



The impact of the 2009 Minaret Referendum on the muslim community in Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Background: The 2009 Minaret Referendum caused a major controversy in the history of direct democracy in Switzerland. Switzerland's image as a country with a strong tradition of participatory democracy gave rise to a public initiative proposed by the right-wing *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP) and *Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union* (EDU) parties to ban the construction of minarets throughout Switzerland. This proposal originated from the rejection of the construction of several minarets in the cantons of Solothurn, Bern, and St. Gallen, but it developed into a national movement that sparked controversy between conservative and liberal groups. With the support of 114,137 signatures, the proposal was successfully brought to a referendum and received 57.5% of the popular vote. This event became a paradox in the direct democracy system, where the people have full power to determine policy, but the decision made has the potential to violate human rights, particularly freedom of religion. **Methods:** This study is a qualitative study based on literature research, applying historical research methods consisting of heuristics (source collection), verification (source criticism), interpretation (source interpretation), and historiography (historical writing). In addition, this research is supported by a theoretical foundation comprising a political sociology approach, the concept of Islamophobia, and *Alexis de Tocqueville's* theory of the tyranny of the majority. **Findings:** The referendum on minarets in Switzerland in 2009 had multidimensional political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal impacts on the Muslim community. The referendum reinforced symbolic marginalization, affected social integration, limited the public expression of religious identity, and intensified feelings of exclusion among Muslims in Switzerland. **Conclusions:** The study concludes that the Swiss minaret referendum demonstrates the challenges of balancing majority rule with the protection of minority rights in a democratic system. Beyond the Swiss context, this case highlights the importance of ensuring that democratic decision-making remains consistent with constitutional guarantees and human rights principles in pluralistic societies. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study addresses the research gap by moving beyond fragmented analyses of the 2009 Swiss minaret referendum and providing a multidimensional analytical framework that integrates its political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal consequences from the perspective of the Muslim community.

KEYWORDS: direct democracy; Islamophobia; minaret referendum; religious freedom; Switzerland.

1. Introduction

Switzerland is a country in the heart of Europe with no coastline. It borders Germany to the north, Austria and Liechtenstein to the east, Italy to the south, and France to the west. Switzerland has an area of approximately 41,285 km² and a population of around 8 million. Politically, Switzerland has adopted a federal system of government based in Bern since 1848. The country consists of 26 cantons and more than 2,000 communes. Each canton has

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extensive autonomy in local government matters, such as education, taxation and domestic policy (Linder & Iff, 2011; Fleiner & Hertig, 2010).

The Swiss political system, also known as direct democracy, provides citizens with the opportunity to actively participate in voting through three instruments: mandatory referendums, optional referendums, and popular initiatives (*The Swiss Confederation: A Brief Guide*, 2010; Fleiner & Hertig, 2010). More specifically, this system allows citizens to reject or approve regulations proposed by parliament, as well as to propose constitutional amendments directly (Linder & Iff, 2011).

One of Switzerland's instruments of direct democracy, the popular initiative, is considered a system that can fulfil the aspirations of the people, but sometimes it can actually trigger controversy. Over the past twenty years, there has been a marked increase in the number of popular initiatives in Switzerland that have been accused of violating human rights. One controversial case is the anti-minaret initiative, which highlights the construction of minarets in Switzerland. This initiative is considered excessive and discriminatory against the Muslim community in Switzerland, which numbers around 350,000-400,000 people (Camelia, 2015). In fact, of the 150 Muslim places of worship, only four have minarets, and none of these minarets are used to broadcast the call to prayer with loudspeakers due to restrictions in Switzerland. Two of these minarets were built in 1963 and 1978 (Orlanski & Schulze, 2017; Camelia, 2015; Couttenier et al., 2019; Fetzer & Soper, 2012). This initiative was triggered by the proposal to build a fifth minaret in Langenthal, a city in the Berner Mittelland (Central Highlands) region, which is considered the heart of Switzerland (Matyassy & Flury, 2011).

During the campaign, almost all political parties and the government advised everyone not to approve this initiative. However, the results of the vote on 29 November 2009 came as a major political surprise, as prior to the vote, opinion polls had predicted between 30 and 40% approval, which was not enough to pass the proposal. Due to this popular decision, a new provision will be included in the Swiss Federal Constitution, which will come into force, namely Article 72 (3) on the prohibition of tower construction. This does not affect the four towers already standing in Zurich, Geneva, Winterthur, and Wangen (Peters, 2009; State Secretariat for Migration, 2009).

The referendum banning the construction of the minaret is a clear example of how direct democracy mechanisms can actually threaten the fundamental constitutional values of the country itself. This decision not only violates Switzerland's long-standing commitment to religious freedom, but also shows how the majority vote can be used to restrict the rights of minorities, particularly the Muslim community. The ban reflects a growing trend of intolerance and Islamophobia in Swiss society, which has the potential to damage the country's image as a symbol of pluralism and neutrality on the international stage (Dixon & Uhlmann, 2018).

The ban on minarets in Switzerland has attracted widespread international attention. This issue arose amid rising global anti-Islam sentiment following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre, which were followed by various other events. Cases of Islamophobia in Switzerland have become increasingly prominent because they contradict the country's image as a symbol of democracy, multiculturalism, and political neutrality in foreign affairs. Therefore, the 2009 referendum on the ban on minarets not only surprised many parties, but also had an impact on Switzerland's reputation and international perception on the global stage (Camelia, 2015).

The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on examining the social, cultural, and identity impacts directly experienced by Muslim communities in Switzerland after the 2009 referendum banning minarets, an aspect that has not been studied in depth in previous studies. Whereas previous studies have emphasised the politicisation of the issue, the role of religious institutions, or Switzerland's international reputation, this study places the Muslim community at the centre in order to understand how this political decision has impacted their lives, in terms of their sense of security, social acceptance, and the negotiation of Islamic identity in the public sphere. Thus, this study presents a new perspective that emphasises the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal

dimensions of the minaret referendum. This study does not produce new data, but rather offers a multidimensional synthesis of the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal impacts on the Swiss Muslim community. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: How did the 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum affect the Muslim community politically, socially, culturally, psychologically, and legally?

1.1 Literature review

Discussions regarding the impact of this referendum have been addressed in several previous publications. However, research specifically discussing the impact of the minaret referendum on the Muslim community in Switzerland in the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal spheres is still limited. Existing literature has mostly explored the politicisation of the issue, the role of religious institutions, or Switzerland's international reputation, while the impact on the Muslim community has been minimally discussed, and even then, only in the social dimension. All of this literature remains relevant for use as references in this study.

One such piece of literature is an article by Orlanski & Schulze entitled "Religious Organisations, Political Articulation, and the 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum", published by the CESifo Working Paper Series, which explains the role of religious organisations, both Islamic and non-Islamic, in shaping political discourse and public opinion ahead of the 2009 referendum on the ban on the construction of minarets in Switzerland. Through a quantitative approach and media content analysis, this study found that Christian organisations had a significant influence in determining the direction of public debate, while the voice of the Muslim community was relatively marginalised due to a lack of political representation and weak organisational structures. The similarity with this study lies in its focus on the impact of the referendum on the Muslim community in Switzerland. However, the difference lies in the approach, namely that this article highlights political aspects and institutional representation, while this study focuses more on the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal impacts directly felt by the Muslim community in Switzerland (Orlanski & Schulze, 2017).

Furthermore, a thesis entitled "The Politicisation of Anti-Towers in Switzerland and Its Implications for International Public Opinion" by Nur Dina Cameli, a thesis at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Jember, discusses how the issue of banning the construction of minarets in Switzerland was politicised by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and subsequently sparked widespread reactions from the international community. Through a triangulation method that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study shows that the minaret ban initiative represents a form of xenophobia and Islamophobia that has been legalised through direct democracy mechanisms in Switzerland, and has also had an impact on the decline of Switzerland's image as a democratic and multicultural country in the eyes of the international community. The similarity with this study lies in its focus on the 2009 minaret referendum as an object of discrimination against the Muslim community and the emergence of anti-Islam sentiment in Switzerland. However, the difference lies in the perspective, namely that this thesis focuses on the process of politicisation of the issue and the international public response to it, while my research focuses on the impact of the referendum on the ban on minarets on the Muslim community in Switzerland (Camelia, 2015).

Then there is a discussion section entitled "An Ecological Analysis of the 2009 Swiss Referendum on the Building of Minarets in Islamophobia in the West" by Fetzer & Soper (2012). It discusses the 2009 minaret referendum, emphasising how the Swiss People's Party (SVP) campaign framed minarets as a symbol of Islamisation and how factors such as partisanship, ethno-linguistic identity, religion, and education level influenced voting. The results of their ecological analysis show that the majority of Catholic-Protestants and ethnic Germans were more supportive of the ban, while highly educated voters and religious minority communities were more opposed to it, highlighting survey bias due to the sensitive nature of the issue and the symbolic role of identity in the referendum results. Similar to

this study, the referendum had strong symbolic weight for Muslims as a minority group. However, Fetzer & Soper focused on the causes and patterns of voter behaviour, while this study focuses on the impact of the referendum on the Muslim community in Switzerland in the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal spheres (Fetzer & Soper, 2012).

Other literature includes an article entitled "The Structure of Islam in Switzerland and the Effects of the Swiss Minaret Ban" by Dodd (2015), which is one of the important studies on the historical, political, and social context behind the 2009 referendum on the ban on mosque minarets in Switzerland. Dodd (2015) asserts that the ban not only reflects the tension between Swiss secularism and Islamic religious expression but also reveals an attitude of othering toward the Muslim community. The main focus of Dodd's research is the socio-political dynamics and direct social impact on the Muslim community, such as increased alienation, the symbolization of difference, and the emergence of new solidarity among Swiss Muslims. This research is similar to the present study in that it discusses the impact of the referendum on the Muslim community, particularly in terms of social and religious identity. However, the present study broadens the scope of analysis by examining the impact experienced by the Muslim community not only in the social dimension but also across political, cultural, psychological, and legal dimensions. Therefore, Dodd's study serves as an important conceptual foundation and comparative framework for understanding the multidimensional consequences of the 2009 minaret referendum.

Next, there is an article by Dina Wyler entitled "The Swiss Minaret Ban Referendum and Switzerland's International Reputation: A Vote with an Impact" (2017). It discusses how the 2009 referendum on banning the construction of minarets in Switzerland affected the country's international reputation. Through an analysis of National Brand Index (NBI) data from 2005–2015, the article explains that the Swiss people's decision to support the ban on minarets lowered the image of Swiss society in the eyes of the world, especially in Muslim countries, although the reputation of the Swiss government remained intact thanks to active diplomacy and effective public communication strategies. The similarity with this study lies in the focus on the polemic surrounding the minaret referendum and the issue of discrimination against Muslims, while the difference is that Wyler's article discusses the external impact in the form of changes in Switzerland's image and international relations, whereas this study highlights the internal impact on the Swiss Muslim community (Wyler, 2017).

There is also a relevant chapter by Douglas Pratt titled "Expressing Fear of Islam: The Swiss Minaret Ban" (2016), which comprehensively examines the dynamics behind the 2009 referendum in Switzerland that banned the construction of mosque minarets. The chapter explains how the issue of Islam was mobilized in the political arena through politics of fear, right-wing party campaigns, and an amendment to Article 72 of the Swiss Federal Constitution, which prohibits the construction of minarets. Furthermore, the chapter examines the referendum's implications for the relationship between Islam and Swiss society, particularly from social, cultural, and theological perspectives, demonstrating that the ban reflects growing public concerns regarding the presence of Islamic symbols in public spaces. This chapter shares similarities with the present study, as both discuss the 2009 mosque minaret referendum as a pivotal moment in the relationship between the Swiss state and the Muslim community. However, this study differs from that chapter in that it not only examines the political background and symbolic significance of the referendum but also comprehensively analyzes its impact on the Muslim community in Switzerland across five key dimensions: political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal. Thus, this study offers a broader perspective on the post-referendum consequences (Pratt, 2016).

An article titled "The Politics of Muslim Visibility in Europe: The Case of the Swiss Minaret Ban" by Myriam Cherti (2010) examines the political dynamics behind the 2009 Swiss referendum banning minarets, with a focus on the visibility of Islamic symbols, identity politics, and national and international reactions to the referendum's outcome. The article shares similarities with the present study, as both discuss the 2009 minaret referendum and its implications for the Muslim community in Switzerland. The difference is that Cherti's article focuses more on identity politics and religious symbols in the public

sphere, whereas this study comprehensively analyzes the referendum's impact on the Muslim community across five dimensions: political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal. Thus, this study provides a broader scope of analysis regarding the post-referendum consequences (Cherti, 2010).

In addition to the articles discussed earlier, there is another study that is also relevant to explaining the dynamics of the 2009 referendum on minarets in Switzerland: a journal article by Marco Antonsich & Phil I. Jones titled "Mapping the Swiss Referendum on the Minaret Ban" (2010), which analyzes the spatial patterns of the referendum results based on demographic, linguistic, religious, and political preferences of voters at the municipal level. The article shares similarities with the present study in that both address the 2009 Swiss referendum on minarets. The difference lies in the fact that Antonsich & Jones's article focuses on political geography and the factors influencing Swiss voters' behavior, whereas the present study places greater emphasis on analyzing the referendum's impact on the Muslim community through five dimensions: political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal (Antonsich & Jones, 2010).

Finally, a journal article titled "Discrimination and Immigrant Identity: Reactions to the Swiss Minaret Ban in Online Communities" (2015) examines the responses of Muslim communities in online forums to the results of the 2009 Swiss referendum banning the construction of mosque minarets. The article focuses on how post-referendum discrimination influenced the construction of Muslim immigrant identity, particularly through the strengthening of group identity and the dilemma of hyphenated identity among European Muslims in online forum discourses. The article shares similarities with the present study as both discuss the impact of the 2009 minaret referendum on Muslim communities. The difference lies in the fact that the article limits its analysis to psychological responses and identity formation within online communities, whereas the author's research examines the referendum's impact more comprehensively across five dimensions: political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal, thereby providing a more holistic picture of the referendum's consequences for Muslim communities in Switzerland (Holtz et al., 2015).

After reviewing the relevant literature, it is evident that the 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum has been extensively studied from various perspectives. Most previous research has focused on the political dynamics underlying the referendum, voter behavior, identity politics, Islamophobia, the role of political parties, the symbolism of minarets, and the referendum's impact on Switzerland's international image. Some studies have also touched on the referendum's impact on the Muslim community in Switzerland, but these generally focus only on specific aspects such as social identity, political representation, or psychological responses without providing a comprehensive discussion of the various consequences experienced by the Muslim community in the aftermath of the referendum. The various studies the researchers found tend to focus more on the factors leading to the referendum, the political processes behind it, patterns of public support for the referendum, and the referendum's implications for Switzerland's international reputation. Meanwhile, discussions regarding the impact of the referendum on the Muslim community remain partial and scattered across specific dimensions, thus failing to provide a comprehensive picture of the interrelated political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal consequences.

Given these circumstances, this study seeks to offer a fresh perspective by placing the Muslim community in Switzerland at the center of its analysis. This study not only examines the background and political dynamics that led to the 2009 Minaret Referendum but also comprehensively analyzes the referendum's impact on the Muslim community across five key dimensions: political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the discourse on the multidimensional consequences of the referendum, while also providing a more comprehensive synthesis of how policies resulting from direct democracy affect the lives of the Muslim community as a minority group in Switzerland. By integrating these five dimensions, the study aims to identify the interconnected consequences of the referendum rather than treating its effects as isolated outcomes. In this way, the findings are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how direct

democratic decisions concerning religious symbols can shape minority experiences, rights, and social inclusion in contemporary Switzerland.

2. Methods

2.1 Theoretical foundation

This research is supported by a theoretical foundation consisting of a political sociology approach, the concept of Islamophobia, and Alexis de Tocqueville's theory of the tyranny of the majority. Political sociology is a branch of science that examines the relationship between society and politics. Accordingly, the political sociology approach views politics as an integral part of social life and examines the reciprocal relationship between society and political power, as well as how social structures interact with political institutions in shaping patterns of government and the distribution of authority. Through this perspective, political sociology seeks to understand the dynamics of power and decision-making processes at various levels, ranging from local and national to international contexts (Nuraedah et al., 2024).

The concept of Islamophobia refers to hatred, hostility, and fear toward Islam and Muslims, which may subsequently lead to discriminatory actions against them (Green, 2015). Within the context of this study, this concept provides an analytical lens for understanding the 2009 Minaret Referendum in Switzerland as a manifestation of negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims, particularly when such attitudes take the form of prejudice, discrimination, or policies that marginalize Muslim communities. Islamophobia is therefore not examined merely as an individual attitude but also as a social and political phenomenon that can influence public discourse and policy-making.

Furthermore, Alexis de Tocqueville's theory of the tyranny of the majority explains that, within a democratic system, majority power is not limited to determining political direction through formal laws but can also generate social and moral pressures that constrain the freedom of individuals and minority groups. According to Tocqueville, democratic societies tend to position majority public opinion as a source of truth, causing different views to be perceived as erroneous and subsequently marginalized (Adamova, 2013). This theoretical perspective is relevant to the 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum, in which the majority vote was used to legitimize a policy restricting the architectural expression of Muslim religious identity. The decision thus illustrates not only the dominance of majority preferences in a democratic decision-making process but also the possibility that majority public opinion may develop into a form of symbolic oppression against minority groups.

Taken together, political sociology, the concept of Islamophobia, and the theory of the tyranny of the majority provide an analytical framework for examining the 2009 Minaret Referendum as a political and social phenomenon. Political sociology explains the interaction between social forces and political power; Islamophobia helps identify the forms of prejudice, hostility, and discrimination directed toward Muslims; while Tocqueville's theory provides a framework for analyzing how majority preferences within a democratic system can potentially restrict minority rights and religious expression.

2.2 Research method

This research employs a qualitative approach using library research. In library research, information is collected from various sources, including books, journals, theses, and other relevant literature. The process involves reading, recording, evaluating, and processing information that serves as the basis for the research (Zed, 2004). The method applied in this study is historical research, which consists of four stages: heuristics (source collection), verification (source criticism), interpretation (source interpretation), and historiography (historical writing) (Abdurrahman, 2019). During the heuristic stage, researchers collected sources from books, journals, theses, online articles, and digital archives relevant to the research topic. These materials were obtained from campus and

local libraries, as well as online academic platforms and databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Taylor & Francis. Sources were selected according to several criteria, including their relevance to the 2009 Minaret Referendum, the credibility of their authors and publishers, the reputation of the journals or publishing institutions, and their direct relevance to the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal impacts of the referendum on Muslim communities in Switzerland. All collected sources were subsequently subjected to critical evaluation through external and internal criticism to identify the most valid and relevant evidence.

In the verification stage, the researcher primarily utilized secondary sources, including books, journal articles, online articles, and other written materials. This stage was conducted to assess the authenticity of sources through external criticism and the validity of their contents through internal criticism. The process involved examining source identities, including authorship and publication year, and comparing information across different sources (Abdurrahman, 2019). Priority was given to sources published in peer-reviewed journals, academic publishers, and official institutions, as well as media reports corroborated by academic publications. Statements attributed to members of the Muslim community were derived from published news reports and treated as historical documentary evidence rather than as independently verified interview data.

The interpretation stage involved analyzing and synthesizing the collected information to describe and integrate the relevant historical evidence (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). At this stage, the political sociology approach, the concept of Islamophobia, and Alexis de Tocqueville's theory of the tyranny of the majority were applied as analytical tools to examine the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal dimensions of the 2009 Minaret Referendum. The final stage, historiography, involved writing and presenting the results of the historical research in a chronological and systematic manner (Abdurrahman, 2019). The analysis focuses particularly on the consequences of the referendum for Muslim communities in Switzerland in 2009.

This study did not involve the collection of primary data through interviews or direct observation. Instead, the entire analysis is based on a critical synthesis of relevant secondary sources. Therefore, the study does not produce new empirical data but presents a historical synthesis of the political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal impacts of the 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum on Muslim communities. The findings should consequently be understood as the result of historical interpretation and synthesis rather than independently verified empirical evidence. Future research may strengthen empirical validation by incorporating primary archival materials and empirical approaches, such as interviews with Muslim communities in Switzerland, to provide further insight into the referendum's long-term impacts.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Background to the referendum

The case of the minaret referendum in Switzerland began with a proposal to build minarets by a number of large mosques in cantons, such as Solothurn, Bern, and St. Gallen. This idea was then exploited by the Swiss People's Party (SVP), a right-wing nationalist party, as part of their campaign strategy. The SVP used the direct democracy mechanism, which is characteristic of the Swiss political system, to stir up public sentiment against the construction of mosque minarets (Camelia, 2015). The main political argument developed by the initiators was that mosque minarets are not religious symbols, but rather symbols of political-religious claims to power, which are contrary to Swiss traditions and legal systems.

In 2007, the SVP launched an initiative entitled "Against the Construction of Minarets". The party forced a national referendum to ban mosque minarets because they were considered a symbol of religious political imperialism, not just traditional architecture (Nielsen, 2009). A year later, on 8 July 2008, they submitted official support in the form of 114,137 signatures from the public. The initiative was also supported by the

Eidgenossenschafts-Demokratische Union (EDU) or Federal Democratic Union, a small conservative Christian party. Conversely, the Swiss government, the majority of parliament members, major political parties, church organisations, and some civil society organisations recommended that the initiative be rejected because it was considered contrary to human rights (Camelia, 2015).

Based on this initiative, on Sunday, 29 November 2009, the debate on the acceptance of the Muslim community in Switzerland reached its peak, with a national referendum held to determine whether the construction of minarets would be banned throughout Switzerland. This was a unique event, unprecedented in Europe (Orlanski & Schulze, 2017; Nielsen & Otterbeck, 2016). The vote resulted in 57.5% of voters supporting the ban on the construction of minarets (Orlanski & Schulze, 2017), while 42.5% opposed it. This result was very surprising to many, as surveys prior to the referendum had predicted that only around 35% of citizens would support the ban. (Camelia, 2015).

The referendum decision sparked much debate, both domestically and internationally. Domestically, discussions following the referendum were intense among academics, observers, and political actors. The main debate arose between left-liberal and right-conservative groups. The left-liberals considered the referendum results a violation of human rights, because in a constitutional state, society must adhere to the principles of universal democracy that protect freedom of religion (Camelia, 2015). This initiative is not in line with freedom of religion and the prohibition of discrimination as guaranteed in Articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Thus, this marks a tension between the values of Swiss direct democracy and the protection of the rights of Muslim minorities. (Thommen, 2022).

Meanwhile, the right-wing conservatives believe that the sovereignty of the people is absolute and cannot be restricted. According to them, if the results of a referendum that reflects the aspirations of the people are not implemented due to a court injunction, then this constitutes a mockery of democracy. Therefore, the ban on the construction of the tower remains in force to this day, as it is considered a valid and binding decision that reflects the aspirations of the people (Camelia, 2015). Meanwhile, at the national level, the UN Human Rights Council and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have even condemned the results of this vote as a discriminatory act that violates the right to freedom of religion (Moeckli, 2011). Various Muslim leaders, church figures, European politicians, and human rights experts have condemned this right as a form of discrimination and a violation of freedom of religion. (Traynor, 2009).

Supporters of the anti-minaret initiative also rejected the notion that the policy violated human rights. They viewed minarets as a political symbol of the Islamisation process in Switzerland, not merely a religious symbol, and therefore felt they needed to be banned. This was emphasised by SVP Chairman Toni Brunner after the referendum: "Voters had clearly rejected the idea of parallel societies and the further expansion of Islam, including radical, political Islam in Switzerland" (Camelia, 2015).

The Swiss government's reaction to the referendum results was complex and defensive. Although it had previously rejected the proposal to ban minarets, the government stated that it would respect the results of the vote in accordance with the principles of direct democracy. In order to ease tensions, they explained that the ban was not a rejection of the Muslim community or Islam. Justice Minister Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf acknowledged that the referendum results reflect public fears of fundamentalism, and assessed that restricting architectural symbols is not an effective measure in dealing with extremism. In addition, the government also realised that implementing the referendum results could damage Switzerland's reputation in terms of violating international conventions on religious freedom and the principle of non-discrimination, prompting them to draft subsidiary regulations while facing intense international criticism (Cumming-Bruce & Erlanger, 2009). This response therefore illustrates the tension between respecting the outcome of direct democracy and maintaining Switzerland's commitments to religious freedom, non-discrimination, and the protection of minority rights.

3.2 The correlation between patterns of support for the referendum and xenophobia

The ecological analysis provides a more detailed picture of the social and political factors associated with voting behavior in the 2009 Swiss minaret initiative. Rather than treating the referendum outcome solely as an aggregate expression of majority preference, this analysis identifies variations in support for the initiative across socioeconomic, educational, ethno-linguistic, political, and religious groups. These dimensions are important for understanding how opposition to minarets was distributed across different segments of Swiss society and how social characteristics may have shaped the referendum outcome. As shown in Table 1, the ecological estimates indicate substantial variation in support for the initiative across these categories, providing an empirical basis for examining the social composition of the majority that endorsed the minaret ban.

Table 1. Ecological analysis of 2009 Switzerland minaret initiative

Variables	Yes (%)	Standard error (%)
Official result	57.5	n/a
Economic/rational choice		
Upper classes#	53.2*	9.8
Post-materialism		
College educated #	8.3*	0.2
Ethno-linguistic		
German	64.6*	7.0
French	51.6*	6.8
Italian	68.9*	5.4
Political		
Swiss People's Party	86.1*	6.2
Christian Democrats	63.9*	7.8
Social Democrats	6.5	37.5
Religious		
Catholic	62.8*	7.4
Protestant	64.1*	8.6
Other/None	26.3	n/a

Note: Estimates were obtained using the EI2 method (see King, 1997). The 95% confidence interval indicates the level of uncertainty surrounding the estimates. An asterisk (*) denotes statistically significant results at $p < .05$, while a hash (#) indicates that the unit of analysis is the canton. The notation *n/a* indicates that the data were unavailable or unsuitable for calculation. Adapted from Fetzer & Soper (2012)

Analysis of the referendum support pattern shows that public preference cannot be understood solely as an assessment of the tower's architectural aspects, but is also related to broader domestic political dynamics rooted in xenophobic patterns already established in Swiss society. The results of an ecological study (Fetzer & Soper, 2012) show that support for the referendum tends to be higher among certain groups, particularly German-speaking communities, voters with lower levels of education, and individuals on the right of the political spectrum. These groups are more sensitive to interpreting Islamic symbols as a threat to Swiss cultural homogeneity and traditional values. Conversely, highly educated individuals and voters from the left wing of the political spectrum show rejection of the referendum, indicating differences in value orientation and sensitivity to cultural plurality.

Fetzer & Soper also note that an analysis of political dynamics prior to the referendum shows that the community groups that had historically supported right-wing parties, particularly the SPV, had a social profile almost identical to that of the groups that supported the referendum (Fetzer & Soper, 2012). The SVP is known as a political mastermind that consistently promotes anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Therefore, mapping the party's electoral base provides an important picture of the social structure that is most responsive to exclusive and xenophobic programs. This political alignment suggests that support for the referendum was closely connected to broader patterns of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment within segments of the Swiss electorate.

Table 2. Ecological analysis of the 2007 Switzerland federal assembly election

Variables	SVP (%)	Standard error (%)
Official results	28,9	n/a
Economic/rational choice		
Upper classes	30,0*	10,1
Post-materialism		
College educated	17,0*	0,5
Ethno-linguistic		
German	33,9*	6,9
French	18,0*	4,1
Italian	5,7*	0,2
Religious		
Catholic	24,0	14,4
Protestant	44,6*	0,6
Other/None	3,1*	0,3

Note: Estimates were obtained using the EI2 method (see King, 1997). The 95% confidence interval indicates the level of uncertainty surrounding the estimates. An asterisk (*) denotes statistically significant results at $p < .05$, while the hash (#) indicates that the unit of analysis is the canton. The notation n/a indicates that the data were unavailable or unsuitable for calculation. Adapted from Fetzer & Soper (2012)

The similarity in social characteristics between right-wing political supporters and those who voted in the referendum shows that mobilisation around the minaret issue was not a sudden phenomenon. Instead, this pattern reflects a well-established xenophobia among certain sections of the electorate. The groups that previously showed resistance to immigrants and the presence of other ethnicities are the same groups that support restrictions on Islamic symbols. Thus, the referendum can be understood as a political plan to express collective fears about demographic and cultural changes associated with Muslim groups.

Orlanski and Schulze's study also explains that support for the referendum follows long-established socio-political patterns with xenophobic sentiments. Orlanski and Schulze explain that approval of the initiative increases with high unemployment, low levels of education, and strong rural conservative orientation, while most significantly, regions with a higher proportion of Muslim residents show a correspondingly high level of support for the referendum. This finding is considered strong evidence that the presence of Muslim communities triggers perceptions of cultural threat and increases xenophobic attitudes, which ultimately amplify support for Islamic symbols. (Orlanski & Schulze, 2017).

3.3 The impact of the referendum on the muslim community in Switzerland

3.3.1 Political impact

The referendum banning the construction of minarets in Switzerland has had a direct impact on the internal dynamics of the Muslim community in that country. On the other hand, this ban has actually fostered a sense of solidarity and collective identity among the Muslim community. Previously, the Swiss Muslim community tended to be fragmented based on their countries of origin, such as Turkey, Bosnia, Kosovo, and North African countries (Nebehay, 2009). However, after the referendum, a new awareness emerged to form a shared identity as the 'Swiss Muslim community'. In this context, the ban on minarets has triggered the Muslim community to organise itself in a structured manner, fight for their civil rights, and participate in the national political arena. With the formation of the concept of the Swiss Muslim Community, the Muslim community has begun to fight for their voice and interests under the umbrella of a shared national identity, not merely as immigrants, but also as part of Swiss society itself (Dodd, 2015). Behind the scenes, the Swiss government sought to restore trust among the Muslim community by issuing an official statement on the day of the referendum assuring that the four existing minarets, the

construction of new mosques, and the practice of Islam in general would not be affected by the decision (Cherti, 2010).

This referendum shows how the discourse of Islamophobia is being exploited by populist parties to gain public support through religious issues. After the referendum, a series of policy demands emerged that were more discriminatory in nature, such as banning foreign funding of mosques, controlling sermons and imam education, and refusing legal recognition for Muslim communities. This marks a shift in Swiss politics towards an exclusionary model that institutionally restricts the religious rights of Muslims, and also strengthens the political legitimacy of groups that oppose religious pluralism (Yendell & Huber, 2020).

This controversy set a precedent that reinforced the narrative of nationalism based on Christian identity, which opened up space for policies that restricted Islamic religious expression (Lauwers, 2024). With 80% of Swiss citizens believing that their national identity is entirely shaped by Christian values, Islam is positioned as a 'foreign religion' that is not fully accepted in the public sphere. As a consequence, the Muslim community faces political challenges in the form of limited representation and official recognition within the state structure, which further marginalises their position in the life of the nation and state (Yendell & Huber, 2020). Furthermore, since approximately 90% of Muslims in Switzerland are classified as foreign nationals, they do not have the right to vote in referendums. This situation prevents the majority of the Muslim community from participating directly in political decision-making processes that affect their lives and rights (Pratt, 2016).

Domestically, this policy risks marginalizing the Muslim community as part of Swiss society, thereby fueling social tensions, deepening polarization, and hindering the process of social integration. Meanwhile, at the international level, the referendum's outcome has the potential to damage Switzerland's image as a country that upholds democracy, human rights, and religious tolerance. Furthermore, this policy also opens the door to negative reactions from Muslim-majority countries, which could take the form of diplomatic pressure or actions that impact Swiss economic interests, thereby demonstrating that the minaret issue is not only a matter of domestic politics but also has implications for international relations and Switzerland's standing in the eyes of the world (Antonsich & Jones, 2010).

3.3.2 Social impact

The formation of a collective Muslim identity is believed to raise concerns about the emergence of social barriers between Muslims and Swiss society in general. Some believe that the existence of a national Muslim community structure could create a perception of 'Muslims versus the Swiss,' which could worsen the integration process of the Muslim community into wider society. Right-wing political narratives linking Islam to threats to national identity reinforce negative stereotypes and increase social discrimination against Muslims. As a result, the Muslim community faces social pressure in the form of stigmatisation, increased intolerance, and limitations in openly expressing their religious identity (Yendell & Huber, 2020).

This is as stated by Barbara Myhoubi, a Swiss convert to Islam, that the policy of banning the construction of minarets has labelled Muslims as exceptions or the others, symbolically marking them as a group that is different from other Swiss citizens. Although concerns remain, to date the Swiss Muslim community has been able to practise their religion freely and worship without significant obstacles. Sumaya Mohamed, a Swiss woman who converted to Islam 28 years ago, explains that the challenges faced by the Muslim community are more socio-psychological than practical. She warns that the religious freedom currently enjoyed by Swiss Muslims should not be taken for granted, as discrimination and social prejudice could erode it at any time (Dodd, 2015). According to Couttenier et al. (2019) in their study "The Logic of Fear: Populism and Media Coverage of Immigrant Crimes", they argue that voting patterns show a strong anti-foreigner component

The controversy also reinforced the position of Swiss Muslims as a double minority, both in terms of religion and ethnic origin. This worsened their social integration in

Switzerland. Most of the Muslim community in Switzerland are foreign nationals or descendants of immigrants, where this ban not only targets religious symbols, but also reinforces the social divide between Swiss society and Muslims. With a population of around 400,000 or 5% of the national population, nearly half a million Muslims live in the country, less than 20 percent of whom are Swiss citizens (Fetzer & Soper, 2012). The Muslim community there feels the social impact in the form of stigma, exclusion and a sense of alienation in Swiss society (Orlanski & Schulze, 2017).

According to a report by Doudou Diène, the UN Special Rapporteur, conditions in Switzerland ahead of the referendum showed growing racism and xenophobia. This situation is rooted in a deep cultural resistance within Swiss society to the process of multiculturalisation, namely a covert or overt rejection of the changes in social structure that have begun to diversify as a result of the influx of immigrants and Muslim communities (Nielsen, 2009). This resistance is reflected in the community's discomfort with non-Christian religious symbols, including minarets.

This referendum also offers an important lesson regarding the concept of integration in a multicultural society. The referendum demonstrates that the integration process cannot be placed solely on the Muslim community as a minority group, but also requires the majority society to be prepared to accept the social changes arising from increasing diversity. Thus, integration must be understood as a two-way process, in which both the Muslim community and the native Swiss population are equally called upon to foster mutual respect, adapt, and create an inclusive shared living space. Without the involvement of both sides, policies such as the minaret referendum actually have the potential to reinforce prejudice, hinder social cohesion, and widen the gap between the majority group and the Muslim community in Switzerland. Public opinion was also driven more by general anxiety than by any real threat stemming from the religious practices of Muslims. Thus, the referendum results reflect public perceptions rather than a response to an actual threat. Furthermore, the public's anxiety regarding diversity, as reflected in the referendum, also mirrors similar emotional reactions found in public opinion in various other countries (Antonsich & Jones, 2010).

Five years after the referendum, the Muslim community in Switzerland faces increasingly complex social pressures in their integration process. Integration is no longer understood as a two-way relationship between the majority and minority, but rather as a one-sided adjustment that requires the Muslim community to fully conform to the norms of the majority society. In this context, political and media discourse that often links Islam to radicalisation and terrorism reinforces negative stereotypes and encourages subtle forms of Islamophobia. As a result, the Muslim community in Switzerland must constantly prove that they are peaceful and loyal citizens, even though they continue to be viewed with suspicion. They find themselves in a social dilemma. When they are open and express their Islamic identity, they are considered too conspicuous and restricted (Green, 2015), but when they try to adapt and not stand out, they are accused of being closed and not integrated. This paradoxical situation creates a sense of alienation and social exclusion among Swiss Muslims, showing that the minaret referendum not only had an architectural impact, but also deepened the social and psychological wounds of the Muslim community as a minority group in the country (Trucco et al., 2024).

Following the referendum, negative stigma towards the Muslim community emerged, fostering an atmosphere of suspicion among the public. In 2013, around half of the Swiss population felt threatened by the Muslim community, while a 2009 survey found that almost a third of the population was sceptical and some were even hostile towards Muslims, indicating a lack of tolerance and social cohesion in a country known for its direct democracy system (Yendell & Huber, 2020).

3.3.3 Cultural impact

The results of the referendum, which was supported by the majority of the Swiss people, illustrate a collective rejection of Islamic symbols that are considered incompatible

with the Western cultural landscape. The referendum campaign even featured images of veiled Muslim women against a backdrop of missiles, interpreting the visual as fear and stereotypes of Islam as a threat (Cherti, 2010). The Swiss non-Muslim community views minarets not only as architectural elements, but also as symbols of Muslim visibility and presence in public spaces that challenge European cultural homogeneity. Therefore, this policy not only restricts religious expression, but also marks a process of symbolic alienation of Muslim identity. In this context, minarets become a central point of cultural alienation and threat, widening the gap between Muslims and other Swiss citizens (Ahmanideen & Iner, 2023). The referendum clearly stigmatised Islam, a religion practised by a recently arrived migrant community. The campaign was considered highly controversial because it aggressively exploited fears of Muslim immigrants and linked Islam with terrorism and violence (Couttenier et al., 2019).

According to Farhad Afshar, chairman of the Swiss Islamic Organisation Coordination, the results of the vote have caused a sense of alienation, as they reflect public anxiety directed at Islamic identity. The public attitude revealed by the referendum results is also seen as widening the social divide between the majority population and Muslims. Therefore, this result carries a deeper symbolic message that the Muslim community has not been fully accepted as part of the religious community in the country. Meanwhile, the C1 World Dialogue Committee in Cairo stated that the referendum results reveal hidden anxieties that are not addressed by the normal political process, and emphasised the need for integration between communities (Nebhay, 2009).

Tamir Hadjipolu, a representative of the Muslim community in Switzerland, said that following these events, the Muslim community was concerned about attacks and restrictions on their rights. Elham Manea, a Swiss citizen who converted to Islam, believes that the referendum discriminates against the Muslim community, because Catholics and Sikhs are allowed to build their places of worship freely. However, if all religious symbols were banned from places of worship, then I would accept it (Amin, 2009).

The referendum reinforced feelings of alienation among Swiss Muslims, who began to see themselves as a group whose identity was publicly rejected. The representation of mosques and minarets as foreign symbols has become a major source of cultural dissonance in secular Western societies. This cultural impact is not only symbolic, but also affects the dynamics of social integration, as Muslim communities are faced with the dilemma of either maintaining their religious identity or conforming to the dominant cultural norms. Therefore, the referendum serves as a social mechanism that deepens identity polarity and weakens the process of multicultural integration in Switzerland (Ahmanideen & Iner, 2023). Why is this the case? Swiss society considers mosque minarets to be a symbol of non-integration, similar to the wearing of the hijab, which symbolises Muslims unwillingness to assimilate and their perceived separation from Swiss society (Nielsen, 2009). This is used as a political weapon to reject all symbols of Islam.

Following the referendum, significant changes occurred in media coverage and public perception of the Muslim community in Switzerland. Before the vote, news stories about foreign criminals were five times more likely than those about native Swiss citizens. However, after the referendum, this difference disappeared completely. The disappearance of this distortion shows that the Swiss People's Party's communication strategy succeeded in shifting the focus of public discourse from the issue of religious freedom to fears of violence and immigration. Campaigns linking Islam to security threats created stereotypes of Muslims as a potentially dangerous group. Therefore, the impact of this referendum was to internalise Islamophobic narratives in the public consciousness, which then complicated the process of integration and social acceptance of the Muslim community in Switzerland (Couttenier et al., 2019).

3.3.4 Psychological impact

The 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum had a significant psychological impact on the Muslim community in Switzerland. Muslims' reactions to the referendum's outcome varied,

ranging from indignation to resignation. For many Muslims, the referendum was seen as a manifestation of rising Islamophobia and hostility toward Muslims in Switzerland. Furthermore, most Muslims felt that their voices were silenced due to their status as non-citizens in Switzerland, leaving little room for their aspirations within the political process. The negative and unsettling impact of the referendum was widely felt, with many Muslims experiencing deep shock, while others chose to accept the situation with resignation. Furthermore, there were concerns that the referendum could hinder dialogue between Muslims and Christians and increase the risk of radicalization among young, Swiss-born Muslims who felt rejected in their own homeland (Pratt, 2016).

Not only in Switzerland, but also in various European countries. The referendum results sparked an uproar among Muslims and put pressure on Muslim identity, particularly for those who have long sought to balance their Islamic identity with their desire to integrate into European society. The referendum created a psychological dilemma because they had to maintain their commitment to integration while simultaneously dealing with disappointment and anger over the referendum results. On the other hand, for more fundamentalist Muslim groups, the referendum results actually reinforced the belief that the West is hostile toward Islam in general, thereby solidifying their identity as those facing this hostility (Holtz et al., 2015).

3.3.5 Legal impact

In the field of law, particularly with regard to the protection of the Muslim community's freedom of religion, the constitutional result of the referendum made the ban on the construction of minarets part of the country's basic law, which symbolically and legally affirmed the Christian identity in the national landscape. The legal impact became even clearer when the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rejected a lawsuit filed by a Swiss Muslim group on the grounds that the petitioners could not be categorised as victims of a convention violation. The decision shows that religious practices such as the construction of minarets are not recognised as part of the freedom of religion guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. Therefore, the referendum not only narrowed the space for religious expression for the Muslim community, but also marked the failure of the European legal system to provide effective protection for minorities. More broadly, this situation illustrates how legal instruments can be used to legitimise the symbolic exclusion of certain communities, and also reinforces the majority bias in the legal meaning of religious freedom in Switzerland after the referendum (Pierik, 2022)

3.4 Synthesis of qualitative findings

The findings outlined above indicate that the impact of the 2009 Swiss Minaret Referendum extends beyond a single dimension. To facilitate analytical interpretation, Table 3 summarizes the main qualitative findings based on five categories of impact and links each finding to the concept of Islamophobia as well as Tocqueville's theory of the tyranny of the majority. This synthesis highlights how these empirical findings align with the theoretical framework used in this study.

Table 3 demonstrates that the impact of the 2009 Swiss minaret referendum extended beyond the immediate prohibition of new minaret construction and affected multiple dimensions of Muslim life. The findings reveal a cumulative pattern in which political exclusion, social stigmatization, cultural marginalization, psychological insecurity, and legal restriction are interconnected rather than isolated consequences. Politically, the referendum strengthened the perception of Muslims as a minority whose interests could be subordinated to majority preferences. Socially and culturally, the decision contributed to the stigmatization of Islamic identity and reinforced boundaries between Muslim communities and the broader Swiss society. These conditions were also reflected at the psychological level through feelings of insecurity, alienation, and uncertainty regarding social acceptance and future interfaith relations.

Table 3. Summary of qualitative findings based on the categories of impact

Impact category	Research findings	The Tyranny of the Majority: Alexis de Tocqueville's theory and its relation to Islamophobia
Political	The referendum has fostered a stronger collective identity among Swiss Muslims, but at the same time has reinforced an exclusionary political discourse, reduced political representation, and legitimized further restrictive policies targeting the Muslim community.	From the perspective of Islamophobia, political institutions translate public fear of Islam into exclusionary policies. According to Tocqueville's theory, the majority uses democratic authority to legitimize restrictions on minority groups whose political participation is already limited.
Social	Muslims are facing increasing stigmatization, discrimination, social exclusion, and barriers to integration, while public attitudes toward religious diversity are becoming increasingly negative.	Islamophobia explains why negative prejudices and stereotypes against Muslims persist. The tyranny of the majority is reflected in the dominance of the majority's social norms, which pressure minority groups to assimilate while limiting their equal acceptance in society.
Cultural	The referendum reinforced the symbolic rejection of Islamic identity by portraying mosque minarets as something out of step with Swiss national culture, thereby deepening cultural alienation.	Through the lens of Islamophobia, Islamic religious symbols become objects of cultural fear and exclusion. According to Tocqueville, the cultural values of the majority gain normative authority and marginalize the cultural expressions of minorities in the public sphere.
Psychological	Many Muslims have expressed feelings of disappointment, insecurity, alienation, and despair, as well as concerns about future interfaith relations and social acceptance.	Islamophobia creates a sense of psychological insecurity through constant social suspicion toward Muslims. The concept of "the tyranny of the majority" illustrates how the opinions of the majority can create psychological pressure even in the absence of direct physical coercion.
Legal	A constitutional amendment banning the construction of new minarets has narrowed the legal space for the expression of Islam, while judicial protections have failed to effectively guarantee the religious rights of minority groups.	Islamophobia has become institutionalized through discriminatory legal provisions that target Islamic symbols. Tocqueville's theory explains how the preferences of the majority, once enshrined in constitutional law, can undermine equal protection of minority rights.

From the perspective of Islamophobia, the findings indicate that anti-Muslim attitudes should not be understood solely as individual prejudice. Rather, negative perceptions of Islam and Muslims can be reproduced through social norms, political discourse, and institutional arrangements. The referendum is particularly significant because a religious symbol associated with Muslim identity became the object of a nationwide political decision, allowing broader anxieties surrounding Islam to acquire institutional and legal consequences. The legal dimension therefore represents the most formalized expression of the process, as the restriction on minaret construction was incorporated into the constitutional framework and consequently transformed a contested social attitude into a binding legal provision.

The findings also provide substantial support for interpreting the referendum through Tocqueville's concept of the tyranny of the majority. Although the decision was produced through a formally democratic procedure, the outcome illustrates the possibility that numerical majority rule may generate pressures that constrain minority rights and expressions of identity. The majority's preference did not merely determine the outcome of

a particular policy question but also acquired normative and institutional authority over the religious expression of a minority group. In this sense, the referendum demonstrates the tension between democratic majoritarianism and the protection of minority rights: democratic legitimacy alone does not necessarily guarantee substantive equality when minority interests lack sufficient institutional safeguards.

Taken together, the five categories indicate that the referendum should be understood as a multidimensional process of marginalization rather than as an isolated policy concerning architectural structures. Political and legal restrictions reinforced social and cultural exclusion, while these forms of exclusion contributed to psychological insecurity among Muslims. At the same time, the emergence of a stronger collective identity among Swiss Muslims suggests that marginalization may also stimulate forms of community consolidation and identity reinforcement. Thus, the findings position the 2009 referendum as an important case for examining how Islamophobia can intersect with democratic majority rule and produce consequences that extend from public discourse and social relations to institutional and constitutional arrangements.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the 2009 referendum on banning minarets in Switzerland is a clear example of how direct democracy mechanisms can produce decisions that potentially threaten minority rights when not balanced with the protection of human rights principles. This phenomenon shows that the majority vote can be used as a means of legitimising cultural anxieties and Islamophobic sentiments that have long been rooted in Swiss society. The findings of the study confirm that the referendum not only had an impact on the relationship between the state and minority groups, but also influenced the formation of collective identity, social dynamics, and the cultural position of the Muslim community in the Swiss public sphere.

As a synthesis of analyses of political, social, cultural, psychological, and legal impacts, this study shows that policies targeting religious symbols such as mosque minarets have multidimensional impacts that go beyond debates about architecture or urban planning. The referendum not only reinforces the symbolic marginalization and social exclusion of Muslim minority groups but also creates psychological pressure in the form of feelings of alienation, disappointment, helplessness, and concerns about the future of interfaith relations and the process of social integration. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on Muslim communities as the primary subjects of analysis, aiming to understand how these political decisions affect their experiences, both in the short and long term. Beyond the Swiss context, this case also contributes to the broader debate on the protection of religious minority groups in democratic societies, particularly when the principle of majority rule intersects with the protection of constitutional rights.

More broadly, the findings of this study contribute to the literature on direct democracy and the challenges of balancing popular sovereignty with the protection of minority rights. This study underscores the importance of constitutional protections and respect for human rights principles to ensure that democratic decision-making processes do not result in discriminatory practices or have long-lasting psychological impacts on minority groups. Therefore, further research is recommended to complement this literature-based study with an empirical approach, such as conducting interviews with Muslim communities in Switzerland or a more in-depth policy analysis, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of the referendum and the effectiveness of minority rights protections within a democratic system.

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