

Varied regional culture may affect individual expression of religion in US

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Religious expression in the workplace—from wearing symbols of one's beliefs to discussing faith at work—varies from geographic location to location, with Christians more likely to express their faith in the South, Jews most likely in the Northeast and Muslims most likely to do so out West, according to a new paper from researchers at Rice University's Boniuk Institute for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance

and its Religion and Public Life Program, Purdue University, West Virginia University and Wheaton College.

In "The Role of Region and Religious Tradition in Predicting Individuals' Expressions of Faith in the Workplace," part of the "Faith at Work: An Empirical Study," primary investigator (PI) Elaine Howard Ecklund, co-PI Denise Daniels and the research team examined if and how regional and local culture contributes to different styles of religious expression.

"In the United States, there are significant regional differences in types and rates of religious affiliation," said Ecklund, the Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences, professor of sociology and director of Rice's Boniuk Institute. "We found that these can also translate into different styles of living out your faith in public."

Using two measures of religious expression—displaying or wearing religious items at work and talking about religion at work—the data show workplace religious expression is shaped by how workers' religious tradition intersects with their regional culture. Ecklund said this suggests that regional circumstances can sometimes override religious subcultures to determine if and how people express their religion in the workplace.

The analysis found that evangelical-conservative Protestants and Catholics in the South are more likely to say that they wear faith items in the workplace when compared to those in the West.

For instance, after accounting for other religious and demographic characteristics, 8.47% of Catholics in the South strongly agree that they wear faith items in the workplace compared to 3.69% of Catholics in the West. Similarly, 6.91% of evangelical-conservative Protestants in the South strongly agree that they wear faith items in the workplace compared to 2.56% of similar individuals in the West.

There's a different pattern for Jewish and Muslim individuals. After accounting for other factors, the data showed that Jewish individuals in the Northeast (13.64%) are more likely to wear faith items in the workplace relative to Jewish individuals in the Midwest (3.34%) or West (1.63%). They also found that Muslims in the West are most likely to wear [faith](#) items in the workplace (42.79%).

The findings have broader implications for an increasingly diverse U.S. society: Religious expression at work may be shaped by fear of experiencing discrimination in the workplace, which can be influenced by regional population and local cultural expectations, Ecklund explained.

This is an important area of study, Ecklund said, because when employees feel supported in their expression of religion at work, they report higher levels of job satisfaction, productivity, commitment and emotional attachment to the organization.

The findings are published in the journal *Religions*.

More information: Jacqui Frost et al, The Role of Region and Religious Tradition in Predicting Individuals' Expressions of Faith in the Workplace, *Religions* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/rel14070920](https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070920)

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