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Muslim Students' Perceptions of Campus Climates¹

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The educational experiences of students who are immigrants, people of color, and religious minorities are an essential area of study for institutions committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Now more than ever, young Muslim Americans are being targeted with hate crimes and instances of discrimination within educational settings (CAIR 2017; Masci 2019). The Muslim population in the U.S. is projected to grow, yet few campus climate studies focus on the experiences of Muslim Americans in higher education (Mohamed 2018). As the population of young Muslim Americans increases, U.S. educational institutions need to be prepared to address the needs of this racially-heterogeneous community (Pew Research 2017). Given that three-quarters of Muslims in the U.S. are immigrants or children of immigrants, the prejudice and discrimination against Muslims may dually target their religious and immigrant backgrounds.

This report begins to assess religious and racial campus climates for Muslim students. The key findings of this report are as follows: 1) UC Muslim students are a racially heterogeneous group with majority immigrant backgrounds; 2) Muslim students are significantly less likely to feel respected for their racial/ethnic backgrounds than other religious peers; 3) Among Muslim students, African/Black/Caribbean Muslims rate both religious and racial campus climates lower than their other-raced Muslim peers; 4) Immigrant background may play a role in shaping variation on campus climate ratings across different racial groups within the Muslim student community.

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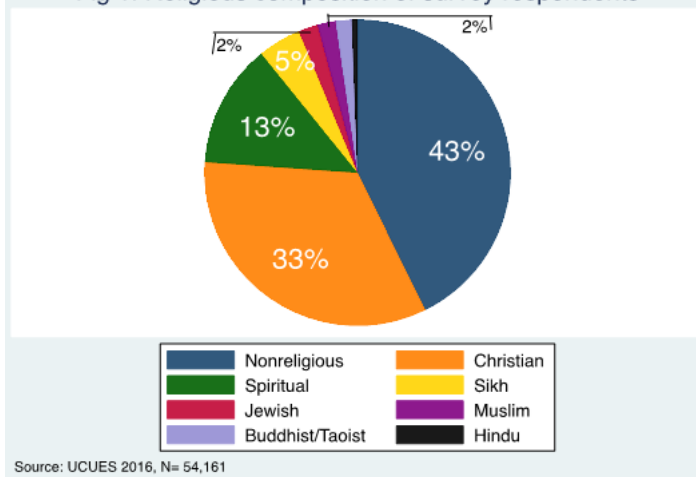
This study focuses on self-reported experiences of Muslim students concerning racial and religious campus climates while taking into account their racial and immigrant backgrounds. Religious campus climate refers to the aggregate of individual attitudes, interpersonal interactions, and institutionalized policies and practices that enable students to feel respect for spiritual beliefs, comfort in expressing beliefs, structural worldview diversity, and space to receive support for spiritual expression and experiences (Fosnacht & Broderick 2018; Seggie & Sanford 2010; Mayhew, Bowman, & Rockenback 2014; Bowman, Rockenback, & Mayhew 2015). Racial campus climate refers to attitudes, perceptions, and experiences regarding race relations and racial justice among and between students, faculty, and staff (Pelak et al. 2007). Findings in this report are based on a representative sample of over 54,000 undergraduate students, including over 1,000 Muslim students, who responded to the 2016 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES).

This brief begins with religious and racial demographic information for students in the 2016 UCUES. Religious students' ratings of religious and racial campus climates follow as measured by the level of respect they feel for their religious and racial backgrounds. The last section examines variation across race and immigrant generation within the Muslim student community.

Muslim Students Are Religious Minorities on Campus

Muslim students are only about 2% of the University of California (UC) students on campus, similar to the percentage of Muslim Americans in the general U.S. population (Mohamed 2018). Just over half of the University of California (UC) students identified with some religious group or as spiritual (57%). Figure 1 below demonstrates that 43% of students identified as nonreligious, 33% as Christian, 13% as spiritual, 5% Sikh, and a combined 6% as Jewish (2%), Muslim (2%), Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu.

Fig 1. Religious composition of survey respondents



A Majority of Muslim Students Come from Immigrant Backgrounds

A significantly higher percentage of Muslim students come from immigrant backgrounds (82%) compared to all other UC students (52%) (see figures 2 and 3 below). Muslims are significantly more likely to identify as 1.5 or second-generation immigrants. In this report, 1.5 is defined as anyone who arrived in the U.S. at age 17 or younger (i.e., completed high school in the U.S.). Non-immigrant includes third and later-generation immigrants who have U.S. born parents in addition to students who do not have immigrant backgrounds.

Fig 2. Immigrant Background of Muslim Students

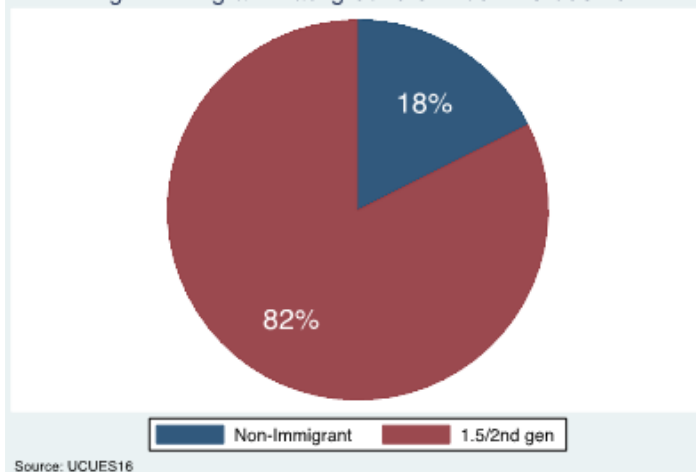
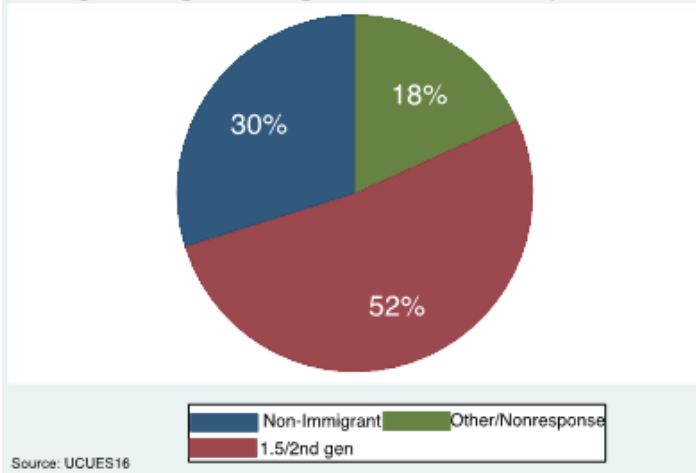


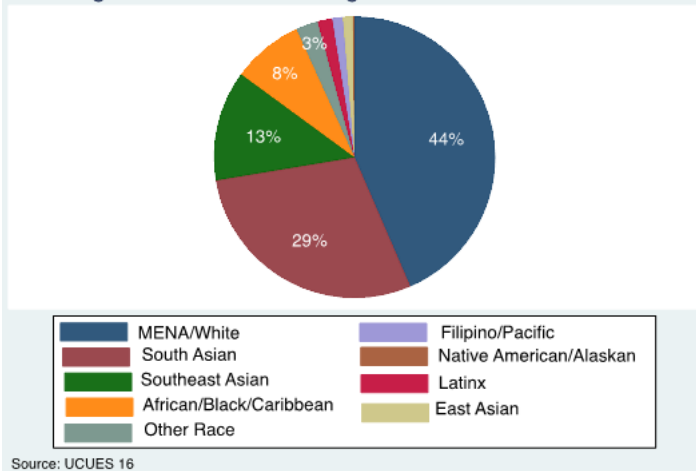
Fig 3. Immigrant Background of UCUES Respondents



Muslim Students Are Racially Diverse

Muslim students are a racially-heterogeneous group. Figure 4 shows that Muslims comprise a large percentage of students who identify as Middle Eastern North African (designated White) (44%), South Asian (29%), Southeast Asian (13%), and African/Black/Caribbean (8%). The racial diversity of this community suggests that variation may also exist within the religious group along racial lines, which is explored later in this report.

Fig 4. Racial/Ethnic background of Muslim students

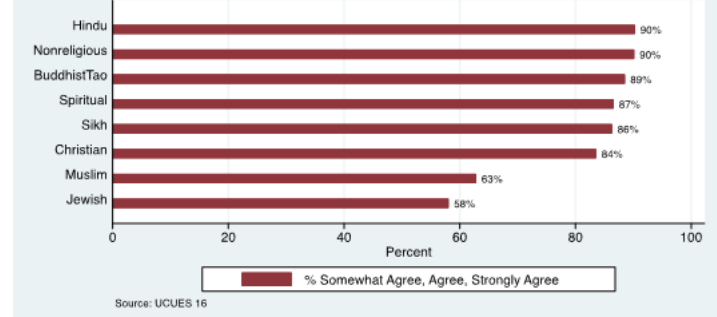


Muslim Students Rate Campus Climates Lower Than Most Religious Students

Muslim students rated religious campus climate significantly lower than most of their religious peers. Just 63% of students agreed, strongly

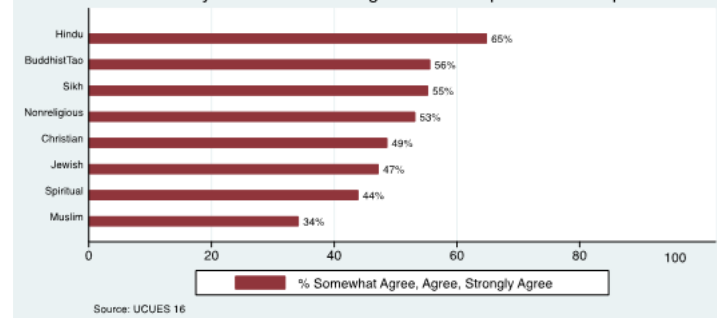
agreed or somewhat agreed that “students with my religious beliefs are respected on campus” compared to 84% of Christian students, 87% of spiritual students and 90% of nonreligious students. See figure 5 below. Only Jewish students rated religious campus climate lower (58% agreement).

Fig 5. Proportion of Religious Students Who Agree with the Statement: "Students of my religious beliefs are respected on campus"



Muslim students were also significantly more likely to rate racial campus climate lower than all other religious groups. In Figure 6 below, Muslim students were significantly less likely to agree that their racial/ethnic background was respected on campus (34%) compared to their spiritual (44%), Jewish (47%) and non-religious peers (53%).

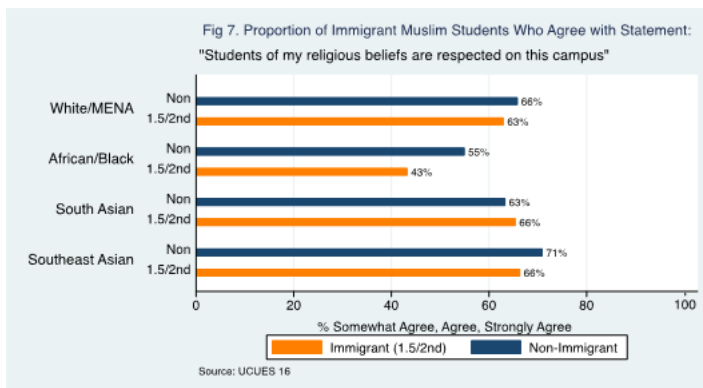
Fig 6. Proportion of Religious Students who Agree with the Statement: "Students of my Racial/ethnic background are respected on campus"



These findings may be a result of the racial heterogeneity of the Muslim student community. Research on campus racial climates suggests that students of color rate campus climates lower than their White peers (Harper & Hurtado 2007). The next section examines whether there is variation within the Muslim community on campus climate ratings along racial lines.

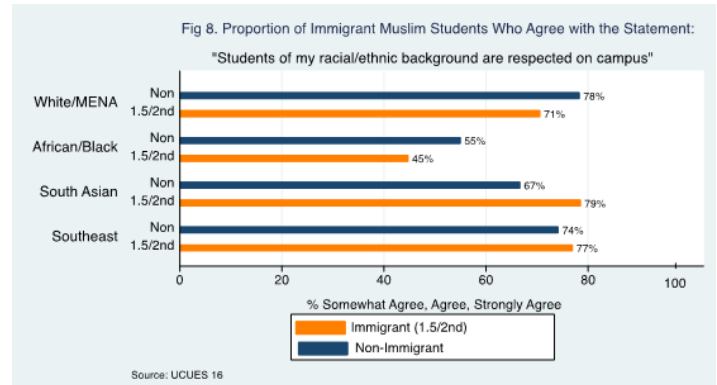
African/Black/Carribbean Muslim Students Rate Campus Climates the Lowest

African/Black/Caribbean (ABC) Muslim students are significantly more likely to rate religious campus climate lower compared to their Middle Eastern/North African (White) Muslim peers. Figure 7 shows that among ABC Muslim students, those with immigrant backgrounds rate religious climate even lower (43% agreement compared to 55% non-immigrant students). Across different racial groups within the Muslim community, immigrant students rated respect for religious belief lower, except among South Asian Muslim students, where 1.5 and second-generation immigrant students rated religious climate higher.



In addition to religious climate, African/Black/Caribbean (ABC) Muslim students were also significantly more likely to rate campus racial climates lower compared to their Middle Eastern North African (referred to as White in the survey) Muslim peers. 1.5 and second-generation immigrant ABC Muslim students rate racial climate lower than their non-immigrant peers (45% compared to 55%) (see Figure 8 below). Immigrant South Asian and Southeast Asian Muslim students rated racial campus climate higher than their non-immigrant peers.

Immigrant background was statistically significantly related to lower ratings on campus climate for Middle Eastern/North African (White) Muslim students only. A larger sample size is needed to examine whether immigrant background leads to significant variation within other Muslim racial groups.



Implications

Across the nation, students of color are outnumbering their White peers in public schools (de los Rios 2017). As students move through K-12 towards higher education, universities are tasked with enacting their commitments to uphold equity, diversity, and inclusion in order to retain diverse student bodies. The sociopolitical climate of anti-Muslim racism, xenophobia, sexism, and blatant racism are likely to shape the campus climate experiences of marginalized students (Hurtado et al. 2012). Experiences with religious and racial campus climates shape students' abilities to not only thrive academically but also feel belonging and a sense of wellbeing.

This study suggests that students' religious, immigrant, and racial backgrounds affect how they experience racial and religious campus climates. Even when students share the same religion, race, and immigrant generation may create variation in their experiences. Qualitative research is needed to examine how race, religion, and immigrant background interact with each other to shape students' experiences on and off-campus.

Practitioners should consider that certain student groups may require more support for different facets of their experience. For example, this report suggests that African/Black/Caribbean Muslim students from both immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds rate religious and racial campus climates lower than their peers. Being a part of multiple communities can make it difficult for students to feel a sense of belonging to any

of them. This experience can limit students' access to resources. Campus practitioners should make efforts to provide resources that directly affect multiply-marginalized groups. Adequately supporting these students, that fall into multiple different communities, will provide an institutional means of belonging and access to resources that may otherwise be limited. Finally, practitioners should recognize the importance of multiple campus climates, and how students' experiences with climate will affect their success.

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