

Ellie Sheinwald
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Professor Raymond Smith
Race & Ethnicity in American Politics

Issue Brief: Minority Religion and Violence

Keywords: Minority religion, violence, Jewish, Muslim, extremism, stereotypes

Key Points:

- The population of minority religion groups is extremely small in comparison to the majority religion group in the United States, Christianity.
- Minority religious violence is bidirectional: the groups commit violent acts and the groups are affected by the acts themselves.
- 87% of Americans have a high level of acceptance towards people who do not share their religious faith.
- Approximately 41% of the crimes recorded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2014 were hate crimes.

Description:

The following issue brief is meant to address the relationship between minority religious groups living in America and violence. This topic will be addressed through an analysis of minority religion groups committing violent acts and minority religion groups facing violence committed by others. The brief will focus on why violent attacks happen by and against minority religion groups, and will cite the Muslim and Jewish populations in America for more specific examples.

Issue Brief:

The difference in percentage between the majority religion, Christianity, and minority religions, like Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, is significantly large within the population of the United States. In a 2014 study done by the Pew Research Forum, 70.6% of the population identified with America's major religion, Christianity. Minority religions pale in comparison, with groups such as the Jews comprising 1.9% of the population and Muslims who make up 0.9% of the population. Although Christians make up the largest religious population in the United States, it is imperative to analyze specific aspects within minority religious groups. Since there is such a vast range of minority religion groups within the United States, this brief

will focus solely on two minority religion groups in American: Jews and Muslims. While Christianity is not outside of this phenomenon, minority religion groups are vulnerable to different forms of violence. This violence is bidirectional in that it impacts the group itself commits violence and the group faces violent acts committed by others.

When minority religious groups commit violent acts, their methods of choice have been physical/armed attacks on others, intimidation, or vandalism. Often times, this type of violence arises out of a religious group's need to press their views onto others and see no more peaceful means of doing so. It comes from the desire for non-believers to understand the scriptures of one's religion. Minority religious violence also stems from the belief that a religious group will look more powerful by committing acts of terror. The shooting attacks in San Bernadino, California, serve as an accurate example of these points. During these attacks, a Muslim couple shot and killed 14 people and wounded 21 others in a social services center. This act of violence was committed in the name of their religion, Islam, and the couple used this event to pledge their allegiance to the extremist Muslim group, ISIS. This act of terrorism, and other smaller acts of violence, have ultimately created feelings of resentment towards Islam as their religion and acts of violence are inextricably intertwined. Acts of violence, such as this event, build on the reputation of a minority group's extremist sect and display the power that the religion may have over individuals.

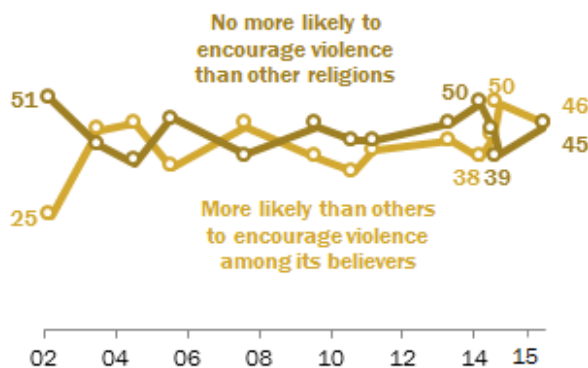
Looking at the intersection of minority religion and violence from the opposite perspective, it would seem that these religious groups are more likely to be on the defense as opposed to attacking others. This idea becomes clear through an examination of the statistics gathered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in a 2014 poll. Between 15,494 law enforcement agencies, there were 6,418 hate crimes. Within that number, 1,094 of them were

religiously motivated hate crimes; 2.4% of the 1,094 crimes were against religious institutions. Further, 78.5% of the attacks were against a specific minority religion. These crime statistics, specifically against religious groups, represent American citizens shifting away from the principles upon which our nation was founded: tolerance and religious freedom.

The Muslim religion is the one of the most widely-studied minority religious groups in the United States; this interest could be attributed to its extremist members or sects being more visible to the public than members of other minority religious groups. More specifically, in 2015, 83% of Americans saw ISIS as a major threat to their land. This statistic increased by 16% within the span of a year, suggesting that the fear of violence associated with the sect on American soil has become more of a reality than ever before. Additionally, as more non-Muslim Americans learn about this religion, they recognize that there are tropes of extreme violence within the group’s main religious text, the Quran. Despite the violent episodes in the text, a Pew study shows that the same percentage of Americans who believe that the Islamic religion is more likely than others to encourage violence is equivalent to the percentage of people who see the religion as not encouraging violence amongst its members. This idea may shift in the near future

Does the Islamic religion encourage violence more than other religions?

% who say the Islamic religion is ...



Source: Survey conducted Dec. 8-13, 2015.
Don't know responses not shown.

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due to the stance of the 2016 presidential candidate, Donald Trump. His conservative stance on immigration specifically pinpoints and vilifies the Muslim population, inciting hatred from non-Muslims living in America. Drawing from a study done by the Center for Security Policy, he shared that one-fifth of survey respondents believe that the use of

violence in the United States is justified in order to make shariah the law of the land in this country. This statistic certainly has led the Muslim population in America to be on the defensive, and could be correlated to the increasing violence against their group.

Anti-semitism, or the hatred of Jews, also manifests itself into different forms of violence. Some examples of anti-semitic acts include include assault, vandalism, harassment, and threats. In a study done by the Anti-Defamation League in 2014, there were approximately 21,000,000 people in the United States who were harboring some anti-semitic feelings or attitudes. In the same year, there were 912 anti-semitic attacks with 56% of the attacks comprising of harassment and assault. Acts of violence against the Jewish community are committed often because of stereotypes or exaggerations associated with this minority religious group. Some examples of these stereotypes include that Jews are more loyal to Israel than they are to the United States, they still talk too much about the Holocaust, and that they have too much power in the business world. In the United States census, there are not any specific statistics that show how many crimes that Jews commit per year and whether they were motivated by their religion. There are statistics depicting how many Jews there are in federal prisons, yet the small percentage suggests that Jews commit crimes of diminished severity or violence.

U.S. Public Has Warmest Feelings for Jews, Catholics and Evangelicals

Respondents in a Pew Research Center poll were asked:

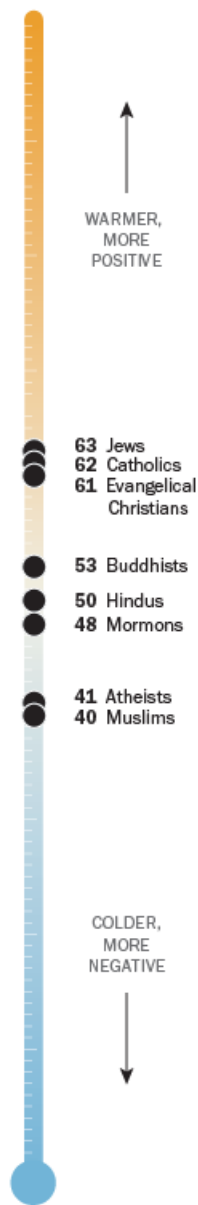
"We'd like to get your feelings toward a number of groups on a 'feeling thermometer.' A rating of 0 degrees means you feel as cold and negative as possible. A rating of 100 degrees means you feel as warm and positive as possible. You would rate the group at 50 degrees if you don't feel particularly positive or negative toward the group."

Results at right show total mean ratings of each religious group



Source: American Trends Panel (wave 4). Survey conducted May 30-June 30, 2014.

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Acts of violence by minority groups are not common in the United States. Further, our government has taken many precautions to avoid or prevent this type of behavior; their efforts include engaging with religious leaders in specific communities, supporting religious leaders as political advocates, and introducing educational programs that teach others about the practices and beliefs of a specific minority religious group. The notion that acts of violence committed by minority groups are not common has been shown by a Gallup poll questioning whether religion carries a price to individuals. The results demonstrate that from members of a religious faith community, 87% of respondents indicated a high level of acceptance towards people who did not share their religious faith.

Another Pew Research Forum study would agree to a certain extent, stating that Jews are viewed warmly by other Americans. Due to these greater levels of integration or tolerance in American society, one can guess that this has diminished the potential of violence that would normally be at the hand of minority religious groups.

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