To cite text:

Kostić, Ivan Ejub. 2024. "A Political Empowerment: The Role of Party Politics in the Future of European Muslim." *Philosophy and Society* 35 (3): 607–624.

Ivan Ejub Kostić

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: THE ROLE OF PARTY POLITICS IN THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN MUSLIMS

ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the socio-political dynamics affecting Muslims in Europe, focusing on the significant barriers that hinder their active participation in party politics. A central argument is that the internalized secular worldview has led to widespread political disengagement. This issue is further compounded by the first generation of Muslims in Europe, who developed and entrenched a minority mindset, along with certain ulema who promote socio-political passivity and quietism, severely limiting more complex and effective political engagement. To counter this situation, the paper emphasizes the urgent need for Muslims to move beyond status quo or reactionary approaches, such as supporting mainstream parties or resorting to political abstention, both of which only superficially address their concerns. Instead, it advocates establishing independent political entities rooted in Islamic principles that strive for more profound systemic change. Such an approach would empower Muslims to form strategic alliances, challenge the status quo, and tackle broader societal issues, ultimately advancing the interests of both their communities and European society as a whole.

Introduction

On July 24th, 2023, Shabir Akhtar, one of the most significant contemporary Islamic thinkers, passed away. In 1991, Akhtar published *The Final Imperative: An Islamic Theology of Liberation.* In this work, Akhtar endeavored to defend and affirm the belief that Islam is a "political religion," positing it as an alternative to the defeatism, quietism, tyranny, authoritarianism, corruption, and radical opportunism that characterize much of the contemporary Muslim world. Moreover, Akhtar sought to challenge the widely held notion that "violence" is inherently unacceptable, emphasizing that in certain circumstances, it is necessary to achieve peace, justice, and freedom. In this regard, Akhtar

Ivan Ejub Kostić: Research Fellow, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade: ivan.kostic@ifdt.bg.ac.rs.

argues that Islamic teachings take political obligations very seriously, making it incumbent upon every Muslim believer to identify injustice and actively combat it. Akhtar supported all forms of political engagement for Muslims, from participation in party politics to involvement in liberation movements. In the introduction to the book, Akhtar notably approved of establishing the Islamic Party in the United Kingdom, which held substantial symbolic significance as it marked the first time such a party had been formed. He viewed the creation of this party as a step through which British Muslims offered an alternative to mainstream political parties (Akhtar 1991: 3).

Following Akhtar's line of thought, this paper aims to demonstrate that creating alternatives to mainstream political parties to disrupt the status quo in the political sphere and to secure more substantial agency for Muslims in Europe is crucial for their future. The analysis will first offer a critical review of the lack of European Muslim participation in party politics, followed by a discussion of the potential reconfiguration of their political strategies. These strategies would mean systematic efforts towards establishing political parties rooted in Islamic worldviews and, subsequently, active collaboration with political organizations that do not include the long-dominant political parties. However, before delving into these questions, we will provide a brief historical overview of the most significant debates regarding Muslim presence in the West and then examine the current state of Muslim communities in Western European countries.

Historical Debates on Muslim Presence in Europe: Reconsidering the West as Dar al-Islam

> *"To God's is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God's countenance. Behold, God is infinite, all-knowing" (Al-Baqara: 115).*

In classical Islamic theory, cartography often appears dominated by the concepts of *dar al-harb* (the abode of war) and *dar al-Islam* (the abode of peace), positioned in antagonistic opposition. The term *dar al-harb* refers to territories governed by non-Muslim rulers and laws. In contrast, *dar al-Islam* denotes territories predominantly inhabited by Muslims where Islamic law, *Shariah*, is in effect. This dichotomous, polarizing worldview was not reflective of the complex realities, prompting Islamic jurists throughout history to continually adjust their views towards a more nuanced understanding of Muslim existence in regions governed by different legal frameworks. Khaled Abou el Fadl notes that early Islamic legal discussions regarding the legality of residing in non-Muslim territories were cryptic and evolved in response to emerging historical challenges. Initially, the discourse was strongly influenced by the traditional dichotomy between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, which primarily focused on whether Muslims could ethically live under non-Islamic rule.

Nevertheless, despite the dominance of this traditional dichotomy, early Islamic jurisprudence did not uniformly prohibit Muslims from living under non-Islamic rule, with opinions varying across different legal schools (Fadl 1994a). For instance, the Hanafi school demonstrated a tendency toward a more open approach, emphasizing the ability to freely practice one's faith as a key criterion in deciding whether Muslims should remain in non-Islamic environments. Al-Shaybani, one of the prominent Hanafi jurists, argued against the obligation to migrate if Muslims could live their faith authentically, thus opening the possibility of coexistence in diverse cultural contexts (ibid). On the other hand, the Maliki school adopted a more restrictive stance, emphasizing the need to avoid residing in non-Islamic territories to protect Muslims from the legal and ethical complications that may arise from exposure to non-Islamic laws. Malik ibn Anas, the school's founder, particularly stressed the risks associated with traveling to non-Islamic countries for trade, warning against the moral and legal dangers such endeavors may entail (ibid). The Shafi'i school, through the works of the well-known Islamic thinker al-Mawardi, presented a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that territories where Muslims could publicly manifest their religion could be considered part of *dar al-Islam*. Lastly, while closely aligned with the restrictive Maliki approach, the Hanbali school permitted exceptions based on the security of religious practice and personal safety. Ibn Qudama, a renowned Hanbali jurist, advocated migration as a necessity except when conditions for practicing Islam were guaranteed (ibid).

The shift towards more permissive perspectives intensified, particularly from the tenth century onward, when many Muslims came under Christian rule due to conquests and border changes. These historical circumstances led to a fundamental questioning of the binary worldview, resulting in even more nuanced positions among Islamic jurists, who increasingly began to legitimize Muslims living in non-Muslim territories.

This historical process culminated in the modern era when many Islamic thinkers started using terms like *dar al-ahd* (the abode of treaty), *dar al-aman* (the abode of peace), *dar al-sulh* (the abode of conciliation), and *dar al-shahada* (the abode of testimony) to describe non-Muslim territories.[1] The reason for this shift is that, from the mid-20th century, many Muslims began settling in Western Europe and North America, regions where their human rights were better respected than in the predominantly Muslim countries of their birth. With the increasing presence of Muslims in European and North American states, some Islamic scholars felt the need to provide legitimacy through jurisprudential approaches for their residence and the potential permanence of

---

1   Other terms are also in use. For example, Taha Jabir al-Alwani argues that it is more precise to use the terms *dar al-ijabah* (the abode of acceptance) and *dar al-dawah* (the abode of invitation) (Kamali 2011: 126). All of these terms are synonymous and refer to those states that are predominantly non-Muslim and do not have Islamic governance but still respect international law, which guarantees freedom of religious practice and freedom of thought.

their descendants. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, *fiqh al-aqalliyyat* (the fiqh of Muslim minorities) emerged, primarily developed by Sunni activists and jurists of Arab origin in response to the Muslim immigration to the West during that period (Hassan 2013: 8). The most prominent figures of this school were Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who, in their works, emphasized the issue of Muslim integration into non-Muslim societies. They advocated for a careful understanding of Islamic sources, aiming to support active civic participation by Muslims and to recognize the existence of multiple identities and the possibility of diverse forms of loyalty that Muslims could develop in non-Muslim societies.[2] Additionally, these scholars insisted that the context, i.e., the reality of living (*waqi'*), significantly influences the interpretation of the original text.[3]

Despite these ideas, the outcomes of *fiqh al-aqalliyyat* remained limited. These scholars continued to view social issues primarily through the lens of necessity (*darura*) or need (*haja*), revealing that they had not fully reconciled with the idea that Muslims in the West today consider it home. In other words, this approach provided Muslims with "tools to survive in Western non-Muslim societies but not answers on how to genuinely be active citizens and agents of change and reform within them" (Ramadan 2005: 159). Therefore, it can be concluded that, at its core, this approach was still dominated by a communitarian perspective that did not provide European Muslims with sufficient breadth to develop thinking that transcends notions of "minority status," often resulting in self-ghettoization and, in some cases, self-victimization.

As a response to this situation, critical works emerged towards the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, primarily those of Tariq Ramadan, as well as significant reflections by Khaled Abou Fadl, Jasser Auda, and other Muslim thinkers, who, from various perspectives, sought to provide a different worldview for Muslims in predominantly non-Muslim societies. In his writings, Ramadan moved towards rejecting the traditional cartography, i.e., the geo-religious boundaries defined through the territorial applicability of Islamic law.[4] His goal was not only to redraw more inclusive boundaries but to fundamentally dissolve them, proposing a unified global space where

---

2   The most significant works by Al-Alwani and Qaradawi on *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*: Al-Alwani, Taha Jabir. 2003. *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections.* Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, and Al-Qaradawi, Y. 2003. *Fiqh of Muslim Minorities: Contentious Issues & Recommended Solutions.* Cairo: Al-Falah Foundation.

3   Contextualists assign crucial hermeneutical value to the historical context in which the Qur'an was revealed. In other words, they argue that when interpreting the Qur'an, scholars should consider the social, political, economic, intellectual, and cultural circumstances of the revelation, as well as the environment in which the interpretation took place in the past and takes place today. Contextualists thus tend to view the Qur'an as a source of practical guidance (Saeed 2014: 4). For more on the contextual approach to the text, see Abdullah Saeed's work: *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach.*

4   In addition to Ramadan's views, Sarah Albrecht's book *Dār al-Islām Revisited: Territoriality in Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse on Muslims in the West* offers more

Muslims transcend physical and political borders through the practice and expression of their faith (Taha 2013: 23). Drawing on these premises, Ramadan developed a critical stance towards *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*, emphasizing that Muslims must actively engage in the various societal contexts in which they live, while particularly warning against the dangers of all forms of isolationism and communitarianism.[5] In Ramadan's view, by failing to account for the circumstances and realities in which Muslims live, they place themselves in a position of political and social disconnection, which is fundamentally at odds with the original Islamic message. As an alternative, Ramadan argues that Muslims must be aware of Islam's universal message and ethical obligations, which mandate that they work within their societies to promote justice and do good to ensure social progress. He also urges Muslims to reject narrow political strategies that neglect the Qur'anic universal principles in favor of merely ensuring the community's survival or pursuing utilitarian political interests and societal advancement exclusive to their group rather than the broader society (Ramadan 2005: 159–165).

Similarly to Ramadan, Jasser Auda points out that the ideal of achieving justice is so central in the Islamic worldview that the term *dar al-adl* (land of justice) is synonymous with dar al-Islam and is used in numerous traditional sources.[6] According to Auda, this premise implies that "Islamic leadership" that is not guided by justice but rather by a predominantly "ethnic principle" (*asabiyya*) does not constitute a valid condition for any territory to be recognized as *dar al-Islam*. In other words, Auda argues that the traditional cartography, which divides the world into *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb* without considering the level of justice exercised by the rulers and the freedom within society, represents a false dichotomy. Consequently, Auda contends that certain states with a predominantly non-Muslim population could be more accurately characterized as following Islamic principles of justice than many predominantly Muslim states. This stance led Auda to conclude that this reality undermines one of the fundamental postulates of *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*, namely that Muslims in Western states should not be regarded as a "minority" since these states are "lands of justice" and, as such, acceptable from an Islamic perspective (Auda 2018: 46).

However, viewing Western states solely through the lens of embodiments of justice overlooks significant challenges posed by contemporary circumstances, particularly those that emerged after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the commencement of the War on Terror in 2003. This strategy led to the rise of radical right-wing and populist parties with pronounced Islamophobic stances

---

on different contemporary critical perspectives on traditional cartography. The reflections of the French-Moroccan theologian Tareq Oubrou are particularly interesting.

5   In his works, Ramadan consistently warned about the dangers of religious communitarianism and the risks of ethnic communitarianism.

6   It is worth noting that Auda, to support his views on the centrality of justice in the Islamic worldview, cites Ibn Taymiyyah and Rashid Rida, figures often associated with the Salafi school of thought.

and has become increasingly prevalent across Western countries. Therefore, although Western states certainly provide a degree of flexibility in religious expression, the widespread media stigmatization of Muslims, the securitization and surveillance of Muslim communities, xenophobic immigration policies, and political rhetoric that portrays them as archetypal enemies all affect their daily lives and sense of security, ultimately making their existence and livelihood more difficult.

To combat this situation more effectively, the question arises as to what extent Muslim European citizens must take significantly more active roles in social and political arenas, specifically in party politics and electoral processes. And, by actively engaging in party politics, do they compromise Islamic ethics? (El-Fadl 1994b: 186).

Before addressing these questions, it is essential to briefly examine the unfavorable socio-political context, namely the discriminatory conditions in which Muslims currently live in Europe.

Securitization, Discrimination, and Normative Engineering

Anti-Muslim hatred and the perception of Muslims as a security threat to Western civilization significantly intensified following the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York. From that moment, the "clash of civilizations" discourse became the dominant narrative guiding state policies in Western plutocracies. Shortly after the attacks, in 2003, George W. Bush declared the Global War on Terror (GWOT), which has, for over two decades, been primarily directed at Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, as well as Muslims in the West who are unwilling to conform to the Western-centric worldview unconditionally. As a result, the GWOT in Europe unleashed deeply entrenched Islamophobic societal prejudices. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in countries with colonial histories, such as the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Italy, as well as in states that, despite their declared commitment to the rule of law, pluralism, and human rights, have for decades treated Muslim minorities as inferior and uncivilized through Orientalist stereotypes and the racist ideologies of white supremacy (Aziz and Esposito 2024: 2). Within the GWOT context, Western governments have, over the past two decades, implemented numerous security programs aimed at monitoring, disciplining, and, if necessary, detaining or even physically eliminating defiant Muslims who manifest their Islamic identity and piety in the public sphere. Mainly, draconian measures have been reserved for Muslims eager to engage in overt political activism grounded in their Islamic values.

The first program launched following the declaration of the GWOT was the Prevent program in the United Kingdom, which assigned various segments of British society roles that should have been exclusively reserved for the police and secret services. Initially created in 2003 by the Labour government, it was expanded following the London bombings in 2005. The program's core tenet is that any opposition to British values constitutes a form of extremism.

Numerous reports have revealed that this program disproportionately targets Muslims, including investigations into children as young as three years old for "extremist" behavior (Bridge Initiative).[7] Despite criticism from human rights organizations against the Prevent program, the British government continued its implementation, further institutionalizing it in 2015 by making it a statutory duty for public institutions (Tazamal 2024: 96).

Under the influence of this discriminatory program, the Barack Obama administration in 2011 launched the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program in the United States. Like Prevent, this program has been sharply criticized for primarily targeting and stigmatizing American Muslims based on unfounded accusations, leading in many cases to severe violations of civil liberties. Particularly problematic was the expansion of the term «violent extremism» to include «non-violent extremism,» resulting in many projects under this program focusing not on (physical) violence and militancy but on ideas. In other words, the goal was not to prevent or eliminate specific (violent) acts, but to punish individuals for their beliefs (Hafez 2021: 12).

Outside the Anglophone sphere, one of the most recent and radical examples of the securitization of Muslims and their organizations is the establishment of the Documentation Center for Political Islam in July 2020 by the Austrian government, led by Sebastian Kurz and his right-wing populist Austrian People's Party (ÖVP).[8] This center, staffed by individuals with documented histories of anti-Muslim sentiments, continually promotes the surveillance of vital Muslim organizations as well as prominent Muslim intellectuals in Austria.[9] The culmination of this repressive policy by the Austrian government occurred during "Operation Luxor," the most extensive police action in Austrian history, exclusively targeting the Muslim community. During the operation, raids were conducted at 60 locations, and 70 individuals were detained without any grounds linking them to alleged terrorism (Hafez 2023). The state used the November 2, 2020, terrorist attack in Vienna as a pretext for the crackdown, which was immediately followed by the deeply controversial "Law on Political Islam." The vast majority of the Muslims detained were targeted solely because of their religious and humanitarian activism, highlighting the extent of the criminalization of Muslim civil society in Austria (ibid.).

---

7   In 2019, the UK Home Office announced an independent review of the Prevent program, finally taking into account widespread criticism and concerns from numerous social actors regarding human rights violations. For more Bridge Initiative Factsheets see: https://bridge.georgetown.edu/
8   The ÖVP also used various institutions, such as the Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), to spread narratives about Islam that fuel anti-Muslim hatred. Additionally, the ÖVP advocated for banning foreign funding of Islamic organizations, closing mosques, and attempting to secure authorized translations of Islamic texts.
9   The Kurz government's introduction of the concept of "political Islam" into the public sphere aimed to establish a distinction between Islam as a religion and «political Islam" as an alleged ideological and violent threat. However, in practice, this effort sought to avoid accusations of implementing repressive policies based on anti-Muslim hatred.

In addition to security projects primarily focused on the surveillance and monitoring of Muslims, it is crucial to highlight the programs implemented by Western states aimed at normative engineering—that is, the epistemological and value-based reconfiguration of Muslim minds. From a long-term perspective, these programs are significantly more malignant and detrimental to Muslims and Islamic values than security programs. The American state-affiliated organization RAND provided the platform for the ideological battle against Islamic values and their reconfiguration in 2003 with the publication of the report *Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies* by Cheryl Bernard. This report offers detailed guidelines to the United States government and Western European states on how to undermine Islamic values by "domesticating Islam" and establishing ties with liberal Muslim organizations and intellectuals to fund their promotion of (post)modernist and relativist interpretations of Islamic sources to advance "liberal values," "secularism," "gender equality," and "sexual freedoms and LGBTQ rights" (Kostić 2021 and Massad 2024).

The project of "Islamic reform," which French President Emmanuel Macron has been attempting to implement for years under the label of creating a national "French Islam," certainly falls within the category of normative engineering. This initiative aims to Westernize the doctrinal content of Islam in theological terms (Roy 2004). Hakim El-Karoui, widely regarded as an unofficial advisor on "Muslim affairs" to President Macron, authored a report in 2016 titled *French Islam is Possible*, which outlines his vision for reorganizing the relationship between the French state and Muslim communities to promote "harmonious" coexistence (El Karoui 2016). The report suggests the establishment of various institutions, legal alignments, and doctrinal interventions to align Islamic teachings with French societal norms and values. It proposes creating two bodies—the Foundation for Islam in France and the Muslim Association for French Islam. These institutions are envisioned as bridges between the French state, Muslim communities, and the broader public. Practically, they would aim to fund religious and cultural projects to support the development of a "French Islamic theology." Additionally, the report envisions establishing the institution of the "Grand Imam of France," who would be responsible for promoting doctrinal sources reinterpreted in line with French republican principles.

The tactic of creating paternalistic and security-centric "nationalized Islams," whose primary goal is to reflect the secular values of nation-states, is not unique to France but has also emerged in other European countries. In Germany, the German Islam Conference (Deutsche Islamkonferenz) was established in 2006 by the Ministry of the Interior. Like France, the DIK encouraged "dialogue" between the state and Muslim communities. However, in practice, rather than establishing genuine dialogue, this institution serves as a platform that imposes conditions on Muslim organizations in Germany, particularly regarding "national" "German" values, all to produce a 'German Islam eventually' (Hernandez Aguilar 2017: 5). One of the most illustrative examples in Germany is citizenship tests. In 2006, the state of Baden-Württemberg introduced a discriminatory citizenship test. Dubbed the "Muslim test,"

it specifically targeted Muslims, who were required to prove their adherence to "German values" through the test. The questions addressed attitudes toward gender equality and Jews. Although this specific test was eventually abolished, it was replaced by a mandatory nationwide test for all citizenship applicants (Hernandez Aguilar 2017: 25; Islamic Human Rights Commission 2006). The latest instance of discrimination against Muslims seeking German citizenship occurred in June 2024, when the government decided to include questions about antisemitism in the test, along with a declaration explicitly affirming the right of the apartheid state of Israel to exist.[10]

These examples of normative engineering, which at times transitioned into overtly repressive policies, represent more subtle and sophisticated forms of epistemological racism that dominated European states during the colonial period. In other words, the critical characteristics of epistemological racism remain alive and well. European states continue to privilege an essentialist worldview rooted in the dominant tradition of Western philosophy, where only the "West" is considered legitimate and capable of producing knowledge, granting it exclusive access to "universality," "rationality," and "truth" (Grosfoguel 2010). On these foundations, Muslims in Western societies can only participate in socio-political processes if they unequivocally reject their Islamic worldview and embrace the dominant Eurocentric perspective. Otherwise, any Muslim who attempts to engage socially and politically guided by an Islamic reference framework is labeled a fundamentalist and subsequently ostracized and excluded from the public sphere. Consequently, today in the West, every practicing and politically active Muslim is deemed "bad" (Mamdani 2005). In contrast to the "bad Muslim" stands the category of the "good, moderate Muslim," which corresponds to a Muslim identity disinterested in political activity and unwilling to challenge or potentially dispute the alleged virtues of secular politics.

Under the pressures of normative engineering, many Muslims have unfortunately become complicit in undermining their traditions. Those seeking incorporation into society are often compelled to conform to a system that upholds the absolute epistemological dominance of the secular Western European paradigm (Lumbard 2024). As a result, these Muslim activists, driven by personal gain, have consciously accepted the role of "compradors." Hamid Dabashi uses this term to describe individuals who tell their masters what they want to hear, earning them promotion as exemplars and recognition as "voices of progress, rationality, and moderation," even though they do not genuinely represent Muslims in Europe (Dabashi 2011).

---

10   In addition to the new conditions for obtaining citizenship, after the start of the war against Gaza, Germany introduced strict repressive measures banning protests against crimes against humanity in Gaza. At the same time, the suspension of freedom of expression and speech permeates all segments of society, from the media to civic associations and even the academic sphere. In this context, the German government labeled the non-violent Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement as a potentially extremist group in June.

Achieving Political Agency through Party Politics

In light of the considerations above, Muslims in Europe must reevaluate their socio-political engagement. This is particularly pertinent after October 7th and the onset of the war against Gaza, which once more made it evident that mainstream political parties in Western European plutocracies do not genuinely care about the opinions and perspectives of their Muslim citizens but instead follow a pragmatic, opportunistic agenda driven by powerful lobby groups and corporate capital.

Since the 1960s, Muslims have predominantly supported political parties that take more open stances on immigration issues and workers' rights, such as the Labour Party in the United Kingdom (Hussain 2004, Peace 2013), the Socialist Party in France (Chelini-Pont 2023, Serisier 2016), the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party in Germany (SVR Integration Barometer 2016), and other ideologically similar political organizations across various European states.[11] Initial connections with these political parties were primarily established through labor unions, with which first-generation Muslims had substantial ties. However, over time, these parties have consistently shown that their willingness to accommodate the needs and aspirations of Muslim voters is limited. Integrating Muslim concerns into mainstream party agendas is driven purely by electoral calculations. Only when these parties—despite their rhetoric on equality and anti-discrimination—determine that the net gain from engaging Muslim voters outweighs potential losses will they make any genuine effort to address their needs (Dancygier 2017: 7). Consequently, the current support for these parties and existing forms of socio-political engagement must be fundamentally re-evaluated.

Thus far, Muslim socio-political activity has primarily focused on work within the civil sector, namely non-governmental organizations, and to some extent through initiatives and advocacy groups exerting pressure on state institutions regarding specific, isolated issues.[12] For example, in the Netherlands, a study published in 2016 showed that those who frequently attend mosques are more engaged in civic organizations, both within their ethnic communities and in the broader society (Fleischmann, Martinovic, and Böhm 2016).[13] However, this study also revealed, as did the most recent research published in 2023 covering 17 European countries, that mosque attendance and regular religious practice do not contribute to party political participation and

---

11   Over time, there has been limited support from Muslims for other political options on the right side of the political spectrum. However, this remains a minority compared to the aforementioned support for liberal, social-democratic options.

12   Tariq Ramadan strongly criticized politics based on advocacy groups and lobbying. In his critique, he emphasized that Israeli, Zionist politics should not be the standard for Muslims; in other words, Muslims should not aspire to politics driven solely by "interests" but by "principles" (Ramadan 2005: 169).

13   This study specifically focused on members of the Turkish and Moroccan ethnic communities in the Netherlands.

increased voter turnout among Muslims (Kollar, Geurts, and Spierings 2023).[14] Simultaneously, research conducted in the United Kingdom and published in 2017 highlighted another crucial factor: Muslims tend to abstain from voting when they are dissatisfied.[15] This pattern was evident in the most recent general elections in the UK, where voter turnout was 10 percent lower in areas with high Muslim concentrations. A similar trend was observed in the European Parliament elections in France, where Muslims, frustrated with policies regarding the genocide in Gaza, chose to «punish» mainstream political parties by withholding their votes.[16]

These data suggest that despite decades of Muslim presence in Europe, there remains a need to cultivate further awareness and understanding regarding the role of party politics and electoral participation. The role of political parties in the political systems of Western countries is to select, aggregate, and ultimately articulate interests and grievances at normative, institutional, and practical levels. In other words, political parties represent the most significant form of organization in contemporary politics and, as such, serve as the critical link between the civil sector and the state, between the interests present in society and the institutions of power. Similarly, participation in elections in Western democratic societies is the only way to ensure legitimate and adequate representation and influence the formation of a government and its policies (Heywood 2019). Therefore, it is exceedingly difficult to address grievances and achieve common goals without engaging in party politics and the electoral process, which are the cornerstones of the political system.

In this regard, the experience of Christian democratic parties in the twentieth century can inspire Muslims in Europe. Christian democratic parties demonstrated that repressive state actions can be capitalized upon and used as a rallying point for mobilizing potential voters around a specific issue and channeling their political resistance. These parties emerged out of the dissatisfaction of devout Christians with the overly strict separation between state and religion, leading them to become agents rather than objects of politics and to work towards establishing and affirming political Catholicism as a response

---

14   Some studies present a different perspective, such as the one by McAndrew and Sobolewska, which showed that in the UK, regular mosque attendance is positively correlated with all forms of social engagement by Muslims, such as voting, protests, petitions, and boycotts (McAndrew and Sobolewska 2015). A similar study in the USA from 2005 also showed a high correlation between regular mosque attendance and political engagement (Jamal 2005).

15   Martin's research revealed that the increase in Islamophobia and dissatisfaction with foreign policy in the case of the Iraq intervention and participation in the war in Afghanistan resulted in greater political alienation, i.e., lower voter turnout and a decreased likelihood of voting among Muslims (Martin 2017).

16   Voter turnout among Muslims was higher in French national elections. A broadly based coalition and an almost referendum-like atmosphere succeeded in mobilizing more Muslims to vote; however, in the European Parliament elections, abstention among Muslims was 10% higher than in the rest of the population. See: https://www.lejdd.fr/politique/europeennes-2024-62-des-electeurs-musulmans-ont-vote-pour-lfi-146276.

to the unfavorable circumstances in which believing Christians found themselves (Laurence 2012). They achieved this by supporting political parties that advocated for their interests or by founding their political organizations to participate in elections and enter institutions where political decisions are made.

Attempts to establish Muslim political parties have been made in several Western European countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. However, unlike Christian democratic parties, these attempts were insufficiently theoretically and strategically articulated and were narrowly communitarian, reflecting the "minority mindset" promoted by the first generation of Muslims in Europe.[17] Due to this approach, their electoral success has been very modest, highlighting the need for an original political agenda that goes beyond narrow identity politics and can attract not only younger generations of Muslims who reject a communitarian mindset and rigid conservative views but also create conditions for forming alliances with non-Muslim political organizations.[18] These parties must prioritize the fight against all forms of socio-economic inequality, resist radical identity politics, and ensure robust protections for workers' rights. Additionally, they must tackle the crises in housing, healthcare, and the environment while unapologetically championing anti-war and anti-imperialist positions. Such political programs would bring them closer to genuine left-wing political parties, with which Muslim parties could form plural, multidimensional coalitions, alliances, and partnerships in the broader socio-political space and within party politics to challenge the dominance of mainstream political parties.[19] Furthermore, this

---

17   Over the years, there have been several attempts in different European countries to establish parties inspired by Islamic teachings or parties aimed at representing a specific ethnic Muslim group. None of these parties achieved significant success, and all are highly conservative and focused exclusively on minority issues. Some of them include the Islamic Party of Great Britain (UK), the Union of French Muslim Democrats (France), Islam Democrats (Netherlands), Denk (Netherlands), NIDA (Netherlands), the Alliance for Innovation and Justice (Germany), DAVA (Germany), the Nuance Party (Sweden), and the Islam Party (Belgium). Some of these parties even formed a pan-European alliance in 2024 called "Free Palestine" for the European Parliament elections. None of the parties received enough votes to enter the parliament. See more at: https://hyphenonline.com/2024/01/29/a-new-muslim-political-coalition-is-running-for-power-in-europe/.

18   Previous research on the second and third generations of Muslims in Europe has shown that, unlike the first generation, they adapt Islamic values to align with their lived reality. In other words, many young Muslims, while maintaining a connection with their ancestral culture, are also influenced by the secular and liberal values of European society (Ghatas 2017). This leads to the creation of "multiple" and "hybrid identities," where Muslim and European/national identities do not exclude one another but complement each other (Torrekens, Kavadias, and Bensai 2020).

19   The best examples of attempts to destabilize mainstream political parties and disrupt the status quo are the support given by Muslims to genuinely leftist options in the UK (Respect Party and Workers Party) and in France, La France Insoumise and its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In Germany, in several instances, similar support was given by Muslims to the Die Linke party. However, unlike Galloway's Workers Party in the UK and Mélenchon in France, this party showed inconsistency regarding the genocide in Gaza, leaving

would enable Muslims to actively support and strengthen leftist parties in their ongoing struggles against right-wing and nationalist movements and parties that threaten to take over Western European societies and impose their xenophobic and racist ideologies.

One significant obstacle on this path is the puritanical and quasi-quietist ulema, who pander to systems of power. On the one hand, they serve as tools in the hands of Western governments, aiming to alleviate Muslims. On the other hand, they are financially and politically connected to states ruled by authoritarian monarchies or military juntas that have, for decades, physically persecuted and eliminated thinking Muslims and liberationist Islamic movements, perceiving party politics and free elections as existential threats to their corrupt, despotic oligarchies. As a result, members of this ulema caste use mosques and religious organizations to promote anti-intellectual narratives and reactionary ideas that define political parties and free elections as anti-Islamic, all intending to maintain socio-political stagnation, both within European Muslim communities and throughout the predominantly Muslim world. This ulema, which has largely monopolized the exclusive right to define "true" Islam, is not limited to petrodollar-funded Salafi scholars. It also includes (neo)traditionalists with a pro-Sufi orientation, who, rather than condemning Western imperialism and capitalist world order, promote the belief in a symbiosis between conservative Western values and core Islamic principles (Quisay 2023). Both groups equally ostracize Muslims who do not accept the existence of an ontological category of the "good" Muslim based on unquestioning acceptance of divine law as they interpret it. These essentialist narratives, which drive Muslims towards isolationism or quietism, align with far-right anti-Muslim rhetoric that seeks to portray Europe as threatened by Islam, promoting patriarchal worldviews and exclusive, anti-Western interpretations that insist Islam is in irreconcilable conflict with European values and lifestyles (Cesari 2014).[20]

The response to this situation within Muslim communities must be that every Muslim rediscovers the liberating message of the Qur'an and frees their faith from the clutches of those who, by denying the socio-political and socio-economic demands of *tawhid* and the importance of justice in the Qur'anic worldview, have turned Islam into a theology of the status quo (Saffari 2024: 59). Islamic teachings are fundamentally oriented towards societal and political dimensions, to the extent that it can be said there is no religious practice (from prayer to pilgrimage) that does not emphasize, and even prioritize, the collective aspect. With this in mind, it is incumbent upon Muslims, wherever they may be, to defend justice, promote the common good, and work towards improving the society in which they live (Ramadan 2005: 148).

Muslims isolated and subjected to social ostracism and repression. See more: https://www.newarab.com/opinion/eu-elections-why-everyone-germany-should-vote-mera25.
20   Khaled Abou Fadl warns that insisting on preserving the distinctiveness of Islam will ultimately negate the universality of Islamic experiences. Moreover, he points out that this approach will unconsciously transform Islam into a marginal eccentricity (Fadl 2004: 126).

Conclusion

The potential for advancing the interests and needs of Muslims in Western European societies remains largely untapped. The roots of this underutilization can be traced to the internalization of a secular worldview systematically imposed on Muslims in Europe over the past few decades through epistemological interventions, repression, and securitization tactics. This worldview has predominantly been embraced by Muslims who have forsaken the Islamic understanding of the fundamental synergy between religion and power, instead adopting Enlightenment-inspired, Eurocentric values and the notion of a strict separation between religion and politics. However, significant responsibility also lies with the first generations of Muslims in Europe, who, in reaction to the circumstances they faced, developed a closed system that resulted in a minority mindset insufficiently capable of more effective socio-political engagement. Finally, the situation is further exacerbated by the influence of certain ulema who unequivocally promote the idea that Western European societies are un-Islamic and encourage Muslims to withdraw from the socio-political sphere. Although these ideas are in direct contradiction to the proactive universalism of the Qur'anic message, they hold considerable influence over Muslims in Europe, particularly during times when they feel threatened and discriminated against.

Overcoming these barriers is essential, and one critical step forward is the active participation of Muslims in party politics. Despite an increasingly favorable demographic landscape, Muslims in Europe have yet to demonstrate a clear and unified political vision. In Britain, for instance, Muslims make up over 30% of the electorate in 20 municipalities; in Berlin, every fourth resident has a migrant background, with the largest group being of Turkish origin. Similar demographics are found in cities like Cologne, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Brussels, Vienna, Marseille, Malmö, and Stockholm (Dancygier 2017: 2). Unlike the first generations of Muslims living in Europe, today a significant number have acquired citizenship, granting them full membership in society, the right to vote, and consequently, the ability to influence political outcomes. Therefore, Muslims in Europe must reassert their agency by drawing on Islamic principles while shedding the limitations of a minority mindset and actively engaging as empowered citizens in the political sphere.

Additionally, they must develop policies that are not merely reactive responses to the circumstances they face and the actions of other actors but also call for innovative initiatives to improve the situation of Muslims and, more importantly, the betterment of society. While often focused on critique, reactive politics can devolve into defeatism and self-victimization if they do not provide concrete solutions or forward-looking visions. Muslim communities need to transcend mere criticism and articulate strategic, actionable goals that align with broader societal needs. For this reason, Muslims must not enter politics solely in the name of 'their community' but in the 'name of God,' which implies acting in the name of inalienable, unchangeable principles that

are fundamentally opposed to any form of quietism and communitarianism (Ramadan 2005: 147).

Of course, it is essential to note that Muslims in Europe do not constitute a monolithic voting bloc, and no political party can confidently rely on their votes (Dancygier 2017). However, as some studies have shown, the existence of a "Muslim vote" is indeed a reality. In other words, shared religious beliefs, identity, and concerns among Muslims in Europe often lead to preferential voting for "Muslim candidates" (Azabar, Thijssen, and van Erkel 2020).[21] Muslims should capitalize on this reality much more in the future rather than allowing their votes to be co-opted by mainstream political parties that address their issues only in a utilitarian manner while perpetuating various forms of social inequality. A crucial step forward would be for Muslims to completely abandon voting for mainstream parties. The approach of one-off 'punishment' through abstention, which some advocated during the war against Gaza and the genocide carried out by Israel, is fundamentally flawed. This 'impulsive' politics, driven by immediate frustrations, lacks the strategic, long-term planning necessary for meaningful change. Even if specific policies, like those related to foreign affairs, were to shift, the systemic inequalities perpetuated by these political structures should compel Muslims to pursue more profound, more substantial alternatives.

Promoting participation in party politics does not mean other forms of social activism are not valuable. On the contrary, these activities should be viewed as mutually complementary, meaning that political participation should be an extension of other socio-political activities. Moreover, in modern societies, financial and media power often surpasses that of politicians, while art significantly influences societal movements and values. Therefore, Muslim engagement in these spheres of life can have an equal, if not greater, role in contributing to society (Hussain 2004).

Thus, whether in party politics or other forms of social participation, Muslims in Europe must further develop their interest in issues of broader public concern and, through active engagement in society, strengthen civic awareness so that they are not merely passive critics or objects of decisions made by others. To achieve this, Muslims must thoroughly study the societies in which they live, identify the resources available to them, and recognize the actors with whom they can effectively collaborate in the radical political, economic, and value-based transformation of European societies, all while remaining faithful to their Islamic principles and ethics.

---

21   The same study showed that among Muslims, religious identity outweighs ethnic identity in influencing voting behavior and that preferential voting is significantly more common among Muslims than in the non-Muslim population.

References:

Al-Alwani, Taha Jabir. 2010. *Towards a Fiqh for Minorities: Some Basic Reflections*. Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. 2005. *On Jurisprudence of Muslim Minorities: Lives of Muslims in Non-Muslim Societies* [Fi fiqh al-aqallliyyat: Hayat el-Muslemin vasat al-mujtama'at al-ukhra]. Cairo: Dar-al-shuruq.

Albrecht, Sarah. 2018. *Dār al-Islām Revisited: Territoriality in Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse on Muslims in the West*. Leiden: Brill.

Auda, Jasser. 2018. *Rethinking Islamic Law for Europe: The Concept of the Land of Islam*. In: Mohammed Hashas, Jan Jaap de Ruiter, and Niels Valdemar, eds. *Imams in Western Europe Developments, Transformations, and Institutional Challenge*s. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp.: 39–51.

Azabar, Samira, Peter Thijssen, and Patrick van Erkel. 2020. "Is there Such a Thing as a Muslim Vote?" *Electoral Studies*: 66.

Aziz, Sahar F., and John L. Esposito, eds. 2024. *Global Islamophobia and the Rise of Populism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Cesari, Jocelyne, ed. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chelini-Pont, Blandine. 2023. "Le Vote des Musulmans en France (2002-2022): De l'électorat captif à l'électorat capté?" *Revue du Droit des Religions* 16: 83–104.

Dabashi, Hamid. 2011. *Brown Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.

Dana, Karam, Bryan Wilcox-Archuleta, and Matt Barreto. 2017. "The Political Incorporation of Muslims in the United States: The Mobilizing Role of Religiosity in Islam." *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 2 (2): 170–200.

Dancygier, Rafaela M. 2017. *Dilemmas of Inclusion: Muslims in European Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

El Karoui, Hakim. 2016. *French Islam is Possible*. Paris: Institute Montaigne.

Fadl, Khaled Abou El. 1994a. "Islamic Law and Muslim Minorities: The Juristic Discourse on Muslim Minorities from the Second/Eighth to the Eleventh/Seventeenth Centuries." *Islamic Law and Society* 1 (2): 141–187.

_____. 1994b. "Legal Debates on Muslim Minorities: Between Rejection and Accommodation." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 22 (1): 127–162.

_____. 2004. *Islam and the Challenge of Democracy: A Boston Review Book*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fleischmann, Fennela, Borja Martinovic, and Magdalena Böhm. 2015. "Mobilising Mosques? The Role of Service Attendance for Political Participation of Turkish and Moroccan Minorities in the Netherlands." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39 (5): 746–763.

Ghatas, Ishak M. 2023. "Muslim Diasporas: An Examination of the Issues of the Second and Third Generation Muslims in Europe." *Transformation* 40 (2): 156–168.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2010. "Epistemic Islamophobia and Colonial Social Sciences." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 8 (2): 29–38.

Hafez, Farid. 2021. "Surveilling and Criminalizing Austrian Muslims: The Case of 'Political Islam.'" *Insight Turkey* 23 (2): 11–21.

_____. 2024. *Operation Luxor: Eine kritische Aufarbeitung der größten rassistischen Polizeioperation Österreichs*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Hassan, Said Fares. 2013. *Fiqh Al-Aqalliyyat: History, Development, Progress*. New York, NY: Palgrave.

Hernández Aguilar, Luis Manuel. 2017. "Suffering Rights and Incorporation. The German Islam Conference and the Integration of Muslims as a Discursive Means of their Racialization." *European Societies* 19 (5): 623–644.

Heywood, Andrew. 2019. *Politics*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education/Red Globe Press.

Hussain, Dilwar. 2004. "Muslim Political Participation in Britain and the 'Europeanisation' of Fiqh." *Die Welt des Islams* 44 (3): 376–401.

Jamal, Amaney. 2005. "The Political Participation and Engagement of Muslim Americans: Mosque Involvement and Group Consciousness." *American Politics Research* 33 (4): 521–544.

Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. 2011. *Citizenship and Accountability of Government: An Islamic Perspectiv*e. Cambridge: The Islamic Text Society.

Kollar, Rachel, Nella Geurts, and Niels Spierings. 2023. "Religiosity and Electoral Turnout among Muslims in Western Europe." *European Political Science Review*: 1–20.

Kostić, Ivan Ejub. 2021. "Islamofobija i građanski i etnički nacionalizam." *Takvim* 117–128.

Laurence, Jonathan. 2012. *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims: The State's Role in Minority Integration*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lumbard, Joseph E. B. 2024. "Islam and the Challenge of Epistemic Sovereignty." *Religions* 15 (4): 406.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2005. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York, NY: Three Leaves Press/Doubleday.

Martin, Nicole. 2017. "Are British Muslims Alienated from Mainstream Politics by Islamophobia and British Foreign Policy?" *Ethnicities* 17 (3): 350–370.

Massad, Joseph. 2024. *The Price of Recognition: The One Islam and the Many*. In: Sahar F. Aziz and John L. Esposito, eds. *Global Islamophobia and the Rise of Populism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp.: 23–35.

McAndrew, Siobhan and Maria Sobolewska. 2015. "Mosques and Political Engagement in Britain. Participation or Segregation?" In: Timothy Peace, ed. *Muslims and Political Participation in Britain.* London: Routledge, pp.: 53–81.

Peace, Timothy. 2013. *Muslims and Electoral Politics in Britain: the Case of the Respect Party.* In*:* Jorgen S. Nielsen, ed. *Muslim Political Participation in Europe.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp.: 299–321.

Quisay, Walaa. 2023. *Neo-Traditionalism in Islam in the West: Orthodoxy, Spirituality and Politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Ramadan, Tariq. 2005. *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Roy, Olivier. 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Saeed, Abdullah. 2014. *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*. London: Routledge.

Saffari, Siavash. 2024. "Political Islam and Emancipatory Politics: Snapshots of Islamic Liberation Theology." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 25 (1): 52–69.

Serisier, Wilfried. 2016. "Le défi des islams en Seine-Saint-Denis." *Hérodote* 3 (162): 29–54.

Taha, Dina. 2013. "Muslim Minorities in the West: Between Fiqh of Minorities and Integration." *Electronic Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law (EJIMEL)* 1 (1): 1–36.

Tazamal, Mobashra 2024. *Islamophobia: How the Far Right Went Mainstream in Britain*. In: Sahar F. Aziz and John L. Esposito, eds. *Global Islamophobia and the Rise of Populism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp.: 94–111.

Torrekens, Corinne, Dimokritos Kavadias, and Nawal Bensaid. 2023. "Being 'Both': Identifications of Second and Third Generation Brussels Muslim Youths towards the Country of Origin and the Country of Residence." *Social Sciences* 12: 350.

Ivan Ejub Kostić

Političko osnaživanje: uloga partijske politike u budućnosti evropskih muslimana

Apstrakt:

Ovaj rad kritički ispituje društveno-političku dinamiku koja utiče na muslimane u Evropi, fokusirajući se na značajne barijere koje ometaju njihovo aktivno učešće u partijskoj politici. Glavni argument jeste da je internalizovani sekularni pogled na svet doveo do široko rasprostranjenog političkog neangažovanja. Ovo pitanje dodatno otežava prva generacija muslimana u Evropi, koja je razvila i učvrstila manjinski način razmišljanja, zajedno sa određenom ulemom koja promoviše društveno-političku pasivnost i kvijetizam, čime ozbiljno ograničava složeniji i efikasniji politički angažman. Kako bi se suprotstavio ovoj situaciji, u ovom radu naglašava se hitna potreba da muslimani prevaziđu *status quo* ili reakcionarne pristupe, kao što je podrška preovlađujućim partijama ili pribegavanje političkoj uzdržanosti, koji samo površno rešavaju njihove brige. Umesto toga, ovaj rad se zalaže za uspostavljanje nezavisnih političkih entiteta koji su ukorenjenih u islamskim principima i koji teže dubljim sistemskim promenama. Takav pristup bi osnažio muslimane da formiraju strateške saveze, izazovu *status quo*, kao i da se pozabave širim društvenim pitanjima čime bi, na kraju, unapredili interese kako njihovih zajednica tako i evropskog društva u celini.

Ključne reči: muslimani u Evropi, sekuritizacija, normativni inžinjering, partijska politika, preovlađujuće političke partije, manjinski način razmišljanja, kvijetizam, poremećaj, osnaživanje.