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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Financial Control as Soft Repression: The Islamic Civil Society in France Reacting to 2021's Law Against Separatism

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ABSTRACT: After Daesh terrorist attacks, the French State reinforced its securitarian policies, targeting – among others - Muslim associations (Kaya, 2011). The “War on Terror” has been accompanied by restrictions on civil liberties in the name of rapid and preventive repression (Vedaschi & Graziani, 2019). Yet repression does not operate solely through visible coercion. Alongside the use of force, authorities deploy less visible strategies aimed at weakening Civil Society organizations (Talpin, 2016). Among these, financial control constitutes a central mechanism of soft repression, understood as a non-violent form of repression that reduces the capacity for contestation available to subaltern actors. In France, where the non-profit sector is largely dependent on public funding (Archambault et al., 2013), the State can use budgetary resources as leverage. Authorities often mobilize discourses of “budgetary constraint” to pressure organizations into compliance or to fragment mobilization by fostering competition over scarce funds (Talpin & Bonneville, 2023). In extreme cases, security-related justifications are invoked to freeze organizations’ bank accounts, like after the introduction of the Law Against Separatism (2021) – later renamed Law Concerning the Respect of Republican Principles. Drawing on qualitative interviews with leaders of four Muslim associations, this paper addresses the following research questions: *How and when does the French State enact soft repression through financial control over Muslim associations? How do targeted associations react?* By analyzing both State strategies and the responses of affected organizations, before and after 2021's law, the paper highlights how soft repression is deployed and when it prompts adaptive, infrapolitical, reactions by Muslim associations.

KEYWORDS: Financial Control, Infrapolitics, Islamic Civil Society, Muslims, Soft repression

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1. Introduction and Research Overview 2021's Law against Separatism as part of the War on terror and aims of the paper

The 2021 French Law against Separatism, formally the *Loi confortant le respect des principes de la République* (LCRPR), represents a pivotal development in the country's trajectory of securitarian governance and its entanglement with civil society. Following a series of terrorist attacks between 2015 and 2020, the State reinforced measures targeting Muslim actors under the guise of counterterrorism (Kaya, 2011). The "War on Terror" has repeatedly intertwined with the suspension of civil liberties in the name of swift repression (Vedaschi & Graziani, 2019). However, repression often manifests not only through visible coercion but also through subtle and silent strategies, including financial control, that authorities employ to weaken civil society (Talpin & al., 2017). Among these mechanisms, the regulation of funding and economic dependency has emerged as one of the most effective instruments of governance and repression.

The adoption of the LCRPR followed the shocking murder of schoolteacher Samuel Paty on 16 October 2020 in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, near Paris. The perpetrator, Abdullah Anzorov, claimed he acted in response to Paty's classroom use of satirical caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad published by *Charlie Hebdo* (Moalla & Cozma, 2023; Szukala, 2023). Paty's killing marked the tragic culmination of a debate that had drawn France into heated discussions on freedom of expression, *laïcité*, and religion (ibidem). Police operations subsequently targeted offenses such as incitement to hatred and the dissemination of Paty's personal information, framing the assassination as part of a broader social divide (Szukala, 2023). In this context, terms such as "separatism" and "communitarianism" gained prominence (Moalla & Cozma, 2023), echoing President Macron's Mureaux speech of 2 October 2020, which identified "Islamic separatism" as a central problem, ultimately giving rise to the LCRPR. In his words (from October 2020's speech), for instance, Macron defines Islamic separatism as «...*a proclaimed, publicized desire, a systematic way of organizing things to contravene the Republic's laws and create a parallel order, establish other values...*», antagonizing it to the Republic and explaining with an aggressive rhetoric what the Republic should do: «*We must attack separatist Islam... a conscious, theorized, politico-religious project which is at odds with the values of the Republic.* »

Hence, framed as a necessary response to "separatism" and alleged links between associations and jihadist financing, the LCRPR institutionalized and expanded State control over the cultural and financial life of civil society organizations (CSOs) (Fregosi, 2021; Messner, 2022). The law aimed to reinforce national cohesion by reaffirming core Republican values, particularly *laïcité*, understood as the submission of religious values to republican norms, thereby downplaying ethnic and religious identities in favor of political unity (Gazagne-Jammes, 2022) – here it is worth mentioning that *laïcité* constitutes a historically specific interpretation of secularism developed within the French republican tradition, grounded in the principle of state neutrality and in the restriction of religious expression within the public and political sphere, while formally preserving citizens' freedom of conscience and belief. A central and controversial innovation is the *Contrat d'engagement républicain* (CER), a compulsory agreement that CSOs must sign to access public funding (Fregosi, 2021; Gazagne-Jammes, 2022; Khemilat, 2023). Beyond a neutral declaration of legal compliance, the CER mandates adherence to a State-defined interpretation of *laïcité* and republican values (Article 1), embedding oversight directly into the conditions of associational funding. CSOs that refuse the contract are automatically excluded from State partnerships (Messner, 2022), a provision interpreted as part of a broader European illiberal turn.

The law also imposes new certifications for imams (Fregosi, 2020, 2021; Messner, 2022), in line with Article 3's prohibition of "abusive proselytizing," a term left deliberately vague, thereby allowing broad interpretive discretion and potential law instrumentalization (Messner, 2022; Gabor, 2024). Restrictions on foreign funding—already in place—were further tightened under Article 6, reflecting concerns about external influence (Chaudhry & Heiss, 2021; Gazagne-Jammes, 2022; Georgeault, 2022). Collectively, these measures

create a growing dependency of CSOs on State resources, distributed through selective procedures (Delfini et al., 2021; Gabor, 2024). Consequently, the LCRPR not only reshapes the financial landscape of associational life but codifies a hierarchy of legitimacy, favoring compliant organizations while marginalizing dissenting voices.

Criticism has been substantial. International watchdogs and NGOs argue that the LCRPR embeds authoritarian risks, shrinking civic space and undermining associational freedoms (Amnesty International, 2021; Alternatives Humanitaires, 2022; CIVICUS Monitor, 2023). Scholarship confirms these concerns, highlighting financial control as a mechanism for co-optation and selective empowerment that limits autonomy while empowering “acceptable” actors (della Porta, 1995; Gabor, 2024). While formally applicable to all CSOs, in practice the law disproportionately targets Islamic civil society organizations (ICSOs), which have become the primary focus of securitarian suspicion by virtue of their religious character.

The present paper examines the financial implications of the LCRPR for ICSOs, focusing on State control strategies and the responses they elicit. The analysis draws on qualitative interviews with leaders of Muslim associations in Lille, Marseille, and Paris and concentrates on four case studies chosen for both analytical and temporal significance. Despite the limited number of cases, they represent diverse types of organizations operating across distinct regional contexts, allowing each ICSO to be situated within specific analytical frames defined by its activities and relationship with the State. The sample includes ICSOs categorized as “juridical,” providing legal defense and advocacy; “educational,” addressing pedagogical needs from a Muslim perspective; and “humanitarian,” delivering goods and services in accordance with religious precepts.

This classification reflects each organization’s historical relations with public authorities and helps explain their respective stances toward the State. While educational and humanitarian ICSOs are often recognized as legitimate partners, juridical ICSOs tend to adopt confrontational positions, particularly when challenging institutions legally. Accordingly, sampled ICSOs are further classified as “contentious,” “collaborative,” or “legalist,” based on missions and orientations toward authority rather than mobilization strategies.

Temporal positioning is also critical. *Lycée Averroes* provides a pre-LCRPR reference point, while CCIF and Zakat exemplify post-law repression. ADM occupies an intermediary position spanning both periods. By triangulating interviews, watchdog reports, and official documents, the research offers an empirically grounded analysis of financial repression and the adaptive, resilient, or co-optative strategies it generates.

To achieve this objective, the paper addresses not only mechanisms of soft repression but also how ICSOs’ historically rooted relations with the State shape their perceptions of risk, opportunity, and authority. Section 2 details methodology, Section 3 develops a theoretical framework on soft repression and financial control, Section 4 introduces infrapolitics as an analytical lens for ICSOs’ reactions, the empirical analysis begins in Section 5, and Section 9 concludes.

Table 1 – The Four ICSOs sampled classified for nature, previous attitudes towards the State, period of repression suffered.

ICSO	Nature of the ICSO’s mission	Nature of previous ICSO-State relations	Beginning of financial repression suffered
Lycée Averroes	Educational (Muslim school, multi-religious students)	Collaborative: school in partnership with the State).	2019-2020, before LCRPR.
CCIF (Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France).	Juridical (production of reports on Islamophobia and discrimination starting from the frames developed in French and International law).	Contentious: high level of criticism towards the State (previous heated quarrels documented)	2020, before LCRPR’s adoption.
Associations Droits des Musulmans	Juridical: legal assistance to people suffering Islamophobia and racism.	Hybrid: sparking from collaborative (in some workshop and seminars held with authorities) and contentious (harsh criticism in times of crisis).	2024, after LCRPR.
Zakat	Humanitarian (gathering and distribution of almsgivings)	Legalist: independent activities carried in respect of the legal frame imposed by the State.	2024, after LCRPR.

2. Methodology: Why a Qualitative Approach to Study Infrapolitics and Financial Repression

The research adopts a qualitative approach for both theoretical and practical reasons. Studying ICSOs under repression involves a sensitive field where limited access, surveillance, and risks for participants render quantitative methods impractical. Qualitative research, by contrast, is particularly suited for exploring how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences through interaction, discourse, and everyday practices (Corbetta, 2010; della Porta, 2010; Garfinkel, 1967; Merriam, 1998). Grounded in interpretivist and inductive epistemologies, this perspective prioritizes contextual knowledge and participant voices over generalizability. As Guba and Lincoln (1985, p. 189) note, “*Social phenomena assume their meaning more from the context where they take place than from their very nature.*” The aim is therefore to produce context-sensitive data capable of revealing the dynamic repertoires of action in a constantly evolving setting.

Data were primarily collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, recognized in interpretive research for capturing lived experiences and enabling participants to reflect, articulate, and elaborate freely (Charmaz, 2006; Belina, 2023). This format allowed participants to frame their own

categories of meaning rather than rely on externally imposed concepts (Glaser, 1978). Interviews combined broad thematic questions on activism, repression, and ICSO–State relations with a focus on personal trajectories, highlighting dynamics of soft repression that would otherwise remain invisible (Avallone, 2018; Mattoni, 2014; Creswell, 2013).

Given the field's sensitivity, a snowball sampling strategy was adopted, leveraging participants' networks to access otherwise hidden or vulnerable groups (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Atkinson & Flint, 2001). While this method risks sample homogeneity (Noy, 2008), representativeness was not the objective; the goal was an inductive, explorative understanding of diverse strategies of adaptation and resistance. To mitigate potential bias, interview data were triangulated with watchdog reports and official State documents.

Key informants were initially drawn from academic and activist networks, enabling trust-building. The final sample comprised ten leaders or prominent figures in Muslim organizations, interviewed between March and December 2024 in Lille (5), Paris (3), and Marseille (2). Names and identifying details have been modified to protect anonymity. Despite the modest sample, qualitative standards were met and data saturation achieved (Charmaz, 2006; Mattoni, 2014).

Analysis followed a grounded theory-inspired process, deriving categories, subcategories, and relational links inductively from participants' voices. This approach allowed the identification of causal and dynamic connections, showing how the State's soft repression prompted infrapolitical strategies by ICSOs.

In sum, the qualitative approach—centered on semi-structured interviews—was essential for capturing the complexity of repression. It provides a nuanced, contextually rich account of how ICSOs navigate an increasingly hostile environment shaped by the LCRPR.

3. Literature Review: Soft Repression in the Form of Financial Control

Historically, scholars have primarily focused on hard repression, meaning coercive or violent actions aimed at suppressing protests (Combes and Fillieule, 2011; Davenport, 2015; Earl, 2013; Jämte and Ellefsen, 2020). Soft repression, instead, operates through more subtle, often invisible mechanisms (Earl, 2006; Jämte and Ellefsen, 2020; Talpin, 2016). Both strategies share the same goals: increase the costs of mobilization (della Porta, 1995; Earl, 2011; Tilly, 1978), and weaken solidarity among activists (Wood, 2007). Ferree (2005, pg. 141) explains soft repression as “the collective mobilization of power, albeit in nonviolent forms and often highly informal ways, to limit and exclude ideas and identities from the public forum.”

Soft repression is therefore a tactical choice, enabling States to avoid the counterproductive effects of visible violence, such as media backlash, the increase of radical fringes (Wood, 2007) or the risk of office loss (Davenport, 2005). Moreover, soft repression can be used to pre-emptively contain dissent by narrowing narratives available to challengers (Talpin, 2016) or limiting their economic resources (Boykoff, 2007). Control over economic resources and public images of groups are considered soft repression. Within this framework, authorities can shape the political engagement and public identities of dissidents (Earl, 2011).

Soft repression includes techniques such as (1) stigmatization/labelling, which work at the individual level by triggering self-censorship (Fallon et al., 2018; Jämte and Ellefsen, 2020), as well as (2) co-optation and clientelism, which manipulate organizational autonomy, often through material incentives (Talpin, 2016).

On the one hand, (1) labelling and stigmatization involve the use of language and imagery to discredit collective identities and their legitimacy (Ferree, 2005; Jämte and Ellefsen, 2020). This can limit the capacity for mobilization (Boykoff, 2007), but without the visibility of violent repression (Fallon et al., 2018; Delfini et al., 2021). For instance, moral panic triggered by media and authorities' representatives is often considered a low-violence strategy to discredit political actors (Worrell, 2019). This recently occurred with the pro-Gaza movements in Western countries like Germany and Italy (della Porta, 2024), where pro-Gaza demonstrators are accused of antisemitism.

Macron's Mureaux speech can be qualified as a soft repression technique of stigmatization/labelling. Despite the focus of the paper being financial control, it is generally recognized that the Mureaux speech set specific boundaries for ICSOs: Muslims are a component of French society unless they are fundamentalist (without specifying the term), in that case they are enemies. It comes that ICSOs must navigate a political situation encouraging self-censorship.

This logic mirrors the instrumentalization of news events involving migrants or ethno-religious minorities, a process producing negative perceptions of these groups (Kühle & Lindekilde, 2010). As Bourdieu (1998: 21) noticed, *"the accidents of everyday life, can be loaded with political or ethnic significance to unleash strong, negative feelings [...]"*. Stigmatization strategies triggering moral panic over a movement are indeed used by elites to divide protestors into legitimate and illegitimate.

Into the other, the second form of soft repression, (2) co-optation and clientelism, involves more direct State intervention. Here, financial leverage is used to influence or neutralize CS actors (Delfini et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant in contexts where organizations are heavily dependent on public funding, like in France (Pinson, 2010; Talpin and Bonnevalle, 2023). The threat of funding withdrawal can force associations to align with State positions or mute radical claims. Clientelism in this context refers to the strategic allocation of material benefits in exchange for political compliance or support (Talpin, 2016; 2017; Talpin and Bonnevalle, 2023). Nelson (2013) coined the term "resource depletion" – opposite of "resource mobilization" – to refer to all repressive strategies that do not target movements physically, but it targets their money and mobility to prevent actions without attract criticism (Nelson, pg. 168).

These mechanisms help shaping the very boundaries of legitimate protest. Through financial leverage, States can determine which actors gain visibility and public recognition, and which are excluded from the public sphere (Mitchell and Staheli, 2005). As Gramsci (1971) suggested, liberal States do not merely repress opposition; they also seek to incorporate or domesticate it, shaping dissent to fit hegemonic norms. To control funding and resources of CSOs means controlling their political stances and repertoires of action: if a contentious strategy may cost an organization its economic resources, it will less likely engage in open conflict with authorities. In the same way, if violent actions and rhetoric may cost movements accusations of radicalism, they may decide to isolate their radical fringes. In both cases, CSOs must find other ways to dissent other than open conflict.

The 2021's LCRPR perfectly suits as an example of this mechanism: by reducing the opportunities of external fundings for ICSO and by establishing specific conditions – like the CER - the French State forced ICSOs to accept the limits of dissent set by *laïcité*.

If it cannot be claimed that financial control is a novel concept, it must be noted that it remains an illiberal trend growing in Western societies and, consequently, a topic that constantly gains attention. However, since the frame of this paper relies on State-ICSOs relations, the article would be incomplete without a section dedicated to ICSOs reactions to State's soft repression. As a matter of fact, soft repression prompts reactions that may differ from those prompted by applying hard repression: ICSOs—not only the State—can face negative media attention if they resort to violence during protests, especially as a reaction to soft, invisible repression.

4. The Nature of Infrapolitics: Reply to Repression Without Visible Confrontation

As mentioned in the last section, if the State avoids visible confrontation by enacting soft repression, the repressed subalterns may react on the same, silent register. Here, the concept of infrapolitics developed by James C. Scott provides a useful analytical lens (Cleuziou, 2010). Scott (2018) identifies three levels of

interaction between dominant and subordinate groups: the (1) public transcript, the (2) hidden transcript, and (3) infrapolitics.

The (1) public transcript encompasses interactions that occur in visible, formal spaces, where both dominants and subordinates perform roles aligned with societal expectations. This is the realm where power is most explicit and where the dominant narrative is upheld (Scott, 2018). In the context of State-ICSOs relations, the public transcript is represented to hard and direct repression motivated by official narratives— an example may be the open repression of Pro-Gaza protests under the pretext of contrasting antisemitism.

In contrast, the (2) hidden transcript refers to the discourses and practices that take place out of sight, among subordinate groups. It is in these private or semi-private settings that counter-narratives emerge, allowing subordinates to critique and reject dominant ideologies without immediate consequences (Scott, 2018). In the context of State-ICSOs relations, the hidden transcript is represented by organizational and private processes proper of ICSOs, like the preparation of an event or campaign.

Table 2 – Overview of soft repression suffered by ICSOs, infrapolitical reaction enacted, and outcomes.

Case Study	Soft Repression (State/authorities)	Infrapolitical Reaction (ICSOs)	Outcomes
Lycée Averroes	Threat to freeze the contract with the State (control of financial resources) over accusations of foreign fundings and links with terrorism moved by Regional authorities.	Formal complaints against the Regional judicial organs, followed by the juridical escalation to the National arena with the involvement of the Council of State (use of independent juridical institution to win soft repression).	Re-establishment of the State’s contract after a sentence favorable to the school.
CCIF	Threat to halt the organization (cutting funds and erasure from associations’ register) over accusation of spreading hatred and supporting terrorism.	Avoidance of repression by transfer of funds and personnel abroad before the emission of the halting order - in a totally transparent and legal fashion.	Substitution of CCIF by CCIE (Collective Contre l’Islamophobie en Europe) and the broadening of the research focus from France to the European Union.
ADM	Illegal and invisible freezing of personal fundings (the head of the ICSO). No direct and formal accusation received by authorities.	Avoidance of repression by disseminating the illegal repression suffered and by escalating to supranational organizations to externally pressure authorities.	Unlock of fundings after a prolonged standoff.
Zakat	Illegal and invisible freezing of fundings over activities deemed suspected (even though never specified with formal accusations).	Avoidance of repression by normal procedures of bank transfer.	Temporary unlock of fundings after a prolonged standoff. Elaboration of eventual strategies to react in the future.

(3) Infrapolitics occupies a space between these two transcripts. It includes subtle, everyday forms of resistance that “do not take the form of open protest but nonetheless challenge authority” (Scott, 2018, pg. 12). These acts can be ethical, cultural, political, or symbolic: because they are less visible, they carry fewer risks and allow for sustained resistance over time (Honari, 2017; Matthews, 2022). In the context of State-ICSOs relations, infrapolitics are understandable as those actions enacted by ICSOs to react without giving reasons to adopt hard repression. For instance, when dissidents decide to confront the State’s repression, they

may choose to do so through official procedures and legal complaints, denouncing the repression in courts and the media, thereby exploiting legal instruments still considered capable of limiting the State's repression. Infrapolitics means challenge authority through the spaces and instruments provided by the institutional framework — at least in the French case, mainly democratic. The idea of infrapolitics in this context is that ICSOs, to resist, adopt a transcript acceptable to authorities, that allows sustained resistance without surrendering nor escalating.

The table 2 offers a prelude to the empirical findings, listing the soft repression enacted by the State (financial control) and the infrapolitical reactions of ICSOs. Each of these action-reaction relations will be debated in the next sections.

5. Islamist funding and Syllabus: The Lycée Averroes in Lille and the accusations of foreign fundings

The first case study analyzed takes place in Lille, North-eastern France, in 2019, way before the promulgation of the LCRPR. However, due to the nature of the accusations and the developments, several observers see in the Lycée Averroes' case a precursor to the 2021's law against separatism.

Founded in 2003 by the Averroes Association (Law 1901), the Lycée Averroes quickly became a key institution for the local community (Hanafi et al., 2025). Initially funded by private donors, it obtained a State contract in 2008, becoming the first Muslim school in France to do so and receiving public funding in exchange for compliance with national educational standards (Bourget, 2019). However, this institutional recognition also marked the genesis of recurrent accusations of Islamism (Hanafi et al., 2025). A major turning point came in 2019 with the publication of the *Qatar Papers*, an investigative book (written by journalists Chesnot and Malbrunot, 2019), alleging €4 million in Qatari funding to the school. Although investigations later confirmed the amount was under €1 million and constituted an unconditional donation, allegations of links to the Muslim Brotherhood persisted and were mobilized politically to suppress the school public funding.

The first interview conducted was with Omar, senior figure of Lycée Averroes, who provided a detailed reconstruction of the school's history culminating in the suspension of its contract. His account revealed how administrators framed the controversy.

For Omar, the suspension of State funding followed what he termed "*pretentious events*," a phrase that unintentionally echoed the "*injustice frame*" (Bechroue, 2014) often invoked by French Muslims to interpret State actions against Islamic actors. His choice of words reflected deep mistrust toward the school's accusers. He situated Averroès within a broader securitarian environment, stressing that while suspicion was present from the outset, pressure became markedly harsher after 2015.

This suspicion was rooted in the school's origins. "*Our school was founded by the Mosque of South Lille, central to the Ligue Islamique du Nord, part of the former Union des Organisations Islamiques en France—today Musulmans de France—which in the past was accused of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.*" References to the Brotherhood reveal a long-standing trope in French political discourse, where the group is portrayed as an existential enemy (Amghar, 2008; Dazey, 2019; Maréchal, 2015). As Mr. Mahmood, senior figure of the Averroes association and formerly close to UOIF leadership, pointed out such accusations are regularly mobilized to discredit ICSOs (Ajala, 2021; Smidt et al., 2021), such as in the dissolution of BarakaCity under the LCRPR (Faure, 2021).

Omar noted that allegations intensified in 2019, when Xavier Bertrand, president of the Region, invoked *Qatar Papers* to claim that in 2014 the Lycée had received “a cheque from Qatar.” Bertrand publicly declared that such a donation raised suspicions of foreign influence: “There was a donation from Qatar, so I’m cutting off subsidies. I want to know why that donation was made, what the counterpart was—as if Qatar had asked us to do something here in France.” Omar countered that this narrative reflected wider anxieties: any financial connection to Arab or Muslim countries was treated as proof of disloyalty to republican values.

Although this case predated the LCRPR, it foreshadowed its architecture. Restrictions on foreign funding forced Islamic organizations to rely almost exclusively on State partnerships, thereby increasing State leverage (Talpin & Bonneville, 2023). As both Omar and Mahmood emphasized, Catholic schools such as Lycée Stanislas or Henri IV receive State subsidies without suspicion, yet Muslim schools are cast as potential threats of separatism (Gazagne-Jammes, 2022; Geisser, 2021; Messner, 2022).

Omar insisted that the Qatar donation was misrepresented. The funds, he explained, came from Qatar Charity, a philanthropic body collecting zakat, and were used solely to purchase premises. Nonetheless, media narratives transformed this donation into evidence of links with Qatar, Hamas, or the Brotherhood, stigmatizing the school administration. “If Muslims receive money from Qatar, we must be Brotherhood or pro-Hamas,” he remarked, illustrating how suspicion operates as a discrediting narrative.

The donation controversy triggered further scrutiny. Even before the funding was officially deemed regular, authorities ordered an inspection by the Regional Chamber of Accounts in 2023. The audit extended beyond finances into curricular matters: inspectors reviewed the school’s Muslim ethics program and criticized its use of *40 Hadiths*. While the text itself was benign, commentators cited by the book had expressed conservative views on apostasy and homosexuality. Omar stressed that none of these positions were ever taught at Averroes, yet the school was accused of undermining republican principles, an accusation that risks disqualifying voices and justifying financial repression.

This episode illustrates how constructed accusations—at times bordering on “fake news”—can serve as soft repression. Scholars highlight how digital and media ecosystems allow authorities to fabricate suspicion and legitimize investigations (Ferree, 2005; Massoumi, 2021). While Averroes was not the victim of outright falsehoods, exaggeration of commentary in media debates constrained its legitimacy. Such tactics, often associated with authoritarian regimes, are increasingly observed in democratic contexts. Human Rights Watch (2023) and the European Civic Forum (2024) warn that minority organizations are disproportionately targeted, signaling a regression of civic rights.

By following the forms of soft repression classified in section 3, it is possible to notice how authorities mobilized a public imagery (radicalism and the Brotherhood) to discredit the Lycée’s legitimacy (Ferree, 2005; Jämte and Ellefsen, 2020). The reference to fundamentalist readings triggered a moral panic in public opinion, which limited the chances of replies of the Lycée, all without the visibility of violent repression (Fallon et al., 2018; Delfini et al., 2021).

When asked about the prefect’s decision to terminate the contract, due to the alleged links with Islamists, Mahmood’s frustration was evident: “This is the beginning of the school’s end. Terminating the contract means cutting off funding. If we can’t reverse the decision, the State will not pay our teachers or provide subsidies for maintenance.” His words underscored the existential threat posed by administrative measures that equate suspicion with guilt, thereby eroding institutional survival.

The case of Lycée Averroes thus highlights how suspicion, amplified through media and political discourse, can escalate into material repression. Rooted in anxieties around the Muslim Brotherhood and foreign funding,

the accusations illustrate broader mechanisms of delegitimization shaping the shrinking civic space for Muslims in France.

5.b. Aware of Innocence, Confident in Justice: Lycée Averroes' Infrapolitical reactions

Despite Lycée Averroes' first appeal, a commission of the Chamber of Regional Accounts confirmed the prefect decision to suspend the school's contract. For Omar, the hearing was "a joke" while Mahmood described it as "a terrible meeting with terrible implications." These comments illustrate how the school's leaders perceived the proceedings: unjust, absurd, and politically driven rather than impartial.

This perception of injustice emerged strongly in interviews. Omar emphasized his loyalty to French institutions: "I have always been republican in my veins: republican and Muslim," recalling that State representatives had repeatedly praised the school prior to 2019. All participants insisted on their innocence, an assessment shared by teachers, students, and parents. One teacher highlighted the school's pluralistic environment: "All the teachers here are Republicans, trained and paid by the State... Some are Catholics, other atheists."

Although Regional authorities were perceived as hostile interlocutors, participants retained faith in the judicial system. "All of this will come out through prosecutors or judges," one teacher argued. Mahmood echoed this confidence: "We received the confirmation of suspension, we refused the accusation, we named plenty of lawyers and contested the prefect decision." This "plenty of lawyers" strategy can be interpreted in two ways: as reliance on national institutions considered more impartial, and as a deliberate refusal to mobilize public protest. Instead of contentious activism and polarizing declarations against prosecutors, leaders pursued infrapolitics: avoiding confrontation in the public sphere to try to use the room left in the Republican judicial system to obtain justice.

Omar justified this approach: "If we filed the case, it's because the accusation of teaching values contrary to the Republic does not exist! What we are accused of is pure conspiracy, and the only way to face conspiracies and Islamophobia is justice." He argued that politicians "don't really suspect connections between Averroes and Islamism, but they make people believe it to justify what is happening." The school, he added, had "plenty of proof—teachers, inspectors, parents—showing the accusations wrong: that book was never here." This demonstrates both the recognition of institutional resources and the conviction that a peaceful, legalist response could succeed.

After their initial appeal was rejected by the administrative tribunal, the school escalated to the Council of State. "They didn't want to suspend the prefect decision? Fine! We're appealing before the Council of State, which has strong influence in cases like this. Our lawyers filed briefs." This step-by-step reliance on higher judicial institutions illustrates a carefully elaborated infrapolitical strategy, seeking suspension through legal precedent.

Mahmood explained the logic: "If we demonstrate our innocence, the State Council, as an independent organ, may suspend the prefect's decision. If suspended, the contract is restored until the case is settled in tribunal, and the lack of evidence will make us justice. Our hope is to gain time and let justice run its course." Such reasoning highlights the rare presence of a clear infrapolitical strategy in a securitarian context: pursuing incremental goals (suspension → restored funding → time for defense) through institutional channels.

Participants were unanimous in framing regional authorities as impossible to engage. "We need to change our interlocutor because the prefect is terrible with us: he expelled several imams, caused other problems... you have the mosque of Villeneuve d'Ascq, and you have our case. All of us representing somehow the Muslim

community.” Whether empirically accurate or not, this framing reveals a deliberate attempt to shift the confrontation to higher State institutions, perceived as more impartial.

Ultimately, this strategy yielded results. In December 2024, the Council of State suspended the prefect decision. On 23 April 2025, the administrative tribunal declared the suspension procedurally flawed and lacked sufficient evidence, reinstating the contract retroactively.

In addition to legal recourse, leaders mentioned potential fallback strategies. Asked about the risk of failing to pay teachers, they referred to emergency support from “*some mosques or federations*” and solidarity networks capable of covering salaries through domestic donations. Although not implemented, these considerations reveal a pragmatic orientation: mobilizing community resources while judicial proceedings unfolded.

The Averroes case thus illustrates how ICSOs may resist repression not through protest but through deploying legal tools, institutional loyalty, and pragmatic contingency plans to confront accusations perceived as conspiratorial and politically motivated.

6. Being Accused to be Delegitimized: the instrumentalization of Paty’s homicide against CCIF

If the Lycée Averroes case showed a positive ending in the use of law as infrapolitics of resistance, it must be noted that such a strategy does not always reach the results hoped.

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to connect with former high-level exponents of CCIF. The association had already been the target of several State’s actions. In the table in section 2, CCIF had been classified as Juridical organization with contentious relations with the State - and hence remains kind of emblematic of the State’s use of soft repression against dissenting voices.

The CCIF was founded in 2003 with the aim of documenting and combating discrimination and violence suffered by Muslims in France. Over the years, it has gained notoriety as the main French organization engaged in denouncing Islamophobia, regularly publishing reports and participating in the public debate on secularism and religious freedom.

The turning point came in October 2020, after the assassination of Professor Paty. In the following days, the French government – and in particular Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin – accused the CCIF of ideological and moral complicity: the ICSO allegedly contributed to creating a hostile climate around the teacher by sharing online critical contents about the lesson in which Paty had shown caricatures of Muhammad.

Bilal, 33, a former leading activist and national board member in 2019–2020, explained to me how “*things went out of control*” after the 2020 assassination of Paty, when repression against the organization escalated sharply. Mustafa, 54, one of the founding members, traced CCIF’s origins further back to the early 2000s, when it was created to combat discrimination and racism—an initiative that, he stressed, “*the State never liked.*”

This bitterness pervaded nearly all interviews, reflecting both the association’s trajectory and the repression it endured. Former members consistently framed their experience within what they called “*the authoritarian*

and illiberal turn of the French State” (Melyssa, 25, former activist). In their view, this shift was legitimated in public discourse through the rise of Daesh but was experienced as disproportionately targeting Muslims.

According to participants, this authoritarian drift manifested in relentless political and media attacks. They recalled repeated accusations linking CCIF to terrorism, often without evidence. Bilal, a former leader, complained that after attacks such as the Stade de France or Bataclan, CCIF was casually associated with responsibility despite the absence of any link. He emphasized that the State failed to shield the association from defamatory claims. While far-right hostility was expected, activists noted attacks from other CSOs as well. Melyssa described this as self-censorship: avoiding naming specific groups for fear of retaliation. Her account resonates with scholarship showing how CSOs may delegitimize competitors in contexts of shrinking resources and growing fragmentation (Ferre, 2004; Fallon et al., 2018; Delfini et al., 2021).

The October 2020 murder of Paty marked a decisive rupture. Bilal recalled how the Ministry of Interior publicly accused CCIF, sparking harassment and raids across its offices. No incriminating evidence was found, yet Mustafa argued that the State had long awaited an opportunity to dismantle the collective: Paty’s murder offered the “*perfect occasion*.” In his words, “*everything about our work was legal, but uncomfortable for them*.”

6.b. From the National to the Supranational Level: The Collectif Contre l’Islamophobie en France (CCIF) and the Impossibility of Legalist Infrapolitics

A parallel emerges with the case of Lycée Averroes. Both ICSOs illustrate how authorities deploy fabricated or exaggerated claims to restrict discursive opportunities and shape public opinion by delegitimizing dissenting voices (Ferree, 2014; Kang et al., 2023; Massoumi, 2021). The difference lies in scale: Lycée Averroes was targeted regionally, while CCIF faced direct attacks from national leaders, including Minister Darmanin, who accused it of morally justifying terrorism. The fact that CCIF had been accused directly by the State’s organs and members of the Government, automatically diminished the chances of reaction, especially through the judicial system.

For most interviewees, repression was linked not to extremism but to CCIF’s independence. Bilal emphasized that the collective did not rely on state subventions but on donations and community support.

However, it must be noted that, while the Lycée was linked to the State through a contract of financial dependency, CCIF remained an organization relying on international fundings and private donors, hence diminishing the financial leverage of the State, that indeed, after failing for years to find ways to financially limit CCIF, decided to escalate and proceed with the dissolution warrant.

For most interviewees, repression was indeed linked not to extremism but to CCIF’s independence. Mustafa added that CCIF’s previous critical stances against the State—court cases, monitoring reports, peaceful mobilization—were precisely what made it intolerable for authorities. Independence and legality thus became liabilities, echoing practices observed in less democratic contexts, where governments manipulate public opinion to disqualify critical CSOs (Brechenmacher, 2019).

Participants also located the dissolution within the broader passage of the 2021’s LCRPR. They recalled heightened tensions during the law’s drafting, criticized by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for undermining associative freedom. CCIF’s reports on rising Islamophobic attacks, they argued, increased its visibility—and its vulnerability. Authorities, they contended, instrumentalized outrage after Paty’s murder to accelerate the law’s adoption, silencing opposition to it (Bechrouri, 2023; Roy, 2023).

This dynamic aligns with della Porta's theory of repression at critical junctures (1995, 2015): extraordinary shocks provide momentum for exceptional measures. By capitalizing on a shocked public opinion, the French government gained legitimacy for a law that might otherwise have faced stronger resistance. In this climate, CCIF's dissolution was both symbolic and strategic. As Mustafa summarized, authorities accused the collective of moral complicity in Paty's murder merely because it had issued a critical statement on the cartoons shown in class.

Therefore, since the room for reaction was deemed too narrow – with no chances for legalism –, CCIF opted for a more radical infrapolitics, that Mustafa described as “going international”. As a matter of fact, the professional leadership of CCIF used the temporary window left open by administrative procedures (namely the issue of warrant of dissolution): by simple and formal procedures – and by acting preventively –, CCIF “resigned the loan contract of its French structures, canceled its name from the register of Civil Society organizations recognized by the State and asked the paid staff to move to Bruxelles (or found people in place)”, as explained by Bilal. Later, he also added that “Bruxelles is the core of our international network, hence we had in there plenty of friends that helped us with procedures like registering in National album and find structures for rent for the new organization – the *Collective Contre l’Islamophobie en Europe*”.

In sum, the CCIF case illustrates how an independent, professional, and juridical ICSO became the target of systematic repression. Far from being marginal or radical, CCIF operated within legal frameworks, but its independence from State control rendered it vulnerable. Its dissolution signals a broader contraction of civic space for Muslims in France, where discursive closure, media delegitimization, and financial repression converge. The testimonies suggest that repression now extends beyond contentious or radical actors to encompass even legal organizations, pointing to a deeper authoritarian drift in State–Civil Society relations.

Concerning CCIF's reaction in front of the State's repression, it falls within the adaptation of infrapolitics I offered in section 5. The differences mentioned with Lycée Averroes and the other ICSOs studied (in both: the nature of accusations received and the previous attitude towards the State) further explains the radicality of the reaction. While Averroès demonstrated how legalism could serve as an infrapolitical strategy to survive under pressure, CCIF reveals the limits of such repertoires once repression reached the administrative core of the State. Averroes contested accusations step by step through courts, whereas CCIF was confronted with direct government attacks and rapid dissolution, leaving little scope for legal defense.

This divergence reflects differences in political and media contexts. In the aftermath of Samuel Paty's assassination, CCIF was publicly framed as “*complicit*” in terrorism, which dramatically curtailed discursive opportunities. Unlike Averroes, able to retain some institutional collaboration, CCIF was recast as a national security threat. The State exploited the momentum of fear (della Porta, 1995; 2015), transforming trauma into political capital to stigmatize a critical actor.

Two dynamics stand out. First, the instrumentalization of crisis: accusations without evidence resonated with a fearful public, legitimizing extraordinary repression. Second, the administrativization of repression: the LCRPR enabled authorities to bypass judicial checks through dissolution warrants and financial blockages (Shen-Bay, 2018; Blokker, 2022; Yang et al., 2023).

Repression, however, fostered adaptation. Unable to defend itself domestically, CCIF relocated abroad, reconstructing it as CCIE. Ironically, expulsion amplified its European visibility, highlighting the double-edged nature of legalism—viable only where institutions allow appeals, fragile where legality itself becomes exclusionary.

7. “They Won’t Silence Me”: Suffering Soft Repression by oneself

The third case study centers on Leila, a leading figure in a small, juridical Muslim advocacy organization in Paris: The *Action Droits des Musulmans* (ADM), an association founded in November 2025 by anti-racist activists and lawyers willingly to provide legal support for people suffering racism. What characterized ADM is the participation in collaborations with National and international institutions: by collaborating with the writing of reports and the gathering of data, ADM was generally considered a reliable partner, sometimes even by the State. One day in 2019, however, BPN Paribas decided to freeze Miss Leila’s bank account without notice or explanations.

Uniquely, this case involves a very limited number of interviews—Leila was the only one who agreed to speak—and features an unusually indirect and personalized form of repression, which targeted her as an individual rather than the organization. As such, information about ADM itself will remain limited, while the dynamics affecting Leila will be deeply analyzed.

As a lawyer-activist, Leila began her involvement after the 2015 Daesh attacks. As she recalled, she was “shocked” by how the emergency law affected “all Muslims,” not just those linked to terrorism. Through her networks, she connected victims of police abuse with legal support: “*That became our speciality: dealing with the excesses of anti-terrorism legislation and administrative decisions of police.*” ADM’s work consisted of contacting people facing intimidation, warrantless arrests, or home searches, and aiding them “*according to their availabilities.*”

Her testimony highlights the intertwining of solidarity and legalism. For ADM, obstructing State illegality and discouraging authoritarian tendencies mattered more than financial stability: “*It does not matter if you are rich, poor, or middle class. If they decide to surveil Muslims, they surveil all of them.*”

Through this work, Leila became increasingly visible nationally and internationally. Her activism reached the United Nations, where she denounced French Islamophobia: “*They were already well-documented, but ADM gave them more reasons to investigate France’s government. They recommended changes to anti-terrorism laws.*”

Unlike CCIF, which resembled ADM in mission and strategy, ADM was born as a direct reaction to the repression following Daesh’s attacks. Unsurprisingly, the State perceived both ADM and Leila as threats.

7.b. Dealing with a Vindictive State: Repressive Actions and Infrapolitical Reactions

At the core of her testimony, Leila linked activism to repression: “*I annoyed them. They couldn’t stand me anymore. So, they said, ‘How do we get rid of ADM? By hitting their finances.’ The problem is I didn’t accept it. I made a scandal.*”

Initially, repression targeted her personally. “*One day I was just unable to access my bank account. They froze it.*” Such measures resembled de-risking practices—freezing accounts linked to terrorism suspects (de Koker & Casanovas, 2024)—but in this case no warrant was issued, suggesting illegality (Chaudhry, 2022; de Goede, 2008, 2017).

“*They had nothing to arrest me with, so they tried to intimidate me. I received no paper, no notification,*” she explained. She suspected the General Directorate of Internal Security, noting their informal intervention with her bank: “*They probably said I was under investigation. Hence, I filed a case against that bank section, and they backed up. They gave me back my account, but that wasn’t the end.*” Scholarship confirms the opaque

role of French security services in implementing counter-terror laws (Fredette, 2014; Hennette-Vauchez, 2019; Fritsch, 2025). Leila, like Lycée Averroes, contested the State through legal channels, exposing contradictions, but without the same results.

The State escalated. *“After the bank issue, they kept targeting me: once I was going to Spain to meet a judge, and they followed me. Then I came home and found my place violated—one computer taken, threatening messages on my phone. They are psychopaths! But they released my account and froze ADM’s instead.”*

This shift—from illegal intimidation of an individual to a “legalized” measure against an organization—illustrates the adaptability of France’s security apparatus. Freezing ADM’s account fits within anti-terror laws, showing how centralized State power escalates in repression (Bechrouri, 2023).

Despite these attacks, Leila remained composed: *“I kept actions legal.”* She mobilized a network of associations, who sent letters to the Ministry of Interior demanding justifications. *“When they denied everything, I was furious. We went to the UN, telling them we were targeted by the French State.”*

International pressure followed: *“The UN sent a letter, saying retaliation against civil society violates international law. The government denied it, but within days ADM’s account was freed. That explains everything. We won that time, but they may come back. They won’t silence me.”*

The case of ADM and Leila adds a crucial dimension to the study of ICSOs in France. Unlike Lycée Averroes, which victoriously relied on courts, or CCIF, which fought on national and supranational fronts, ADM illustrates how soft repression can take a personalized form. Authorities first froze Leila’s personal bank account—an extra-legal act—before extending sanctions to the organization.

When formal, legal complaints failed, ADM combined grassroots solidarity and relied on networks of activists and lawyers to divulgate the injustice suffered, while involving supranational organizations to exert pressure over authorities in a legal manner but circumnavigating repressors. These tactics embodied Scott’s notion of infrapolitics—subtle, legality-based acts that resist authoritarian practices without overt confrontation.

8. War on Charity: The Case of the Zakat Association

The fourth and last case study takes place in Marseille, where I interviewed Khaled *obligatory almsgiving in Islam*”. Such a religious reference says much about the identity of the organization, which is a humanitarian NGO founded in 2021 (before LCRPR). Taking inspiration by the Qur’an, Zakat deals with the gathering and re-distribution of almsgiving among the communities of Marseille, especially in Northern neighborhoods, considered more disadvantaged. Despite a clear Muslim identity, the mission of Zakat does not exclude other communities from the distribution of the donations.

As described by Khaled, *Zakat* operates mainly with volunteers but maintains a professional structure: *“[...] we have two lawyers working with the association. We have a firm of responsible experts. We have an auditor to make sure everything is above board, to verify and publish our accounts, and to report to the prefecture [...]”*. Khaled justified this professionalization as a response to the repression of ICSOs after 2015. For him, having lawyers and auditors within the organization is essential, allowing Zakat to *“operate within the boundaries of the law.”* Like many independent CSOs facing restrictive contexts, Zakat invested in professionalization to strengthen resilience (della Porta, 2010; Tarrow & Tilly, 2015).

Despite this, Zakat began suffering indirect financial pressure after the LCRPR. According to Khaled, the association's difficulties intensified in 2023–24, triggered by his public comments on the genocide in Gaza. While ADM's repression targeted its president, here the State appeared to punish the organization itself as a reaction to Khaled's statements—an indirect but still repressive tactic, bordering legality (de Koker & Casanovas, 2024).

Khaled explained: “[...] in 2023, we suddenly had our bank account frozen [...]”, precluding to leitmotiv. “[...] *It is the bank to put obstacles in our way. We work with them for three or four months, and then they shut the account. Without any explanation. Without any notice.*” As in ADM's case, the pressure came suddenly, with no notice, nor right of appeal—hallmarks of arbitrary administrative repression.

Khaled recognized how French security services might perceive Zakat: A Muslim humanitarian NGO suspected of channeling funds to terrorism, as had been alleged against BarakaCity (Faure, 2021). In this climate, public criticism of Israel provided a pretext for securitarian intervention. Since 2015, humanitarian Muslim NGOs have repeatedly been targeted (Weill, 2019). While some suspicions have merit, many cases have been denounced as repressive in reports by Liberties (2025), Human Rights Watch (2025), and the European Civic Forum (2024).

Yet Khaled insisted Zakat's practices were fully legal and transparent: “[...] *when we distribute Zakat, we do it in France, sometimes in other European countries, but never abroad [...] people asked us to send money to Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, but we always refuse, because France considers those countries sensitive. We never send money out of Eurozone.*” For him, the repression was triggered by his discourse, not by the NGO's activities.

The sequence of events underscores this. In June 2023, their bank requested donor lists as part of a “normal control.” Suddenly, the account was shut. “*We did not know why, but advisors told us it was likely security-related, namely being Muslims.*” Following procedure, Zakat turned to the Banque de France, which assigned a new bank in August 2023. After five months, this account was closed. In March 2024, another bank terminated their account within weeks after opening the account. Khaled recounted with frustration how a technical excuse was later provided: “[...] *a paper with no letterhead, no signature, saying the application had to be submitted by the president, not the treasurer [...]. We had to apply to three different banks, and when we finally found one, they refused, saying the amount of money we wanted to send was too much.*”

These repetitive, unexplained closures echo ADM's experience but seem designed to foster exhaustion and voluntary withdrawal instead of intimidation (Delfini et al., 2021; Smidt et al., 2020).

8.b. No Surrender: Zakat's resistance Infrapolitics after Infrapolitics

Despite the pressure, Khaled was determined: “[...] *we will never stop. We'll keep going according to the procedure, and if this continues we'll try to demand justice in the assigned places [...] and if that does not work, we will close but first we will send our money to an international organization to keep our work on a broader level—or we can even work only here in Marseille, on the ground, with less money, fewer people, but maybe without all this attention. They just cannot stop us.*”

Here Khaled echoes strategies observed in other cases. Like Averroes, Zakat placed trust in legal action, hoping that appeals to higher bodies might succeed. At the same time, they considered “*going international,*” as a valid alternative (like ADM), transferring funds to a transnational humanitarian organization capable of resisting French repression—like CCIF. Though lacking the scale to physically move staff, Zakat saw inspiration in CCIF's model.

Khaled admitted that such internationalization had never been considered before financial troubles. Their outreach to a larger organization - unnamed but presumed capable of defending them legally and politically—, confirms a pattern: ICSOs under pressure increasingly look abroad for survival. Another option discussed was downsizing activities to reduce attention: serving fewer beneficiaries with smaller resources while redirecting most funds to other organizations. This reflects an adaptation strategy seeking minimal visibility while maintaining autonomy.

Infrapolitically, Zakat's tactics combined trust in the legal system with internationalization. By continuing local-level charity, shifting to smaller fundraising events, and involving mosques in transparent distribution, the association sustained activity while managing financial blockages. Declaring these events to the municipality of Marseille further demonstrated an effort to maintain legality. Yet Khaled acknowledged the fragility of this solution: “[...] *only in my network, mosques everywhere had their accounts frozen for something.*”

This awareness reinforced Zakat's rejection of co-optation: “*We don't take public funding, because we want to be independent. If we take money from the State, they will ask for something back. That is not going to happen. Zakat will rather close!*” Independence, therefore, is central to Zakat's identity but also the source of vulnerability under the LCRPR, which effectively channels ICSOs toward State dependency by restricting foreign donations and scrutinizing large-scale Muslim fundraising.

In this sense, the repression of Zakat resembles a strategy of indirect co-optation. By applying sustained but opaque financial pressure—triggered by Khaled's criticisms of Israel but tied to broader securitarian logics—the State sought not to dissolve Zakat outright but to compel adaptation within the legal framework imposed by the 2021 law. Unlike CCIF, targeted for elimination, or Averroes, challenged in court, Zakat faced a slower grind of administrative hurdles, aimed at frustrating leaders into compliance or self-limitation.

Khaled, however, refused to surrender. Whether through continued legal petitions, appeals to the Banque de France, fundraising, or potential transfer of funds to international NGOs, Zakat embodies a layered infrapolitics: adapting, downsizing, or relocating without conceding independence. Despite being stuck in a bureaucratic cycle may not be labelled as victory for Zakat, this resilience underscores once more how repression fosters innovation in resistance, but also how fragile civic space remains for Muslim ICSOs in France.

In this context, Zakat remained infrapolitical. Legalist strategies of transparency and accountability failed, prompting a shift to small-scale local fundraising, mosque-based networks, and cautious exploration of international partnerships. Avoiding direct confrontation, the NGO relied on discreet, everyday survival practices.

9. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Lycée Averroes, CCIF, ADM, and Zakat offers a nuanced perspective on how ICSOs in France navigate the State's soft repression through infrapolitical strategies. While each trajectory is distinct, collectively they reveal broader patterns in the reconfiguration of political opportunities under France's evolving security and identity framework, particularly following the 2021 LCRPR.

From the State's perspective, the LCRPR significantly expanded the scope for financial repression. ADM and Lycée Averroes, operating before the law, demonstrate the necessity for informal or extra-legal measures

to act in ways that were previously difficult to justify. In contrast, CCIF illustrates a context in which heightened public concern and outrage following Paty's murder created favorable conditions for rapid, restrictive interventions - their case closely accompanied the legislative process and represented a declared objective of the reform, even though the dissolution was executed one month before the law formally entered into force. Zakat, in 2023, encountered financial repression that was informal and opaque, reminiscent of ADM's pre-LCRPR experience, likely reflecting the absence of a catalyzing public crisis comparable to Paty's case. This comparison highlights the role of public salience in shaping the intensity, visibility, and form of State interventions.

From the perspective of infrapolitics, the cases reveal important contrasts. Lycée Averroes retained access to judicial remedies, allowing burdensome yet tangible contestation. CCIF, the first direct victim of the LCRPR, faced governmental accusations of "complicity in terrorism" and administrative dissolution, effectively closing legal avenues. Zakat, post-LCRPR, experienced financial repression applied without due process, echoing ADM's pre-2021 situation, but within a strengthened legal framework that formalized certain previously borderline administrative strategies. This demonstrates a broader shift: repression moved from judicialized channels, where courts offered a forum of last resort, to administrativized mechanisms that bypass legal scrutiny. Consequently, ICSOs facing post-2021 repression increasingly turn to international arenas to navigate constraints, as national legal remedies are limited.

Across all cases, ICSOs combined formal compliance—court appeals, transparent accounting, and rights-based discourse—with discreet, adaptive resistance, exemplifying infrapolitics extended to organizational strategies. Lycée Averroes succeeded legally; CCIF relocated abroad as a European entity; ADM leveraged solidarity networks and international advocacy; Zakat scaled down operations, relied on grassroots funding, and pursued transnational partnerships. These strategies reveal how ICSOs sustain agency under constraint and foster discourses on State–Civil Society relations and the concept of infrapolitics itself. The case of CCIF, for instance, deserves further debate to determine the extent to which the exploitation of grey zones in legal frameworks—the achievement of resistance by the State's tools—can be considered a proper infrapolitical strategy.

Collectively, these trajectories illustrate the transformation of civic space in France after the LCRPR: repression has shifted from judicial contestation to administrative exclusion and financial control, reflecting broader European trends. French authorities appear to seek mechanisms to curtail dissent without overt violence, while ICSOs respond through infrapolitical strategies to maintain operations and resist exclusion.

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