

Visible and Vocal: The Intersection of Gendered Islamophobia and Muslim Women's Political Priorities

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Abstract

This study examines the intersectional impacts of Islamophobia and gender on American Muslim women, with a focus on their perceptions, political behavior choices, and policy priorities. Building on Beydoun and Sedique's theory of gendered Islamophobia, which highlights the uniquely gendered tropes that characterize Islamophobia, this article explores how these dynamics influence Muslim women's perception of discrimination and political participation. Using data from surveys fielded in 2019, 2020, and 2023, three key findings emerge. First, Muslim women perceive discrimination as a more significant issue compared to Muslim men. Second, Muslim women are more likely to participate in women-specific protests, explaining the increased visibility of Muslim women in women's social movements. Perceptions of discrimination were positively associated with an increased likelihood to participate. Third, Muslim women prioritize reproductive justice as a policy concern at higher rates than Muslim men. These findings contribute to the growing empirical literature on American Muslim women, situating their experiences within broader conversations on intersectionality, racialization, and women's political engagement. The analysis underscores the vital role Muslim women play navigating the intersections of Islamophobia and gender, demonstrating how women's rights issues remain important for Muslim women.

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Keywords

Islam, gendered Islamophobia, Muslim women, surveys, Political Science, discrimination

On February 10th of 2015, we all witnessed the hate-motivated murder of Yusor, and we understood this to be a horrendous consequence of white supremacy and gendered Islamophobia, primarily driven and fueled by Yusor's visible Muslimness. This moment shook the very foundation of how we understood safety, community healing, and care and became the defining moment of starting our organization. We were consumed by so many questions. What kind of world do we want for ourselves and our community? How do we begin to define safety, and how do we keep the lived experiences of Muslim women at the center of this question? And why weren't there existing spaces to discuss this? How can we build our own space to reimagine safety for ourselves and our communities? And so, we began convening places like this for Muslim women coming together to answer these very questions. —Muslim Women For

Introduction

This remark was made by Lela Ali, a community organizer at the “Muslim Women For” event in North Carolina and occurred days before the November 2024 election, as Muslim women gathered to promote voter mobilization in their area, cognizant of the role they played as voters in a swing state where the margin of victory between the presidential campaigns was razor thin. Central to their interests was the notion of centering women, their interests, and their safety. The opening remarks commemorated the death of Yusor Abu-Salha and centered her loss as the primary motivation for Muslim women in North Carolina to organize together (L. Ali 2024). The death of Yusor Abu-Salha, alongside her sister Razan and husband Deah, not only brought shockwaves to American Muslims of the worst case outcome for an anti-Muslim hate crime but also underscored the unique ways that Muslim women specifically have felt as the primary target of hate crimes, and how they have thought of Islamophobia as uniquely gendered.¹ In the 20-plus years since 9/11, our understanding of American Muslims has grown alongside a steady understanding that Islamophobia has racialized and affected Muslims in dynamic and distinctive ways (Aziz 2021; Beydoun 2018; Chouhoud et al., 2019; Dana, Lajevardi, Oskooii, and Walker 2019; Jamal 2005; Lajevardi 2020; Oskooii 2016; Sedique 2019).

Islamophobia affects Muslim men and women in distinctive ways. This article draws attention to how Muslim women have grappled with this reality and aims to identify the intersectional ways that Islamophobia and gender influence Muslim women in differential ways relative to Muslim men. Building on Beydoun and Sedique's (2023) theory of gendered Islamophobia, which argues that Islamophobia has evolved with uniquely gendered tropes, this article examines the consequences of gendered Islamophobia on American Muslim women, identifying ways that Muslim women's perceptions, political behaviors, and policy priorities center

women's issues as a central way that they navigate gendered Islamophobia. In particular, we trace how perceptions of discrimination toward Muslims are one mechanism that influences women's likelihood to mobilize and prioritize women-specific activities and policies.

Drawing on data from surveys fielded in 2019, 2020, and 2023, three key findings emerge. One, Muslim women perceive discrimination as a more significant issue than Muslim men, reiterating prior study's findings that Muslim women perceive discrimination as a larger concern compared to Muslim men (Dana et al. 2019; Sedique 2023). Two, examining Muslim women's political behavior choices, we find that women were more likely to attend women-related protests compared to Muslim men and that women who perceived discrimination as a major issue were more likely to engage politically. Finally, we turn to understanding the case of reproductive justice and identify how Muslim women are more likely to prioritize reproductive justice as a policy priority compared to Muslim men.

In developing an understanding of American Muslims, Muslim women have played unique roles in building the institutions, organizations, and policy advocacy that affect their communities (Al-Hibri, 1982; T. M. Ali 2022; Chan-Malik 2018; Ahmad-Sedique, 2019; Hammer 2012). While much has been written in the realm of Muslim women that draws on meaningful qualitative methodologies, there is a burgeoning opportunity to advance our understanding of American Muslim women empirically. These findings draw on empirical findings from large survey studies and articulate how issues of women's rights and reproductive policy are ones that Muslim women connect to their own experiences of Islamophobia, offering a more comprehensive look at how gender and racialization come together for Muslim women. It offers insights into how Muslim women navigate the complex intersectionality of discrimination tied to their gender and faith-based identity, being Muslim, and the difference in policy choices that impact them as women.

Gendered Islamophobia

Political processes and advocacy work that affect minorities inherently have both gendered distinctions that persist but are sometimes overlooked. As Black feminists articulated through the Combahee River Collective (1977:19), "We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression, which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual ..." This sentiment is echoed in findings by Crenshaw (1989) that focuses on the "intersectionally marginalized," articulating the reality that some people may hold multiple marginalizations that cut across race and gender. Recent analysis underscores how this manifests in organizational spaces and preferences, where disadvantaged minority groups may overlook the needs of their women constituents (Strolovitch 2008). Much of feminist political science work focuses on the multiple marginalizations and the case of women of color, but would benefit from more robust engagement with Islamophobia, when looking at the case of the experiences of Muslim women in the United States.

Islamophobia refers to the fear and prejudice that individuals may harbor toward Muslims, which is connected with the process of flattening Muslims into stereotypical tropes (Beydoun 2018). Gendered Islamophobia argues that intrinsic in the development of Islamophobia is the curation of stereotypes that bifurcate Muslim men from Muslim women, treating men as violent, terroristic individuals and women as foreign, exotic, submissive, and meek. Gendered Islamophobia's manifestation can "ascribe unique political meaning to Muslim male and female bodies, and normative value to identity markers associated with their respective gender expression ..." (Beydoun and Sedique 2023:471).

This gendered articulation of Islamophobia highlights how Muslim women are often portrayed as submissive and oppressed, necessitating "liberation" from Muslim men, who are simultaneously depicted as violent and tyrannical. Gendered Islamophobic narratives not only justify imperialist interventions (e.g., US intervention in Afghanistan) but also obscure the unique challenges Muslim women face, as their experiences are frequently overshadowed by a focus on Muslim men as the primary victims of Islamophobia. By centering the experiences of Muslim women, the theory of gendered Islamophobia aims to reveal how legal and societal structures perpetuate these gendered stereotypes, leading to specific harms against Muslim women (Beydoun and Sedique 2023).

This theoretical articulation of gendered Islamophobia motivates this study's focus on Muslim women. The September 11, 2001, attacks were a meaningful inflection point where Muslims gained the status of "perpetual terror suspect," and the far-right movement's tropes of Muslims gained elevated traction and were not only discussed in media discourse but legitimized through government officials and policies (Bail 2012; Lajevardi 2021). Policies like the "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism" (PATRIOT ACT) eased restrictions to permit law enforcement to increase surveillance of suspects. For Muslim women, this meant being very visible suspects for surveillance, as in the instance of the unlawful spying on Muslims in NYC through the NYPD racial profiling program, which had an impact on Muslim women in particular given their heightened visibility wearing hijab in NYC (Price 2013).

Hate crimes targeting Muslim women escalated in a post 9/11 era. Incidents of bullying of young Muslim women who wear hijabs in K-12 schools that have led to situations such as a young woman's hijab being grabbed or ripped off have increased in decades following 9/11 (Council on American-Islamic Relations (Cair) 2022; Terry 2024). In addition, Muslim women report experiencing alienation on college campuses (Cole and Ahmad 2003), and in places of employment (Sedique 2016). Even public spaces have increased as a point of concern for women's safety. In Seattle, Washington, in February 2024, a woman was held by knifepoint and robbed of her hijab. As the local news reported (Itoh 2024):

... a woman was approached from behind and placed in a "chokehold" by a man displaying a "small knife" in the University District around 9 a.m. The suspect was "voicing

disparaging remarks and general hatred for the victim's perceived religious beliefs and national origin," the Seattle Police said. He stole the woman's hijab before running off.

Incidences like this event in Seattle have occurred in salient ways for Muslim women across the country. Similar reports of hijab grabbing in 2024 were also reported in other parts of the country, such as Illinois and New York City.

For Muslim women, these attacks have also led to their most feared scenarios coming to life. This is exemplified by the deaths of Yusor and Razan Abu-Salha in North Carolina. One important detail that emerged in the court trial for the aggressor was that he was unaware that he had Muslim neighbors, but seeing Yusor adorned in her hijab alerted him and made Yusor and her family the violent targets of this visible hate crime. It was after seeing Yusor with hijab that the individual began harassing Yusor and her husband, Deah, which ultimately led to their fatal interaction. These incidences highlight the distinctively gendered experience of hate crimes for Muslim women, who often appear at the front lines of hate-motivated attacks.

While we understand that this process of Islamophobia treats women and men differently, it is important to understand whether this plays out in terms of actual impact on American Muslims. Do Muslim women perceive discrimination differently, and do they make distinctive political choices compared to Muslim men? The rising visibility of Muslim organizations run by Muslim women that center solely on the concerns of Muslim women suggests that this may be the case.

Muslim Women's Political Engagement

Muslim women in the United States have been politically engaged since the early twentieth century. In many ways, their early activism reflects their ethno-racial community's interests and policy priorities. Black Americans, who account for the earliest Muslims in America, comprise roughly 20 percent of the American Muslim community, and Muslim women have been at the helm of their political engagement (Diouf 2013; Pew Research Center 2017). Leaders like Betty Shabbaz and Aisha Al-Adawiya are prominent Black Muslim women engaged in various manifestations of civil rights organizing. The "queen mother of Harlem," Aisha is a prominent leader in Harlem, New York and was a close confidant of Betty Shabazz. She founded Women of Islam on the heels of the 1992 genocide in Bosnia and helped establish the Malcolm X Museum (Aidi 2024). That tradition has carried on for Black Muslim women today, particularly in developing organizations like "Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment" (RISE) in Minneapolis. The rich tradition of Black Muslims, from those who are part of the Nation of Islam to those who are part of Imam Warith Deen Muhammad's community, set the early foundations of Muslim women's political engagement (Chan-Malik 2018).

For Muslim women with ethno-racial ties to the Middle East and South Asia, early community development prioritized the preservation of cultural traditions and cultural practices (Haddad et al., 2002). The heightened visibility of these

women emerged in the 1970s to 1980s. For Arab Americans, the Feminist Arab-American Network (FAN) was created in 1982, on the heels of the founding of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in 1980 (Haddad 2021). Organizations like these have increased in the years since, and have worked on a span of issues that center Muslim women, from leadership, legal concerns, physical safety in response to Islamophobia, and reproductive justice.

For example, safety in response to Islamophobia has been a key issue motivating the establishment of some Muslim women's groups. "We Are Malikah," founded by Rana Abdelhamid is a Muslim-woman-founded non-profit in New York City whose primary focus is providing Muslim women self-defense training and centering conversations on Muslim women's safety. Similarly, Black Muslim women established RISE in Minneapolis. In their organization's founding, RISE states:

In September 2015, a handful of Muslim women gathered in the offices of Pollen in the North Loop of Minneapolis. They began to share their experiences and their observations about female leadership, civic engagement, and community involvement. Muslim women were teachers, scholars, professionals, activists, philanthropists—doing the work but going unacknowledged. Coupled with anti-Muslim rhetoric and a rise in harassment and hate crimes targeting Muslim women, the need for a platform founded on sisterhood was clear.

RISE's statement underscores gendered hate crimes and gendered Islamophobia as a key motivation in their development as a non-profit organization, noting that the need for a platform was "clear" with the "rise in harassment and hate crimes targeting Muslim women." Since their inception, RISE has hosted annual Muslim women's leadership conferences, as well as events to meet local elected officials and mobilize Muslim women to vote.

In addition to safety, reproductive justice has steadily grown as an issue of interest for Muslim women's organizations. Organizations like the Adiya Collective and HEART have established themselves in recent years and built up reproductive justice as an issue that is intersectional, highlighting the urgency to connect these issues with gendered Islamophobia. Freedom of choice has been built under the messaging of these organizations. Bodily autonomy and access to care are central concerns Muslim women have emphasized for HEART and the Adiya Collective.

Our current understanding of American Muslim women would benefit from understanding how the development of these types of organizations maps onto the policy concerns and political behaviors of everyday Muslim women. The history of Muslim women and the rise of women-led Muslim organizations, which aim to center Muslim women's concerns, suggest that these organizations are born in response to an increased demand from Muslim women (L. Ali 2024; Mohajir 2024; Sahar 2022; Bullock, 2005). This is consistent with how women from other marginalized backgrounds may approach their advocacy work (Cohen 1999). The following section offers a set of expectations to drive our empirical understanding of Muslim women and whether their views are

distinctive from Muslim men, and the ties of discrimination to their political choices and policy preferences (Zimmerman 2014).

Study I: Muslim Women's Protest Choices

The history and current activism of Muslim women have evolved under the socio-political context of gendered Islamophobia. To understand the consequences of gendered Islamophobia on Muslim women's experience, it is important to examine the ties between perceptions of discrimination and whether this affects their political participation, specifically. If Islamophobia impacts women and men in distinctive ways, it is plausible that their perceptions of discrimination may also vary by gender. Prior studies have suggested that Muslim women may perceive that discrimination is an issue impacting Muslims at a higher level compared to Muslim men (Dana et al. 2019; Sediqe 2023). There is varying evidence that suggests that Muslim women may experience higher levels of discrimination given their heightened visibility wearing hijab. For example, the 2019 Institute for Social Policy and Understanding poll finds that Muslim women had reported higher levels of discrimination (68%), in comparison to Muslim men (55%). Similarly, we retest this claim and expect gendered Islamophobia to continue to have a unique impact on Muslim women. We argue that Muslim women are more likely to perceive discrimination as a major problem compared to Muslim men (H_1).

Second, it is important to understand that Muslim women's likelihood to participate in women-specific issues is distinctive relative to men. To understand this distinction in political behavior, we focus on protest engagement. American Muslims have historically utilized extra-systemic political actions like protests in the political realm, particularly because they were some of the few available means for Muslims to articulate their concerns and utilize their political voice. Prior to the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in the 1960s, exclusionary policies during the Jim Crow era (1877–1964) prohibited Muslims from exercising their right to vote and engaging in traditional forms of political activism. This not only meant restricted access to voting but also hindered Muslims from running for elected office, severely limiting their avenues for direct political engagement. As a result, American Muslims often express their political behavior in non-traditional ways, most recently visible through the 2023 to 2024 social protests.

For Muslim women, they may articulate and discuss women's issues and notions of feminism distinctively than other women (Chan-Malik 2018); but this does not mean they dismiss women's concerns or advocacy that centers similar policy concerns that other women prioritize as well. Muslim women identify women-specific issues as a central part of their concerns, as exemplified by NC-based organization, Muslim Women For's articulation of their organization's creation within the introduction. We expect that this can manifest in both their political engagement and their policy preferences.

This drives our primary hypotheses. We expect that Muslim women will be more likely to engage in women-specific motivated protests relative to Muslim men (H_2). Not only will they be more likely to participate in this, but we anticipate that this

participation is driven in response to perceived subjugation, wherein women who perceive discrimination as an issue are more likely to engage in gender-specific protest (H_3).

Study 1 Methods

To better understand who Muslim women are and how their distinctive identities affect their attitudes surrounding gendered Islamophobia, two sets of studies are performed. For study one, I draw on two survey datasets. The 2019 survey encompasses 1,000 Muslims nationwide, and was fielded from April to June 2019 in an online panel survey that the first author fielded with Qualtrics. Demographics of race, gender, age, and socioeconomic status from a 2017 Pew study were utilized to build a more representative sample of Muslims within the study (Pew Research Center 2017; Mohamed 2018).² It is important to note that this is a sample that is not nationally representative like Pew's work but aims to offer a general portrait through their sampling recruitment strategies.³ Second, I draw on a 2023 sample, which was collected in an online panel survey implemented by Lucid survey firm. There are 930 respondents within the 2023 sample, and similar efforts to achieve relative representation were utilized.⁴ The 2023 survey data further clarifies whether the relationship between Islamophobia and political engagement are a temporal phenomenon that was significant given the heightened escalation of Islamophobia during the Trump administration or whether this belief (perceptions of discrimination being different among Muslim women) persists under the Biden administration in 2023.

Study 1 Findings

Muslim women are more likely to perceive discrimination as an issue than Muslim men. Figure 1 offers a descriptive overview of the prevalence of belief discrimination as an issue among respondents in both the 2019 and 2023 American Muslim sample. In both surveys, individuals were asked whether they perceived discrimination was a major, moderate, minor, or no problem for Muslims in the U.S. While the shift in general perceptions is lower for 2023, compared to 2019, Muslim women, on average, report relatively higher perceptions of discrimination being an issue for Muslims. In 2019, 65.2 percent of Muslim women reported it was a major problem, compared to 53.51 percent of Muslim men. In 2023, 47 percent of Muslim women and 48 percent of Muslim men reported it was a major problem, which is relatively equal. Importantly, in 2023, 9.74 percent of Muslim men report it is no problem at all, compared to 6.82 percent of men. Similarly, a higher rate of men (7.51%) reported it was no problem at all, compared to Muslim women (2.73%) in 2019. Men reported it was no problem at all at a higher rate than women, and this difference between Muslim women and men suggests a distinctive divide in perceptions.

To determine whether this difference in perceptions of discrimination between genders is statistically significant when controlling for additional factors, we ran a

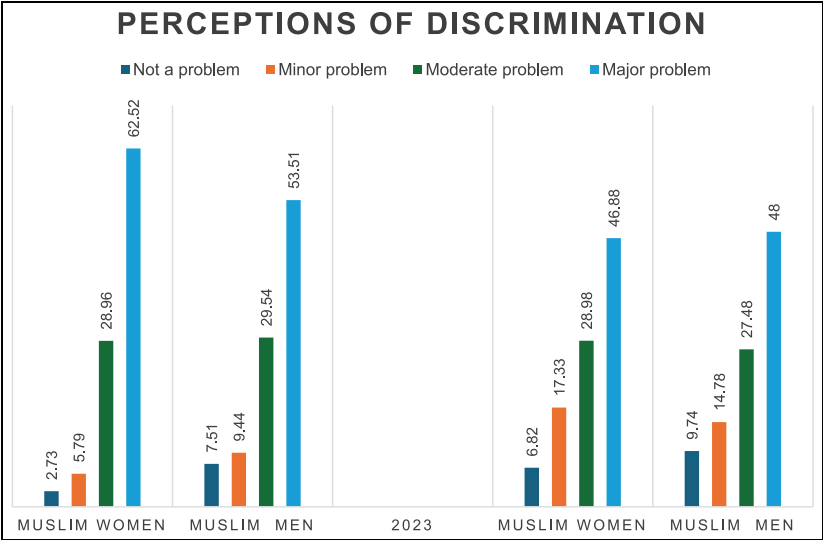


Figure 1. Descriptive overview of perceptions of discrimination (American Muslim Survey 2019, 2023).

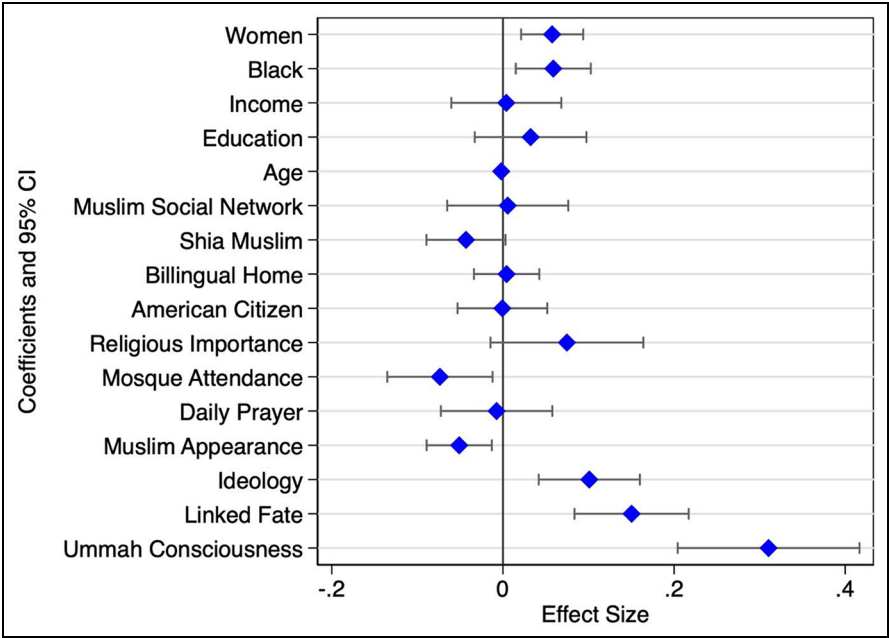


Figure 2. 2019 Muslims' perception of discrimination (American Muslim Survey 2019).

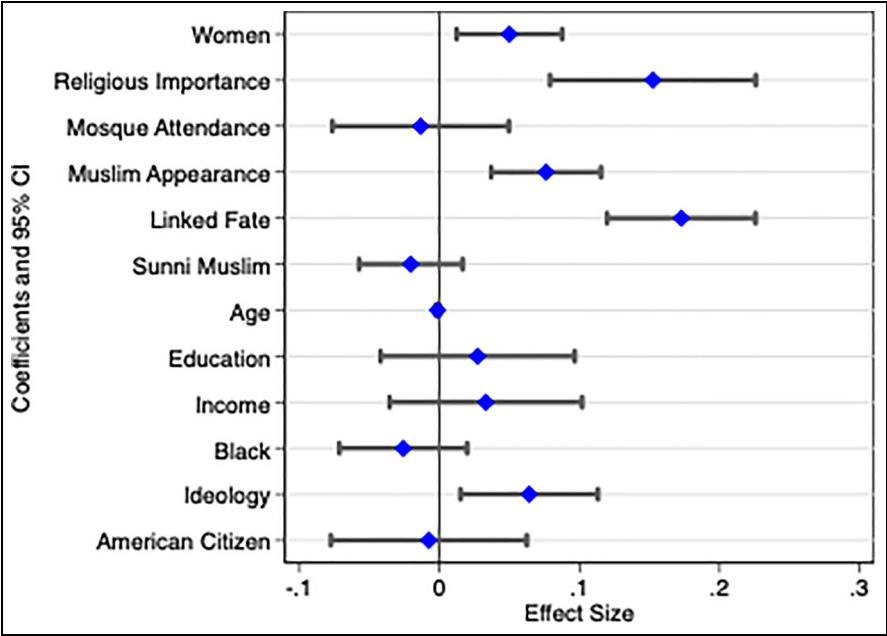


Figure 3. 2023 Muslims' perceptions of discrimination (American Muslim Survey 2023).

multivariate regression analysis. As Figures 2 and 3 show, Muslim women are more likely to report that discrimination is an issue relative to Muslim men. These results are consistent with the first articulated expectations, highlighting that this gender divide in perception exists through two distinctive time periods. In addition, racial identity is meaningful in 2019, wherein Black Muslims are more likely to perceive discrimination as an issue, compared to non-Black Muslims. Ideology is also significant in explaining for differences, wherein respondents who reported identifying as liberal were more likely to perceive discrimination as a major problem, compared to respondents who reported identifying as conservative.

Muslim women are more likely to participate in women's protests. If Muslim women perceive discrimination is an issue, does it translate to political engagement? If so, does this occur in distinctive ways compared to men? Turning to political engagement, I examine women's protest participation. The primary question we focus on is on protest activity. Respondents in the 2019 survey were asked, "These are a few protests that will be occurring in your area. How likely, if at all, are you to attend the following?" I specifically asked Muslim respondents if they would be interested in attending another iteration of the women's march.

This framing alludes to the Women's March of 2017, held on January 21, 2017, the day after the inauguration of the first term of President Donald Trump. This specific protest is considered by many to be the largest one-day political

Table 1. Women’s March Protest (American Muslim Survey 2019).

Women’s March Protest	Coef.	St.Err.	t-Value	p-Value	95% conf interval	Sig
Women	0.05	0.022	2.23	.026	[0.006, 0.094]	**
High perceptions of discrimination	0.046	0.021	2.15	.032	[0.004, 0.088]	**
Black	−0.007	0.027	−0.27	.79	[−0.06, 0.046]	
Income	0.033	0.039	0.84	.399	[−0.044, 0.111]	
Education	0.104	0.04	2.61	.009	[0.026, 0.183]	***
Age	−0.004	0.001	−5.02	0	[−0.005, −0.002]	***
Muslim social network	0.043	0.043	0.99	.32	[−0.042, 0.128]	
Shia	0.054	0.028	1.91	.056	[−0.001, 0.11]	*
Bilingual	0.005	0.023	0.23	.821	[−0.041, 0.051]	
American citizen	0.052	0.032	1.62	.105	[−0.011, 0.115]	
Religious importance	−0.105	0.055	−1.90	.058	[−0.213, 0.004]	*
Mosque attendance	0.191	0.038	5.06	0	[0.117, 0.265]	***
Daily prayer	−0.073	0.04	−1.84	.066	[−0.152, 0.005]	*
Muslim appearance	0.011	0.023	0.48	.631	[−0.035, 0.057]	
Ideology	0.027	0.037	0.73	.464	[−0.045, 0.098]	
Group consciousness	−0.093	0.075	−1.24	.214	[−0.239, 0.054]	
Linked fate	0.124	0.042	2.97	.003	[0.042, 0.207]	***
Ummah consciousness	0.398	0.067	5.96	0	[0.267, 0.529]	***
Constant	0.197	0.079	2.49	.013	[0.042, 0.352]	**
Mean dependent var	0.585		SD dependent var			0.342
R-squared	.211		Number of obs			998
F-test	14.564		Prob > F			0.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	492.249		Bayesian crit. (BIC)			585.458

***p < .01. **p < .05. *p < .1.

demonstration in the U.S., with an estimated 3.3 to 4.6 million attendees (Waddell 2017). The protest occurred in response to the inauguration of Donald Trump, in response to what attendees believed was divisive and demeaning rhetoric against women, immigrants, and Muslims, among other minoritized communities. Muslim women were actively engaged in the initial wave of these protests, with Muslim women like Linda Sarsour holding significant leadership positions within the movement (Sarsour 2017). This question was posed to Muslim respondents in 2019, amid the Trump administration’s first presidential administration. Given the widely popular movement with the women’s movement, it will be meaningful to see whether Muslim women are more moved to attend compared to Muslim men.

To test this, I implemented a multivariate regression with the “likelihood to attend the Women’s March protest” as the dependent variable. The findings, highlighted with the detailed regression results in Table 1 and the coefficient plots of the key variables in Figure 4, suggest that women are five percentage points more likely than men to say they would participate in a new iteration of a protest than Muslim

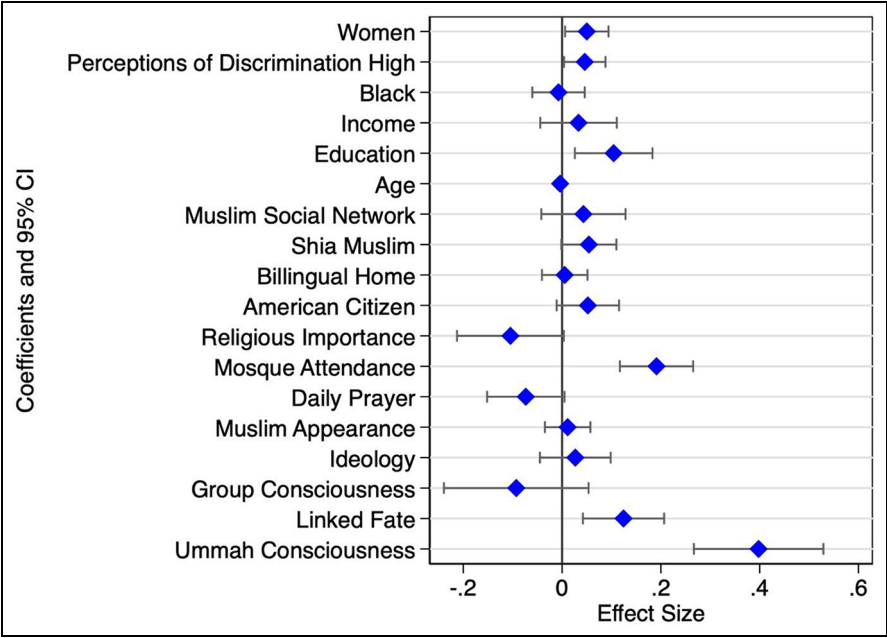


Figure 4. 2019 Muslims’ likelihood to attend Women’s March Protest.

men. This is a statistically significant distinction and holds even after controlling for other key predictors, including ummah consciousness, linked fate, religious practices, socioeconomic factors, and demographic characteristics. Psychological resources (e.g., *ummah* consciousness, linked fate), socioeconomic background (education), and mosque attendance are also meaningfully associated with a higher likelihood of attending the protest.⁵ The results highlight women’s higher likelihood of participation, suggesting greater engagement in movements addressing gender equality and broader issues of social justice. The women’s effect persisted despite accounting for variables such as mosque attendance and daily prayer, suggesting that women’s higher likelihood of attendance is not solely explained by religiosity but may reflect broader social dynamics with Muslim women. It highlights that Muslim women may make politically distinctive choices relative to Muslim men. This is consistent with our expectations.

Turning to our final hypothesis, to better understand Muslim women specifically, we sub-sample the data set implement a multivariate regression analysis with just the women respondents, and examine what factors matter for attending a women’s protest among women alone. Figure 5 presents the coefficient plot visualizing the regression results (full regression results are included within the Supplemental Appendix). Interestingly, we found a statistically significant difference in the likelihood of attending a women’s protest between those who reported that they perceived discrimination as a major problem and those who did not.

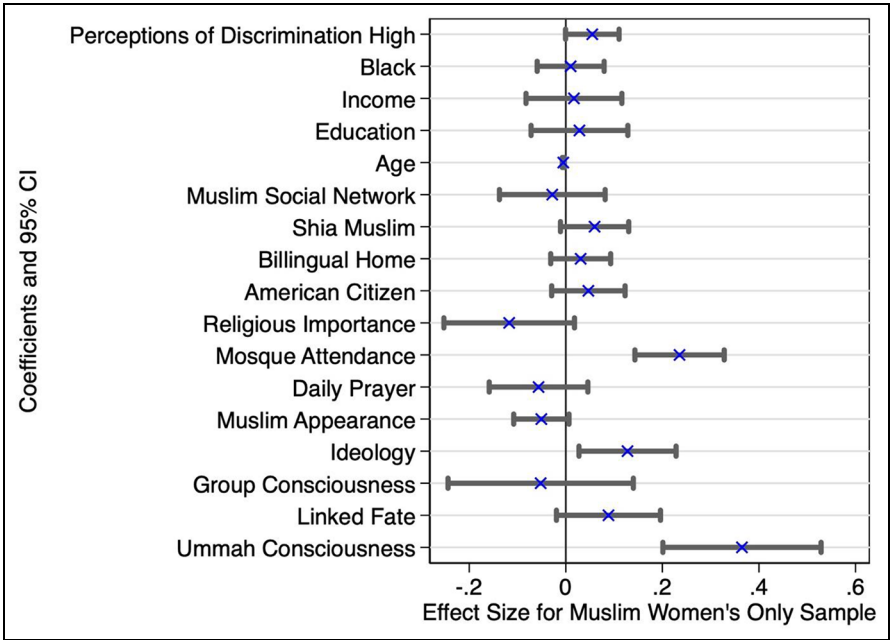


Figure 5. Women’s only sample and likelihood to participate in Women’s March (American Muslim Survey 2019).

Individuals who perceive higher levels of discrimination were more likely to report a desire to participate in the Women’s March, consistent with the third hypothesis. This relationship suggests that experiencing discrimination may motivate greater involvement in protest activities.

Study 2: Policy Priorities of Muslim Women Center Reproductive Justice More

Illustrating the gendered differences in political participation in a women’s protest, I turn to examining whether we also see gendered differences toward policy preferences. Reproductive justice has been a central concern for women across the United States, punctuated by the 2017 women’s march in reaction to Trump’s first inauguration and intensified with the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* ruling, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, eliminating federal constitutional protections for abortion.

This decision has had profound implications for the reproductive justice movement, which frames access to abortion as representative of broader struggles for equity, including racial, economic, and social justice. By centering the lived experiences of marginalized communities, the reproductive justice framework highlights the disproportionate impact of abortion restrictions on low-income individuals,

people of color, and other vulnerable groups, emphasizing the intersectional nature of the fight for bodily autonomy and reproductive freedom. Muslim women's organizations, such as HEART, Muslim Women For, and Muslim Abolitionist Futures, have centered pro-choice policies as part of their policy advocacy.

For example, HEART has created a guide for Muslim women, noting (Azmat et al., 2022), "These are some of the verses in the Quran and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (S) that have influenced Islamic rulings and ethics regarding the permissibility of abortion in traditional Muslim contexts." In addition, there have been other women-led Muslim collectives, such as the Ad'iyah Collective, who state their mission to be:

Ad'iyah Collective has aimed to be a radical alternative to mainstream approaches to pregnancy-ending support. We recognize that the current healthcare system is deeply flawed, especially when layered with the additional burdens Muslims face in navigating systemic oppression. We reject the idea that reforming these fundamentally broken systems will ever create truly safe, affirming care for all.

Ad'iyah Collective not only provides support but cites "systemic oppression" as a challenge Muslims face when navigating many features of life, including healthcare. Given Muslim women's sustained engagement in this space and that Muslim women specifically, rather than broader Muslim organizations, have been at the forefront of this issue, we expect that Muslim women are more likely than Muslim men to prioritize reproductive justice as a policy concern (H_5). In addition, since the discourse around reproductive rights has highlighted the intersectional nature of the reproductive justice movement and its ties to systemic oppression, we expect that perceptions of discrimination will be positively correlated with their prioritization (H_6).

Study 2 Methodology

To test these expectations, data from the 2020 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-election Survey (CMPS) was utilized in Study 2 (Frasure et al, 2024). This was a non-partisan omnibus survey conducted by investigators at UCLA with a sample size of 17,545 people. The survey is multi-lingual, and respondents were able to take it in "Spanish, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu, Farsi and Haitian Creole," in addition to English. This dataset is unique given that it intentionally oversamples for minority populations who are harder to reach, such as immigrants that are Black, Afro-Latinos, LGBTQ + respondents and people who are Muslim. There are 782 people within the Muslim oversample included in the study that we focus upon. As Dana and Lajevardi (2025), the principal investigators responsible for assisting in the development of the Muslim/ MENA part of the survey, note, there are extensive challenges to attaining a representative sample of American Muslims and it is important to

Table 2. Multivariate Regression of Policy Priorities (CMPS 2020).

Reproductive health	Coef.	St.Err.	t-Value	p-Value	95% conf interval	Sig
Age	−.001	.001	−1.22	.223	[−.002, .001]	
Education	−.015	.04	−.39	.696	[−.093, .062]	
Income	.001	0	1.55	.122	[0, .001]	
Ideology	.131	.048	2.73	.006	[.037, .225]	***
Women	.068	.02	3.42	.001	[.029, .107]	***
Religious importance	−.098	.033	−2.97	.003	[−.164, −.033]	***
Perceptions of discrimination to Muslims	.046	.032	1.41	.159	[−.018, .109]	
Constant	.027	.053	.51	.612	[−.077, .131]	
Mean dependent var	.074		SD dependent var			.263
R-squared	.062		Number of obs			686
F-test	6.387		Prob > F			.000
Akaike crit. (AIC)	83.032		Bayesian crit. (BIC)			119.279

Asterisks indicate levels of statistical significance: ****p* < .01 (highly significant); ***p* < .05 (significant); **p* < .1 (marginally significant)

remain conscientious of whether this sample is representative of the full diversity of American Muslims.

Study 2 Findings

The primary variable of interest here focuses on respondents being asked to prioritize reproductive justice. “On the whole, what are the most important issues that you want the new President and new Congress to address?” Respondents are invited to select up to 3 of these responses, and response options include 22 options, from voter suppression, COVID, to protecting minorities. This is a particularly interesting question because it can help move beyond a social desirability bias, wherein people may just say they generally support the idea of reproductive rights. Rather, the question asks individuals to select only three choices, which constrains them and encourages them to reveal their preferences when constraints are involved. In that way, this question framing offers a meaningful, realistic portrayal of how these policies are prioritized in the broader socio-political arena, such as policies that non-profits or mosques may choose to spend time and resources on.

The findings, depicted in Table 2 and Figure 6, highlight the gendered distinctions between men and women from the sample. Women have a 6.8 percentage point higher likelihood of supporting reproductive justice policy compared to men, holding all other variables constant. The effect is both meaningful and statistically significant at the 1 percent level, demonstrating that Muslim women may be more likely than men to prioritize this policy. In addition, people who are more ideologically self-reported as liberal, are more likely to support the policy. These results are consistent with the fourth hypothesis. Finally, perceptions of discrimination

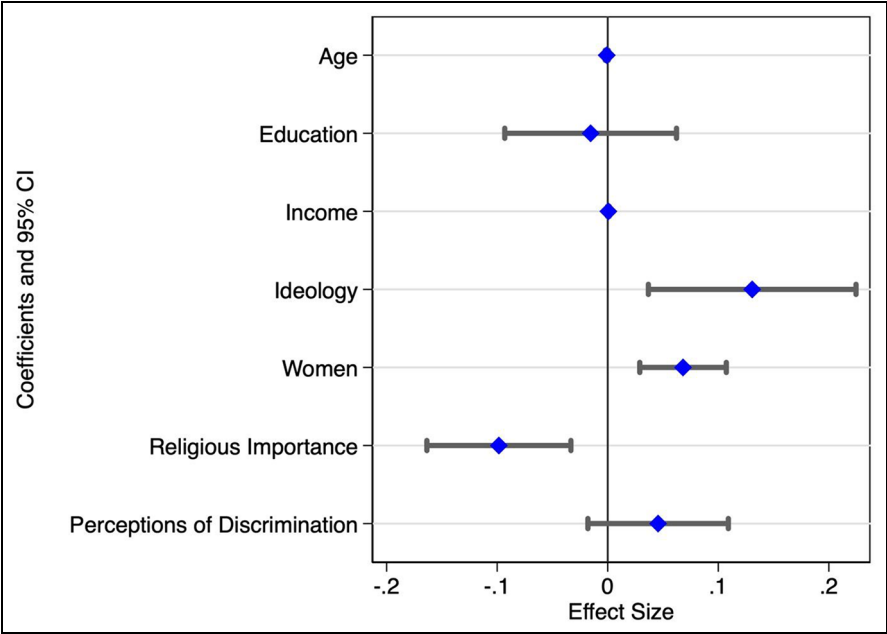


Figure 6. Reproductive health priority for American Muslims (CMPS 2020).

targeting Muslims, while positively correlated is not meaningful in the likelihood to select this policy as a priority.

Discussion

The results presented here offer meaningful insight into the nuance of how we think about Muslim women and Muslim men, particularly with respect to how they navigate gendered Islamophobia. First, we highlighted how Muslim women perceive discrimination as a major problem at higher rates than Muslim men. As extant literature has indicated, perceptions of societal issues are strongly linked with behavioral decisions and the way perceptions influence social dynamics is very consequential. The fact that this trend of Muslim women perceiving this to be an issue at higher rates than Muslim men, across the different points in time (2019, 2023) should leave those interested in the intersectional dynamics of American Muslims to further consider how impactful the consequences of gendered Islamophobia are.

These findings indicate that gendered Islamophobia is not simply a matter of systemic Islamophobia painting Muslim women and men with different stereotypes, but also has differential impact on Muslim women and men themselves, on an individual-level (Sedique, 2020). It reveals how much considerations of gender

are influential and must be considered as we consider the empirical understandings of American Muslims going forward.

These distinctions appear meaningful in the political realm as well. Study one's examination of the likelihood to attend a women's protest reveals gendered differences highlighting that Muslim women are more likely attend the women's march. Importantly, increased perceptions of discrimination are positively correlated with a higher proclivity to attend a women's protest. While additional factors, namely group-based resources like *ummah* consciousness and linked fate, also influence the likelihood to engage in political protests, it is meaningful to identify the ways in which Muslim women's political behaviors may be different than Muslim men's (Sedique 2023). Importantly, while racial variation in experiences of Muslim women is important to understand (Chan-Malik 2018), when the statistical model focused on just Muslim women, we saw limited variation in the responses of Muslim women from varying racial backgrounds. This may speak to how elevated this issue is for Muslim women across ethno-racial communities.

These findings are also consistent with how we see gendered discrimination having political implications for other marginalized groups as well. In the case of Black women, they have displayed their long standing political commitment and solidarity to voting strategically for the Democratic ticket, showcased with the 2024 Presidential election by voting 92 percent for Kamala Harris. Their high turnout for Harris is indicative of their high level of political engagement due to their amount of social capital and consciousness of the impacts this has on Black women and their perceived marginalization (Farris and Holman 2014). In the case of AAPI women, the @stopAAPIhate campaign brought to light gendered violence targeting these women. AAPI women have found success in utilizing social media as a platform to build coalitions both within the AAPI community itself, as well as with other communities. In 2013, the hashtag #NotYourAsianSidekick gained popularity, and many AAPI women utilized the discourse to discuss their unique struggles with both racism and misogyny (Kuo 2017).

This finding also maps on to what Muslim women's organizations have articulated. For example NY-based Muslim women founded and run organization, "We are Malikah," offers a justice statement on their organization's website, which offers insight to why the policy priorities and protest behaviors of Muslim women may appear as they do. They note:

Historically, many of our sisters, because of the cultural biases and intersectional inequities, have been violently kept out, silenced, and dismissed in women-led spaces and movements. The Women's Movement can only thrive when we set out to seek justice, equity, and liberation for all of us ... Malikah is our dreams for what our world could be. She is the one who won't allow us to cease being loud until we exist in a world where each and every single one of us is guaranteed security, justice and liberation. Malikah is every woman. Here's to building a world where all women feel connected, healed and secure within all of the spaces we occupy.

In this statement, they advocate for the inclusion of Muslim women and emphasize the shared experiences of inequities and cultural biases that manifest for women in distinctive ways. This perspective highlights the types of insights Muslim women who are leaders in these spaces draw upon when politically mobilizing. While ethno-racial distinctions between Muslim women are important to keep in mind, the impacts of gendered Islamophobia reveal a condition where there is a shared experience for women across sub-groups of American Muslim women.

Emerging work also suggests that Muslim women are more engaged in intersectional movements, extending beyond the women's protests. For example, Muslim women are more likely to support the Black Lives Matter movement (ISPU 2020; Sediqe 2025). Black Lives Matter, as a movement, is not only focused on advancing racial justice for Black Americans but has centered gendered violence affecting women and members of the LGBTQ + communities. These emerging findings suggest that Muslim women make the interconnections of their shared struggles in a nuanced way, as the affirmation from "We Are Malika" also suggests. Future research would benefit from further understanding why Muslim women are more inclined to support these initiatives.

Finally, the importance of women's issues is punctuated by looking at policy preferences toward reproductive justice. As study two highlighted, Muslim women were more likely to prioritize reproductive justice relative to Muslim men. Interestingly, perceptions of discrimination did not significantly associate with Muslim women's likelihood of prioritizing reproductive justice. The result raises questions about the specific pathways through which Muslim women engage with policy issues, particularly those tied to reproductive rights. It suggests that reproductive justice may be viewed by Muslim women as less mediated by external perceptions of discrimination than by other sociopolitical or cultural factors.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this analysis. The sample size for this specific study was relatively small, and only 49 of the 368 women in the sample selected to prioritize reproductive justice as a policy, which may have constrained the statistical power to detect more nuanced relationships. Future research with larger and more diverse Muslim samples could provide greater clarity on whether these findings hold across different contexts or sub-groups. A larger sample size could also facilitate the exploration of potential mediating or moderating factors, such as religiosity or generational differences, in shaping the link between perceptions of discrimination and reproductive justice preferences.

Despite this limitation, the findings remain meaningful in highlighting the contexts in which perceptions of discrimination appear to influence political engagement versus policy preferences. This distinction emphasizes the need for scholars to disentangle the complex and multifaceted ways that discrimination interacts with policy attitudes and political behaviors, particularly for marginalized groups like Muslim women. Overall, these insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersections of gender, religion, and policy in shaping political priorities. This finding further illuminates the intersectional elements of gender woven into the fabric

of Islamophobia. Just as Islamophobia has inherently gendered features, the experiences of women being distinctive from men's mirrors these manifestations.

Conclusion

The empirical analysis of American Muslims offers meaningful insight into the types of trends that we see persisting among Muslims in a socio-political era where Muslims remain hypervisible and part of politically contentious arguments. As the paper highlights, the intersectional dimensions of Muslim behavior are meaningful to better understand, as Muslim women do have some distinctive opinions in comparison to Muslim men. The findings presented in the two studies highlight some ways that Muslim women have distinctive policy priorities and choices than Muslim men. The findings reveal that Muslim women are more likely than Muslim men to perceive discrimination as a significant issue, and these perceptions are associated with distinct political behaviors, such as a higher likelihood of attending women's protests. These behaviors reflect not only the systemic stereotypes imposed by Islamophobia but also the differential impacts it has on individuals based on gender. Further research examining the differential impacts of discrimination on Muslim women would add further insight into this relationship.

Muslim women's political engagement patterns are also important to deliberate further upon. While Muslim women may not all fit the traditional feminist mold of Western feminism, it does not preclude them from carrying concern for women's rights. The findings highlight a relatively higher interest in participating in women's-based protests and that women who perceive discrimination as a large problem are more likely to participate in these protests. These findings are complemented by narratives highlighted by various Muslim women's organizations, calling attention to the ways that the empirical findings are reflected in the advocacy work of Muslim women across the country.

This contextualizes the trends we see in the second study, where we see a higher portion of Muslim women prioritizing reproductive justice as a key policy concern, compared to Muslim men. While the limited sample size presents challenges to generalizability, the results indicate the importance of exploring how gendered dynamics interact with broader structural and cultural contexts to shape policy attitudes and political behaviors. Moreover, the consistent patterns across ethno-racial backgrounds in Muslim women's responses suggest that certain issues, such as reproductive justice and participation in women's movements, are elevated concerns for Muslim women as a collective group. This finding aligns with the voices of Muslim women's organization's emphasis on the need for inclusive, intersectional approaches to justice and equity.

Finally, these insights provide a critical lens for understanding the intersectional elements of gender and religion within Islamophobia. They call for future research to deepen our understanding of how gendered experiences of discrimination influence political engagement and policy priorities, offering valuable perspectives for both scholars and policymakers interested in the multifaceted experiences of American Muslims. In doing so, this work contributes to broader conversations

about how marginalized groups navigate complex layers of identity, discrimination, and agency in political and social spheres. As the dynamics of gendered Islamophobia continue to evolve, centering our understanding of Muslim women is vital to attaining a comprehensive understanding of the state of Muslims in the United States.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the department of political science at Michigan State University, UCLA's Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey for their support.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This study was supported by the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the corresponding author's institution, Michigan State University. Informed consent was secured from all participants before their involvement in the study.

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Data Availability Statement

The CMPS 2020 data is available through the University of Michigan and the topline data for the 2019 and 2023 will be made accessible upon completion of corresponding author's book manuscript, which draws on the same data set.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. This references the highly publicized murder and hate crime of three students from Chapel Hill North Carolina, that occurred on February 10, 2015. Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Razan Abu-Salha—were fatally shot and killed by their neighbor, who was subsequently charged with first-degree murder. While initial reports suggested the

- crime stemmed from a parking dispute, the victims' families and advocacy groups raised concerns about Islamophobia prejudice as the key motive. The incident made the discriminatory experiences of Muslim Americans a salient topic in American public discourse.
2. The sample characteristics for both survey samples are included within Supplemental Appendix A.
 3. The principal investigators worked with both vendors (Lucid in 2023; Qualtrics in 2019) to ensure that Muslims that were within the online samples were not oversampled from a specific region of the country. The vendors were responsible for online recruitment from their sample of survey respondents and the PI's ensured that there was not an oversample of Muslims from specific backgrounds (e.g., race, gender) and resembled the variation that the 2017 Pew Study indicates is the portrait of American Muslims.
 4. The sample characteristics are displayed in Supplemental Appendix A, and the coding for the primary variables is included as Supplemental Appendix B. Respondents skew younger, in comparison to the 2019 data.
 5. Linked fate is a concept introduced by Dawson (1994) that asks individuals if they think the following: "Do you think that what happens generally to Muslims in the United States will have something to do with what happens in your life?" *Ummah* consciousness is a measure of collective community responsibility for American Muslims developed by Sediqe (2024), which measures Muslims' sense of closeness to the global Muslim community (*ummah*) and the level of agreement that they hold a sense of responsibility to other Muslims within the *ummah*.

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