

Religious New Zealanders most tolerant of Muslims

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The research also found that highly religious New Zealanders—irrespective of their religion—were the most tolerant of Muslims.

New Zealanders are highly accepting of religious diversity, yet some groups are the targets of more prejudice than others, researchers at Victoria University of Wellington and the University of Auckland have found.

Victoria's Dr John Shaver, Dr Geoff Troughton and Associate Professor Joseph Bulbulia, and University of Auckland's Associate Professor Chris Sibley, analysed data collected from almost 14,000 New Zealanders.

They were particularly interested in the drivers of prejudice and tolerance towards Muslims, says Associate Professor Sibley.

"New Zealand is an incredibly diverse, socially progressive and tolerant country, however levels of extreme prejudice towards Muslims are twice as high as for other minority groups."

Dr Shaver says several decades of research suggests religious people are more prejudiced to those outside of their in-group. "With regard to Muslims, others have suggested that longstanding

Christian-Muslim conflicts are self-perpetuating. Neither perspective is quite right."

The researchers propose that when it comes to religion and [prejudice](#), place trumps beliefs.

"People tend to think that religious ideas drive conflict, however the same religious ideas can be interpreted in opposing ways, and it's a local history that predicts how religious ideas are put to use," says Dr Shaver. "In peaceful countries such as New Zealand, strong religious faith enhances charity and acceptance."

The researchers found that while secular people are more tolerant than those who only weakly identify with their religion, non-Muslim New Zealanders who identify as highly religious are the most tolerant of Muslims.

"Among New Zealanders, a strong religious faith is correlated with being more accepting of Muslim peoples. This correlation is about as strong as the correlation between having a postgraduate education and being more accepting of Muslim peoples," says Dr Shaver.

"Our findings are important," says Associate Professor Bulbulia, "because tolerance of Muslims lags behind other groups. Our results suggest that communities of religious non-Muslims are a key resource for bridging the Muslim acceptance gap."

The research was supported by the Royal Society of New Zealand, and recently published in the international journal *PLOS ONE*, in a paper titled Religion and the Unmaking of Prejudice toward Muslims: Evidence from a Large National Sample.

More information: John H. Shaver et al. Religion and the Unmaking of Prejudice toward Muslims: Evidence from a Large National Sample, *PLOS ONE* (2016). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0150209](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0150209)

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