamism in* la France Laïque

Abstract: The article points to growing cultural tensions in France today. On the one hand, the French government is tightening the rules of *laïcité*, while on the other, Islam is playing an increasingly important role. This is due to both the consolidation of Muslim identity and the ever-growing Muslim population in France. According to the author, French republicanism, which is inextricably linked to *laïcité*, is incapable of resolving this tension and, in fact, systemically generates it.

Keywords: Islamism, Islam, France, secularism, violence, *laïcité*

Introduction

The current situation of Muslims in Western European countries is ambivalent. Despite the widespread promotion of multiculturalism, two contradictory trends are becoming increasingly apparent at the cultural, social and political levels. On the one hand, there is an increasingly visible secularism that seeks to eradicate religion from the public sphere; on the other, there is the growing strength of radical Islam. This process is particularly evident in France, where Muslims make up around 6 million people, or almost 10% of the population [Insee 2023: 39]. The central hypothesis of this article is that the *laïcité* model of the French Republic is generating increasingly glaring aporia and internal contradictions. Faced with the growing role of Islam in French society and politics, the doctrine of *laïcité*, which presupposes a systemic "blindness to the question of religion", faces major challenges in minimizing social tensions and, moreover, increasingly generates them itself.

Without making any judgement on the political role of Islam in other Western countries, in France the dynamics of the political process are entering into a logic

of conflict between *laïcism* and Islamism. Both French *laïcité* and Islamism claim totality and absolutism. Consequently, any criticism of these doctrines is perceived by their supporters as an attack on the most fundamental values. In the long term, such a state of affairs is conducive to the entrenchment of radical attitudes in France. This situation is well illustrated by the symbol of the perpetuum mobile – a self-propelled mechanism. The government's hardening of the principle of *laïcism* is met with a response from the Islamists. The reaction of the radicals reinforces the government's conviction that the fight against Islamism must be stepped up and *laïcism* must be entrenched even more consistently.

The hypothesis was tested in four successive steps: (1) to present the origins of the principle of *laïcité* in France, (2) to analyse the idea of secularism on the basis of Islamic doctrine, (3) to examine the tightening of the principle of *laïcité* in the past two decades, and (4) to show the increasing importance of the Islamic factor in the course of the political process.

In this article, the term Islamism is used to refer to all movements and ideologies that advocate strictly Islamic policies.[1]

The separation of state and religion. The origins of *laïcité* in France
The idea of separating religious and political matters is rooted in the very nature of Christianity itself. Jesus' words *So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's* (Mt 22:21, NIV) have for centuries constituted the formation of autonomous orders – the religious and the political [Voegelin 1992: 97]. It is not lost on researchers that the phenomenon of secularization concerns primarily Western societies, and many scholars point out that the idea of secularization arose only within Christian culture. Scholars such as Marcel Gauchet, for example, go so far as to claim that secularization is the culmination of Christianity and its most profound expression [Gauchet 1999].

José Casanova notes that the term "secularization" can have three meanings. Firstly, it can mean a process associated with social modernization, leading to the differentiation and emancipation of secular spheres. Secondly, secularization can mean the gradual disappearance of religion. In the third sense, secularization refers to the process of privatization of religion and the disappearance of classical church religions [Casanova 1994: 19ff]. Paradoxically, as a result of the growing role

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[1] On the concept of fundamentalism and Islamism, cf.: [Kramer 2003: 65–77].

of the Muslim community, we are witnessing in contemporary France a growing tendency in the opposite direction to that assumed by the theory of secularization. Religion – and Islam in particular – is beginning to play an increasingly powerful role in the public sphere.

However, secularization in a descriptive sense, i.e. as a certain independent and objective social process, is different from *laïcité*, i.e. the doctrine that the *state, which is secular by nature*, should be *completely cut off from any religious influence* [Gilson 1994: 162]. Seen in this way, *laïcism* – unlike the process of secularization – is not descriptive but normative. In such a perspective, religion (or the Church) is inherently seen as an enemy of the state [Drury 2017: 293].

The origins of French *laïcité* are inextricably linked to the French Revolution, its anti-Christian dimension,[2] and the formation of the modern French nation. Secularization, which had been underway since at least the mid-eighteenth century [Bell 2003], and then the Revolution negated the Christian political order by laying the foundations for the emergence of nationalism, thus beginning the process of constructing a French nation based on the secular principles of republicanism. As Anthony D. Smith notes, from that point onwards the binder of the community was not *God's will, but the law of the nation, no more a covenanted people, but autonomous and equal citizens, not the quest for holiness, but ideals of liberty and fraternity, had now become the lodestars of the Revolution's oaths, guiding the nation towards national regeneration and a new secular era* [Smith 2008: 137]. Based on revolutionary ideals, the individual, the citizen, *only finds true freedom by being absorbed in a nation-state* [Smith 2008:138]. In the spirit of Rousseau's *On the Social Contract, the sovereign knows only the nation as a body and does not draw distinctions between any of those members that make it up* [Rousseau 1987: 34]. These ideas are aptly captured in the words of a deputy, Count Stanislas–Marie–Adélaïde de Clermont–Tonnerre in his speech of 1789: *We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals. We must withdraw recognition from their judges; they should only have our judges. We must refuse legal protection to the maintenance of the so-called laws of their Judaic organization; they should not be allowed to form in the state either a political body or an order. They must be citizens individually. But, some will say to me, they do not want to be citizens. Well then! If they do not want to be citizens, they should say so,*

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2 Noteworthy is Eric Voegelin's reflection that the French Revolution was anti-Christian but not anti-religious, since it aimed at establishing a caesaro-papistic regime of non-Christian religion; cf.: [Voegelin 1975: 171].

and then, we should banish them. It is repugnant to have in the state an association of non-citizens, and a nation within the nation... In short, Sirs, the presumed status of every man resident in a country is to be a citizen [Clermont–Tonnerre 1789; Hunt 1996: 88]. This revolutionary principle should be borne in mind when analysing the situation of Muslims in France today.

The ideology of the French Revolution was remarkably tolerant in principle, but in practice the political situation was quite the opposite. Article X of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, while guaranteeing religious freedom, introduced an important caveat about its limits: *as long as the manifestation of such opinions does not interfere with the established Law and Order* [DRMC 1789: Art. 10]. This dissonance between the general norm and the specific exception laid down in the law – perfectly understandable in legal terms – was used in practice to combat Christianity. The concept of *interference with the public order* could be defined and interpreted in different ways, including ideological ones. In practice, the revolutionaries sought to subordinate the Catholic Church to the state, a striking example of which was the adoption of the "Civil Constitution" of the clergy in July 1790. It was a specific attempt to create a national church that was not hierarchically subordinate to the Pope. The civil constitution required all clergy to take an oath to uphold the constitution, and those who refused to do so were to be removed from office. In their place, the secular power would elect new priests and bishops [Burleigh 2007: 61–62; Burleigh 2011:72]. In October 1791, a decree was issued in whose aftermath, in 1792, all clergy were compelled to take the oath. Priests who refused to take it (nonjuring, or refractory clergy) were given two weeks to leave France or face deportation to French New Guinea [Burleigh 2007: 63–64]. As Michael Burleigh points out, by 1794, out of 40,000 pre-Revolution parishes in France, only 150 were officially celebrating Holy Mass [Burleigh 2007: 66]. The religious and clergy were no longer allowed to run schools and provide care in hospitals. Christianity was to disappear from the public sphere and be "relegated" to people's consciences. What was to take the place of religion and religious sentiment in the public sphere was nationalism.

The concept of separation (*la separation*) as a legal category first appears in the Decree of the Convention of 21 February 1795 "On the Separation of Church and State" [*La première «Séparation»*]. Article 5 of the decree stated that the *law does not recognize any ministry of religion: no one may appear in public wearing the vestments, ornaments, or costumes associated with religious ceremonies*, while Article 7 prohibited the display of any sign of worship in a public place.

The struggle against the Church in France continued with few interruptions for most of the nineteenth century (especially after the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870[3]), but the most important element in the introduction of the *laïcité* model was the 1905 law on the separation of Church and State [*Loi du 9 décembre 1905*]. Under the terms of the law, church property became the property of the state and all religious orders, except those engaged in charitable activities, were suppressed. *Laicity* became the basis of the French Republic's identity.

The recognition of the fundamental importance of the principle of laicity is still present today. The belief in the power of laicity as a founding value of French identity is well reflected in the words of the historian Claude Nicolet – *Legal and territorial unity* (…) *also require unity of another kind: moral or spiritual: this is the function of laicity* [Baubérot 2011: 127]. *Laïcité* in France has therefore never been descriptive – from the outset, it has been a political and ideological category aimed at establishing a new social order. This perspective is also confirmed by President Emmanuel Macron's remarks in October 2020. Announcing the submission of a bill to combat 'Islamist separatism', he said that *laïcité is the glue of a united France* [*France 24* 2020]. Moreover, social surveys conducted in 2017 show that 90% of the French consider *laïcité* to be an essential value of the Republic [IPSOS 2017: 4].

At the same time, in 2020, 87% of respondents were convinced that *laïcité* was under threat (an increase of 29 percentage points compared to 2005) and 79% believed that Islamists had declared war on the Republic [IFOP 2020a: 31]. Such high indicators allow us to conclude that the perception of the problem of Islamism in France is defined in terms of an existential threat to the political foundations of the French Republic.

Religion and politics in the doctrine of Islam

In contrast to European culture, Islam has gone its own way, where secularism is considered a threat to Muslim identity. Unlike Christianity, Islam does not separate political and religious authority. The two powers intertwine, complement and condition each other to the extent that they ultimately merge into an inseparable whole, a particular political–religious amalgam. It is for this reason, among others, that Bernard Lewis – one of the most eminent contemporary experts

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[3] In France, the last census in which religion was included took place in 1872 [Coller 2020: 17]. From 1883, religious instruction was forbidden in primary education.

on Islam – stresses that the use of the term religion in relation to Islam can be misleading when one tries to encapsulate Islam in Western categories [Lewis 1988: 2; Al–Attas 1993: 51]. The Muslim community – the *ummah* – is both religious and political in nature. The Koran states that *you are the best community* [i.e. the *ummah* – note by the author] *singled out for people: you order what is right, forbid what is wrong* [The Qur'an 3,110:42]. As Janusz Danecki notes, the *ummah* became the main instrument of social integration: (…) *leaving the* ummah*, leaving the community, was not only a social act, like leaving the tribe, but also an act that was considered morally wrong, even reprehensible. For one was breaking away not only from one's people, but also from God* [Danecki 2007: 33]. Muhammad was the religious and political superior of all Muslims. Consequently, the emergence of an autonomous secular space in Islam became impossible. It was only the long and turbulent processes of military decline in the Middle East, especially in the Ottoman Empire, that somehow forced these states to modernize and open up to Western models, including the separation of religious and political orders. However, it should be stressed that the Europeanization (Turkish: *Avrupalaşmak*) of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century was not, as the name itself suggests, a process that originated within Islam. It advanced as a model in competition with the solutions proposed by Islamic doctrine.

The second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century were a period of intense pressure from Western culture (mainly secular or outright secularist) on the Muslim culture of the Middle East and North Africa. The idea of the separation of the religious and political orders in Islam was first put forward as late as 1925 by Ali Abdel Raziq, an Egyptian legal scholar (educated at Oxford), who sought to provide a theological justification for the actions of Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), the Turkish dictator who introduced the principles of *laïcité* into the nascent Republic of Turkey [Razek 2013]. Raziq, who worked at Cairo's Al–Azhar University, argued that neither the *Qur'an* nor the *Sunnah* pointed to a particular model of governance and that the fusion of religion and politics did not follow from Islamic doctrine. While this idea was welcomed by liberal circles, it was understandably severely criticized by Islamic theologians, and the author himself was expelled from the university.[4]

Like the idea of the separation of religious and political orders, the concept of secularization is alien to the world of Islam. The term first appeared at the end

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[4] For more on the formation of the idea of secularization in the Islamic world, cf.: [Tamimi 2002: 13–28; Sulkowski 2019: 177–189].

of the nineteenth century in the context of Western ideas, first as a neologism in Turkish – *ladini* (non-religious), and then as a neologism in Arabic – *almâniyya* (from âlam – world) and later *ilmani* (from *ilm* – knowledge, science), meaning a scientific view of the world (as opposed to a religious one). This scepticism towards the idea of separating the political community from religion can still be observed today, especially within fundamentalist currents. Even in Turkey, which for several decades was held up as a model example of the separation of religion and politics (although it should be remembered that secularism was imposed through undemocratic methods), this process was halted or even reversed during the more than two decades of rule by the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [Sulkowski 2016: 241–255].

Muslims and Islam in France. Reinforcing the principle of *laïcité*

The encounter between the Islamic world and Frankish culture occurred early, only a century after the death of Muhammad. In 732, Charles Martel ('the Hammer') stopped the invasion of Gaul by the Umayyad army [Baszkiewicz 1974: 24]. In the centuries-long history of Franco–Muslim relations, Napoleon's victorious campaign in Egypt in 1798 and France's consequent strong expansion in the Middle East and North Africa in the 19th century are important. The colonization of Algeria from the 1830s onwards was particularly significant. In the inter-war period, there was a large Muslim diaspora in France, particularly from North Africa (Algeria, Morocco), and the Grand Mosque was opened in Paris in 1926. In 1947, Algerians living in France were granted the status of French citizens. However, the question of integration only arose as a result of rapid decolonization, the Algerian civil war and Algeria's declaration of independence in 1962. As a result of the events in Algeria, more than 100,000 *harkis* – Arabs who fought on the side of the French – who had to flee the reprisals of the National Liberation Front, arrived in France [Burgess 2019: 202; Vince 2020]. Since then, increased refugee, economic, and family reunification migration has led to a steady increase in the number of Muslims living in France. In 1970, the diaspora already numbered almost 2 million people, and by 1990 it had reached almost 4 million [Kettani 2010: 157]. In 1997, the Minister of the Interior, Jean–Pierre Chevènement, announced that he would contribute to the affirmation of 'French Islam', and two years later he began to create a forum to institutionalize relations between Muslims and the Republic. In 2002, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy declared: "We cannot ask Muslims in France to respect the values of the Republic if we do not invite them to the table of the Republic" [Laurence and Vaisse 2006: 144].

However, the events of the early 21st century – in particular the attacks on the World Trade Centre – heralded new challenges for France as well. A strong communal Muslim identity began to be perceived as a threat to republican values. In 2004, on the initiative of President Jacques Chirac, a law was passed banning the wearing of religious symbols in schools. The ban applied to primary and secondary education and affected both teachers and pupils. Although the law treated believers of all faiths equally, it was no secret that Muslim girls and women were particularly affected, especially as the circular accompanying the law made an exception for "discreet symbols" of religion, which certainly did not include the Muslim headscarf (*hijab*) [Falski 2018: 47]. At the time, relatively few Muslim women in France wore the *hijab* – around 13% (compared with 53% in the UK, 45% in Spain and 44% in Germany) [PEW 2006]. The new law was met with widespread Muslim protests (more than 3,000 protested in Paris), which quickly spread to other EU countries as well as the Middle East and Pakistan [*Al–Jazeera* 2004]. At the same time, however, research by the PEW Research Center showed that the ban was supported by as many as 78% of French respondents. By comparison, the introduction of a headscarf ban in the UK was supported by only 29% of respondents [PEW 2005: 5].

The French authorities did not stop at this tightening of the law and in June 2008, at the request of André Gerin of the French Communist Party and with the support of President Nicolas Sarkozy, a special parliamentary committee was set up. It was to deal with the issue of the ban on wearing Islamic headscarves [Olech, Różańska 2021: 6]. As a result, on the initiative of the President in April 2011[5] a law came into force banning the wearing of Islamic headwear, such as the *burqa* or *niqab*, which covers a woman's face [*Loi n° 2010–1192*]. Under its provisions, those who do not comply with the law face a fine of €150 and an order to attend a 'citizenship course'. At the same time, those who force others to cover their faces (in practice, usually Muslim parents) face imprisonment of up to one year and a fine of up to €30,000. In a situation where the person forced to cover the face was a minor, the maximum penalty increased to two years in prison and a sum of €60,000 [*Circulaire* 2011]. In practice, in France, only around 2,000 Muslim women wore the *burqa* or *niqab*. Although the law was supported by up to 82per cent of French people surveyed [PEW 2010], it was met with numerous protests from Muslims (more than

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[5] Earlier, in 2008, the Council of State ruling upheld the administrative decision of refusal to grant French citizenship to Moroccan immigrant Faiza Silmi because she wore a *burqa* (face veil). The Council ruled that her "radical practice of Islam" was incompatible with French values such as gender equality [Bennhold 2008].

60 demonstrators were arrested on the first day of the protest) accusing the government of Islamophobia [*France24* 2011; IJRC 2013]. Already in 2011, the law was challenged at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The plaintiff, a Muslim woman born in 1990, argued that the law violated her freedom of religion and that no one forced her to wear the *niqab* – she simply chose to do so for religious reasons during the celebration of Ramadan. However, the Court rejected the case and upheld the French government's position. In the judgment, it was stated that "[t]he voluntary and systematic concealment of the face is (…) incompatible with the fundamental requirements of 'living together' in French society" and that "[t]he systematic concealment of the face in public places, contrary to the ideal of fraternity, … falls short of the minimum requirement of civility that is necessary for social interaction" [ECtHR 2014: par.141]. The ruling stressed that the French law banning the veiling of the face does not violate human rights.

Muslim accusations against France for its allegedly Islamophobic political culture intensified further in 2016, after some French Riviera resorts (including Cannes) decided to make mandatory the beach attire, "which respects good customs and secularism" [*The Guardian* 2016]. In practice, these rules involved banning the *burkini*, an Islamic swimsuit that covers a woman's entire body except for the face, palms, and feet. Although these regulations were suspended in one French municipality by the Council of State – France's highest administrative court – many municipalities still enforce such bans [*BBC* 2019], and the social controversy continues to this day [*Le Monde* 2022; Bestandji 2022].

In March 2021, as part of the '*séparatisme*' project, the National Assembly adopted the bill "Law reinforcing respect for the principles of the Republic" [*Loi n° 2021–1109*], which, among other things, prohibits the wearing of the *hijab* in public places (thus not only in schools) by girls and female students. The ban also applies to mothers of children when bringing or dropping off their children at school, and to those present during school trips. The law also bans foreign funding of imams, the issuing of 'virginity certificates', and the dissemination of private information about a person with the intention of endangering his or her life. The new law also severely restricts the possibility of home education. It also institutionalized the celebration of a 'day of *laïcité*' on 9 December each year (the anniversary of the 1905 law). The law entered into force with the overwhelming support of the deputies.[6]

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[6] 347 deputies voted 'for', 151 'against', and 65 abstained.

In September 2023, the wearing of the *abai* – a loose garment characteristic of the Middle East – was banned in schools. Gabriel Attal, the then Minister of Education, went against the position of the Muslim Worship Council – stating that the garment was religious dress. In the European Parliament, the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) (linked to the Muslim Brotherhood) criticized the French government for introducing a ban on the wearing of the *abai* [Pidgeon 2023].

Political Islam and *laïcité*

Tensions between the *laïcité* world-view and Islam have been growing steadily. The trend towards radicalization is particularly evident among young Muslims. In 2020, as many as 57% of Muslims aged 15–24 stated that Sharia is more important than state law. This is an increase of up to 10 percentage points compared to 2016 [IFOP 2020b: 25].

These tensions escalated after the murder of the teacher Samuel Paty in October 2020. In a Paris suburb, 200 metres from the school building, an 18–year-old Chechen man beheaded a history teacher for showing students caricatures of Mohammed published in the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* during a lesson on freedom of expression [*The Guardian* 2020b]. Although this is an isolated incident, it is a good illustration of the wide divergence between Muslims and the rest of the French population in their understanding of freedom of speech (and the limits of freedom of expression). Only 36% of Muslims – compared to 80% of Catholics and 80% of the non-religious – agree with the statement that teachers should be given the right to show caricatures of religious figures to pupils to illustrate forms of freedom of expression [IFOP 2020b: 22]. Showing caricatures of Muhammad is considered blasphemy by followers of Islam.

At the same time, however, there has been an increase in attacks on followers of Islam. In 2020, the number of attacks on Muslims rose by 52% compared to the previous year (from 154 to 234). The climate of social tension led as many as 96% of respondents in November 2020 to express their belief that France was threatened by terrorist attacks [IFOP 2022: 5–6]. At the same time, however, 79% of respondents believe that the vast majority of Muslims practise their religion peacefully and that only a radical minority undermines republican values [ibid.: 48]. Part of the blame for this situation was placed on the government, with as many as two-thirds of respondents saying that the government was not doing enough to support Muslim leaders in the fight against radicalism [ibid.: 51].

The Islamic factor in the political process in France

Although the political process in France is largely dominated by republican and *laïcité* ideas, Islam and Muslims will undoubtedly play an increasingly important role in its course. This is mainly due to the growing proportion of Muslims in French society and the strong Islamic identity.

Regarding the demographic evolution of the Muslim population, it is worth referring to a study by the PEW research centre, which estimates the number of Muslim believers in France in 2050. The analysis makes the level of Muslim population growth dependent on three migration scenarios: a zero–migration scenario, a medium migration scenario and a high migration scenario [PEW 2017].

In the zero–migration scenario, the number of followers of Islam in 2050 will represent 12.7% of the French population, or around 8.6 million people. In the medium migration scenario, this figure rises to 17.4%, or 12.6 million people. The high migration scenario brings the figures, respectively, to 18% or 13.2 million followers of Islam [PEW 2017: 10]. Given the political situation to date and the growing political role of Muslims, the zero–migration scenario is hardly realistic: despite numerous declarations and attempts to reduce migration since the 1970s, the migration process of Muslims to France continues uninterrupted with a relatively constant dynamic. This is due to the fact that the majority of Muslims enter France legally through family reunification procedures or as migrants searching for work.

Therefore, regardless of whether one of the other two scenarios – medium or high migration – materializes, the number of Muslims in France is expected to double over the next 25 years to around 12–13 million people, which means that almost one in five French citizens will be Muslim. Considering the demographic factor alone, there is no doubt that the role of Islam, including political Islam, in the French public sphere will increase steadily. An inappropriate policy towards Muslims will have far-reaching consequences, including the risk of undermining the foundations of the unity of the political community and the emergence of two hostile communities based on opposing axiological systems.

It is not only the growing number of Muslims that challenges republican ideas, but above all the strengthening of Islamic identity. Contrary to the thesis of the inevitable secularization of successive generations of immigrants, the research presented by IFOP, covering the period from 1989 to 2019, shows exactly the

opposite trend. Attendance at Friday prayers in the mosque has been increasing for decades in every age cohort surveyed. The strongest increase is seen in the youngest cohort analysed, 18–24-year-olds. In 1989, only 7% of these respondents attended a mosque, whereas by 2019 this had increased almost sixfold to 40%. In the 25–34 age cohort, the percentage has risen from 14% to 31%, and in the 35–49 age group from 23% to 36% [IFOP 2019: 6].

Figure 1. Attendance at mosque prayer by age.
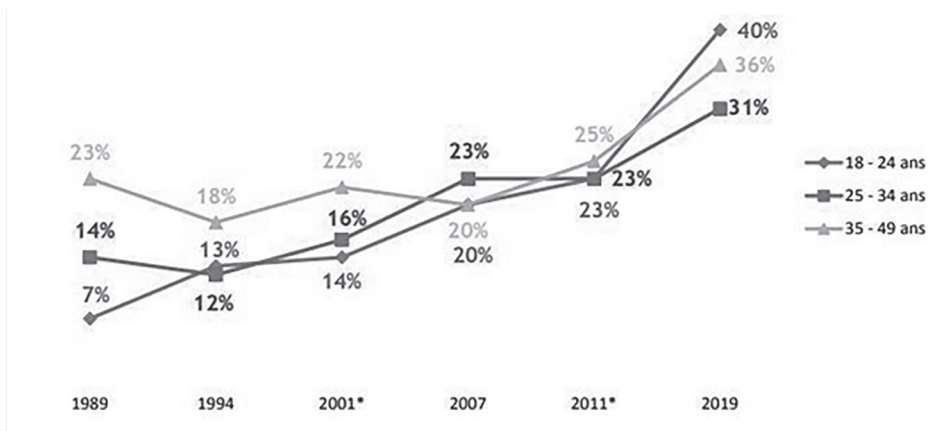
Source: [IFOP 2019: 6].

Nor is the thesis of growing secularization supported by data on the percentage of Muslims who fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and an obligation for every adult believer. In 1989, 60% of respondents reported fasting during the whole of Ramadan, compared to 66% thirty years later. At the same time, the percentage of Muslims who do not fast at all during the period fell from 32% to 22% [IFOP 2019: 9]. Similar trends apply to the consumption of alcohol, which is forbidden by Islam. In 1989, 35% of Muslims surveyed admitted to consuming alcohol, while only 21% did so in 2019. Consumption of *halal* meat, or meat prepared in accordance with Sharia law, remains high. In 2019, 58% of respondents systematically bought *halal* meat, a slight decrease (1 percentage point) from 2010, although at the same time the percentage of Muslims who systematically analyse the composition of the products they buy, to ensure they do not contain substances prohibited by Islam has increased (from 45% to 48%). Only 8% of Muslims surveyed never buy *halal* meat [IFOP 2019: 16].

An analysis of the relationship between secularism and Islam is also interesting. While still more Muslim respondents (41%) say that Muslim practices should be adapted so that they do not conflict with the principle of *laïcité*, the percentage of respondents who say that it is the principles of *laïcité* that should be adapted to the practices of Islam increased from 29% to 37% between 2011 and 2019 [ibid: 33]. At the same time, in 2024, as many as 2/3 of Muslims believe that there is currently a policy of systematic discrimination against Muslims in France [IFOP 2024: 39].

The 2024 research also shows a high percentage of Muslims supporting Hamas – i.e. 19% (among the French it is only 3%), while in the 18-24 age group, support for this organization increases to 27% [IFOP 2024: 10]. As many as 45% of respondents believe that the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023 was only an "action of resistance". The Muslim Brotherhood enjoys an even higher support, with 37% of respondents sympathizing with it, and in the 18-24 age group this indicator increases to 57% (in the 50+ age cohort it is "only" 22%). Importantly, the level of sympathy for this organization is correlated with religiosity (people participating in religious practices several times a week – 54% compared to 26% of non-practising Muslims). These results indicate quite a broad support for radical organizations, especially among young Muslims. This is important because the French Directorate General of Internal Security recognizes the Muslim Brotherhood as an Islamist organization whose activities pose a threat of an emergence of a counter-society in the national territory [DGSI 2018: 3].

Conclusion

The political situation in France regarding the relationship between the state and Islam is extremely tense. The French model of republicanism, based on *laïcité,* seeks to completely eradicate the role of religion in the public sphere. Such tendencies are perceived by a significant proportion of Muslims as an attack on the fundamental principles of Islam and a manifestation of Islamophobia. In this context, the French paradigm of *laïcité* is one of the major factors catalysing the conflict along the line of relations between the state and political Islam. The prospects for untangling this Gordian knot are not promising. On the one hand, successive French governments have tended to tighten the rules of *laïcité,* and on the other, the role of Islam as a political factor is growing dynamically. There is a systematic increase in the number of Muslims in France, which will double to around 12–13 million in the next 25 years, and at the same time, a growing tendency to claim an Islamic identity. As a result of this polarization, there is an

increased risk of attempts to cut the knot by force – on both sides – and the hope of creating a "French Islam" is in danger of being buried.

The process of secularization was, in the words of Clermont–Tonnerre, a process of neutralizing communities. According to this assumption, which is still valid today, Muslims should not be recognizable as Muslims in the public sphere, but only as individuals entitled to human rights. Consequently, by ignoring the communal dimension, the state creates space for contesting communities – from separatism to fundamentalism. In the trap of the 'perpetual motion machine', the temptation to use revolutionary means to 'neutralize' the Islamist threat dangerously increases.

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