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The political influence of an interest group: A comparative study on the Muslim minority in the United States and Britain

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The article proposes to examine the existing political influence of the Muslim minority in the United States and Britain. The academic literature rarely refers to the component of political power as a tool that can explain the application of policy. Therefore, the analysis in the article will focus on several criteria comparatively between the two countries. The criteria include the influence of colonialism, the demography of the Muslim minority, the identity of the citizen as “Muslim”, integration policies, and the influence of the Muslim lobby. The article will show how these criteria prominently explain the political power of Muslim minorities in the intra-communal public sphere in Britain, in contrast to their relative weakness in the political sphere in the US. This is in accordance with the relative political power in each country. This article offers a new understanding of the political power of civic groups.

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Introduction

On the eve of London's mayoral elections (2017), the Labor Party sent a letter to its Muslim supporters in West Midlands County, a region with the sixth largest population in the United Kingdom. The letter was signed by Muslim leaders in the area: "The Labor Party and Jeremy Corbyn are the only possibility that we have in these are the in these election... Corbyn opposed the wars in the Middle East, worked on behalf of the Palestinians, and even promised to immediately recognize Palestine if elected" (Kotz, 2017).

In the same year, American President Donald Trump signed a presidential order prohibiting the entry into the US of about 134 million people from Muslim-majority countries, for a period of 90 days. The president also suspended the program for accepting refugees into the United States for 120 days, saying, "We don't want them here. We want to ensure that we are not admitting into our country the very threats our soldiers are fighting overseas" (Shear and Cooper, 2017).

The difference between the ways of relating to the Muslim minority citizens through government policy is at the core of this article. This article analyzes the political influence of the Muslim community in both the United States and Britain on selected policies and the manner in which these countries address this minority. The two countries have had a special relationship for many years. They have a close military alliance and partnership with NATO. They also have a shared history, religion, and language and a similar legal system.² Together they represent a considerable part of world trade and are influential in affecting policies and culture around the world.³ Therefore, examining the electoral power of the Muslim minority in these two countries could also be significant in the international arena.

Britain promotes a policy that empowers its Muslim community and gives significant political control. Comparatively, the US pursues a policy that does not recognize the uniqueness of the Muslim minority nor allows it to stand out. The claim here is that because of its weak political power, the American Muslim community is insignificant to the US administration.

This article employs a comparative case study, covering the years 2000–2020, to examine five factors that link US and British policy to the political and electoral component, which is reflected in either the strength or weakness of the Muslim minority in each country. These factors are the influence of colonialism, the demography of the Muslim minority, the identity of the citizen as "Muslim," integration policies, and the influence of the Muslim lobby. The research assumption is that the political and electoral strength of the Muslim minority is immeasurably more significant in Britain than in the US. That is, the political and electoral variables of this minority community affect policy formulation in the two countries.

This article addresses both prominent concepts and theories in the field of policy and in international relations, as well as the feasibility of the five factors influencing policy implementation. This will be followed by a discussion of how each factor is expressed in the two countries and how the electoral variable can be significant in determining future policies relating to Muslim citizens. After presenting the findings, the article will discuss alternative explanations for the difference between policy implementation in the two countries and the characteristics of the Muslim community in each.

To confirm the argument presented here, the article used the Process tracing method, which traces the relationship between the factor and the result (George and Bennett, 2005, p. 206) in addition to the existing theoretical literature and research by other scholars, this article is based on analysis of primary sources relating to the five variables and their connection to the strength of the electoral factor of the Muslim minority in each country.

The primary sources include government statements, responses, policy implementation, official data, and state plans of both American and British government institutions, as well as public opinion polls of research institutes.

Researchers have given little attention (if at all) to the electoral factor and its relation to determining policy in the field of policy formation and international relations. This article potentially could contribute to the field by adding the political variable as a significant component in analyzing policies and their implementation.

Defining the term "Policy"

Campbell has defined "policy" as a system that has guidelines for making rational decisions (2002). Policy generally applies to governments, organizations, or groups in the public sector, residential decrees, and rules of parliamentary order. Policy serves as a tool for forming both subjective and objective decisions. Research on policy tends to relate also to the process of making important organizational decisions and to the basis of their influence. Policy decisions are implemented according to the relative advantages of several factors; therefore, it is difficult to examine them objectively. Each policy is allocated resources that reflect its decisions (Campbell, 2002).

Theories from the field of international relations have focused on how international institutions or regimes have influenced the actions of other countries or other international attributes and factors. Regime theory describes how selected policies can influence other countries and their interests (Slaughter, 1995, pp. 454–456; Anagnostakis, 2012). Nonetheless, regime theory does not relate to how a group's political position can affect government policy.

The classical theory focuses on the reasons and consequences of social phenomena in terms of the relations between classes. Class analysis sees society as divided into hierarchical layers with unequal access to resources, power, and influence. Although this theory addresses the way in which policies are applied, it does not relate to applying selected policies to a group that is targeted by the policy and to the structured relationship between the parties. It does not refer to the potential power that a group can yield toward the government if it is not satisfied by the policy (Skoczylis, 2017, pp. 117–134).

Other theories examining the impact of policy on group rights do not link political power to the possibility that an "other" community will be treated differently because of their differences. Framing theory presents a selective process of formulating a frame of reference for information about a topic or event (Chong and Druckman, 2007). Constructive theory considers the identities and interests of actors as socially and changing structures; identities are not static and cannot be assumed to be exogenous (Laurence and Rhoads, 2020). From these, the concept of "the other" developed. The term suggests an increased feeling of alienation and hostility toward minority communities and may erode their sense of identity and attachment to an imagined national identity. This policy is based on limiting the group's rights that expand its sense of security (Crawford, 2011; Schmitt, 1996). At the same time, the government does not realize the connection between the political component and the policy implementation. Reflecting upon these existing theories, this article intends to show a group's political power as having the potential to influence policy formation.

The five factors and their significance

The article examines five factors that other scholars have used in their research to explain policy implementation. These five factors

can explain the nature of a policy, the way it is applied, and whether it best meets the policy objectives. As the potential political influence of the Muslim minority communities varies in the two countries examined, this difference has an impact on the government-applied policies.

Existing research refers to these five factors as intuitively affecting the electoral power of an interest group, while at the same time revealing a discrepancy between these factors and the political power component. Scholars examining the integration of Muslim immigrants in different countries have noted that the British colonial administration was carried out according to race or ethnicity (Skinner, 2009; Anderson and Killingray, 2017). During the colonial period, Britain established administrative institutions and implemented policies relating to education, labor, and legislation, which affected millions of people and shaped their identity and the interactions between them. However, these scholars do not connect between Britain's colonial period and the policies pursued today regarding the British Muslim minority (Palagashvili, 2018; Brown and Louis, 1999). Studies focused on the same period in the US show that the American ties and experiences with the Muslim world created negative and adverse notions about Muslims, which is currently US policy vis-à-vis the Muslim minority. As the US did not have any special interaction with any minority group, Muslim immigration to the US did not create any significant political minefield (Pape, 2006; Ismael and Ismael, 1994).

Research on the demographic factor reveals that the migration of certain groups refers to the existing policy regarding that community which has an electoral impact (Helbling and Meierrieks, 2020). The purpose of the policy is to generate political support and improve the chances of elected officials to hold their positions. For example, studies show that a restrictive immigration policy may satisfy the public's demand for such a policy that may increase its sense of security, but this type of policy does not directly address the political variable influencing the specific policy (Huysmans, 2006; Messina, 2014).

Studies focused on the identity factor have shown how political power can arise from adopting a Muslim religious identity over a civic one (Silvestri, 2007; Gurr, 2000). However, these studies also make claims that are not linked to identity and to promoting a minority's electoral power (Gurr, 2000). Similarly, studies examining both the American and British integration policies discuss the impact of identity in the context of general elections (Hjelmggaard, 2017; Entzinger and Biezeveld, 2003), but do not connect this factor to policy nor to the significance of an interest group's political power.

A study on the influence of the Muslim lobby found that Britain promotes the interests of the Muslim minority and its countries of origin (Hussain, 2004). On the other hand, it was found that the Muslim lobby in the US fails to promote the internal or external interests of the Muslim community (Tyler et al., 2010). Moreover, various studies have identified external influences that can affect policymaking and implementation (Radcliffe, 2004; Grzegorzewski, 2014); however, these studies do not discuss these external influences in the context of the political power of the Muslim minority.

Analysis of the factors from a comparative perspective

The influence of colonialism. Britain's colonial past has given it an advantage in more easily recognizing Islam and its significance. During the colonial period, Muslims were given significant roles in the British colonial administration. Thus, Muslim immigration to the UK and integration into British society in general and in the political process, in particular, came easily and naturally for both. As a result, their political power

has grown and expanded. In contrast, Muslim immigrants to the US did not have any historical ties and the government did not give them any special attention. Which in part has kept their political power minimal.

Britain. Britain has a unique history of immigration and citizenship because of its being a major imperialist colonialist power⁴. The Muslim immigration to Britain dates to 1700, it was most significant in the decades following World War II and the collapse of the colonial power (Ansari, 2018). Muslim immigrants came mainly from rural areas and Muslim-majority countries and later from the former British colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean to Britain's port cities as laborers (Abbas, 2007).

This immigration highlights complex issues in British society, such as migration, race, and ethnicity. Furthermore, the British Nationality Act of 1948 allowed subjects of the British Empire to live and work in its territory without a special permit or residence permit, resulting in the arrival of masses of immigrants from all the Commonwealth countries (Deakin, 1969, pp. 77–83).

Since 1905, the British have passed laws ensuring the distinctiveness of its ethnic groups, especially the Muslim minority. For example, in 1965, the Race Relations Act was passed, prohibiting discrimination in the public sphere. The law also created the establishment of the Race Relations Board, whose purpose was to protect ethnic minorities. While Western European countries did not allow immigrants to participate in political proceedings, in the UK, they had full political rights as citizens (Danso, 2000; Bashford and McAdam, 2014). In this context, studies have found that the issue of race in British politics is a meaningful narrative, and religion is an important factor in the selection of candidates for parliament (Fisher et al., 2015).

By the 1920s, the British colonies were home to about half of the world's Muslim population, and they saw themselves as British citizens in every respect and expressed their loyalty. More than 400,000 Muslim soldiers fought for Britain in World War II, accounting for about 40% of the British Army force (Sheikh, 2018). David Lloyd George, the prime minister from 1916 to 1922, said that "it is too often forgotten that we are the greatest Mahomedan power in the world" (Turks and Constantinople, 1920). The influence and contribution of Muslims to Britain in times of crisis and war have been recognized by the ruling elite, while the government understood that the presence of the Muslim minority within the British Empire would be beneficial and would strengthen Britain's objectives and military might (Sheikh, 2018). Therefore, this factor suggests their political influence has been significant.

United States. The History of the US and Islam began as early as the 16th century when some half a million Africans were brought to the US as slaves between the years 1701 and 1800, many of whom were Muslims (Turner, 2013, pp. 28–44). It was the Barbary Wars (1801–1815) that were the country's first significant meeting with Islam. Public pressure forced the US administration to act after the rulers of Tripoli, Algeria, and Morocco intended to attack American merchant ships and capture their crews, either for enslavement or ransom (Davis, 2003). This response led to legislation aimed at protecting and strengthening US naval forces in the African maritime space (Lambert, 2007).

The US government and particularly the American army consider the Barbary Wars significant to the legacy of American warfare. Moreover, these wars helped shape the American attitude toward Islam and its intentions as being the legacy of a defensive battle (Sweetman, 2002). As a result of this early history, the US has downplayed the Muslim community's significance, especially its political power.

This factor illustrates how the Muslim minority in Britain has created a significant political force under the auspices and encouragement of the state, with their roots in Britain's colonial past. In contrast, the American historical past with the Muslim world has been primarily negative regarding Islam and its aims. Therefore, this factor has contributed to the limited political influence of the Muslim minority in the US.

Demographics. It can be claimed that the political influence of the Muslim minority in Britain is greater than in the US due to its demographic composition. First, Britain has a larger number of Muslims than the US does, and the gap between the two countries in terms of the Muslim minority has widened over the years in Britain's favor. Second former US President Trump's ban on Muslims entering the US in 2015 led to a significant demographic increase of Muslims in Britain (Zurcher, 2017; Randerson and Mctague, 2017).

United Kingdom. Due to continuous immigration as already noted, an increase in the birth rate, and conversion to Islam, the number of Muslims in the UK has grown steadily since 1950 (Ansari, 2018, p. 6). According to the 2001 census, the UK's total population was about 59 million, of which about 1,600,000 or 2.71% were Muslims (Kettani, 2010). A decade later, in 2011, Muslims in the UK numbered 2.7 million or 4.4% of the general population. This number, despite their small size relative to the general UK population, has had implications for election results (Sapsted, 2010).

The majority of the UK's Muslim minority resides in England, where they are 5.01% of the general population (2,660,116). In Scotland, they are 1.45% of the total population (49,950), and in Wales, they are 1.5% (45,950). Cities with a high concentration of Muslims include Bradford, Luton, Blackburn, Birmingham, and London (O'Brien and Potter-Collins, 2015) high rates of Muslims in these cities have a real and direct impact on their electoral and social power, and the overall increase of Muslims in Britain especially in the large cities has affected voting patterns (see below).

Although the Muslim community hail from Pakistan (35.57%), Bangladesh (13.4%), India (6%), and Arab countries (10.87%) (Gilliat-Ray, 2010), their diverse national composition does not preclude the same values in most areas of communal life⁵. Slim immigrants have established "states within states", in which they have collectively exploited the democratic system to advance their goals. The Muslim community has supported socialist parties because they promise to distribute allowances, welfare funds, and the like. The same parties repeatedly court the Muslim population to gain additional political support (Gottfried et al., 2018).⁶

The demographic composition of Britain's Muslim minority has led to its increased political power, with candidates for political offices considering the community's presence in central and politically important cities as significant to winning their seats. Muslims account for more than 100% of the fluctuation of votes in some 50 counties in the UK, a figure equivalent to 50 seats in the Parliament, while voter turnout within the Muslim community is 47% compared to 65% of the general public (Fisher et al., 2015). Thus, the electoral status of Muslims in Britain is significant, particularly regarding the results of the elections and the candidates for parliamentary elections (Ismail, 2019).

United States. Considered a country of immigrants (Ragsdale, 2013), almost one-fifth of the world's immigrants move to the United States, which is three times greater than the number of immigrants to any other country (Buniman, 2020). This winning combination of immigrants and their children contributes to its

vibrant and ever-changing economy and culture (Ragsdale, 2013). Until the 1960s and 1970s, the Muslim presence in the US was limited, but it has grown steadily since the 1990s. Still, as of 2001, Muslims formed only 1.221% of the country's total population, compared to 68.6% Christians, 1.75% Jews, and 15.9% with no religion (Mohamed, 2018). American Muslims are one of the most diverse groups. A recent study noted that 25% are African American, 24% white, 18% Asian, 18% Arab, 7% mixed race, and 5% Hispanic. 86% are American citizens, of which about half are native-born (Green, 2017).

These figures indicate that the Muslim minority in the US is decentralized and composed of different groups that do not form a unified community. This contributes to the Muslim community's negligible political power when its demographic size is compared to that of the general American population (Pew Research Center- Religion & Public Life, 2017). To summarize the demographic impact, the composition of the Muslim minority in Britain is significantly higher and more homogeneous than that of the US, and its demographic growth contributes to its growing political influence. In contrast, the demographic composition of the Muslim minority in the US is small and does not yield any political power.

The identity of the citizen as a "Muslim". The article's assumption is that Muslims in Britain create an identity-based difference between themselves and the general population. Their identity as Muslims influences the strength of their political power. They can self-preserve their identity with support from the incumbent government. The government grants the Muslim minority autonomy in religious education and family law in return, the Muslims give the ruling party its vote. This is repeated in every regional or national election campaign. Therefore, the Muslim identity in Britain is strong and continues to grow over the years. In contrast, in the US, Muslims identify themselves as Americans first and as an integral part of the general population (Richards et al., 2019). Thus, the government does not consider the Muslim community as having any significant political importance because of their identity.

United Kingdom. Globalization serves as a key factor in determining the identity of areas where the norms of the majority dictate. Thus, cities or provinces with a Muslim majority assumingly will be characterized by a Muslim identity in most aspects of life. National regions lead to contrasting identities that are universal, hybrid, multilingual, and ubiquitous (Praja, 2006; Ansari, 2018).

Having a prominent Muslim identity and a strong connection to the Muslim community (umma) both can influence a person's social and behavioral perceptions (Archer, 2009). In this process of identity formation, Muslims are seen as a social group whose members have certain norms and practices, which creates a network of support and loyalty. This process has led to the creation of a British Muslim identity that directly and indirectly affects the political processes in Britain (Archer, 2009).

The Muslim community in Britain sees itself as part of Western Europe's larger, more homogeneous, and unified Muslim community (Fetzer and Soper, 2005). Undoubtedly, the identity of a British Muslim citizen, as a Muslim first, is important and politically significant. Britain's Muslim minority is guided by its religiosity; religion influences the community's way of life and its values, which are far more significant than Britain's democratic values. That is, the Muslim minority is interested in empowering their religion. As a result, the Muslim minority expresses its political influence through their identity as Muslims and expects Britain to treat them similarly.

The Rushdie affair was a milestone in the assimilation of British Muslims and their identity (Modood, 2003; Malik, 2010). The Afghan–Russian War caused many young Muslims to embrace political Islam, (Gibbs, 2006; Billard, 2010). Leading to a dichotomous view of the Muslim community as “Asia,” “Pakistan,” “white,” and “non-white” communities (Community Cohesion Review Team and Cattle, 2001). The focus on British Muslim identity intensified especially after the 9/11 attacks, the riots in northern England in 2000, the terrorist attacks in Britain, and the demonstrations against British and American involvement in the war against terrorism, mainly in Afghanistan and Iraq (Madzingira, 2018). This period led to a change relation between the British state and Islam.

The emergent identity shares in having both a civic identity and a conflict of loyalty to Britain. As a minority within Britain’s Christian population, the Muslim community forms collective memories such as “Islam” and “Muslims” (Purdam, 2001). It focuses on the need to define the other, with the idea that they are different, independent identities, each with their own logic and producing their own uniformity. One conclusion is that a culture consistent with a national identity generates dissonance among Muslims vis-à-vis loyalty and belonging toward the religion and state in which they are citizens (Buchler, 2012).

Through liberal legislation, the British government has both enabled and tolerated the Muslim minority, enabling them to lead a comfortable way of life and to preserve their unique communal life, which separates them from the general public (Menski, 2001). The article argues here that this policy has been politically motivated. Policymakers recognize the electoral power of the Muslim minority and in exchange enact, policies that are intended to satisfy the Muslim community over time. The Muslim minority recognizes this situation and exploits it for its own personal interests as a minority seeking to preserve its uniqueness, both publicly and civically (Siddiqui, 2018).

The advantage of candidates who succeed in courting the Muslim vote is immense, and they will provide the community with the appropriate incentives to do so, such as by ignoring actions that contradict the values of the secular state or that only correspond minimally to them (Dancygier, 2017; Modood, 2003). Legislation in favor of the Muslim minority and the bending of the education system in its favor both have enabled the community to remain insular and enhance its identity. The result is a diminishing civic identity and an increasing ethnic identity.

Legislation that has helped to preserve British Muslim identity includes the Education Reform Act 1988, which requires UK schools to provide religious education for all schoolchildren with public funding. This act has enabled Muslim-majority schools to provide religious education to Muslim students, including the holding of religious assemblies, providing halal meat, shortening school days for Ramadan, allowing calls to prayer and gender segregation, and subsidizing trips to Mecca (Moffat and Yoo, 2020, pp. 430–442; Oldham, 2014).

The integration of Islamic law (Sharia) into the English legal system (2014) has created the possibility of recognizing wills according to Sharia law, under the auspices of British courts. Legal implications are that women and children—including those born out of wedlock or who are adopted may not be considered heirs with equal rights. Those considered “non-believers” or who were married in a church, or a civil marriage could also be dispossessed of their rights to inheritance (Siddiqui, 2018).

The Localism Act 2011 grants broad powers and the establishment of an autonomous agenda to local government in England if it does not act in contravention of state laws. This act has allowed cities with a significant Muslim population to practice their religion and customs in the public sphere. The above reinforces the claim here that in exchange for political

support, the government has enabled Britain’s Muslim community to expand and enhance its identity in both public and communal spheres.

United States. The assumption is that the American Muslim minority has only a minor impact, if any, on the political administration. One reason is that this community has not sought political recognition, as the Muslim community identifies predominantly as American first and as Muslim second. Thus, the Muslim minority does not see itself as separate from the majority and behaves according to the public and political spheres (Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2014).

The lack of homogeneity in the American Muslim community and the absence of a uniform identity (Rosentiel, 2007), makes it difficult to form any kind of collective and cooperative body that could provide significant electoral support to political candidates. Unlike the majority of British Muslims, American Muslims tend not to feel marginalized or politically isolated. The need to obscure their religious difference is stronger than their desire to be part of an isolated Muslim community, in contrast to the Muslim minority in Britain, which differentiates itself from the general British population (Brooks, 2011; Ajala, 2014; Gecewicz and Mohamed, 2017). Furthermore, American Muslims see the US as a place where they can achieve personal prosperity and social mobility, as well as religious freedom (Waters and Pineau, 2016; Abramitzky and Boustan, 2017).

The mosque in the US also plays an important role. Led mostly by secular councils, which hire native-born imams to run activities. The mosques in the US do not have solely a religious significance, as they do in Britain; instead, they have libraries, banquet halls, meeting rooms, and interfaith activities. The mosque reflects the goal of the Muslim minority to integrate into American society by opening its doors to the rest of the population (Foley, 2012). While it also assists in the process of assimilation. Moreover, American Muslims tend to be more civilly involved, are open to different views, and tend to treat women and youth more equally (Ozyurt, 2010). Nonetheless, each ethnic group affiliated with the American Muslim community differs in terms of its civic participation, political involvement, and group consciousness. While the mosque serves as a focal point for the entire community, it does not necessarily unify the various ethnic groups (Jamali, 2016).

American Muslims are younger and more liberal compared to the rest of the population. Only one in five Muslims describes their politics as “very conservative” or “conservative.” The majority of the community supports the Democratic Party, contrary to the belief that the Republican Party is more compatible with religious conservatism (Besheer, 2018). American Muslims identify with the Democrats on issues of national security and support for a Palestinian state (Donmez, 2020; Ozalp, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2012). About 70% of American Muslims support the idea that people can realize the “American dream” if they work hard. The majority of American Muslims (89%) are proud to be both Americans and Muslims (Mohamed, 2018). Nonetheless, neither party nor the government invests in courting American Muslim voices as they are perceived as being politically divisive.

Over the years, young American Muslims have questioned religion and its significance, leading to greater secularization.⁷ Nearly 25% of adult Americans who were educated as Muslims do not identify themselves as such (Burke, 2017). According to a survey by the Pew Research Center in 2017, about 100,000 members of the American Muslim minority leave the religion each year (Mohamed, 2018). A quarter of the respondents claimed that religion does not suit them at all. Some 16% reported that they preferred another religion over Islam. Another 14% noted that they abandoned religion due to “personal growth.”

About 20% identified as believers in Christianity (Mohamed, 2018; Sciupac, 2017).

As a religious minority within a secular Western and democratic state, it cannot be easy to lead a religious Muslim lifestyle. The Muslim minority, therefore, has found it necessary to accept liberal values that challenge and even contradict their religious beliefs, such as accepting the primacy of science, individualism, atheism, LGBTQ, and feminism. Moreover, many American Muslims believe that Islamic teachings can be interpreted in many ways (Mohamed, 2018; Sciupac, 2017).

The acculturation approach has encouraged the assimilation of the Muslim minority into American culture, enabling them to freely choose other positions and values (Lakey, 2003). According to the US Census Bureau Special Reports (2005), about 75% are proud of their Muslim heritage, yet also consider themselves integrated into American society and its values (Semaan, 2015). The fact that this is a relatively young community, 37% of Muslims in the US are under the age of 30, helps to promote this approach (Green, 2017). Acculturation affects the process of belonging at a young age, particularly in the framework of education. Among many American Muslims, the desire to be part of the majority and to renounce diversity overrides any zealotness to preserve their culture and the values of their countries of origin, leading them instead to the “American dream” (Semaan, 2015).

Thus, it can be argued that the desire of Muslims in the US to assimilate and integrate into the general population outweighs any wish to maintain a community with a separate identity. The American Muslim minority does not try to enhance its diversity; rather, identifying as American is at its core, and their lives reflect this. By identifying as Americans first and Muslims second, their political power as a minority group becomes minimal.

In summary, it was found that the Muslim minority in Britain emphasizes and promotes its religious identity over its civic one through legislation and policies that enable the Muslim identity to flourish in the public sphere. This situation is possible because the Muslim community has significant political power that enables it to elect officials who in turn help the community maintain its identity. In contrast, in the US, the Muslim minority does not seek recognition of its Muslim identity in the public sphere. Moreover, this community seeks to assimilate and emphasize its American civic identity over its religious one leading to negligible political influence.

Integration policy. The article’s claim here is that the UK does not have an optimal integration policy. It differentiates the Muslim minority from the rest of the population. Although the government seeks to integrate the community, its policy reflects the Muslim minority and not the rest of the population. In the US, in contrast, integration is the goal for the entire population without any distinction, compelling the Muslim minority to adapt.

United Kingdom. Britain’s ambition to implement its integration policy among minority groups has not translated well in reality. It has tried several different integration approaches, most of which face the same challenges. As a result of knowing that the government’s policies have failed at integrating the community, in parallel with the central government’s view that the Muslim community is distinct and different, the Muslim community has been able to gain political influence.

The policy discourse on migration and minority communities, which emphasizes the Muslim community, is driven by the vision of uniting immigrant populations (Garbaye and Latour, 2016). This has created models of changing integration, and at the time of this writing, the relations woven between the Muslim minority

in Britain and the majority have only grown worse. The article argues that the UK does not have a unified national strategy. Despite its national interest, the UK does not currently have a coherent national strategy for civic integration. Furthermore, the Localism Act 2011 moved away from the “top-down” approach. Instead, it has encouraged local authorities and governments to set their own priorities.⁸

This political conduct has led to a hostile and suspicious discourse within the Muslim community outward. Their electoral eligibility is expressed through integration policies. Candidates for political office court the votes of the Muslim minority and are willing to ensure the continuation of the Muslim way of life in exchange for political support. The various integration policies have led to laws that benefit the Muslim community in Britain and maintain its separation from others. Below are several significant integration programs that prove the article’s claim.

1. *The Immigration and Asylum act (1999):* The purpose of the law is to address the conditions that potential immigrants may face before they arrive in the UK. There will be a support system for them through a legal framework. (Clark, 2002, pp. 37–39). The meaning - many of them were moved to places of residence that suffer from unemployment, poverty, crime, violence, and the lack of legal representation and local support. In this way, the extremism and separation between the groups intensified over generations (Clark, 2002, pp. 37–39).
2. The provision of resources to local authorities to promote racial and ethnic equality. Most local authorities with large ethnic minority populations have transformed themselves from being racist to promoting anti-racism and multiculturalism, thus increasing the power of local minority communities (Solomos, 1989).
3. The establishment of the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (MAT), which proposes a viable alternative to resolve disputes in accordance with Islamic law. MAT operates under English law and is not a separate Islamic judiciary. By law, they are considered “arbitration courts” (Rozenberg, 2008). The article claims that this conduct continues to create differences between the Muslim minority and the general population.
4. The Localism Act grants rights and legal obligations to the Muslim minority around the issue of equality. However, the result has been the opposite. This act did not resolve the civil issue but only intensified it (Husband and Alam, 2011). The program has been accused of using social work and local partnerships with community projects and organizations to improve police surveillance of the Muslim community (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011).

The article’s argument is that legislation has promoted alternatives to integration in Britain and has strengthened the Muslim identity over a civic one by fixing Islam and its importance in the public sphere (Hickman et al., 2011). Thus, there can distinguish between two types of communities: a minority community that is distinct and antagonistic to British values and the majority (Shah, 2008). This conduct has led to polarization, which has harmed integration policies and has caused the Muslim community to converge within itself and promote political interests that are compatible with its lifestyle and identity, without any real attempt to integrate into the majority population (Bauman, 2013). The successive failures of implementing integration policies have compelled the administration to advance the interests of the Muslim community to gain their votes.

United States. Since the establishment of the US as an independent state, no nationality or religion has been given primacy.

As Senator Robert F. Kennedy said, “Our attitude toward immigration reflects our faith in the American ideal. We have always believed it possible for men and women who start at the bottom to rise as far as their talent and energy allow. Neither race nor creed nor place of birth should affect their chances” (Jany, 2019).

The majority of American Muslims belong to a high socioeconomic and educational status. They are civically and politically active (Nowrasteh, 2016). The article’s claim here is that members of the Muslim minority feel a sense of belonging to the US and see themselves as full-fledged citizens. The optimal American integration policy does not give room to officially maintain racial or religious differences. As a result, there is little political will or electoral interest expressed toward the Muslim minority, leaving them with negligible political leverage.

In contrast to the Segmented Assimilation Theory,⁹ Gest discusses a reciprocal process by which integration functions in a pluralistic society and indigenous people like immigrants are forced to make concessions as is customary in the dominant host culture (Phalet et al., 2018, pp. 32–43). This process is described as one of the three factors that determine successful integration. First, the government sets an agenda for the integration of minorities by passing laws, establishing curricula, and promoting policies that set boundaries of accepted cultural norms. Second, indigenous society accepts or denies certain behaviors and practices of the incoming group. Third, the migrants shed their previous culture and processes, abandon cultural ties, and are expected to overcome the obstacles of assimilation through upward education and socioeconomic mobility (Phalet et al., 2018, pp. 32–43). The minority group gradually adopts patterns of the dominant culture (Norris and Inglehart, 2012). This process has created a situation in which a minority community must change its lifestyle and practices to integrate sometimes against its will. Two studies surveying the American Muslim community have confirmed the community’s successful integration.

The first random sample survey of Muslim Americans by the Pew Research Center claims that 63% are satisfied with their lives and have a moderate opinion on many issues that distinguish Muslims in Western countries (Rosentiel, 2007).¹⁰ The predominantly Muslim minority is not alienated from American society or values. Most send their children on to secular higher education, thereby encouraging the next generation to strive for a typical American life (Rosentiel, 2007). Among those surveyed, including both Muslim immigrants and native-born, 63% do not embrace radical Islam as a way of life or a form of influence. Therefore, when extremists do appear among them, the Muslim community is able to denounce them and deal with those who threaten their conduct.¹¹ In addition, they willingly alert the authorities to such phenomena (Bhugra and Becker, 2005).

In a study conducted on Muslim American teens between the ages of 13 and 19, education often drove a change in identity or practice. Children of immigrants are forced to deal with new ideas often embedded in the curriculum, specifically designed to facilitate the assimilation of norms and customs of the dominant social group (Hickey, 2015). Of the respondents, 60% reported their attitude changed toward Islam as did their views as they acquired more information, contact with new and different people, as well as exposure to curricula (Cain et al., 2017). It was also found that the public schools reinforce the cultural morals of the host nation, thus acting as centers of assimilation (Lash, 2018).

US integration policies have enabled Muslims to easily integrate economically, which in turn leads to improved social integration. That the majority of American Muslims are richer, more educated, and more dispersed throughout the US, in comparison to Muslims in Europe, has facilitated a more

successful integration (Gest and Nielsen, 2015)¹² However, the Muslim minority understands that social mobility is only possible in the way the US allows it, meaning without any internal objective. Thus, as the article claim the political power of the Muslim minority in the US is negligible, because of their inability to unify the religion within the public sphere.

Moreover, despite the successful integration of the American Muslim community, 201 “anti-sharia” laws have been introduced in 43 states since 2010. Designed to reduce any official Muslim presence in the American public sphere. This legislation mostly includes clauses prohibiting the application of foreign law in US courts, which can conflict with the rights guaranteed by the US Constitution (Shanmugasundaram, 2018). This legislation further underscores the lack of political leverage of the Muslim minority in the US and stands in sharp contrast to Britain, which has passed legislation in favor of Islam in the public space.

In conclusion, the two countries have different outcomes in terms of their integration policies. By failing to prioritize the civic identity over the Muslim one, Britain’s integration policies have made it difficult for British Muslims to easily integrate into the public sphere. The desire of the Muslim minority to remain separate from the rest of the population has compelled the British government to do it through legislation on behalf of the community if the political candidates want to win Muslim votes. In contrast, in the US, integration Policies have not allowed the realization of religion in the public sphere. The Muslim minority has had to adapt itself to the values of the general society—not the other way around. This reality can exist given the negligible political power of the Muslim minority.

The influence of the Muslim lobby—the importance of interest groups. The article claim here is that the Muslim lobby in Britain is significant in terms of the community’s political influence vis-à-vis the government. This influence is evident through the community’s political participation and its electoral leanings. In the US, in contrast, the Muslim lobby does not function as a single entity and has no desire to significantly promote the interests of the Muslim minority.

United Kingdom. The participation of the Muslim minority in the elections can be seen as an encouraging indicator. Organizations and leaders from the Muslim community are extremely supportive of political participation. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) also strongly supports political participation and increased voter turnout among Muslim citizens (Ten key Pledges to support Muslim Communities, 2019). A significant and dominant political voice in the community. It is conducted effective campaigns to register voters and increase voter participation and promote political awareness in doing so. The MCB has also demanded that Britain’s Muslim minority give its vote to potential parliamentary candidates who will promise to meet the community’s political and social demands (Ten key Pledges to support Muslim Communities, 2019).

The political influence of the Muslim minority is evident in the 2005 election when Tony Blair of the Labor Party won his third term as prime minister. After being elected and having given his support to join the American-led war in Iraq, the Labor Party significantly lost its parliamentary power (DW staff, 2007), as the Muslim supporters of the Labor Party withdrew their support to only 38% (Travis, 2004). As result, and despite having a majority of 80 mandates, Blair was unable to bring about parliamentary stability in addition to having created rifts in the party over Blair’s foreign policy. He resigned two years after the election (DW staff, 2007).

Similarly, in 2004, the Respect Party was established, after Muslims had mobilized against the war in Iraq (BBC News, 2003).¹³ The party was successful in areas that had significant Muslim populations, mainly East London and Birmingham, which, in the past, had supported the Labor Party. As it cultivated ties with mosques, organizations, community groups, and trade unions (Peace, 2012), the Respect Party led the Labor Party to rethink its strategy toward its voters and to recognize that the Muslim votes were significant. This idea became even more popular when the Labor Party received less support in the local elections in areas that were heavily Muslim (Peace, 2012).

During the 2010 election, the major parties launched campaigns to encourage support for Muslim-friendly candidates, while allocating resources for these campaigns at the expense of other issues on the party's agenda (Peace, 2015). It was estimated that the Muslim votes could decide the elections in 82 provinces.

The Labor Party traditionally has courted the Muslim minority for its political support. Most of the legislation on the protection of minority rights was passed by the Labor governments (Heath and Demireva, 2014). The Labor Party also has specifically been supportive of Muslim immigrants because many are factory workers who have strong ties to various unions (Dancygier, 2017). The party has built its success on the minority votes by developing an electoral ethnic system that includes their promotion (Garbaya, 2005).

United States. The Muslim lobby in the US focuses mainly on crisis management and requests, especially economic ones that relate to countries of origin, and are not concerned with the Muslim community itself.¹⁴ Therefore, the lobby's impact on foreign policy is negligible (Brad, 2009). Muslim representation in the US over the years has suffered from discrimination. Since the 9/11 attacks, there has been an almost direct cognitive link between Islam and extremist or fundamentalist terrorism. This negative image has also affected the Arab lobby (Zeller, 2006, p. 2555).

Despite the difficulties, most governments representing Muslim-majority countries do try to influence US foreign policy through their embassy representatives, attempts that often fail because of cultural gaps. For example, the PLO has a full-time spokesperson in Washington, but the organization has failed to promote an image that resonates with the American public (Terry, 2005, p. 50).

Several reasons can be given for the Muslim lobby's failure to influence US foreign policy: (1) lack of understanding of American history and the dynamics that drive public opinion; (2) the Muslim-majority countries do not share the same needs and demands; for example, the Palestinians want a state alongside Israel, while the Gulf states want to secure oil exports. Other organizations highlight additional issues, such as fighting stereotypes and discrimination against the Muslim community. An organization that wants to succeed needs to form coalitions and be involved in setting the American agenda (Haney and Vanderbush, 1999). These reasons indicate that the Muslim lobby has no influence on domestic politics, voter turnout, or on their electoral leanings toward one candidate or another.

In conclusion, the Muslim lobby in Britain can influence the government. Muslim organizations in Britain promote the agendas of the Muslim community while emphasizing its electoral power and ensuring its votes for political candidates who will fulfill their wishes in the public sphere and through legislation. In contrast, in the US, the Muslim lobby is weak, without a unified agenda or a desire to influence internally for the benefit of the Muslim community. Therefore, its political influence is low.

Conclusion

This article has proposed a different way of examining the factors that sustain the policy. This research is innovative in that focuses on the electoral variable and connects political power and policy in its analysis of the six comparative factors to show the political power or lack thereof of the Muslim minority in both Britain and the US. Expanding on existing literature, the argument presented here seeks a more comprehensive understanding of the role of political power when determining policy.

The electoral variable manifests itself differently in the two countries analyzed. Britain's Muslim minority, a unique community, expresses and sustains itself optimally. Moreover, the UK recognizes and promotes the community's distinction, recognizing not only its political importance but also its ability to influence election results. This is in contrast to the US, which does not enable the Muslim minority to exist as a distinct or unique community; thus, its political weight does not play a role in political decisions. Future research could address how the political factor manifests itself between two meaningful groups in different countries and how the government chooses to relate to them.

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Notes

- 1 This article was inspired by a chapter from the author's doctoral thesis.
- 2 For more information, see U.S. Embassy & Consulates in the United Kingdom (2021), <https://uk.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history>.
- 3 For more information, see Baker, S. (2020). The most powerful countries on earth in 2020, ranked. Insider. Retrieved 20 January 2020, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/worlds-most-powerful-countries-2020-ranked-us-news-2020-1>
- 4 In the 16th and 17th centuries, and for more than a century, the British Empire was a dominant global power. In 1922, about 450 million people lived under its auspices, constituting about one-fifth of the world's population. Its area extended 35.5 million square kilometers, which is about a quarter of the earth's land area (Robinson, 1998).
- 5 Most see Islam and its application as the central cornerstone of their lives, and their British citizenship as secondary in importance. British Muslims also see themselves as part of the Muslim nation, with their identity based primarily on Islam rather than ethnic affiliation (Gottfried et al., 2018).
- 6 The Labor Party wants to regain control based on the Muslim vote. To this end, Muslim delegates and members of parliament have entered the ranks of the party. Bashir Ibrahim, a British Muslim who had been running in the popular vote campaign to leave the European Union, stated that "We have a Muslim mayor in London, we are seeing Muslims represented in all parts of our political process... We are seeing more and more Muslims get engaged in the political process because they see their image and people that look like them and who come from communities like them in positions of power" (AP Archive, 2019).
- 7 This phenomenon of secularization also exists in Britain. Leaving the religion of Islam or renouncing its principles is considered heretical and could harm a person's personal safety and that of their family. Therefore, few identify as secular within the Muslim minority in Britain and keep their secular identity a secret (Anthony, 2015).
- 8 For example, Wales has been dealing with the issue of refugees since 2008, Scotland has published a 4-year strategic plan, and Northern Ireland has no integration plan at all (European Website on Integration, 2020).
- 9 Segmented assimilation theory suggests that immigrant groups adapt differently to life in the United States. About this theory, see Xie and Greenman (2005).
- 10 This report included more than 55,000 interviews to achieve its random sampling of Muslims in the US. The survey is most varied and includes more than 70 nationalities that identify with Islam (Rosentiel, 2007).
- 11 According to Daniel Benjamin, a senior fellow of foreign policy at the Brookings Institute (Barret, 2007, pp. 75-82).
- 12 Integration into American culture and society is evident by the rates in which Muslims participate in mainstream American activities, such as following local sports teams and watching TV shows, similar to the general American public. For example, half of the Muslim minority place the American flag at home, in the office, or in the car (Jamali, 2016).
- 13 The Respect Party was established as a governmental alternative that would promote a socialist society. It opposed all inequality and injustice and sought to preserve the environment and create a socially just society (Peace, 2012).

14 Overlapping the Muslim lobby is the Arab lobby, which consists of small organizations. This lobby's lack of unity hinders it from influencing American foreign policy. Moreover, the priorities of Arab countries do not overlap with those of the US, not even regarding their vision for international security (Bard, 2009).

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The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical approval

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Additional information

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