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Individuals' Experiences with Religious Hostility, Discrimination, and Violence: Findings from a New National Survey

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Abstract

While concerns about the consequences of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of religious bias have grown in the past several years, the data available to examine these issues have been limited. This study utilizes new data from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults featuring oversamples of key religious minority groups and an instrument dedicated to measuring the extent to which individuals experience hostility, discrimination, and violence due to their religion. Findings show that, while a sizable minority of Christian adults report such experiences, a much greater share of Muslim and Jewish adults report experiences with interpersonal hostility, organizational discrimination, and violent victimization due to their religion. Analyses show that these patterns are largely unchanged after accounting for individuals' race and ethnicity, national origin, and other characteristics, suggesting that experiences with religious hostility are not epiphenomenal to other social locations.

Keywords

religion, discrimination, victimization, bias, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia

The religious landscape of the United States has changed dramatically in the past 30 years (Eck 2001; Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001; Wuthnow 2005). On the one hand, a majority of the U.S. population still identifies as Christian, with many of these individuals linking their religious and national identities together (Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 2018). Surveys have shown that about a third of U.S. adults think being Christian is very important “for being truly American” (Stokes 2017). On the other hand, the percentage of individuals who identify as having no religion has increased from 5 percent of the population according to the 1972 General Social Survey to around 25 percent of the population according to recent surveys (Pew Research Center 2019). The non-religious are heterogeneous, but a sizable subset of this group is “vehemently nonreligious” and “strongly opposed to religion in the public sphere” (Baker and Smith 2009a:731, 2009b). Adding to this complexity is the increased presence of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other non-Christian religious communities. Although such groups still represent a small proportion of the population, their share has increased more than three-fold since the 1970s (Smith 2002; Wuthnow and Hackett 2003; Wuthnow 2004, 2005).

In short, a Christian majority—many of whom hold exclusive views of religious truth and connect these views to

national identity—is increasingly exposed to individuals with no religious affiliation and possibly even hostility toward religion along with individuals who belong to religions outside of the Christian tradition and who might have their own views on the exclusivity of religious truth (Prothero 2011). There is evidence that this dynamic is producing an increase in religion-related tension and conflict in the United States. Official statistics have shown an increase in religion-based hate crimes in the past several years (Government Accountability Office 2019; Levin 2017; Lichtblau 2015). Official hate crime statistics, however, are flawed and limited (Scheitle and Hansmann 2016). Moreover, such hate crime statistics represent only one type of hostility, discrimination, or intolerance that individuals might encounter because of their religion, and they do not allow researchers to understand the connection between religion and other social locations,

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such as race. Indeed, research on these issues has been hampered by a lack of data containing both detailed measures of individuals' experiences with religious discrimination and sizable numbers of individuals belonging to minority religions, whose experiences are particularly important when considering these issues.

Here we present an initial overview of results from a new, nationally representative survey designed specifically to assess individuals' experiences with hostility, discrimination, harassment, and violence due to their religion. Importantly, this new survey, and the qualitative interviews that will follow from it, features oversamples of key religious minority groups (Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist). We present patterns of individual experiences with interpersonal hostility, institutional discrimination, and violence due to religion across religious traditions. Given religion's overlapping boundaries with other social categories, we also evaluate whether observed differences across religious traditions can be explained by differences in race, ethnicity, language, national origin status, or other demographic variables.

Religious Discrimination in America: An Incomplete Picture

Although by no means a new concern (Wuthnow 2005), worries about religious discrimination grew during and in the wake of the 2016 election. Public discussions of banning Muslim immigrants and reports of rising Islamophobia grew (Kang 2019; Vitali 2016), as did rhetoric seen by many as anti-Semitic (Gjetlten 2016). In addition, researchers documented a growing influence of a nationalistic strain of Christianity linked by some to whiteness (Whitehead et al. 2018). Such reports led many observers to fear that individuals belonging to minority religions will continue to be targeted for harassment, discrimination, and violence.

Data collected by advocacy organizations suggest that many of those concerns were justified. The Council of American-Islamic Relations, for instance, reported significant increases in the number of anti-Muslim bias incidents in 2016 and 2017, although it reported a decline in incidents in 2018 and 2019. Similarly, 2019 saw the highest number of hate crimes against Jewish individuals ever reported by the Anti-Defamation League (Walters 2020). Trends in governmental hate crime statistics largely mirror these findings (Hassan 2019).

Understanding the prevalence, predictors, and consequences of individuals' experiences with religious discrimination and victimization is important both for the research literature and for creating programs and policies meant to assist victims. There are, however, many flaws and gaps in the existing data we have to examine the experiences of U.S. religious minorities.

The official hate crime statistics compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigations have a number of well-known shortcomings, including their reliance on crimes reported

to a law enforcement agency and the incomplete and inconsistent participation of law enforcement agencies in documenting hate crimes (McVeigh, Welch, and Bjarnason 2003; Nolan and Akiyama 1999). Similarly, the National Crime Victimization Survey, a federally sponsored survey of individuals' experiences with crime, does ask victims about perceived bias motivations, but it does not ask respondents any questions about their religion (Scheitle and Hansmann 2016).

Regardless, even if they were perfect, such hate crime statistics do not measure harassment, discrimination, or a number of other types of experiences that reflect individuals' encounters with religious bias and discrimination. While the data collection efforts of advocacy organizations sometimes cover a wider range of experiences, they often rely on media reports or victim reports to the organization or only cover a particular religious group. In short, such data sources have woeful shortcomings.

Social science surveys could fill an important need by addressing these shortcomings. Unfortunately, such surveys have rarely included questions explicitly about encounters with religious harassment, discrimination, violence, or other forms of intolerance. When surveys have included such questions, they have tended to be limited to a general question asking whether a respondent has experienced religious intolerance (e.g., discrimination) without asking any specifics about that experience, such as the setting in which it occurred (Hartmann, Gerteis, and Edgell 2003). Or surveys have asked about discrimination only in a particular setting, such as the workplace (Scheitle and Corcoran 2018; Scheitle and Ecklund 2017). Or surveys have focused only on a particular religious group, which makes it difficult to compare experiences across groups (Cragun et al. 2012).

In sum, we are lacking desperately needed data. We need data generated from a survey asking about a wide range of potential encounters with religious discrimination and victimization, administered to individuals representing the full range of religious (and nonreligious) locations, preferably with oversamples of U.S. religious minority groups, with detailed questions on social locations that may be connected to religious discrimination, such as race and ethnicity. To address this need, the authors, with support from the National Science Foundation, designed a survey to measure individuals' experiences with religious intolerance. The instrument was designed to capture a diverse range of experiences ranging from more informal interpersonal hostility to discrimination in organizational settings to physical violence. The sample was designed to include sufficient numbers of individuals from key religious minority groups.

Our goal in this article is twofold. First, we examine differences in the prevalence of individuals' experiences with religious discrimination and victimization across religious traditions. Second, we consider whether any differences across religious traditions can be accounted for by differences in individuals' race, ethnicity, national origin,

language, or other social characteristics. In short, we ask whether any observed religion effect is actually a function of other social locations associated with a particular religious group. This is an initial overview of data and results so that other researchers might have a benchmark for our data collection; we expect other articles to follow.

Data

The analyses for this article comes from the survey portion of the Experiences with Religious Discrimination Study (ERDS), fielded in fall 2019 using the Gallup Panel. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults recruited through both random digit-dial phone interviews and address-based sampling. The panel consists of about 80,000 individuals who complete surveys online and 20,000 individuals who do not have email access and complete mail surveys. The survey (and later interviews) for this project was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation and a university faculty initiatives grant. The data from the survey will be made publicly available at the conclusion of the larger ERDS project.

After a period of conducting cognitive interviews using the instrument and survey pretesting, Gallup drew a stratified sample of 10,198 adults aged 18 and older from the panel. This sample consisted of a general population sample of 5,131 adults randomly drawn from the panel and an oversample of individuals who had previously identified or might potentially identify as Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or atheist. We targeted these groups for oversampling because they are substantively important when considering issues of religious hostility, discrimination, and violence, yet their numerical presence in the U.S. population is smaller when compared to other groups. Some individuals selected as part of the oversample had explicitly identified with the targeted religious groups in prior surveys they had completed as part of the Gallup Panel. Other individuals, depending on what surveys they had previously completed, had only identified their religion as “other” or “nonreligious.” These individuals were included with the aim of ultimately identifying additional cases in the targeted oversample groups.

Selected individuals first received an email or mail invitation along with a \$2 prepaid incentive. Over the next month, five reminder emails were sent to potential online respondents, and two postcard reminders were sent to potential offline respondents. At the conclusion of the survey fielding, 4,774 responses were received, representing a sample completion rate of 46.8 percent. Cumulative response rates for panel surveys must also take into account all stages of selection into the sample, which occurs in several stages. Gallup Panel recruiting begins on the Gallup Daily tracking survey, which has an average response rate of 12 percent based on the American Association for Public Opinion Research Response Rate Definition 3 (AAPOR RR3). An average of 77 percent of Gallup Daily tracking respondents agree to

recontact, and the average response rate (AAPOR RR3) for the panel recruitment is 28 percent. Therefore, the overall final response rate for the ERDS survey, accounting for all stages of the survey, is 1.2 percent ($.12 \times .77 \times .28 \times .468$).

Table 1 presents the composition of the sample and respondents by survey mode and religious identity. Gallup produced weights to account for the oversampling of some religious groups and for nonresponse bias. Targets for post-stratification weighting were generated from the 2017 Current Population Survey and aggregate data from the Gallup Daily Tracking Survey. The weights project the data to the U.S. adult population. As seen in Table 1, when the data are unweighted, Christian individuals represent only 37.2 percent of the sample, while Jewish and Muslim individuals represent 8.4 percent and 4.2 percent of the sample, respectively. When the data are weighted, however, the Christian percentage returns to the population level of 63.7 percent, while the Jewish and Muslim percentages return to their population levels of 2.0 percent and 1.0 percent, respectively.

Measures

One strength of the instrument used in this study was the number and diversity of measures of individuals' experiences with religious hostility, discrimination, and violence. While some past surveys might have included a couple of broad questions concerning these issues, the focus of this study allowed us to build a much more extensive battery of measures. One group of items represented individuals' experiences with what might be called *interpersonal hostility*. Respondents were asked how often in the past year they “sensed hostility from others because of my religion” and “felt disrespected because of my religion” and how often “people assumed things about me because of my religion.” Possible responses to these items were never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, or always.

Another strength of the instrument was found in its explicit attempt to make items relevant to individuals who do not identify with a religion. In many past surveys, it would be unclear whether individuals without a religion would respond to such questions about “my religion” in reference to not having a religion or whether they would simply not see the questions as relevant to them. The instrument for this study, however, contained multiple clarification statements for individuals who do not have a religion. For instance, in the group of items just discussed, the following clarification was provided: “If you identify as an atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us how other people react to these identities or how people react to you not having a religion.”

A second group of items was designed to assess individuals' experiences with organizational or institutional discrimination. These items began with the statement and question, “These next questions ask whether you have experienced

Table 1. Summary of Invited Survey Sample and Respondents.

	Invited Sample		Respondents		
	N	%	N	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Survey mode					
Web	9,241	90.6	4,575	95.8	90.9
Mail	957	9.4	199	4.2	9.1
Total	10,198	100	4,774	100	100
Religious identity^a					
Christian	3,323	32.6	1,774	37.2	63.7
Jewish	710	7.0	402	8.4	2.0
Muslim	866	8.5	201	4.2	1.0
Buddhist	355	3.5	186	3.9	.7
Hindu	74	7.3	56	1.2	.7
Some other religion	560	5.5	254	5.3	8.8
No religion	4,022	39.4	1,896	39.8	23.0
Don't know/missing	288	2.8	5	—	—
Total %		100		100	100
Total N	10,198		4,774	4,769	4,769

^aReligious identity for invited sample comes from respondents' panel data. Religious identity for the respondents comes from responses to the 2019 Experiences with Religious Discrimination Study.

discrimination *because of your religion* in different organizational and institutional settings. Since you reached the age of 16, how often do you suspect you have experienced the following kinds of incidents *because of your religion?*" Respondents were then given eight types of incidents: (1) been denied employment; (2) been fired from a job; (3) received an unfair work evaluation; (4) been treated unfairly by a school, college, or other educational institution; (5) been evicted or denied housing; (6) been refused services when trying to purchase goods or services in a place of business (e.g., restaurant, hotel, bank, grocery store, etc.); (7) been treated unfairly by a doctor, nurse, hospital, or other medical provider; and (8) been treated unfairly when traveling (e.g., in a taxi, airport, etc.). Possible responses were never, once, or twice or more. Similar to the first group of questions, the following statement was provided for individuals who do not identify with a religion: "If you identify as atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us whether you have experienced discrimination because of these identities or because you do not have a religion."

A third group of items was included in the survey to assess individuals' experiences with harassment, threats, and violence due to their religion. Respondents were told, "We now want to turn our attention to incidents of harassment, threats, and violence due to beliefs or identities that you hold." They were then asked, "Since you reached age 16, how often do you suspect you have experienced the following kinds of incidents *because of your religion?*" Seven incidents were offered: (1) had verbal insults directed at you, (2) been threatened with physical violence, (3) had your personal property damaged or destroyed, (4) been chased or followed,

(5) been physically assaulted, (6) been harassed by police, and (7) had your home vandalized. Possible responses were never, once, or twice or more. Again, a note was provided for individuals who do not have a religion: "If you identify as an atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us how often you have experienced these incidents because of these identities or because you do not have a religion."

The instrument included numerous other questions, including follow-up items meant to gather more detailed information on the experiences reported by respondents in the questions described previously. However, our goal in the analysis for this article is to assess two simple but important questions. First, how do individuals' experiences of religious hostility, discrimination, and violence differ across religious identities? Second, to what extent can such differences be explained away by other variables that might differ across religious groups, such as race and ethnicity, language, or country of origin. To assess these questions, the following analyses consider several other measures from the survey.

Respondents' religious identity was measured using a question asking, "Religiously, do you consider yourself to be Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, atheist, or something else? If more than one, select the one that best describes you." Respondents were offered 24 possible responses, including a write-in response for "something else." These categories were recoded into the following for our analyses: (1) Christian, (2) Jewish, (3) Muslim, (4) Buddhist, (5) Hindu, (6) some other religion, and (7) no religion. Individuals' race or ethnicity was measured with a question asking, "Which of the following best represents your race or ethnicity? You may select more than one." Nine

responses were offered: (1) white, Caucasian, European; (2) black, African, Caribbean; (3) Hispanic, Latino; (4) Middle Eastern, Central Asian, Northern African, Arab; (5) East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, etc.); (6) South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, etc.); (7) Native American, American Indian; (8) Pacific Islander; and (9) Other. Because of the small number of responses (<20) in them, the categories of Native American/American Indian and Pacific Islander were recoded into the Other category. Obviously, merging categories like this is never ideal and is not meant to equate these groups in any way. We also recoded individuals who selected multiple races or ethnicities into a separate group.

We include controls for whether the respondent speaks a language other than English and for whether they were born outside of the United States. The former is from a question asking, “Can you speak a language other than English?” The response of “no” is utilized in the following analysis as the reference category (0), with those speaking a different language coded as 1. The latter comes from a question asking, “In what country were you born?” A drop-down list of nations was offered to respondents. Those selecting the United States are coded as 0 in the following analysis, with those selecting a different nation coded as 1.

Finally, we include several control measures representing individuals’ gender, age, marital status, and employment status. Gender was measured with four possible responses to the question, “What is your gender?”: (1) man, (2) woman, (3) nonbinary, and (4) other. The marital status question asked, “Are you currently . . .” (1) married, (2) living together as married, (3) divorced, (4) separated, (5) widowed, and (6) single. A question about employment was, “Which of the following best describes your employment status?,” with the response of (1) working full-time, (2) working-part time, (3) unemployed or temporarily not working, (4) retired, (5) student, (6) homemaker, and (7) other. The age and education measures come from Gallup’s background data on panelists. Education is measured from (1) less than a high school diploma to (8) postgraduate or professional degree, including master’s, doctorate, medical, or law degree. Age is measured continuously and ranges from 18 to 93.

All analyses were conducted in Stata 15.1 and utilize the software’s complex survey command. Weights are utilized to account for the oversampling and patterns of nonresponse so that the estimates reflect the U.S. adult population. After removing cases with missing data on the measures of interest in this study, the sample used here consists of 4,373 individuals.

Results

We begin our analysis by examining the three items assessing individuals’ experiences with what we are calling interpersonal hostility due to religion. These items asked how

often respondents sense hostility, feel disrespected, or have people assume things about them because of their religion. To streamline the presentation, we have recoded the responses of never and rarely as 0 and the responses of sometimes, frequently, and always as 1. This recoding strategy helps us distinguish between those who experience these incidents with some regularity versus those who rarely or never experience them. For interested readers, tables presenting the full responses are offered in the Supplemental Material.

Overall, just over a quarter of U.S. adults say that they sense hostility from others because of their religion (26.9 percent). A similar proportion say that they feel disrespected because of their religion (26.0 percent). A little under half of U.S. adults (47.6 percent) say that people assume things about them because of their religion. This percentage could be higher because of its broader potential interpretation. That is, whereas felt hostility or disrespect is obviously negative, assumptions about a person are not necessarily negative.

When we break these percentages out by religious tradition, we find that Christian respondents largely mirror the overall population, which is not entirely surprising given that Christians comprise almost two thirds of that population. Twenty-two percent of Christians report that they have sensed hostility from others and felt disrespected due to their religion, whereas 45.4 percent of Christians say people have assumed things about them because of their religion.

Compared to Christians, it is noteworthy that Jewish and Muslim individuals, as well as individuals identifying with some other religion, are significantly more likely to report all three interpersonal hostility experiences. The percentages for Muslims, in particular, are remarkably high. Sixty-two percent of Muslim adults report feeling hostility from others because of their religion. This is almost three times the percentage among Christians. Sixty-five percent of Muslim adults say they have felt disrespected, which is also three times the percentage seen with Christians. Just over 80 percent of Muslim adults say that people assume things about them because of their religion. Although the percentages are not as high as among Muslims, Jewish adults are also more likely than Christians to report experiences with interpersonal hostility. Thirty-six percent of Jewish adults report sensing hostility, 35.3 percent report feeling disrespected, and 64.3 percent say that people assume things about them because of their religion. The some other religion group is obviously heterogeneous, although individuals identifying as pagan and wiccan represent a significant segment of this group (~30 percent of respondents in this category). Just over 40 percent of this group reports sensing hostility from others, 41.7 percent say they have felt disrespected, and 62.6 percent report that others make assumptions about them because of their religion.

Those who do not identify with a religion are more likely than Christians to say they sense hostility from others (32.0 percent) and that they have felt disrespected (27.8 percent) because of their religion. This group, however, is not

significantly different from Christians in saying that people make assumptions about them due to their religion. Buddhists and Hindus are not significantly more likely than Christians to report these experiences with interpersonal hostility. In fact, Hindus are significantly less likely than Christians to say they have sensed hostility (9.7 percent) due to their religion. Although not quite statistically significant ($p < .08$), a lower proportion of Hindus say they have felt disrespected due to their religion (11.0 percent). The findings for Hindus are somewhat surprising because we might expect as a religious minority that they would be more likely to experience such hostility.

Table 3 presents results for the items measuring U.S. adults' experiences with organizational or institutional discrimination due to their religion. For this table we combine the once and twice or more responses into a single category, so the percentages in the table represent having at least one experience with each particular type of discrimination. Again, tables with the full responses are offered in the Supplemental Material. Looking first at the overall percentages, we note that reports of organizational and institutional discrimination are much rarer than the types of interpersonal hostility experiences seen in Table 2. The most common type of religious discrimination reported by U.S. adults, at 7.3 percent of individuals reporting, is unfair treatment by a school, college, or other educational institution. Unfair treatment by a medical provider (4.2 percent), receiving an unfair work evaluation (4.0 percent), and unfair treatment when traveling (3.8 percent) are the next most common types of discrimination.

Examining these reports of religious discrimination across the religious groups reveals that Jewish and Muslim adults have significantly higher percentages for most of the discrimination types. The percentages for Muslims are particularly high. For instance, 5.8 percent of Jewish adults and 17.7 percent of Muslim adults say they have been denied employment because of their religion. This compares to 2.7 percent of U.S. adults overall and 2.6 percent of Christian adults. Similarly, 17.6 percent of Jewish adults and 30.7 percent of Muslim adults say they have been treated unfairly by an educational institution. The same percentage is 7.3 percent among all U.S. adults and 6.5 percent among Christians. Possibly most noteworthy is that 58.0 percent of Muslim adults report being treated unfairly when traveling. Jewish adults also report a significantly higher prevalence of discrimination when traveling (12.3 percent) relative to Christian adults (2.9 percent).

There are some other isolated findings worth highlighting. Hindu adults (14.4 percent), for instance, are significantly more likely than Christian adults (1.5 percent) to report being fired from a job due to their religion. Buddhist adults (7.0 percent) and those identifying with some other religion (10.4 percent) are more likely than Christians (2.9 percent) to say they have been treated unfairly by a medical provider. Those identifying with some other religion are also

more likely than Christians to say they have been treated unfairly by an educational institution and been treated unfairly when traveling.

In Table 4, we turn our attention to U.S. adults' experiences with harassment, threats, and violence due to their religion. As with Table 3, we collapse the twice or more response into the once response so that we are looking at whether individuals have encountered these incidents at all. The Supplemental Material presents all of the responses for interested readers. Focusing on the overall percentages first, we see that the most common experience reported is receiving verbal insults due to one's religion. Just under 30 percent of U.S. adults say they have experienced such insults. The next most common experience, at 8.7 percent, is being threatened with physical violence due to one's religion. About 6 percent of U.S. adults report being chased or followed (5.9 percent) or having their personal property destroyed (5.5 percent) because of their religion, whereas 3.8 percent of adults say they have been harassed by police because of their religion. Finally, 2.5 percent of U.S. adults report being physically assaulted and 1.9 percent report having their home vandalized because of their religion.

When we break these percentages out by religious tradition, we find patterns similar to those in previous tables. Jewish (60.7 percent) and Muslim (61.7 percent) adults, for example, are over twice as likely as Christians and U.S. adults overall to say they have been subject to verbal insults due to their religion. Both of these groups are also more likely to say they have been threatened with physical violence, chased or followed, or had their home vandalized because of their religion. Both Jewish and Muslim adults have higher rates of reporting physical assault or property damage due to their religion. The one experience that is comparatively common among Muslim adults but not Jewish adults is harassment by police. Over one-fifth (21.0 percent) of Muslim adults report such an experience. This is about five times the percentage found among the next highest group.

Although we do not find any significant differences in experiences with harassment, threats, or violence when comparing Christians to Buddhists, Hindus, or those who do not identify with a religion, we do find some differences among those identifying with some other religion. Specifically, individuals belonging to some other religion are significantly more likely than Christians to say they have received verbal insults (44.1 percent), been threatened with violence (16.0 percent), or been chased or followed (10.4 percent) because of their religion.

To summarize the big-picture findings from Tables 2 through 4, we can say that Jewish and Muslim adults in the United States are much more likely to report experiences with interpersonal hostility, organizational and institutional discrimination, and harassment, threats, and violence compared to Christians. Some of these differences are particularly striking. Muslim adults, for instance, are much more

Table 2. Percentage Reporting Interpersonal Hostility due to Religion by Religious Identity.^a

The Following Questions Ask about How Other People React to Your Religion . . . Thinking about Experiences You Have Had in the Past Year, How Often Have You Experienced the Following?	Christian	Jewish	Muslim	Buddhist	Hindu	Some Other Religion ^b	No Religion ^c	Overall
Sensed hostility from others because of my religion	22.2	36.5*	62.4*	20.5	9.7*	40.4*	32.0*	26.9
Felt disrespected because of my religion	22.1	35.3*	65.1*	23.5	11.0	41.7*	27.8*	26.0
People assumed things about me because of my religion	45.4	64.3*	80.4*	53.9	44.4	62.6*	44.6	47.6
N	1,552	373	178	168	55	238	1,809	4,373

Note: Estimates weighted to adjust for oversampling and nonresponse patterns. N for religious groups are unweighted. Data are from the 2019 Experiences with Religious Discrimination Study.

^aPossible responses to the frequency of occurrence for each incident type were never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, and always. The percentages in the table represent the combined sometimes, frequently, and always responses.

^bAlthough write-in responses for the some other religion group are diverse, some of the most common responses are “pagan,” “wiccan,” or some derivative of these responses. Such responses represent over 30 percent of the Other category.

^cThose who indicated that they did not have a religion were given the following note before answering the interpersonal hostility questions: “If you identify as an atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us how other people react to these identities or how people react to you not having a religion.”

*Different from Christian percentage at $p < .05$.

Table 3. Percentage Reporting Organizational or Institutional Discrimination because of Their Religion since Age 16 by Incident Type and Religious Identity.^a

These Next Questions Ask Whether You Have Experienced Discrimination because of Your Religion in Different Organizational and Institutional Settings . . . Since You Reached the Age of 16, How Often Do You Suspect You Have Experienced the Following Kinds of Incidents because of Your Religion?	Christian	Jewish	Muslim	Buddhist	Hindu	Some Other Religion ^b	No Religion ^c	Overall
Denied employment	2.6	5.8*	17.7*	6.2	2.3	3.7	1.8	2.7
Fired from a job	1.5	2.7	3.8	7.3	14.4*	2.6	1.0	1.7
Unfair work evaluation	3.8	6.8*	11.0*	9.4	17.4	6.8	2.4	4.0
Treated unfairly by school/college	6.5	17.6*	30.7*	8.6	2.8	11.4*	6.0	7.3
Evicted or denied housing	1.3	0.9	6.4*	0.1*	4.3	0.5	1.0	1.2
Refused services in place of business	1.4	5.9*	5.8*	1.4	0.8	3.7	1.0	1.7
Treated unfairly by medical provider	2.9	6.4*	9.3*	7.0*	3.8	10.4*	4.6*	4.2
Treated unfairly when traveling	2.9	12.3*	58.0*	1.6	6.8	6.2*	2.3	3.8
N	1,552	373	178	168	55	238	1,809	4,373

Note: Estimates are weighted to adjust for oversampling and non-response patterns. Data are from the 2019 Experiences with Religious Discrimination Study.

^aPossible responses to the frequency of occurrence for each incident type were never, once, or twice or more. The percentages in the table represent the combined once and twice or more responses.

^bAlthough write-in responses for the some other religion group are diverse, some of the most common responses are “pagan,” “wiccan,” or some derivative of these responses. Such responses represent over 30 percent of the Other category.

^cThose who indicated that they did not have a religion were given the following note before answering: “If you identify as an atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us whether you have experienced discrimination because of these identities or because you do not have a religion.”

*Different from Christian percentage at $p < .05$.

Table 4. Percentage Reporting Experiences with Harassment, Threats, or Violence because of Their Religion since age 16 by Incident Type and Religious Identity.^a

We Now Want to Turn Our Attention to Incidents of Harassment, Threats, and Violence due to Beliefs or Identities That You Hold. . . . Since You Reached Age 16, How Often Do You Suspect You Have Experienced the Following Kinds of Incidents because of Your Religion?	Christian	Jewish	Muslim	Buddhist	Hindu	Some Other Religion ^b	No Religion ^c	Overall
Verbal insults	27.5	60.7*	61.7*	24.1	25.8	44.1*	25.3	29.6
Threatened with physical violence	7.5	16.7*	20.3*	8.5	11.1	16.0*	7.9	8.7
Personal property damaged	5.2	10.3*	12.4*	5.5	2.2	8.4	4.4	5.5
Chased or followed	5.6	12.7*	13.9*	3.9	7.2	10.4*	4.2	5.9
Physically assaulted	2.1	5.0*	6.0	3.3	5.2	2.9	2.7	2.5
Harassed by police	3.6	2.2	21.0*	3.9	5.1	4.3	3.5	3.8
Home vandalized	1.7	7.7*	5.4*	3.4	3.7	2.3	1.5	1.9
N	1,552	373	178	168	55	238	1,809	4,373

Note: Estimates are weighted to adjust for oversampling and nonresponse patterns. Data are from the 2019 Experiences with Religious Discrimination Survey.

^aPossible responses to the frequency of occurrence for each incident type were never, once, or twice or more. The percentages in the table represent the combined once and twice or more responses.

^bAlthough write-in responses for the some other religion group are diverse, some of the most common responses are “pagan,” “wiccan,” or some derivative of these responses. Such responses represent over 30 percent of the Other category.

^cThose who indicated that they did not have a religion were given the following note before answering: “If you identify as an atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us how often you have experienced these incidents because of these identities or because you do not have a religion.”

*Different from Christian percentage at $p < .05$.

likely than any religious group to say they have been treated unfairly while traveling or been harassed by the police. We also should note that individuals belonging to an other religious group also report higher levels of hostility, discrimination, and violence across many of the measured items, although not as consistently as seen among Jewish and Muslim adults. Also, it is worth highlighting that although individuals who do not identify with a religion were more likely to say they feel hostility or disrespect from others because of their religion (or lack of religion) in Table 2, they did not show significantly higher rates of discrimination or violence in Tables 3 and 4.

Now we examine the extent to which these are truly “religion effects” or whether they are really a function of some other social location. In particular, an individual’s religious identity often overlaps with racial, ethnic, and national identities. Is it possible these religion effects are confounded with these other identities or characteristics? First, it is important to emphasize that the survey questions examined in these tables explicitly asked about these experiences due to the respondent’s religion. This means that in the minds of the respondents, these experiences were at least in part attributable to the individual’s religion. Nonetheless, we can assess this question from a more empirical perspective as well.

As described earlier, the survey instrument included questions to measure detailed information about race and ethnicity, national origin, and whether participants speak languages other than English. Table 5 presents logistic regression analyses predicting any experience with interpersonal hostility, organizational and institutional discrimination, and harassment, threats, and violence due to religion. For each outcome, we begin with a model that only includes religious identity indicators. That is, we begin by establishing the patterns seen in Tables 2 through 4. We then introduce controls for individuals’ race and ethnicity, language, national origin, along with other demographic characteristics, to assess whether the baseline differences across religious groups are eliminated once these variables are taken into account. All effects are shown as odds ratios so that effects above 1 represent an increase in the odds that an individual will report the outcome and effects below 1 represent a decrease in the odds that an individual will report the outcome. (The Supplemental Material offers alternative models that utilize the full range of responses on the outcomes. The findings are largely the same as seen in these logistic models.)

Looking at the baseline religion effects in Model 1, Model 3, and Model 5, we see again the patterns shown in the previous tables. Relative to Christian adults, Jewish, Muslim, and adults belonging to some other religion have significantly greater odds of reporting any type of interpersonal hostility (Model 1), any type of organizational-institutional discrimination (Model 3), and any type of harassment, threats, or violence (Model 5) due to their religion.

Models 2, 4, and 6 introduce the control measures for each outcome’s model. First, the patterns seen for the

religious tradition indicators between each pair of models remain largely the same even after we account for race and ethnicity, language, national origin, and other demographic control measures. That is, independent of race and ethnicity, language, and national origin, individuals identifying as Jewish, Muslim, or with some other religion have significantly greater odds (relative to Christian individuals) of saying they have experienced hostility, discrimination, or violence due to their religion.

Examining the control measures themselves finds some differences across race and ethnicity. For instance, for the interpersonal hostility outcome (Model 2), we see that relative to white individuals, black individuals had lower odds of reporting such experiences due to religion. We see a similar white-black difference for the discrimination outcome (Model 4), but we do not find a significant effect for the violence outcome (Model 6). Model 4 and Model 6 show that individuals identifying their race or ethnicity as East Asian have significantly lower odds relative to white individuals of saying they have experienced interpersonal hostility, discrimination, or violence due to religion. On the other hand, individuals identifying their race or ethnicity as South Asian have significantly greater odds relative to white individuals of reporting religion-based discrimination or violence. The analysis also shows that individuals who speak a language other than English have significantly greater odds of reporting religion-based violence compared to individuals who do not speak a language other than English. On the other hand, we do not find any significant effect of being born outside the United States on the odds of reporting religious hostility, discrimination, or violence.

In terms of gender differences, the analysis shows that individuals who identify as nonbinary or with another gender have significantly greater odds of saying they have experienced discrimination based on their religion. However, these differences are not consistent across the other two outcomes, so it is difficult to know exactly what might underlie this pattern. Age, however, is consistently associated with reduced odds of reporting all three outcomes. That is, older individuals are less likely to say they have experienced hostility, discrimination, or violence due to their religion.

As with the gender differences, we find somewhat inconsistent effects for marital status, education, and employment status. Those living together as married and those who are divorced, for instance, have lower odds of reporting interpersonal hostility due to religion relative to individuals who are married, but we do not find these differences for the discrimination and violence outcomes. Similarly, education is associated with reduced odds of reporting experiences with violence due to one’s religion, but education is not associated with the other two outcomes. A somewhat more consistent difference is seen with individuals who say that they are homemakers in that this group is significantly more likely than those working full-time to report experiences with interpersonal hostility and violence due to religion.

Table 5. Logistic Regression Models Predicting Any Experience with Hostility, Discrimination, or Violence due to Religion.

	Any Interpersonal Hostility due to Religion ^a			Any Organizational-Institutional Discrimination due to Religion ^b			Any Harassment, Threats, or Violence due to Religion ^c		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6			
Religion									
Christian (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—			
Jewish	2.12**	2.21**	3.68**	3.88**	4.02**	4.94**			
Muslim	5.82**	4.55**	13.48**	7.73**	4.85**	2.85**			
Buddhist	1.25	1.56	1.75	2.00	.89	1.18			
Hindu	.87	.60	2.56	.84	.94	.64			
Something else	1.92**	1.65**	2.39**	1.84**	2.20**	1.97**			
No religion ^d	.98	.85	1.01	.82	.90	.78*			
Race/ethnicity									
White, European, Caucasian (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—			
Black, African, Caribbean	—	.74*	—	.62*	—	.91			
Hispanic, Latino	—	.85	—	.77	—	.61*			
Middle Eastern, North African, Central Asian, Arab	—	.58	—	1.76	—	1.67			
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)	—	.25*	—	.14*	—	.06**			
South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)	—	2.42	—	4.76**	—	2.58*			
Other race or ethnicity	—	1.18	—	1.89	—	1.47			
Multiple races or ethnicities	—	1.13	—	1.38	—	1.28			
Speak language other than English?									
No (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—			
Yes	—	1.21	—	1.32	—	1.49**			
Born in United States?									
Yes (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—			
No	—	.93	—	1.18	—	.89			
Gender									
Man (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—			
Woman	—	1.18	—	.95	—	.83			
Nonbinary	—	1.11	—	3.46**	—	.80			
Other	—	2.46	—	6.00**	—	1.98			

(continued)

Table 5. (continued)

Odds Ratios Presented (>1 = Increase in Odds of Experiencing Outcome, <1 = Decrease in Odds of Experiencing Outcome)	Any Interpersonal Hostility due to Religion ^a		Any Organizational-Institutional Discrimination due to Religion ^b		Any Harassment, Threats, or Violence due to Religion ^c	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Age	—	.97**	—	.98**	—	.97**
Marital status	—	—	—	—	—	—
Married (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Living together as married	—	.66*	—	1.18	—	.71
Divorced	—	.65*	—	1.47	—	1.23
Separated	—	1.86	—	2.26	—	1.53
Widowed	—	.70	—	1.86	—	.56
Single	—	.84	—	1.03	—	.77
Education	—	1.01	—	.96	—	.92**
Employment	—	—	—	—	—	—
Working full-time (reference)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Working part-time	—	1.21	—	1.09	—	1.53**
Unemployed	—	1.25	—	1.34	—	1.19
Retired	—	.91	—	.69	—	1.28
Student	—	.93	—	1.22	—	1.07
Homemaker	—	1.79**	—	1.61	—	1.72*
Other	—	1.04	—	1.40	—	1.05

Note: N = 4,373. Estimates are weighted to adjust for oversampling and nonresponse patterns. Data are from the 2019 Experiences with Religious Discrimination Survey.

^aAny response of sometimes, frequently, or always on the three items shown in Table 2.

^bAny response of once or twice or more on the eight items shown in Table 3.

^cAny response of once or twice or more on the seven items shown in Table 4.

^dThose who indicated that they did not have a religion were given the following note before answering: "If you identify as an atheist, agnostic, or otherwise do not have a religion, please respond to these questions to tell us how often you have experienced these incidents because of these identities or because you do not have a religion."

*p < .05. **p < .01.

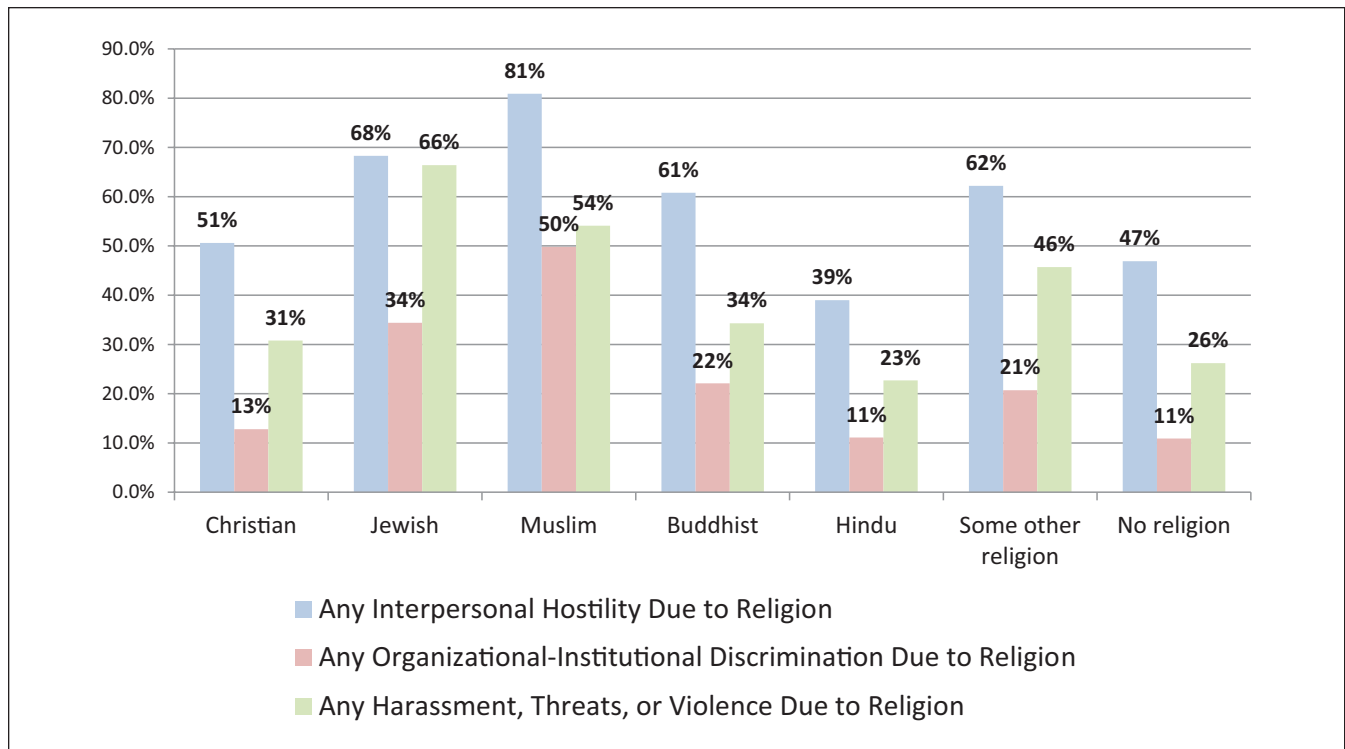


Figure 1. Predicted probability of reporting any experience with hostility, discrimination, or violence due to religion (based on models in Table 5, holding other predictors at their respective means).

However, of most interest is that the religion effects are largely unchanged and remain significant even after controlling for race and ethnicity, language, national origin, and other demographic variables. To make these religion effects clearer, Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities by religion of reporting each of the outcomes while controlling for the other measures in the models found in Table 5. We see that independent of other factors, 50.6 percent of U.S. Christian adults are predicted to report some experience with interpersonal hostility due to their religion. This increases to 68.3 percent and 80.9 percent among Jewish and Muslim adults, respectively. Similarly, 12.8 percent of U.S. Christian adults are predicted to report some experience with organizational or institutional discrimination due to their religion (independent of other variables). This increases to 34.4 percent and 49.8 percent among Jewish and Muslim adults, respectively. Finally, 30.8 percent of Christian adults are predicted to report that they have experienced some harassment, threat, or violence due to their religion, which increases to 66.4 percent among Jewish adults and 54.1 percent among Muslim adults.

Discussion

The changing religious demographics of the United States, along with heightened political rhetoric targeting religious minorities, have led to concerns about the prevalence of individuals' encounters with religious discrimination and

violence. Such intolerance can take a number of forms, ranging from subtle signs of hostility in social interactions to formal discrimination in organizational or institutional settings to even violent criminal victimization. Although statistics collected by government agencies, advocacy organizations, and social scientists have provided partial glimpses at the frequency and patterns of such experiences, the full picture has remained obscured by a lack of comprehensive data.

The findings presented here provide the most extensive examination of individuals' experiences with religious discrimination, hostility, and violence to date. Rather than looking at only one type of experience (e.g., religious discrimination in the workplace) or examining only a single religious group, the data utilized in this study allowed us to assess the frequency and patterns for a wide range of experience-types across a diverse sample of religious (and nonreligious) traditions. Of course, despite its strengths, there remain limitations to our study. Maybe most importantly, our study is still cross-sectional in nature. Given this, we cannot clearly make any claims about whether these experiences are increasing or decreasing or whether any patterns are shifting.

On the one hand, the findings presented in this study confirm some of the conclusions suggested by previous attempts to measure these issues. Across almost every experience-type we considered, Muslim and Jewish individuals consistently report experiencing religious discrimination, hostility, and violence much more so than Christian individuals. This

is largely in line with patterns seen in government hate crime statistics. At least in the case of Muslim individuals, this is also in line with surveys showing fairly negative attitudes among the U.S. public about Islam (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

On the other hand, the diversity of measures included in our survey allows for some nuance to be added to this narrative. For instance, although Jewish and Muslim individuals are similar in their overall higher rate of experiences relative to Christian individuals, there are some differences between the two groups. Muslim individuals, for instance, are more likely than Jewish individuals to say they have been denied employment, denied housing, and been treated unfairly by a school. Even more striking are the much higher rates of experiencing harassment by police and unfair treatment when traveling among Muslim individuals. Jewish individuals, on the other hand, are not any more likely than Christian individuals to report harassment by the police. Such differences highlight that Muslim individuals' encounters with religious discrimination are unique in their frequency and, in some cases, in their nature.

Our findings show that Buddhist and Hindu individuals largely do not differ from Christian individuals in their reports of religious intolerance. The one exception is that Hindu respondents report more issues in the workplace in that they are significantly more likely to say they have been fired from a job due to their religion. Hindu individuals, relative to Christian individuals, also have a higher rate of saying they have received an unfair work evaluation because of religion, although this difference is not statistically significant. Still, it is noteworthy how the experiences of Buddhist and Hindu individuals in the United States appear to be quite different from other religious minorities. Surveys of public attitudes about these groups do tend to find that they are relatively positive, as least compared to attitudes about Muslim individuals (Pew Research Center 2019).

It is also worth highlighting the findings for individuals who do not identify with a religion. We reiterate that our survey explicitly instructed nonreligious individuals to respond to the questions as they relate to their experiences of not having a religion or identifying as nonreligious. Our data do show that this group is significantly more likely than Christian individuals to report feeling more interpersonal hostility (e.g., "felt disrespected because of my religion"). Nonreligious individuals, however, are not more likely to report experiences with types of organizational or institutional discrimination, harassment, or violence. This may be an issue of visibility. That is, many nonreligious individuals may feel disrespected when those around them assume that they are Christian or make hostile comments about individuals without a religion. But people may often not know that an individual is nonreligious, so this does not ultimately lead to more targeted forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence.

Finally, our findings emphasize the explicit religious factor in religious othering. There is often a tendency to see

differences between religious groups as a byproduct of other factors, such as ethnicity, language, or nation of origin (Gale 2008). This is especially true when examining religious minority groups that are often strongly associated with other social location factors (e.g., ethnic groups). In the case of the issues considered here, some might ask whether the greater rate of experiencing religious othering among, say, Muslim individuals is mainly a function of such individuals disproportionately representing a particular ethnic and/or racial group. Yet our analysis finds that religious differences in experiences of religious discrimination and victimization are hardly reduced after controlling for the effects of race, ethnicity, language, and nation of origin.

Although the findings of this study provide a solid and necessary foundation, there are clearly many questions that need to be addressed in additional research. Beyond religious tradition, what makes individuals more or less susceptible to experiences with religious intolerance? How does religion overlap with other social locations, such as race and gender, to have an impact on experiences of discrimination? (One of our next articles from these data will specifically examine experiences of police harassment among Muslims, for example, an experience that we are finding overlaps with raced experiences.) How do individuals react to experiences with intolerance, discrimination, and victimization? How do political and religious identities merge to affect perceptions of non-Christian religious groups? How is religion utilized as a coping resource for individuals in the wake of such experiences? These and other questions will be important to consider as this area of the research literature continues to be developed and as we and other scholars begin to do additional analysis with these new data.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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