

Muslim Minorities in Asia: What Determines Their Treatment?

Muslims in Mongolia, China, India, Singapore, and Russia

Tanisha Dodla

Macalester College

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Abstract

This study employs the theoretical framework of the Securitization of Islam to examine the treatment of Muslims in five minority-Muslim Asian countries: Mongolia, India, China, Singapore, and Russia. The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing secondary data analysis, followed by a quantitative analysis using an original Index. This Index assigns scores to each country based on their treatment of Muslims, drawing from the Freedom House Index and the Pew Research Center. Through linear regression and coefficient analysis, the study seeks to identify the most influential factors affecting these scores, including regime type, historical relations with Muslims, and the Muslim population within each country. The findings indicate that regime type exerts the most significant influence on the treatment of Muslims, with China demonstrating the least favorable treatment and Mongolia displaying the most favorable conditions.

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Since 661 AD, Muslim kingdoms have helped advance society and have been the birthplace of innovation (*Chronology*, 2020). This perception has fundamentally changed, spurred by the Ottoman Empire's fall in 1923 and the prolonged instability in the historically Muslim Middle East. Muslims are now the targets of xenophobia and are stereotyped as terrorists. This idea has been encouraged by the West, especially after the 9/11 attacks in the United States and the multiple wars fought by the West in the Middle East in the late twentieth century¹. This increased Islamophobia, Hijab bans, and migration policies can be explained by the theory of "Securitization of Islam" (Mavelli, 2012). Securitization implies that leaders maintain divergent civil policies regarding the people of one religion, Islam in this case, but not other religions. While this theory of Securitization has mostly been applied to the Global West and Central Asia, this paper will attempt to explore this theory in the Asian context.

Islamophobia is also a growing sentiment in Asian countries with minority Muslim populations as well, even though Asia is home to 70% of the global Muslim population (Sjoquist, 2005). India and China, for example, have been well-documented in their dislike of Muslims (Elshekh, 2021). China and Myanmar have Muslim minorities who have been subject to internment camps, genocide, and centuries-long oppression (McGovern et al., 2024). Mongolia and Singapore, on the other hand, seem to be relatively more accepting of their Muslim brethren. Why are some Asian countries more accepting of Muslim minorities than others? This paper will examine the treatment of Muslims through regime type, the historical context of domestic Muslim relations, and Muslim population percentage. It will attempt to conclude which factors most greatly influence the treatment of Muslims in Mongolia, China,

India, Singapore, and Russia². It will also evaluate the theoretical framework for this paper - the Securitization of Islam - in the context of these five countries.

Methodology

This paper will explore the five country cases both qualitatively and quantitatively, using a mixed-methods hypothesis-generating study. First, the countries will be examined qualitatively to create a baseline expectation for the treatment of Muslims in that country. The second part of this paper will attempt to create an index and score each country based on their treatment of Muslims, called a securitization index.

The paper will examine the relationship between the Securitization index and three variables using linear regression. These three variables are the country's Freedom House democracy score for 2023, the number of Muslims in their country, and how historically contentious Muslim relations have been in their country, which was measured through a social hostilities score from the Pew Research Center. The Freedom House democracy index is composed of two main components: civil liberties and political rights. There are fifteen indicators describing civil liberties and ten describing political rights. Each country is scored out of four for each of these indicators, yielding a score out of 100. The higher the score, the more rights and freedoms are available to the citizens of that country per the context of the analysis. This paper will attempt to conclude which of these factors most highly influences Muslim treatment in the Asian countries being examined in this paper.

A Qualitative History Of The Countries Being Examined

The five countries will be introduced and their laws on religion and treatment of Muslims will be explored in this section.

Mongolia: An Accepting Society With Recent Democratization

Mongolia is a Central Asian country that democratized in 1990 following a peaceful revolution. It used to be a socialist satellite state of the Soviet Union but democratized when the Soviet Union's weakness became more apparent (*History of the U.S. and Mongolia*, n.d.). It is a very recently formed democracy, and yet holds a democracy score of 84 out of 100, making it the most perceived free country being explored in this paper (*Mongolia: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report*, n.d.). Its religious demography is interesting, given that 40.6% of Mongolians self-identify as non-religious. Mongolia does have a Buddhist majority of 51.7%, with Islam being the third largest religious identity; 3.2% of Mongolians identify as Muslims (*2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mongolia*, 2022). The Muslim community is largely comprised of ethnic Khazaks living in the west of Mongolia. The large number of non-religious citizens implies a reduced importance of religion within Mongolia. Due to this, social hostilities towards religion are "Low" (Majumdar, 2022).

The government also protects individuals against harmful religion, conversion, and the indoctrination of children with religion (*2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mongolia*, 2022). An impartial stance is reflected by the prohibition of schools from using state funding to teach religious curricula. However, the government has implemented bureaucratic obstacles in the registration of religion. Religious organizations must register (annually at times) with multiple governmental organizations, maintain multiple documents to do so, and pass a

“safety check” by the local municipal representatives (*2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mongolia*, 2022). Hence, while the Pew Research Center has categorized the Mongolian government as having “Moderate” restrictions on religion, the laws and checks on religion have ensured a lack of religious terrorism or extremism (Majumdar, 2022).

China: A Totalitarian Society With A Goal Of Homogeneity

China’s population is far from homogenous: even though over 90% are Han Chinese, some populations identify as Tibetan, Mongolian, and Muslim (O’Neil et al., 2024). According to the constitution, Chinese citizens can practice one of the five official religions: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism, and Daoism. Specifically, the Muslim population in China is made up of two ethnicities: the Hui Muslims and the Uyghurs. The Hui Muslims are scattered throughout China and speak Mandarin, whereas the Uyghur Muslims are highly concentrated within the Xinjiang province and speak Arabic.

With the selection of Xi Jinping as the head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the treatment of Uyghur Muslims has worsened due to totalitarian control, increased surveillance, and internment camps. China is a totalitarian state, with no limitations on President Xi’s actions: he has formed a cult of personality and a fondness for Sinicization, to which the Uyghur Muslims are a threat⁴ (Pew Research Center, 2023). This desire for uniformity is further reflected by Xi’s favoritism for atheism, not allowing CCP members to be affiliated with any religion (Pew Research Center, 2023). The Social Credit System, a form of surveillance, is widely used in the Xinjiang province to surveil the Uyghurs’ actions⁵ (O’Neil et al., 2024). The Uyghurs demanded freedom to create their own nation, “East Turkestan,” and have used extremist methods, including suicide bombings and mass shootings, to communicate this goal to Beijing

(Greitens et al., 2020)⁶. In response to this, Uyghurs have been forced to be “re-educated” at internment camps: reports indicate that one to three million Uyghurs have been sent to over 1,200 internment camps (Greitens et al., 2020). From a series of leaked government reports, Muslims who spoke Arabic, abstained from drinking and smoking, and did not eat pork, were all sent to these camps (Buckley & Ramzy, 2019). The government classified Xinjiang Muslims as “extremists” and stated that Muslims would be sent to internment camps until they were cured of “the contagion” of Islamic extremism. The vagueness of these numbers suggests tight security over this information, which could mean that anywhere from 5-17% of China’s Muslim population has been in internment camps as of 2019 (Buckley & Ramzy, 2019). The surveillance, control, and internment camps illustrate the government restriction on religion, which, as of 2022, is categorized as “Very High” by the Pew Research Center (Majumdar, 2022).

India: A Majority-Hindu Country With An Increasingly Nationalist Government India’s population has even less homogeneity than China. However, it acknowledged this fact and enshrined the idea of secularism in its constitution in 1976. The constitutional right to religion has become less protected since the right-wing Bharatiya-Janata Party (BJP) leader Narendra Modi was elected as the Prime Minister of India in 2014 (Truschke, 2023). The BJP is an offshoot of a paramilitary organization called the RSS that follows fascist and religious supremacist ideas; these ideas continue to influence the party’s ideology (Truschke, 2023). With the election of Prime Minister Modi, Muslims have been treated as “second-class” citizens.

The country has countless examples of anti-Muslim actions. Cow vigilante violence from 2015 to 2018 killed at least 36 Muslims⁷ (*Violent cow protection in India*, 2023). The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) allowed for fast-tracked citizenship status for *non-Muslims*

from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan (BBC, 2024). An ancient Mughal mosque was destroyed in 1992, and in 2020, Modi laid the first stone for it to become a Hindu temple (Rajesh, 2023). In 2022, a Karnataka state ban allowed educational institutions to ban hijabs and stated that the wearing of a headscarf is a nonessential Islamic practice (Masih & Shih, 2022).

These examples highlight the erasure, violence, and discrimination against Muslims in India who make up roughly 14% of the country's population (Truschke, 2023). Additionally, the Prime Minister is part of the RSS, further encouraging Hindu nationalism⁸ (Truschke, 2023). Interestingly, because of this, social hostilities towards Muslims are categorized as "Very High", which is lower than the "High" government restrictions on religion as of 2022 (Majumdar, 2022). This can also be explained by the historic distrust between Hindus and Muslims, stemming from the Mughal occupation of India from 1526 to 1858. During this time, Hindu temples were destroyed, Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam, and Hindus were taxed more because of the Jizya tax (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). Additionally, there have been terrorist attacks by radical Muslims, including the infamous 26/11 bombings in 2008 in Mumbai (D'Souza, 2024). The historical context of India, along with its rising nationalism, has created a hostile environment for Muslims.

Singapore: A Society That Thrives Due To Its Diversity

In 2014, the Pew Research Center proclaimed that Singapore was the most religiously diverse country in the world (Liu, 2014). There is no majority religion in Singapore, and its second-largest religion is Islam, with 18% of Singaporeans being Muslims (Sjoquist, 2005). It has been said that Singapore's diversity is strictly maintained by the People's Action Party

(PAP), which controls diversity and Muslim teachings through its policies.⁹ Its Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other (CMIO) societal division has been unchanged since the 1960s: the majority of the population is Chinese (75.7%), then Malay (15.2%), then Indian (7.5%), and then Other (1.6%) (Saleem, 2023). These racial quotas let Singapore control racial and religious populations.

Singapore also installed the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) as a statutory body in the 1968 Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA) (MUIS). This allowed the Muslim community to advise the Prime Minister on matters related to Muslims and Islam in Singapore. Hence, Muslims are given relative freedom and power in Singapore. However, according to MUIS, an individual can only become a religious scholar if approved by the Asatizah Recognition Board (a board under the purview of MUIS). This has been done (as stated on the MUIS website) to safeguard against “deviant or problematic ideologies and teachings” (MUIS). This creates a strict system and does not allow individuals to gain power in the Muslim community unless they are endorsed by the governmental body, thereby portraying the co-optation of Islam by the PAP.

However, even though the government has “Very High” restrictions on religion in Singapore, the population does not echo this sentiment (Majumdar, 2022). Only 13% of Singaporeans believe that being Buddhist (the most populous religion) is part of Singaporean identity (Miner, 2023). As such, social hostilities on the grounds of religion are “Moderate” in Singapore (Majumdar, 2022).

Russia: An Authoritarian¹⁰ Society With Occasionally Accepted Diversity

Russia is an extremely diverse country, spanning two continents with 83 constituent units

(*Russia in facts and numbers*, n.d.). The co-optation of Islam and the increasing control over Muslims from Moscow shaped the treatment of Muslims in Russia. Russia has four “traditional religions,” as stated in 1997 as part of a religious association law, which includes Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism (Fradkin, 2024). This law also makes a distinction between religious organizations and religious groups, with the right to practice in public and purchase land given to the former. However, a religious group has had to be registered for at least 15 years to become a religious organization (Fradkin, 2024)¹¹. This was only the case for one Muslim organization: the Central Spiritual Association of Muslims in Russia (SAM). Every Muslim republic had a SAM, and they were used by Moscow to co-opt Islam in Russia (Fradkin, 2024). SAMs have co-opted mosques and have controlled who becomes an Imam (a Muslim religious leader). Religious leaders who do not conform to their SAMs have found themselves pressed with terrorism charges¹². Allegations of terrorism have been used to detain ordinary Muslims in Russia as well, under the guise of stating that they are followers of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement (HuT)¹³. This was seen in 2020, in which 19 men were put behind bars for up to 24 years for their alleged following of HuT, even though they had no association with the religious movement or plans to join it (Aitkhozhina, 2020).

There is a large amount of diversity within the Muslim community in Russia as well, with six former Soviet Socialist Unions being Muslim, including modern-day Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. However, “Russian Muslims”, or Muslims identifying as Chechens, Tatars, Dagestanis, or Bashkirs, are largely given preferential treatment for their “Russian” identity (Aziz & Calderone, 2023).

The co-optation of Islam, as well as the marginalization of some Muslims but not others, is illustrated by the “Very High” score Russia earned for government restrictions on religion

(Majumdar, 2022). Freedom House gave Russia a score of one out of four for freedom of religious expression. Religious intolerance in Russia has worsened due to increasing authoritarianism and the war in Ukraine, with over 53 religious monuments destroyed in Kyiv and 71 religious monuments destroyed in the Donetsk region, as of July 2022 (Ochab, 2022).

A Quantitative Analysis Of The Countries Being Examined

Creating The Index

From the qualitative analysis done above, it can be concluded that all five of these countries have some degree of securitization of Islam, with the exception of Mongolia, which has low religious intolerance. The categories used in the creation of this index have been drawn from Freedom House, the Pew Research Center, and observations found in the qualitative part of this paper. The Freedom House democracy index has an indicator for religious freedom (not for any particular religion) under its civil liberties component. Guiding questions from this indicator were used to create this part of this index. Table 1 below will explain the scoring system. The higher the points a country has, the worse its treatment of Muslims is. This index will be called the Securitization Index - which, in the case of this paper, deals with the Securitization of Islam.

Each question (the leftmost column of Table 1) will carry a certain weight (the third column from the left in Table 1). This weight is determined by this question's relative importance: for example, social hostilities is representative of the popular consensus and societal sentiments regarding Muslims in that country - hence, it is weighted higher. The harassment and arrest of Muslims are also weighted higher because this represents law enforcement's - and by extension, the government's - sentiments regarding Muslims. The destruction of or restriction on building Mosques is the third question given a higher weight. Places of worship are symbols of

religion, and the destruction of that symbol is a threat to the entire Muslim community: representative of the degree of animosity towards Muslims. Finally, freedom of religion is given a higher weight because it illustrates the protection of religion as fundamental to the country, and represents the legality of freedom of religion. Other categories were given a weight of one, which is because these categories may impact more than just Muslims: for example, governments having authority over religious leaders and controlling religious writing can be applied to all religions, not just Islam.

The “points allotted” column aims to create criteria based on its corresponding question. The lowest that can be scored in any category (question) is 0, which states that there are no barriers to Muslims for that specific category. The highest that can be scored in any category is 1, which states that there are full barriers to Muslims for that specific category. Hence, if a country scores 1 for each question, taking into account the weights and additional points, it will receive a score of 14/14 (the highest score for this index) - indicating the worst treatment of Muslims a country can receive for this index. If a country scores 0 for each question, it will receive a score of 0/14 (the lowest score for this index) - indicating the best treatment of Muslims a country can receive for this index.

Table 1

The questions used in the Index and their respective weights

Question	Points Allotted	Weight Given
Are registration requirements employed to impede the free functioning of religious institutions?	0: No registration requirements required 0.5: Registration required for all religions 1: Registration is required for only Islam	1
Are Muslims harassed, fined, arrested, or beaten by the authorities for engaging in their religious practices?	0: Muslims are not harassed or otherwise harmed for engaging in religious practices 0.25: Muslims are fined for religious practices 0.5: Muslims are threatened for engaging in religious practices 0.75: Muslims are arrested for engaging in religious practices 1: Muslims are killed for engaging in religious practices	2
Does the government appoint or otherwise influence the appointment of religious leaders?	0: The government does not influence the appointment of religious leaders 0.5: The government has some degree of control over the appointment of religious leaders (for example, a statutory body) 1: The government has full control over the appointment of religious leaders.	1
Does the government control or restrict the production and distribution of religious writings or materials?	0: The government does not control or restrict the production of religious materials 0.5: Government reasonably restricts the production of religious materials (for example, does not allow federal money to go towards the distribution of religious material) 1: The government fully controls and restricts the production of religious materials	1
Is the construction of Mosques banned or restricted? Have Mosques been destroyed?	0: Mosques are allowed to be freely built 0.5: The construction of Mosques is restricted (for example, the construction of a Mosque has to be approved by a governmental organization) 1: The construction of Mosques is banned +1: Mosques have been destroyed in the last 15 years ¹⁴	2

Are individuals free to practice any religion?	0: The government has freedom of religion and secularism in its constitution 0.25: The government only has freedom of religion in its constitution 0.5: The government has freedom of religion in its constitution but favors a single religion 0.75: The government has freedom of religion in its constitution but favors a single religion and “harrases” a single religion 1: The government does not have freedom of religion in its constitution	2
Are there social hostilities towards Muslims?	0: No social hostilities towards Muslims 0.25: Low social hostilities towards Muslims 0.5: Moderate social hostilities towards Muslims 0.75: High social hostilities towards Muslims 1: Very High social hostilities towards Muslims	2
Are Muslims allowed to wear head coverings in all spheres of life?	0: All religious garb is allowed and protected 0.25: Some religious garb is not allowed 0.5: Head coverings are not allowed in public-sector jobs 0.75: Head coverings are not allowed in schools/universities 1: No religious garb is protected +1: People are harassed and assaulted for their choice of religious clothing	1

Results

Table 2 will score each country using the system outlined in Table 1. They will then be plotted against three separate variables to determine which variable influences the score (treatment of Muslims) the most. These three factors are regime type, which will be operationalized using the Freedom House Score for each country in 2023, the Muslim population as a percentage of the total population, and the history of each country with Islam, which will be operationalized using the Social Hostilities score from the Pew Research

Center. This is representative of the way society remembers Muslims, which is indicative of the country's history with Islam.

Table 2

The five countries' scores using the index outlined in Table 1

Question	Country				
	Mongolia	China	India	Singapore	Russia
Are registration requirements employed to impede the free functioning of religious institutions?	0.5 x 1	0.5 x 1	0 x 1	0.5 x 1	0.5 x 1
Are Muslims harassed, fined, arrested, or beaten by the authorities for engaging in their religious practices?	0 x 2	1 x 2	1 x 2	0 x 2	0.75 x 2
Does the government appoint or otherwise influence the appointment of religious leaders?	0 x 1	0.5 x 1	0 x 1	0.5 x 1	0.5 x 1
Does the government control or restrict the production and distribution of religious writings or materials?	0.5 x 1	1 x 1	0 x 1	0.5 x 1	1 x 1
Is the construction of Mosques banned or restricted? Have Mosques been destroyed?	0 x 2	0.5 x 2 + 1	0 x 2 + 1	0.5 x 1	0 x 2 + 1
Are individuals free to practice any religion?	0.25 x 2	0.5 x 2	0.75 x 2	0.25 x 2	0.5 x 2
Are there social hostilities towards Muslims?	0.25 x 2	0.25 x 2	1 x 2	0.5 x 2	0.5 x 2
Are Muslims allowed to wear head coverings in all spheres of life?	0 x 1	1 x 1 + 1	1 x 1 + 1	0.5 x 1	0.75 x 1
Total score	3/14	9.5/14	8.5/14	4/14	7.25/14

Mongolia's Score: Highly Tolerant

Mongolia requires each religious organization to register, which is generally a bureaucratic process as discussed previously in the context of a State Department report. Additionally, the government does not control who becomes a religious leader or Imam. The government also does not restrict the construction of mosques and has not destroyed mosques since the Mongol Empire. There have been no reports of violence against Muslims in Mongolia, and the government does not control who becomes a religious leader or Imam. There are also no restrictions on religious clothing.

Mongolia does not have secularism in its constitution, but it does outline freedom of religion and has not been shown to favor any single religion. This is evident in its society, with Mongolia given a low social hostilities score based on religion (The Pew Research Center did not mention any countries as having no social hostilities based on religion).

China's Score: Extremely Intolerant

It is given the highest score for the second question due to its internment camps that forcibly house Xinjiang Muslims. This is seen through extreme governmental control. It requires all religious groups to register with the government. It also exerts control over who leads religious ceremonies by sentencing them to internment camps if they preach "Islam extremism". Individuals practicing Islam from Xinjiang were sent to "training schools set up by the government" and international students who came home to Xinjiang were told their relatives were receiving "treatment" or that they were being "dealt with", which was often a euphemism for punishment¹⁵. Article 31 of the 2001 Regulation on the Administration of Publishing bans the printing and dissemination of religious materials (*Prior Restraints on Religious Publishing*

in China, n.d.). In April 2018, a CCP document mentioned Mosque consolidation, which essentially encouraged Mosque demolitions and discouraged the construction of new mosques (Human Rights Watch, 2023), stating that there should be more Mosque demolitions than constructions¹⁶. Finally, in the Xinjiang region, individuals are not allowed to wear veils or have long beards as they are deemed “extremist attire” (Wang, 2018)¹⁷. This, however, contrasts with societal feelings about religion. The Pew Research Center categorized social hostilities on the basis of religion as “Low” (Majumdar, 2022).

India’s score: Socially Intolerant

India, regardless of its high score, does not use bureaucracy in its mistreatment of Muslims. As such, the government has no control over the registration of religious organizations (unless they receive international funding). It also has no control over the appointment of religious leaders nor does it ban or restrict the distribution of religious materials. Socially, however, this is far from the case (an inverse of China’s governmentally strict, socially lax approach). Muslims are harassed and beaten for their practices, but they have not been killed for their religious *practices* (Frayer, 2020). They are instead killed for their alleged lack of respect for Hindu beliefs, such as not eating beef, as seen in the cow vigilante riots. The frequency of these riots explains the systemic lack of legal and policing resources Muslims (and other marginalized communities, such as Dalits) have in India. In a 2019 report from Human Rights Watch, the police routinely stalled investigations, violated procedures, or were complicit in these attacks, suggesting that while the government does not outright restrict individuals on the basis of religion, governmental services still harbor hatred for Muslims. There are no restrictions on building religious buildings, but mosques are vandalized frequently. In 2024 alone, two mosques,

two Muslim schools, one Sufi shrine (an offshoot of Islam), and multiple Muslim graves were destroyed in Northern India (Mogul, 2024). India has the highest score for social hostilities based on religion, likely due to the high levels of nationalism and the multiple wars that have been fought with Pakistan and Bangladesh, both of which are majority Muslim countries. Hijabs are not protected by the law, as seen in the Karnataka state ban disallowing head coverings in some schools.

Singapore's Score: Relatively Tolerant

Singapore requires all religions to register and MUIS, in conjunction with the government, regulates Islamic policies. Hence, the government has some degree of control over who becomes a religious leader and the type of religious materials distributed. The government exerts similar control over religious buildings: mosques cannot be built using government funding. Socially, Muslims fare well in Singapore: there are only Moderate social hostilities based on religion, with individuals being free to practice their religion. While Muslims can wear the clothing they prefer, there is an ongoing case against discrimination against Muslim women for choosing to wear the hijab in some workplaces (Yi, 2020)¹⁸.

Russia's Score: Bureaucratically Intolerant

Russia uses bureaucracy to stifle Islam. It requires all religions to register, controls and surveils the religious information being disseminated, and manipulates the appointment of religious leaders. The latter two are done using the SAM networks. There is no restriction on building mosques, but the Central Mosque in Moscow was demolished in 2011 due to an alleged lack of structural integrity (Lally, 2011). Constitutionally, individuals can practice any of the four

official religions, a structure similar to China. However, instead of atheism, Russia favors the Russian Orthodox Church, which is given a special status in the 1997 law (Aitkhozhina, 2020). Muslims are not allowed to wear head coverings in schools and universities in two territories: the Republic of Mordovia and the Stavropol Territory (Javaid, 2022). Muslims allegedly part of the HuT movement were arrested on charges that could not be backed with evidence (*Russia 2022 International Religious Freedom Report*, n.d.)¹⁹. While their government may pose many restrictions on Muslims, the Russian public has been given a moderate social hostilities score.

Evaluating the Factors

The scores from Table 2 will be plotted against regime type (operationalized using the 2023 Freedom House democracy score), the Muslim population (as a percentage of the total population), and the history of each country with Islam (operationalized using the Social Hostilities score from the Pew Research Center) to explore which factor most greatly affects the treatment of Muslims. In order to explore whether social hostilities impacted the securitization of Muslims, the social hostilities score was removed from the Securitization Index when plotted against the social hostilities score, given that they were from the same source, which can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 1

The impact of regime type on the treatment of Muslims

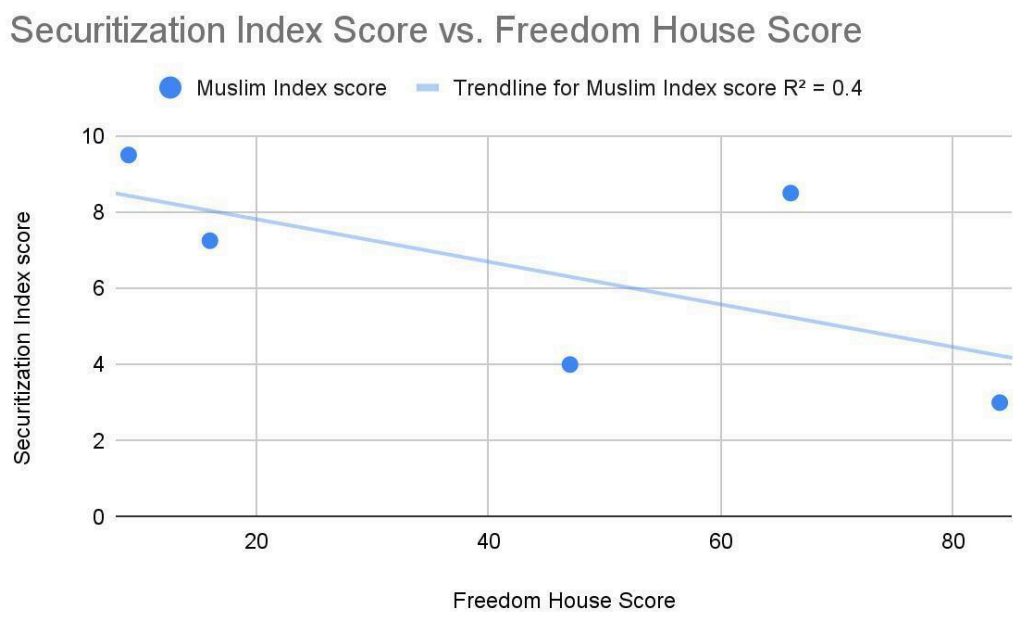


Figure 2

The impact of the Muslim population on the treatment of Muslims

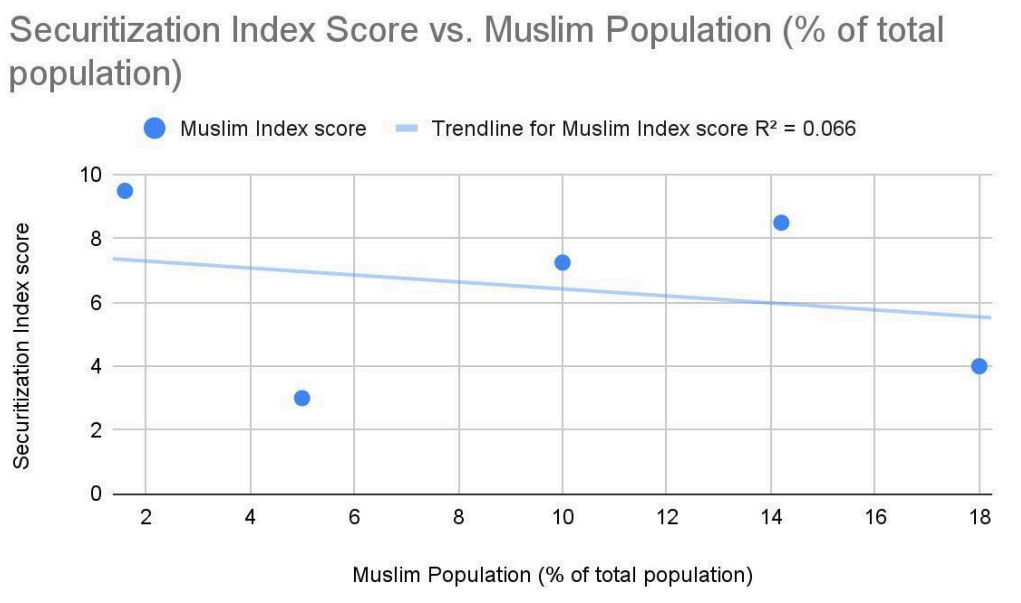
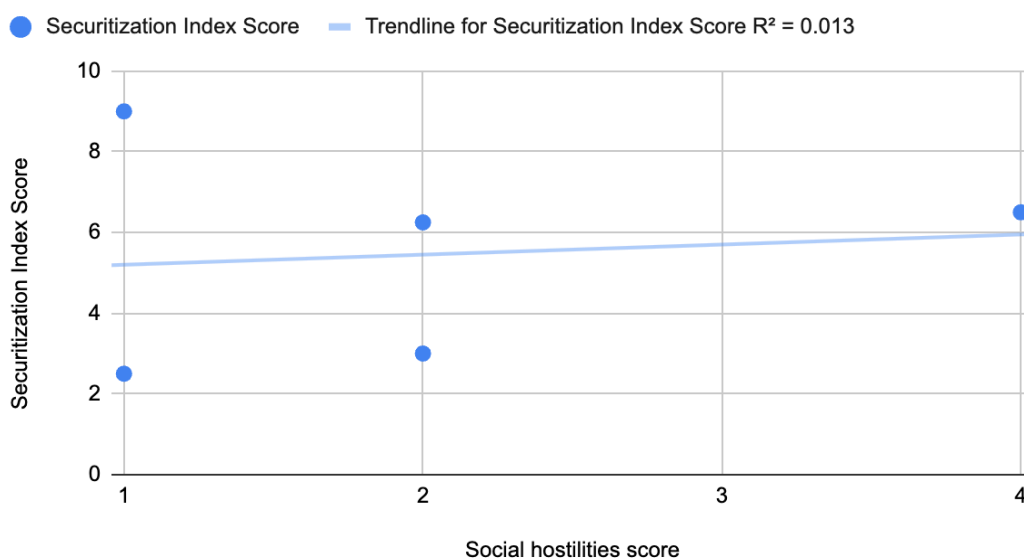


Figure 3

The impact of Islamic relations on the treatment of Muslims

Securitization Index Score vs. Social hostilities

**Table 3**

Outline of the scoring system used for the Social hostilities score in Figure 3

Social hostilities score	The number for which it is coded
Low	1
Moderate	2
High	3
Very High	4

Figure 1 depicts an inversely proportional relationship between the Freedom House score and the Securitization Index score, with a coefficient of determination (r-squared) of 0.4. This suggests that as the government regime-type becomes more authoritarian (the Freedom House score decreases), the treatment of Muslims gets worse (the Securitization Index score

increases). Figure 2 also depicts an inversely proportional relationship, but it is between the population of Muslims as a percentage of the total Muslim population and the Securitization Index score. This implies that if there is a higher Muslim population, the treatment of Muslims is better (the Securitization Index score is lower). This could be logical because a greater Muslim population would suggest more Muslims fighting for their rights and improving their conditions. However, this trend has a coefficient of determination of 0.066, which implies a weak association between the two variables. Hence, the conclusion that a greater Muslim population leads to better treatment of Muslims may not be true, which is supported by the lack of significance of this association (r-squared is 0.066). It is more logical that as the population increases (*and* if there are political opportunities), the treatment of Muslims gets better.

However, as the population increases even more, the majority may see them as a threat and begin to treat them worse. This conclusion is better supported by the qualitative part of this paper, as countries with high Muslim populations (such as India and China) tend to have higher Securitization Index Scores. Figure 3 depicts a directly proportional relationship with a coefficient of determination of 0.013. As social hostilities increase, the Securitization Index score increases. This is intuitive because social hostilities are representative of the general population's sentiments regarding Muslims. However, this relationship is weak, and will likely need to be tested further.

Using the coefficient of determination for the linear regressions in all three of these scatterplots, it can be hypothesized which factor most highly influences the treatment of Muslims. The regime type seems to have the greatest impact on the treatment of Muslims (the Securitization Index Score). This is because it has the highest coefficient of determination (0.4). The second most important factor is the population of Muslims, as a percentage of total

population. This is because its coefficient of determination is 0.066. The least important factor observed is the social hostilities score. This is because its coefficient of determination is 0.013. Hence, social hostilities do not seem to be a good indicator of the treatment of Muslims within this sample. However, if more countries in Asia with Muslim minorities were evaluated, this relationship may strengthen.

Evaluation Of The Method

Strengths

This method allowed for the “treatment of Muslims” to be operationalized based on evidence. Given the fact that the subject of Muslim oppression is sensitive and controversial, a lot of the information seen is biased or false. Hence, creating an index with objective categories and evidence-based scores gets rid of the subjectivity that exists for this issue. This was a mixed-methods analysis, containing both quantitative and qualitative information, which allowed for a holistic evaluation of the treatment of Muslims. The qualitative research created a baseline and informed the index creation and factors that were examined in relation to the treatment of Muslims. Additionally, the categories used in the index were comprehensive. This list is not exhaustive, but it is an adequate starting point to operationalize the treatment of Muslims.

Limitations

The social hostilities research gathered by the Pew Research Center does not clarify which religion society was hostile to. For this paper, it is assumed that society was hostile to Muslims. However, it is important to note that Christians in China, India, and to some extent, Singapore, all face varying levels of discrimination and social hostilities as well. Additionally,

the social hostilities factor (used in Figure 3) is not entirely accurate. The factor being examined is the history of Muslim relations in that country. However, this is influenced by more than just social hostilities. It is also influenced by previous Muslim occupation (and length if applicable), the number (if any) of terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims, and if the country has gone to war with any majority-Muslim countries. Hence, in order to make this method more accurate, this paper would have benefitted from a more comprehensive operationalization of this factor.

Additionally, a sample size of only five countries was used. This does not provide enough information to make conclusions regarding the influence of specific factors on the treatment of Muslims. In the future, it would be prudent to use more countries across a wider geographical range in order to verify the observations in this paper.

Conclusion And Discussion

The Securitization Index, created in this paper, is a vital tool for understanding to what extent minority religions are sidelined and “otherized”. Using this, it can be hypothesized that the treatment of Muslims is most highly influenced by regime type, Muslim population, and then social hostilities. China, with the lowest Freedom House score for democracy (non-democratic), has the highest Securitization Index score (worst treatment of Muslims). Mongolia, with the highest Freedom House score for democracy (democratic), has the lowest Securitization Index score (best treatment of Muslims).

Hence, the theory of the Securitization of Islam is seen within some of these countries. China, Russia, and India all have different policies for Muslims and not other religions. This is likely because, as Mavelli observed, Islam is seen as a greater threat to the “natural order of society” than other religions. The reasons for Islam being a greater threat are different in all three

of these countries. In India, this is because of India's relations with Pakistan, its occupation by the Mughals, and 26/11. In China, it is because of the suicide bombings and Islam's threat to homogeneity. In Russia, it is due to having a strong sense of nationalism: they fear Islam because they worry that a "Muslim" identity will supersede their "Russian" identity. However, it is interesting to note that Mongolia and Singapore do not appear to share this Securitization of Islam. They have high tolerance for Muslims and Islam and their policies reflect that tolerance. This could be because Singapore has carefully constructed a country based on diversity. In Mongolia, this could be explained by its strong democratic institutions.

It is also important to address that there is a securitization of Christianity in India, China, and Singapore. The securitization of Christianity seems to be created more by the government and its restrictions than by societal hostilities. Hence, this research diverges from Mavelli's article because Western countries are (mostly) majority Christian. This is because her argument is based on the Paris and Copenhagen schools of thought regarding securitization (Mavelli, 2012). This is not the case in most Asian countries, which is why this specific set of Muslim minority countries is important to study.

In the future, scholars could use the Securitization Index in this paper to compare the reasons for Muslim treatment, as well as other religious minorities, in different countries. They could also change the weights and add more categories, depending on the countries or religions being examined. While researching, it was found that certain religious minorities were targeted more than others regarding COVID-19, which is a category that could be included in future research. Additionally, the index could be expanded to include each country's sentiments towards the war in Israel and Palestine (which can be done using news coverage bias and aid sent to

Palestine or Israel). Future research could also explore a fourth factor to explain the treatment of Muslims, such as bureaucratic restrictions or government barriers to religion.

The creation of the Securitization Index and the analysis of its scores is important for this field of study and provides a different perspective for scholars of Securitization, who generally work with Western ideas of Securitization.

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Footnotes

¹ It is important to note that Muslims in Palestine are facing genocide, once again encouraged by the West, further inciting Islamophobia.

² These countries were chosen due to their vast differences in type of regime and history with Muslims.

³ In this paper, China is categorized as a totalitarian regime due to its extensive top-down mobilization, Xi's cult of personality, and the one-party system.

⁴ Sinicization is a policy that requires religions to bring their doctrines in line with Chinese morals and ideas. This affects both Muslims and Christians in China (Pew Research Center).

⁵ The social credit system was introduced in 2015 as a way of examining Chinese citizens' financial, political, and social actions and assigning a score to each citizen (O'Neil et al., 2024).

⁶ For more information, refer to page 22 of Greitens et al. paper regarding Counterterrorism in China.

⁷ Cow vigilante violence occurs because Hindus view cows as sacred animals while other religious groups do not. Hindus target these groups, which include Muslims, indigenous people, and Dalits (a marginalized caste).

⁸ Prime Minister Modi has never held a solo press conference in India, and therefore does not dissuade against the wave of Islamophobia that has manifested since he rose to Prime Ministership (Bose, 2023).

⁹ The PAP has been in power since 1959 and has created a hyper-incumbent advantage. During this time, there have been only three Prime Ministers in power (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.).

¹⁰ Russia under Putin's rule will be classified as an authoritarian regime in this paper due to its limited political plurality, weak party ideology, and lack of transparent elections.

¹¹ The 15 year requirement was overturned in 2015, but the network for co-optation was already built (Fradkin, 2024).

¹² At one mosque in Kazan, Tatarstan, an Imam gained popularity. Subsequently, the mosque was closed, citing a "building violation". The imam was charged with extremism due to his alleged support of the HuT movement. A similar event took place in Dagestan. An Imam in Khasavyurt publicly lamented the closing of Salafi mosques and claimed that he was being targeted by authorities. As a result, he was charged with inciting terrorism (Fradkin, 2024).

¹³ This movement sought to unite young Muslims from Western Europe and Central Asia to form a Muslim Caliphate and implement Sharia law. It was deemed a terrorist organization by Russia's Supreme Court in 2003 (Aitkhozhina, 2020).

¹⁴ This is an additional point, outside of the 1 point given to this category. This will not be multiplied by the weight.

¹⁵ For more information about internment camps, see the New York Times article presenting leaked CCP documents

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html#:~:text=The%20leaked%20papers%20consist%20of,the%20Uighur%20population%20in%20Xinjiang.>

¹⁶ For more information about the policy of mosque consolidation, see <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/22/china-mosques-shuttered-razed-altered-muslim-areas>

¹⁷ For more information about China's restrictions on religious clothing, see Human Rights Watch's article about China's Muslim ban <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/12/chinas-muslim-ban>

¹⁸ For more information about this case and its context, refer to this Reuters article <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-singapore-women-rights/job-or-hijab-singapore-debates-ban-on-islamic-veil-at-work-idUSKCN26C030/>

¹⁹ For similar cases and a comprehensive review of Russia's religious structure, see <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/441219-RUSSIA-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>