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Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Islamophobia and Antisemitism in the Twenty-First Century: Historical Origins, Contemporary Manifestations, and Comparative Perspectives****Sara Noor**

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Email: saranoorhayat@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

One of the main problems that still affects social cohesion and democratic values in the current world is religious prejudice. Islamophobia and antisemitism are two of the most tangible forms of religious discrimination that remain a reality for people, communities and institutions around the globe. These phenomena, while having their own historical trajectories, share some common mechanisms, such as the stereotyping, the othering and the social exclusion. The current study is qualitative comparative in nature and analyzed the historical roots, current expressions and social impact of Islamophobia and antisemitism. It examined the historical narratives, political events, media portrayal and world wars that have maintained these forms of prejudice on the basis of recent scholarly literature and international reports. The study also used the concepts of Social Identity Theory, Integrated Threat Theory, Orientalism and Securitization Theory to account for the genesis and persistence of religious discrimination in modern societies. The results revealed that Islamophobia tends to be connected with narratives of terror, immigration, and incompatibility of culture among others, while antisemitism is more often linked with conspiracy theories and claims of undue political and economic power. However, both forms of prejudice have a negative impact on religious freedom, social trust and intercultural relations. The study ends with an emphasis on the need for education, interfaith dialogue and policy actions to address religious discrimination and foster social cohesion.

KEY WORDS: Islamophobia, antisemitism, religious prejudice, discrimination, comparative religion, social identity, hate crimes

1. Introduction

In today's societies, religious prejudice is still a threat to social cohesion and peaceful living. Although there have been improvements in the legislation of human rights and international initiatives to encourage equality, discrimination, according to religious identity, is still widespread in many parts of the world (Allport, 1954). Islamophobia and antisemitism are among the most visible expressions of modern religious prejudice which have been gaining attention in the academic, political, and public spheres in recent decades.

Islamophobia is a form of fear, hostility, prejudice or discrimination towards Islam and Muslim people or communities (Runnymede Trust, 1997). It is not just about individual attitudes; it can also be institutional discrimination, political rhetoric, exclusionary policies and negative media coverage of Muslims, (Allen, 2010). Likewise, antisemitism is defined as prejudice, hostility or discrimination against Jewish people and communities, based on religious, ethnic or cultural identity (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance [IHRA] 2016). Antisemitism today could be expressed in the form of hate crimes, conspiracy theories, social isolation and assaults against Jewish institutions (Lipstadt, 2019).

While Islamophobia and antisemitism have different historical paths and developments, they share certain key features. Both are processes of identifying minority communities as

social or political risks, and are often accompanied by stereotypes, dehumanizing and othering (Meer & Modood, 2012). These illustrations foster polarization in society and can lead to discriminatory practices towards targeted groups.

The dynamics of religious prejudice underwent significant changes in the beginning of the twenty-first century. The events of 9/11 had a significant impact on perceptions of Islam and Muslims, especially in Europe and North America. Muslim communities were increasingly linked to security threats, terrorism and threats to the nation's identity (Cesari, 2021; Massoumi et al., 2017). As a result, there was an escalation of anti-Muslim sentiment in many societies, resulting in rising levels of discrimination and hate crimes.

Meanwhile, antisemitism has been a social problem for a long time, despite extensive efforts to educate and legislate against it following the Holocaust. Holocaust denial, extremist political movements, hate speech on the internet, and conspiracy theories about Jews' influence in politics and economics are some of the modern forms of antisemitism (Lindemann & Levy, 2010; Lipstadt, 2019). There has been a further rise in hostility towards both Muslim and Jewish communities in several countries in recent geopolitical conflicts (Reuters, 2025; UCLA Initiative to Study Hate, 2025).

Studies relating to Islamophobia and antisemitism have tended to focus on them as distinct issues. Yet, although they share numerous similarities in their social and political mechanisms, comparative analyses have been rather limited (Schrijvers, 2025). Identifying these types of prejudice within a similar analytical framework could further our knowledge of the nature and maintenance of religious prejudice in a variety of societies.

Thus, the current research set out to review the origins of Islamophobia and antisemitism in history, as well as their current forms and differences. The study also aims to look for some commonalities of religious prejudice and consider the potential avenues of fostering interfaith understanding, social inclusion, and religious tolerance.

2. Literature Review

Islamophobia

The term 'Islamophobia' became internationally recognised after the publication of the Runnymede Trust report in 1997. Islamophobia was defined as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam which leads to discrimination against Muslims in social, political, and economic life' (Runnymede Trust, 1997). Since then, different definitions have been suggested, which correspond more or less to the complexity of the phenomenon.

Allen (2010) defines Islamophobia as an ideology which seeks to represent Islam as fundamentally at odds with the Western values and democratic systems. Likewise, Lee et al. (2009) define Islamophobia as fear, prejudice and hostility towards Muslims and Islamic beliefs. The definitions suggest that Islamophobia is not solely about personal prejudice and can manifest at institutional and structural levels.

A number of scholars have suggested that Islamophobia is a type of cultural racism. Cultural racism contrasts with biological racism, which sees fixed cultural attributes as belonging to whole populations, and then sees these attributes as inconsistent with the dominant cultural values of society (Meer & Modood, 2012). Muslims are stereotyped as unaccepting of integration, anti-democratic and pro-violence, even though there is diversity amongst Muslims people (Sayyid, 2014).

Media portrayal also has a huge influence on the perceptions of the public regarding Muslims. Studies have shown that Muslims are overrepresented in news coverage and political debates on topics related to terrorism, extremism and security threats (Cesari, 2021). These depictions help legitimize anti-Muslim stereotypes and public mistrust.

Antisemitism

Antisemitism is a form of religious prejudice that is among the earliest in the recorded history. As defined by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, antisemitism is a specific perception of Jews that can be expressed in multiple ways, including hatred towards Jewish people, institutions and communities (IHRA, 2016).

Unlike modern antisemitism, religious anti-Judaism has been around for a long time. While religious, anti-Jewish attitudes of the late antique and medieval periods grew out of theological differences, modern anti-Jewish attitudes became more racial and nationalist in their basis in the nineteenth century (Lindemann & Levy, 2010).

Today, Lipstadt claims, Jewish conspiracy theories about financial, media, and political Jewish control are a recurring feature of contemporary antisemitism. These stories often depict Jews as hidden players with undue influence in countries and around the world. The stereotypes are carried on in political groups, extremist groups, and on the Internet.

The Holocaust is the worst outcome of antisemitism in the modern world. The murder of about six million Jews during the Second World War changed the world's understanding of religious and ethnic hatred and led to the development of laws to protect against discrimination and genocide (Bergen, 2016).

In spite of these, anti-Semitic incidents still take place all over the world. The issue of hate crimes, along with vandalism against synagogues, hate speech on the Internet and Holocaust denial, are still matters of concern in many countries (ADL, 2024).

Similarities and Differences

Islamophobia and antisemitism have a number of sociological features in common. Both make use of stereotypes which reduce complex communities into homogeneous groups. Either one or both depict minorities as a challenge to the national identity, social order or culture (Meer & Modood, 2012).

But there are some significant differences as well. Often Islamophobia focuses on issues such as terrorism, migration and cultural incompatibility. One of the most common ways in which Muslims are depicted in the media is as external threats to social cohesion and public security (Cesari, 2021). Conspiracy theories that involve hidden control, influence and manipulation of politics are considered more consistent with antisemitism than with other forms of racism or bias (Lipstadt, 2019).

The differences indicate that while both are driven by prejudice and exclusion, they take place in different narratives and social processes.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present study employs four complementary theoretical perspectives to explain the persistence of religious prejudice in contemporary societies.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory proposes that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups. Positive evaluation of one's own group often contributes to negative attitudes toward out-groups, particularly during periods of uncertainty or competition (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Religious prejudice may therefore emerge as an attempt to strengthen collective identity and maintain social boundaries.

Integrated Threat Theory

Integrated Threat Theory suggests that prejudice develops when groups perceive realistic or symbolic threats from outsiders (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Realistic threats involve competition over resources and political influence, whereas symbolic threats involve values, traditions, and cultural identity. Both forms of threat contribute to hostility toward minority groups.

Orientalism

Said's (1978) theory of Orientalism explains how Western societies historically portrayed Eastern cultures as irrational, backward, and inferior. These representations influenced colonial policies and continue to shape perceptions of Muslim societies in contemporary political and media discourse.

Securitization Theory

Securitization Theory argues that political actors may transform social issues into matters of national security through public discourse and institutional practices (Buzan et al., 1998). Following the events of September 11, Muslim communities increasingly became associated with security concerns and counterterrorism policies in many Western societies.

4. Historical Origins of Islamophobia and Antisemitism

Historical prejudice against Islam goes back to contact with the early Islamic civilizations and medieval Christian Europe. The Muslim empires' quick territorial growth during the 7th and 8th centuries changed the political and religious landscape of the Mediterranean world. Negative stereotypes (Setton, 1992) often emerged from the European accounts which would present Muslims as military and theological rivals.

Hostilities increased further and ideas of a civilizational clash between Christian and Muslim societies became strengthened during the Crusades. Orientalist scholarship often portrayed Muslims as irrational and not modern, thus legitimizing colonial domination and intervention (Said, 1978).

The nature of Islamophobia has changed from earlier generations of resentment as it now incorporates issues of migration, terrorism and national identity. September 11, 2001, was a turning point in this transformation, and led to higher levels of suspicion against Muslim communities in many countries (Massoumi et al., 2017).

The roots of antisemitism are much longer. Theological differences between Jews and Christians in late antiquity were the origins of the early forms (Johnson, 1987). In medieval Europe, Jewish communities were subject to a wide range of limitations in property rights, political involvement, and employment opportunities (Lindemann & Levy, 2010).

Racial anti-Semitism appeared in the 19th century, and began to grow in a manner that characterized Jewish identity more in terms of biology than in terms of religion. The worst manifestations of these developments occurred in the Holocaust when Nazi Germany systematically murdered some 6 million Jews (Bergen, 2016).

Yet in spite of the many changes in political and social circumstances, contemporary antisemitism is still rooted in a number of stereotypes that go back to the past. These narratives are still ongoing, highlighting the longevity of religious prejudice and the difficulties in addressing religious discrimination.

5. Contemporary Manifestations of Islamophobia

In the twenty first century, Islamophobia is one of the most prominent religious prejudices. While there is some historical background of anti-Muslim sentiment, current Islamophobia is linked to issues of terrorism, migration, national identity and security (Cesari, 2021). Other factors in the diffusion of anti-Muslim narratives include political developments, media presentation and social media platforms.

A frequent form of Islamophobia is when Islamists commit hate crimes against Muslim people and institutions. In Europe and North America, attacks on mosques, Islamic centres and visibly identifiable Muslims are reportedly on the rise, including attacks on women wearing hijab or other religious clothes (Allen, 2010). Muslim communities have begun to face issues with physical assaults, verbal harassment and vandalism regularly.

Discrimination in the workplace is a big problem as well. Research reveals that Muslim applicants are often at a disadvantage to equally qualified non-Muslim applicants when it comes to recruitment, and this is especially true if it is evident they are Muslim in name or dress (Meer & Modood, 2012). This discrimination is a cause of social exclusion and economic inequality.

The role of the media can not be ignored. There are reports that news coverage frequently links Islam to violence, extremism and terrorism, and eclipses the lives of Muslims and their identities (Cesari, 2021). The constant exposure to these stories can make stereotypes seem more common and lead to negative public perception.

Muslims have also been the subject of public perception in the context of political discourse. In some countries, the discussion of immigration, border security and multiculturalism has been increasingly framed in terms of Islam as a cultural and/or security threat (Massoumi et al., 2017). This can foster prejudice and further divide society. The advent of social media has created new issues. Internet means misinformation, hate speech and extremist ideologies can be rapidly spread against Muslim communities (Vidgen & Yasseri, 2018). Through digital communication, discriminatory messages can be spread to a wide audience and help to normalize anti-Muslim attitudes.

Anti-Muslim violence has been further exacerbated by recent international conflicts. There have been reports of anti-Muslim hate crimes in both the USA and Europe after Middle Eastern and other geopolitical developments (Reuters, 2025; UCLA Initiative to Study Hate, 2025). The results indicate that the international political events can affect the intergroup relations at the local level.

6. Contemporary Manifestations of Antisemitism

Although antisemitism has been the object of decades of education and legal steps after the Holocaust, it continues to be a social issue. While in today's world they look different, prejudice against Jewish communities still exists in new and traditional forms (Lipstadt, 2019).

Hate crime against Jews and Jewish institutions is one of the most tangible expressions of modern-day anti-Semitism. Vandals and violent attacks have become a growing problem for synagogues, schools, and community centers in a few nations (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2024). These attacks cause Jews to feel threatened and insecure, and jeopardize religious liberty.

Another significant part of contemporary antisemitism are conspiracy theories. The charge of Jewish control over governments, financial institutions, media outlets, or international politics is still prevalent in political messages and in social media platforms (Lipstadt, 2019). They often come out of times of political unrest and/or economic uncertainty.

Issues of Holocaust denial and distortion also continue to be an issue. There are some who refuse to accept the historical reality of the Holocaust, who downplay its magnitude, or who try to excuse the actions of Nazi Germany (Bergen, 2016). These stories desecrate history and help normalize antisemitic views.

The Internet has played an important role in the dissemination of antisemitic material. Extremist ideologies and conspiracy theories targeting Jewish populations can be spread quickly through social media platforms and online communities (Mustafa & Japkowicz, 2024). The study shows that antisemitic language tends to surge during times of conflict and polarization internationally and politically (Rosen & Dale, 2025).

Numerous areas have also seen an increase in antisemitism as a result of political extremism. Antisemitic narratives have been used by both far-right and some extremist political groups to build collective enemies and garner support (Lindemann & Levy, 2010).

Such changes illustrate how the antisemitic ideologies can be flexible and adaptable to changing social and political contexts.

In recent years, Jewish communities have also experienced tension as a result of international events. Antisemitic incidents have risen after conflicts in the Middle East and as a result of increased political polarization about those events have been reported in Europe and North America (ADL, 2024).

7. Comparative Analysis

While the roots of Islamophobia and antisemitism differ, there are a number of important similarities between the two. Both processes involve the formation of minorities as a threat, and often are underpinned by stereotyping, misinformation and processes of othering (Meer & Modood, 2012).

Political commentary, media portrayal, and social narratives that assert that religious minorities are different from the majority further reinforce both phenomena. Political rhetoric, media depiction and social narratives that assert that religious minorities are different from the majority reinforce both phenomena. These depictions foster discrimination, social marginalisation and hate crimes against the affected communities (Schrijvers, 2025).

There are important differences between the two phenomena, however. Islamophobia often portrays Muslims as outside threats that are linked to immigration, terrorism and incompatibility with culture (Cesari 2021). Antisemitism, however, tends to depict Jews as covert agents, exercising an undue degree of political, economic, or social power (Lipstadt, 2019).

A further difference relates to the historical development. Antisemitism has been documented longer and can be found in the twentieth century in the Holocaust (Bergen, 2016). While Islamophobia emerged as a result of earlier historical conflicts, it took its modern shape mainly in the late 1900s and early 2000s, after the events of September 11, 2001 (Massoumi et al., 2017).

Despite the differences, both forms of prejudice are harmful to the values of democracy, religious freedom and social cohesion. When one type of discrimination is addressed and the other is ignored, then the emphasis is placed on differences and the attempts to work towards equality and respect are undermined.

8. Policy Implications

There is a need for coordinated action at individual, institutional and government levels to reduce religious prejudice. One of the best ways of breaking down stereotypes and fostering understanding between communities is through education (Allport, 1954).

Teachers should be teaching accurate facts about other religions, the experiences of minority communities in the past and the impact of discrimination. Interfaith dialogue programmes can also foster understanding and diminish the sense of social distance.

Governments need to enhance the laws on hate crime and put in place effective reporting systems for the cases of religious discrimination. Good data needs to be collected to understand the nature and extent of hate crimes against religious minorities (ADL, 2024).

Media plays an important part and so do the media organizations. More balanced reporting and avoiding sensational stories could help to minimise the spread of stereotypes and misinformation. Likewise, more effective methods need to be found by social media platforms to detect and delete hate speech and extremist material from the internet (Vidgen & Yasseri, 2018).

Finally, partnerships among governments, civil society groups and educational and religious institutions are needed to foster inclusive societies and safeguard religious freedom.

9. Conclusion

Two major types of religious prejudice today are Islamophobia and antisemitism. Both originated in different historical contexts, but the processes of stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination towards the minorities are similar.

The present study reveals that political debates, media depictions, historical accounts, and international wars play an important role in the perpetuation of both phenomena. Islamophobia often manifests in narratives of threat to security and incompatibility with culture, while antisemitism is often based on conspiracy and claims of hidden power.

The comparative analysis also reveals that both forms of prejudice are harmful to the democratic values, social cohesion and religious freedom. The impacts have ripple effects, impacting on the wider social trust and intercultural relations.

Education, effective public policies, responsible media and meaningful interfaith engagement are all essential elements of combating religious discrimination. Further investigations are needed on the changing features of religious prejudice in digital space and in increasingly diverse societies.

Finally, respect for religious diversity is not just about safeguarding the rights of religious minorities, but about a necessary prerequisite for living in harmony and for the stability of a democracy in the modern world.

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