Understanding Islam for Teachers

Beth Franzosa
National Endowment for the Humanities: Muslim American Identities, Past and Present
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis
Dr. Edward E. Curtis IV
July 2017

Arguably the most important thing to know in teaching about Islam is that it is nearly impossible to generalize about the beliefs of Muslims in the United States and worldwide. The term "Muslim" is analogous to "Christian" (rather than, for example, Roman Catholic or Presbyterian) in that it is an umbrella term for millions of people in many different groups, often with varying beliefs.

James R. Moore argues for the importance of understanding the diversity of Islam in different times and places.

"It is important for students, as active participants in American society, to understand that Islam is not a monolithic entity, immune from change over time and space. Like all religions, Islam evolves as it interacts with complex factors — race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, local cultural mores, and specific historical events — unique to particular countries and regions... For example, the type of Islam practiced in Indonesia... is significantly different from the form practiced in Pakistan... The world's fifty-one predominantly Muslim countries are characterized by enormous diversity" (Moore 143).

Some Muslims recognize an authority figure in their religion, and others do not.

"To be Shi'i is to believe that God intended the leadership of the community to be held by a descendent of the Prophet" (Bill 16). The majority of Muslims in the U.S. and worldwide are Sunni or don't identify as a particular Muslim group, with another minority identifying as belonging to other Muslim groups (Lipka; Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 113; Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "The World's Muslims" 9), so it is accurate to say that most Muslims don't follow a single religious authority, but important to recognize that some groups do.

Kambiz GhaneaBassiri points out that, in recent decades in the United States, "No single Muslim organization was able to unite Muslims under a single cause or a single understanding of Islam" (326).

Among many Muslims, this religious diversity is praised and valued.

The principle of *ikhtilāf* ("disagreement") "permits a Muslim to choose the interpretation of religious teachings that best suits his own circumstances and causes the least harm." Two recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammed claim that "Difference of opinion in the Muslim community is a sign of divine favor" and "It is a mercy of God that the theologians differ in opinion," and this principle allows for "diverse interpretation of the same religious texts" ("Ikhtilāf" 499).

Many Muslims seek to foster unity among religious diversity.

The Amman Message is a statement of agreement among Muslims worldwide. The statement "amounts to a historical, universal and unanimous religious and political consensus (*ijma')* of the *Ummah* (nation) of Islam in our day, and a consolidation of traditional, orthodox Islam. The significance of this is: (1) that it is the first time in over a thousand years that the *Ummah* has formally and specifically come to such a pluralistic mutual inter-recognition; and (2) that such a recognition is religiously legally binding on Muslims since the Prophet (may peace and blessings be upon him) said: *My Ummah will not agree upon an error*." The statement is endorsed by "over 500 leading Muslim scholars worldwide" and defines "who is a Muslim" (recognizing several schools of Islam), forbids calling another Muslim a non-Muslim, and who is allowed to issue *fatwas*, rulings that are authoritative ("The Amman Message").

Similar numbers of Muslims and Christians have a positive view of religious diversity.

In 2017, "Roughly two-thirds of U.S. Muslims say there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of Islam (64%), while 31% say there is only one true way to interpret the teachings of the faith. Changes in opinions on this question have been modest since the past two iterations of this survey. Among U.S. Christians, the balance is similar: 60% say there is more than one true way to interpret the teachings of Christianity, while 34% say there is just one true way to interpret their faith" (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 114).

Before addressing religious belief and practice, teachers might consider their beliefs and established scholarship on what makes a person part of a specific religion.

According to the American Academy of Religion's guide on teaching religion in public schools, a person's religion can be defined in many ways. "Do you have to follow all the rules of a religion to be religious? Religious identification is both a deeply personal and broadly cultural feature of human society. Because religion is intertwined with ethnicity and culture, many people identify themselves as members of a religious community even if they infrequently participate in that religion's rituals or only partially adopt that religion's beliefs. Others can be deeply committed to their religious practice and yet see themselves as on the periphery of their religious community. What it means to be 'really religious' within one tradition can also vary dramatically from place to place" (American Academy of Religion 17).

Muslim Population in the United States and Worldwide

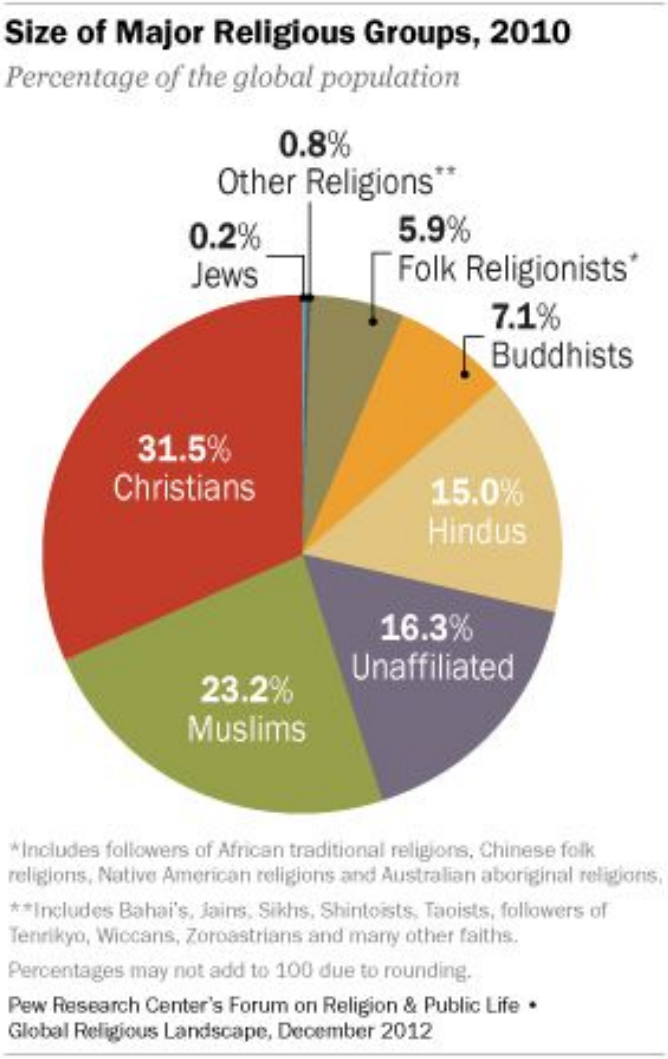
In the United States in 2014, Muslims made up about 1% of the population:

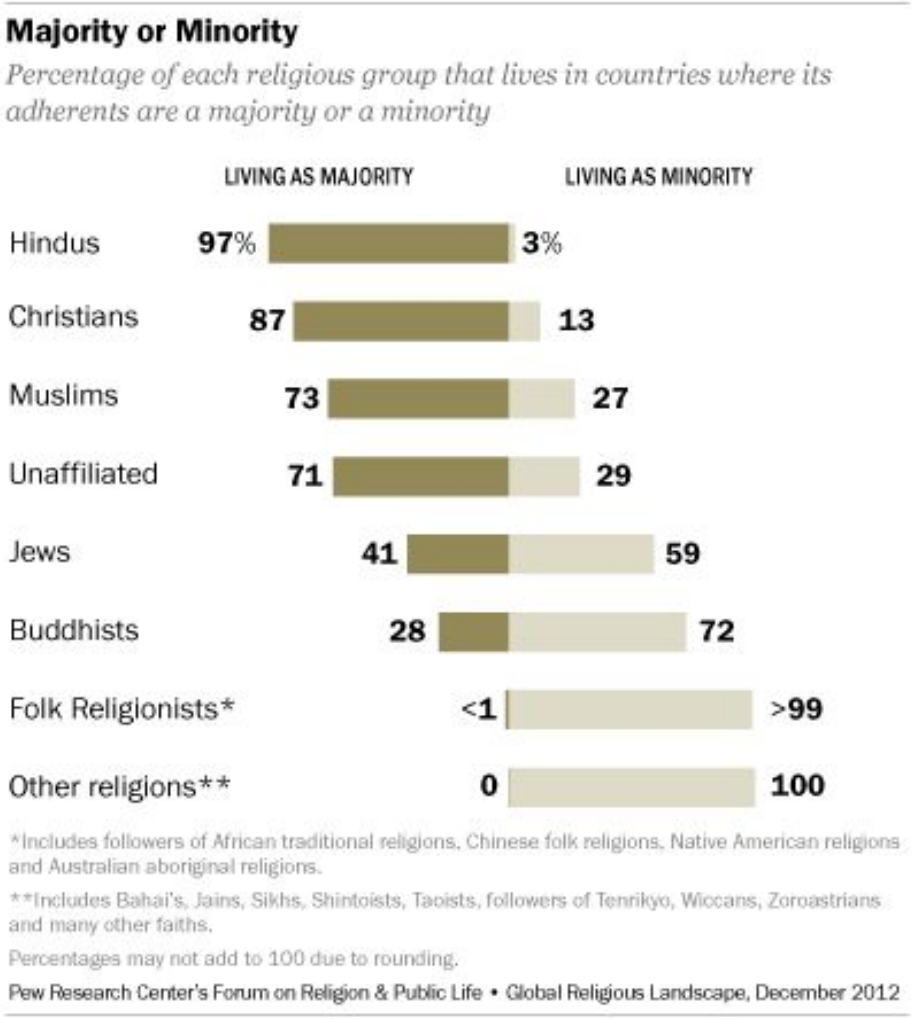
Christian	70.6%
▸ Evangelical Protestant	25.4%
▸ Mainline Protestant	14.7%
▸ Historically Black Protestant	6.5%
Catholic	20.8%
▸ Mormon	1.6%
▸ Orthodox Christian	0.5%
Jehovah's Witness	0.8%
▸ Other Christian	0.4%
Non-Christian Faiths	5.9%
Jewish	1.9%
Muslim	0.9%
Buddhist	0.7%
Hindu	0.7%
Other World Religions	0.3%
▸ Other Faiths	1.5%
Unaffiliated (religious "nones")	22.8%
Atheist	3.1%
Agnostic	4.0%
▸ Nothing in particular	15.8%
Don't know	0.6%

("Religious Landscape Survey")

As of July 2017, "Muslims account for roughly 1.0% of the total U.S. population (including both adults and children), as well as approximately 0.8% of the U.S. adult population," and the number is growing (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims").

Worldwide, however, a quarter of the world's population are Muslim, and three-quarters of those live in Muslim-majority countries:



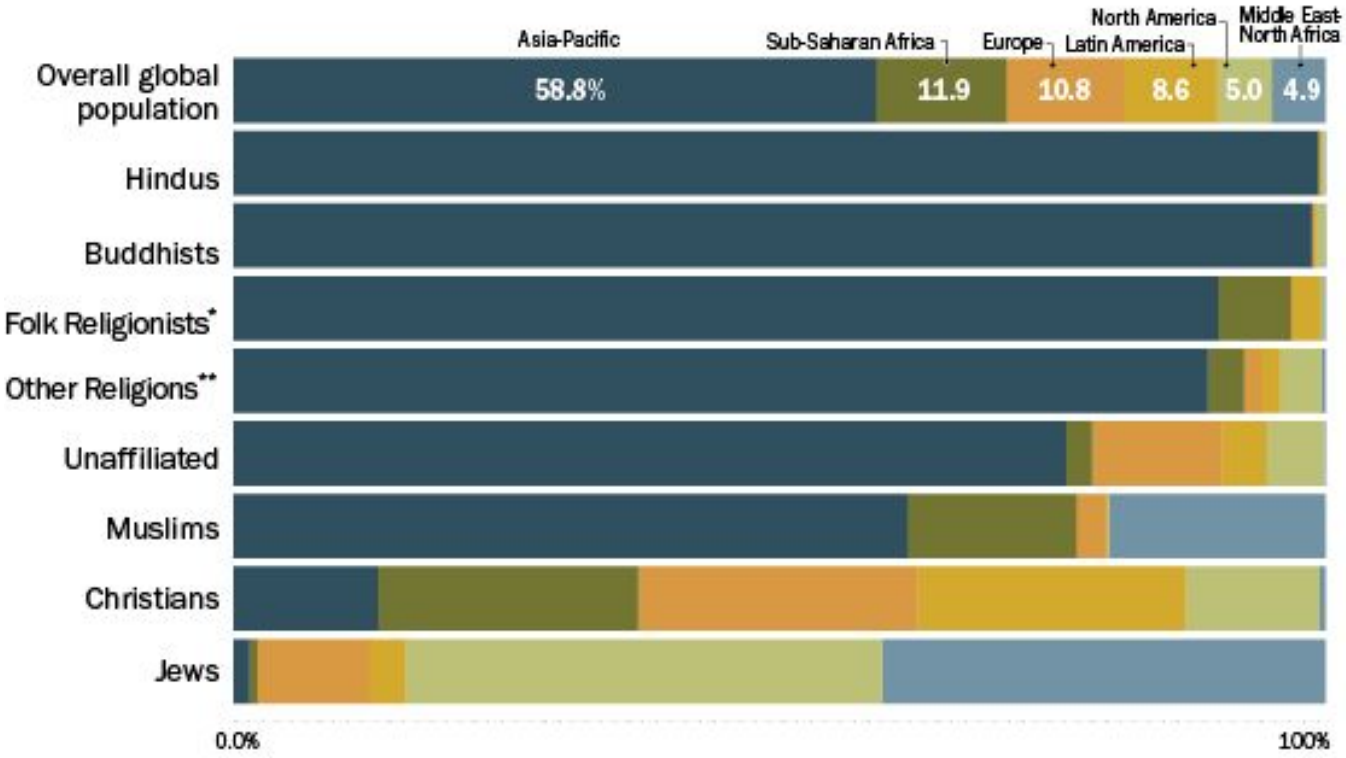


("The Global Religious Landscape")

Most of the world's Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific, Middle East-North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa regions:

Geographic Distribution of Religious Groups

Percentage of each group's total population that lives in particular regions



More detailed bar charts, with percentages labeled, appear in the chapters on each of the eight religious groups. For example, the chart showing the percentage of Christians living in each region appears on page 17.

*Includes followers of African traditional religions, Chinese folk religions, Native American religions and Australian aboriginal religions.

**Includes Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, Zoroastrians and many other faiths.

Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

("The Global Religious Landscape")

In the United States, many Muslims are immigrants:

(Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 22)

Of these, in 2017, not more than 15% of U.S. immigrant Muslims are from a single country (32), and of all U.S. Muslims, 82% are citizens, 42% born in the U.S. and 40% naturalized (34). Muslims in the U.S. have considerable racial diversity: 41% white, 20% black, 28% Asian, and 8% Hispanic (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 35).

Sunni and Shi'a Muslims

"What is the difference between Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims? Sunnis and Shiites are two subgroups of Muslims, just as Catholics and Protestants are two subgroups within Christianity. The Sunni-Shiite divide is nearly 1,400 years old, dating back to a dispute over the succession of leadership in the Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632. While the two groups agree on some core tenets of Islam, there are differences in beliefs and practices, and in some cases Sunnis do not consider Shiites to be Muslims. With the exception of a few countries, including Iran (which is majority Shiite) as well as Iraq and Lebanon (which are split), most nations with a large number of Muslims have more Sunnis than Shiites" (Lipka).

In the United States in 2017, "Slightly more than half of Muslim Americans identify with the Sunni branch of Islam (55%), while 16% identify as Shiite, 4% identify with other groups (such as Ahmadiyya or the Nation of Islam), and 14% do not specify a tradition. An additional 10% declined to answer the question" (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 113).

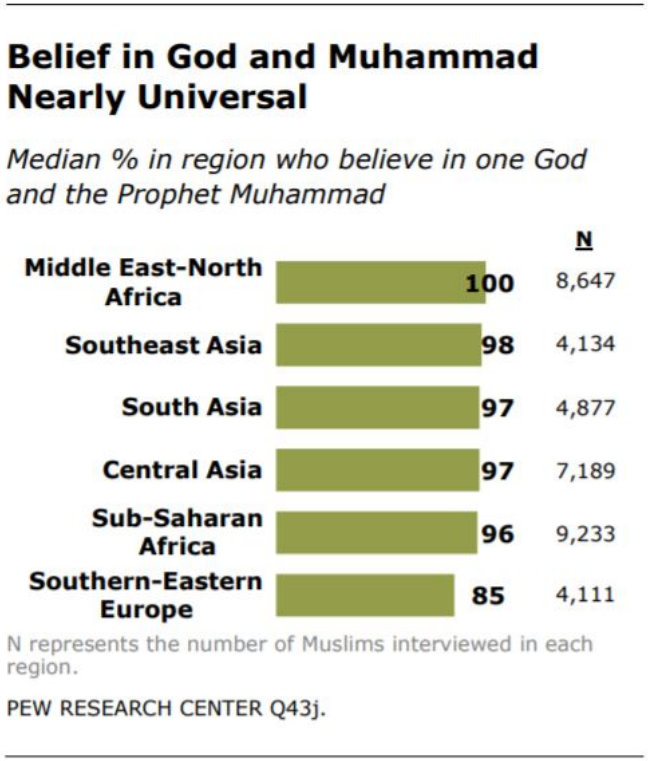
According to a 2012 survey, "Outside of the Middle East and North Africa, the distinction between Sunni and Shia appears to be of lesser consequence. In many of the countries surveyed in Central Asia, for instance, most Muslims do not identify with either branch of Islam, saying instead that they are 'just a Muslim.' A similar pattern prevails in Southern and Eastern Europe, where pluralities or majorities in all countries identify as 'just a Muslim'" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "The World's Muslims" 9).

While teaching these beliefs, teachers can consider central beliefs that are shared by many Muslims, both from scholars of religion and from survey data.

Belief in God and the Prophet Muhammad is nearly universal among Muslims in many areas of the world, according to a Pew survey:

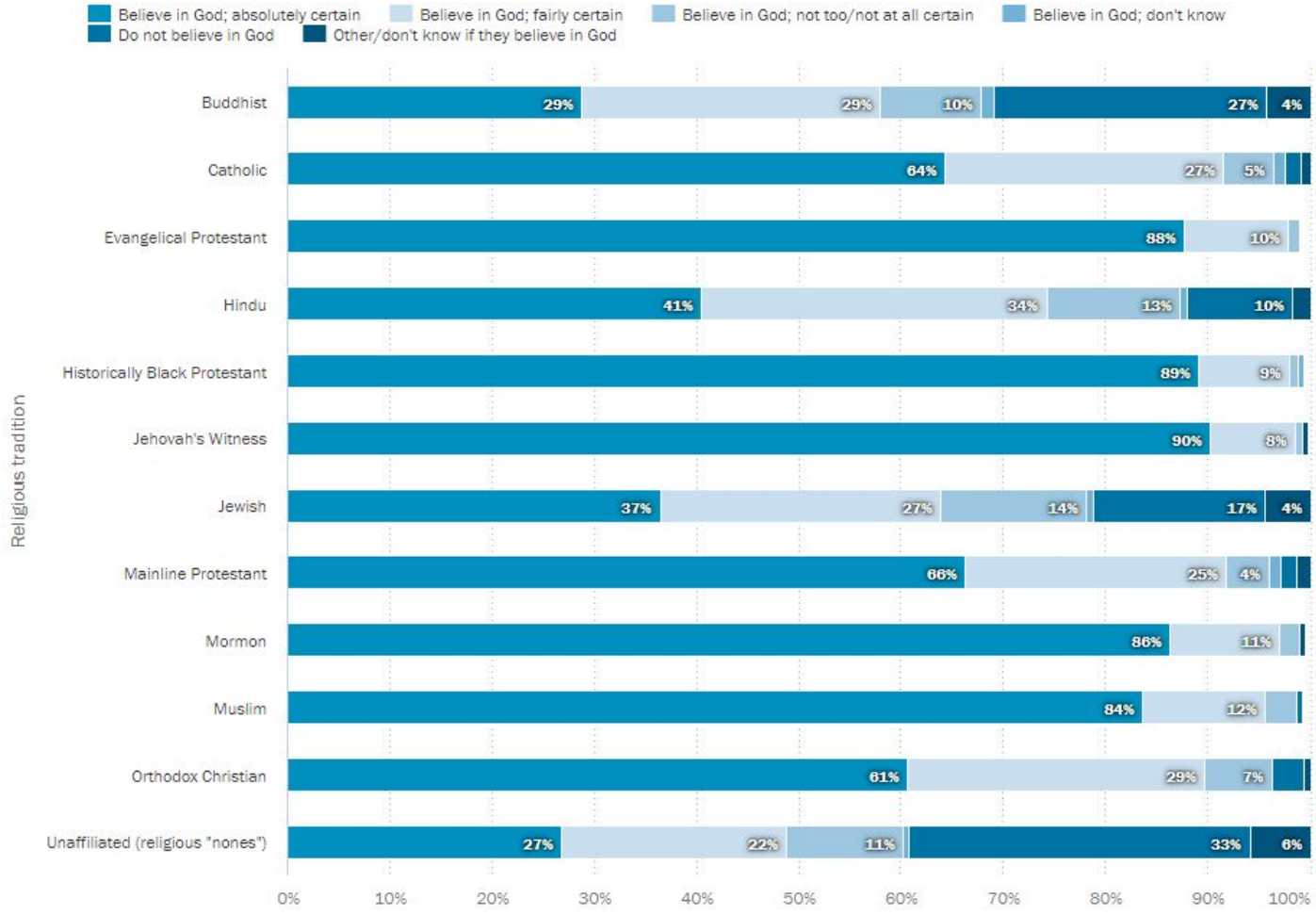
(Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "The World's Muslims" 7)

(Recall that Allah, the word for God that Muslims often use, is the "Arabic word for God" [Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 131].)



In the United States in 2014, belief in God among Muslims was one of the highest among religious groups surveyed:

Belief in God by religious group



Sample sizes and margins of error vary from subgroup to subgroup, from year to year and from state to state. You can see the sample size for the estimates in this chart on rollover or in the last column of the table. And visit this table to see approximate margins of error for a group of a given size. Readers should always bear in mind the approximate margin of error for the group they are examining when making comparisons with other groups or assessing the significance of trends over time. For full question wording, see the survey questionnaire.

("Religious Landscape Study")

There are similarities and differences in the Bible and the Qur'an.

"In both Bible and Qur'an, Abraham is an important figure. Via his first-born son Ishmael on one side and his son Isaac on the other, he is believed to be the patriarch of both Arabs and Israelites." While the Biblical account focuses on Abraham's covenant with God and promised land for God's people, the Qur'anic account "is not so much about the relation of God to a specific people, as to a monotheism that is in principle valid for all humankind" (*Sharing Mary* 103).

"The dramatic event of the near-sacrifice of Abraham's son Isaac [in the Bible] is also mentioned in the Qur'an, but according to Islamic tradition, the intended victim is Ishmael… Noteworthy is the willingness of Ishmael to cooperate in the sacrifice" (105). Teachers may also wish to point out how Hagar's journey to find water for Ishmael is depicted in both texts and especially commemorated during the Hajj (104-5).

Jesus (in the Qur'an, 'Isa) "continues building on the Law of Moses… cures the blind and lepers and raises the dead… surrounded by his disciples," including celebrating significant meals, in both the New Testament and the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, however, "Jesus was not divine and could perform miracles only with the help of God… he is a mortal just like Muhammad" and "a particularly eminent prophet" (197).

The faith and practice of Muslims is based on several sources, which can be interpreted in different ways.

"Sharia stands for Islamic or sacred law. It is an Arabic word meaning 'the way' or 'the path to water.' For centuries, Muslim scholars have given a broad definition of Sharia reflecting the diversity of interpretations on how Muslims have attempted to best understand and practice their faith. The general definition of Sharia as understood by most American Muslims is as follows: Sharia represents how practicing Muslims can best lead their daily lives in accordance with God's divine guidance. It may be generally defined as the Islamic law revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad. That divine law was then interpreted by Muslim scholars over the centuries… Within Islam, there are four principle sources of Sharia, which are accepted by consensus. They are (1) the Qur'an, Islamic sacred scripture, which Muslims believe God revealed to humanity through the Prophet Muhammad, (2) the Sunna (or Prophetic model of behavior recorded in a literature called the Hadith), (3) the consensus of religious scholars, and (4) analogy" ("Sharia").

Asifa Quraishi-Landes further clarifies, "As an Islamic concept, [Sharia] means 'God's Way' or 'God's Law' – the divine way that God exhorts everyone to live. The details of that behavior are in scriptural sources (the Quran and documented Prophetic Tradition). The legal rules that a derived from those sources (through the process of ijtihad – legal interpretation) is called 'fiqh' (literally, 'understanding'). Because ijtihad is a human process, fiqh is pluralistic; it is made up of several different (equally legitimate) schools of Islamic law… If you're thinking of specific legal rules that you've heard are 'Islamic law,' you're actually thinking of fiqh" (Quraishi-Landes).

Another important point in the understanding of Sharia, as Edward Curtis points out, is that the fear that "Sharia law" could be implemented in the U.S. is "a fundamental misunderstanding" of the nature of Sharia. Religious practices, such as prayer and fasting, are "not typically enforced or coerced by an Islamic court" because, in the Qur'an, there is no coercion or compulsion in religion (Curtis, "Sharia").

There are many common beliefs held by Muslims. Teachers should consider scholarship on those beliefs as well as statistics on which beliefs are held.

"Traditionally, Muslims adhere to several articles of faith. Among the most widely known are: there is only one God; God has sent numerous messengers, with Muhammad being His final Prophet; God has revealed Holy Scriptures, including the Quran; God's angels exist, even if people cannot see them; there will be a Day of Judgment, when God will determine whether individuals are consigned to heaven or hell; and God's will and knowledge are absolute, meaning that people are subject to fate or predestination" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "The World's Muslims" 12).

"The Five Pillars of Islam mandate specific values and behaviors that all Muslims must adhere to…

- The first pillar of Islam is called the *Shahadah* (the act of bearing witness). It requires that a Muslim declare his devotion to Allah by saying "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah"…
- The second pillar of Islam requires Muslims to pray at five specified times a day. When praying each devotee must face in the direction of the Great Mosque in Mecca, the holiest city in Islam…
- The third pillar of Islam requires Muslims to pay an annual tax to a religious official or a government representative… usually 2.5 percent of the individual's wealth, [to] be used to help the poor, relieve debt, help travelers, encourage conversion to Islam, and assist those actively serving Allah…
- The fourth pillar involves fasting from sunrise until sunset during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar — Ramadan…
- The fifth pillar of Islam is the *al-hajj*, or annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia… [this pillar] requires every healthy and financially able Muslim to make the journey to Mecca once in their lifetime to perform a series of required rituals…

In addition to practicing the Five Pillars of Islam, Muslims adhere to the Six Pillars of Faith: a belief in Allah; a belief in Allah's angels; a belief in Allah's revealed texts, including the Quran; a belief in Allah's messengers; a belief in a judgment day; and a belief in Allah's complete control over all worldly affairs" (Moore 141)

Muslim practice has some things in common with Christian practice, with some important distinctions. Christians and Muslims both have varying beliefs about ritual and sacramentality.

In a 2017 survey about two of the Five Pillars, fasting and daily prayer, "eight-in-ten Muslim Americans say they fast during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. And roughly four-in-ten Muslims (42%) say they pray all five salah daily, with another 17% saying they make some of the five salah each day" (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 25).

Jamal J. Elias explains ritual requirements and the difference between ritual prayer and other types of prayer: "Even though they recognize the importance of these rituals, many Muslims do not observe all of them or observe them only partially. Islamic law provides extensive guidelines" for specific circumstances and other requirements for rituals. Ritual daily prayer (*salat*), for example, "is not to be confused with the informal, private prayer that most Muslims engage in anytime they feel like asking God for something or when simply conversing with Him"; instead, it is "a ritual obligation which must be fulfilled in order to reaffirm one's relationship with God" (Elias 65-67).

James Renard notes that both Christians and Muslims have different understandings, depending on particular group or personal beliefs, about rituals and holy places:

- "In Christian practice, a great deal of formal praying occurs in the context of rituals that many identify as sacraments. Muslims likewise attend to formal, generally standardized formulations in ritual context, such as the five daily prayers, pilgrimage, and special communal sessions during times of heightened attentiveness, such as the nights of Ramadan's fast. But those rituals do not carry the soteriological freight of Christian sacraments, and among Christians, Roman Catholic and Orthodox soteriologies involve ritual more than do most Protestant communities" (Renard 220).
- "For hundreds of millions of believers in both traditions, blessed places associated with paragons of piety and devotion continue to play an important role. At the same time, large numbers of Christians and Muslims reject any explicit association of 'holiness' with any earthly site" (Renard 220).

Similarities Between Christians and Muslims

A Pew study finds that, worldwide, the opinions about whether Muslim and Christianity are alike are divided. Significantly, this increases with more knowledge of Christianity; "Muslims who say they know at least something about Christianity are considerably more likely than those with less knowledge to believe the two faiths have a lot in common" ("Chapter 6: Interfaith Relations").

In the United States, Muslims and Christians report the importance of religion and attendance at religious services at similar numbers (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 25).

Knowledge Related to Views of Common Ground Between Islam and Christianity

% of Muslims who say Islam and Christianity have a lot in common, among those who know ...

	A great deal/Some	Not very much/Nothing	*Diff.*
Southern-Eastern Europe			
Bosnia-Herz.	73	43	*+30*
Russia	72	42	*+30*
Kosovo	35	26	*+9*
Central Asia			
Kyrgyzstan	62	28	*+34*
Turkey	51	21	*+30*
Kazakhstan	68	50	*+18*
Tajikistan	31	19	*+12*
Southeast Asia			
Malaysia	29	7	*+22*
South Asia			
Bangladesh	27	16	*+11*
Middle East-North Africa			
Tunisia	68	27	*+41*
Iraq	63	24	*+39*
Lebanon	49	28	*+21*
Morocco	48	33	*+15*
Egypt	42	27	*+15*
Palestinian terr.	54	41	*+13*
Jordan	27	16	*+11*

Only countries where differences are statistically significant are shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q22b, Q24.

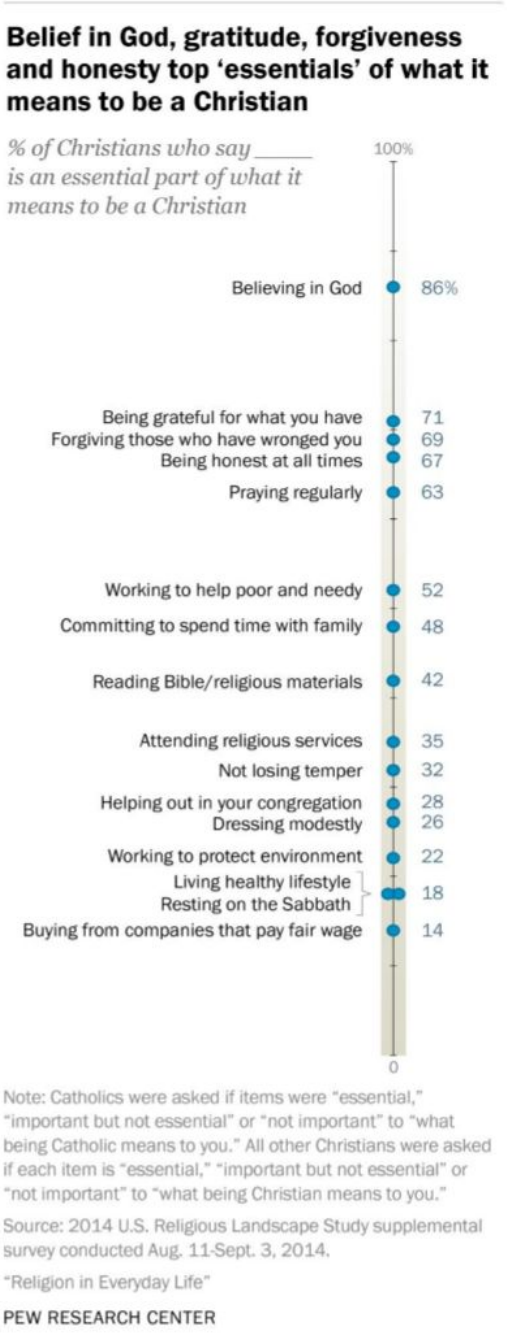
U.S. Muslims, Christians exhibit similar levels of religious commitment

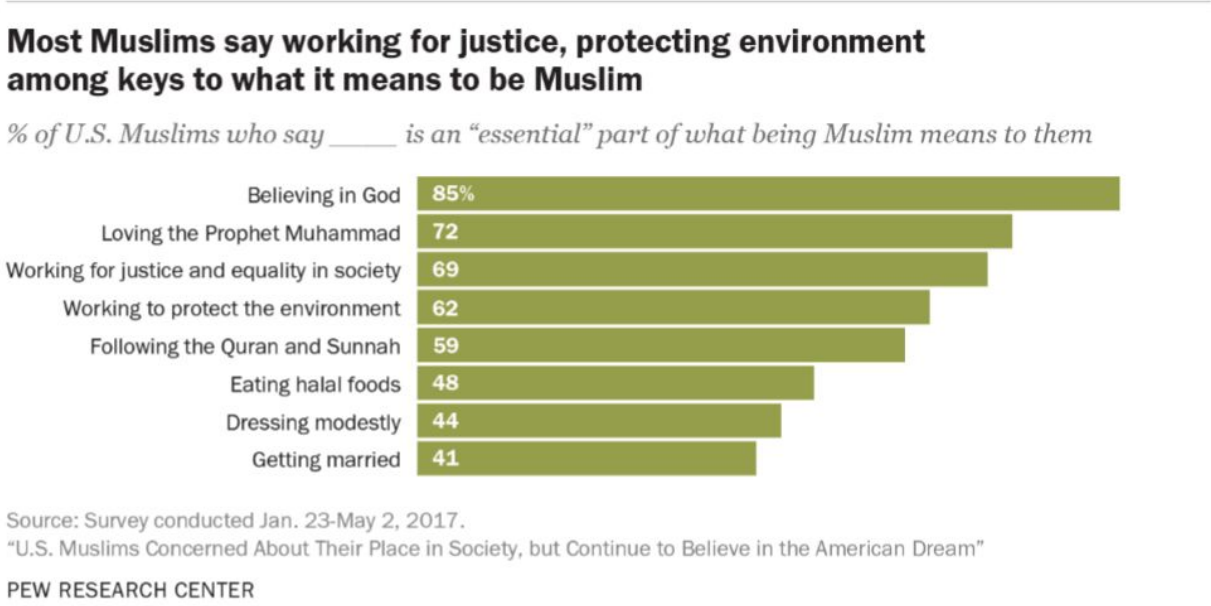
	U.S. Muslims	U.S. Christians
How important is religion in your life?	%	%
Very important	65	68
Somewhat important	22	25
Not too/not at all important	12	7
Don't know	1	1
	100	100
How often do you attend religious services?	%	%
Weekly	43	45
Once or twice a month	12	16
Few times a year	20	21
Seldom/never	26	17
Don't know	<1	1
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Muslims were asked, "On average, how often do you attend a mosque or Islamic center for salah or Jumah prayer? More than once a week, once a week for Jumah prayer, once or twice a month, a few times a year especially for the Eid, seldom, or never?" Christians were asked, "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services? More than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?"
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. Data on importance of religion for U.S. Christians come from Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study. Data on church attendance for U.S. Christians come from aggregated Pew Research Center surveys conducted January-April 2017.
"U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

U.S. Muslims prioritize belief and justice as "essential" parts of being Muslim, while U.S. Christians focus on belief and personal morality.

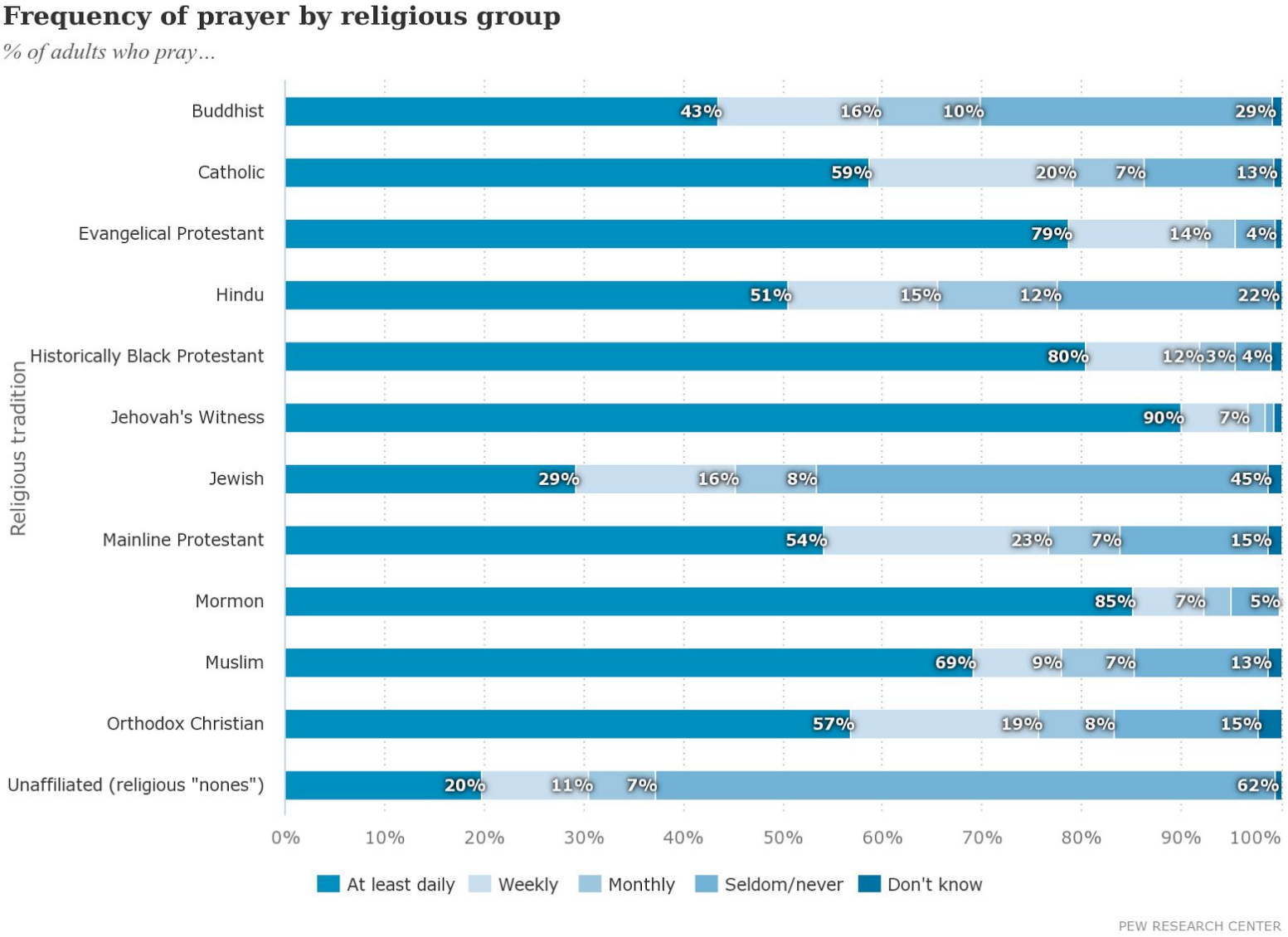




(Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 24)

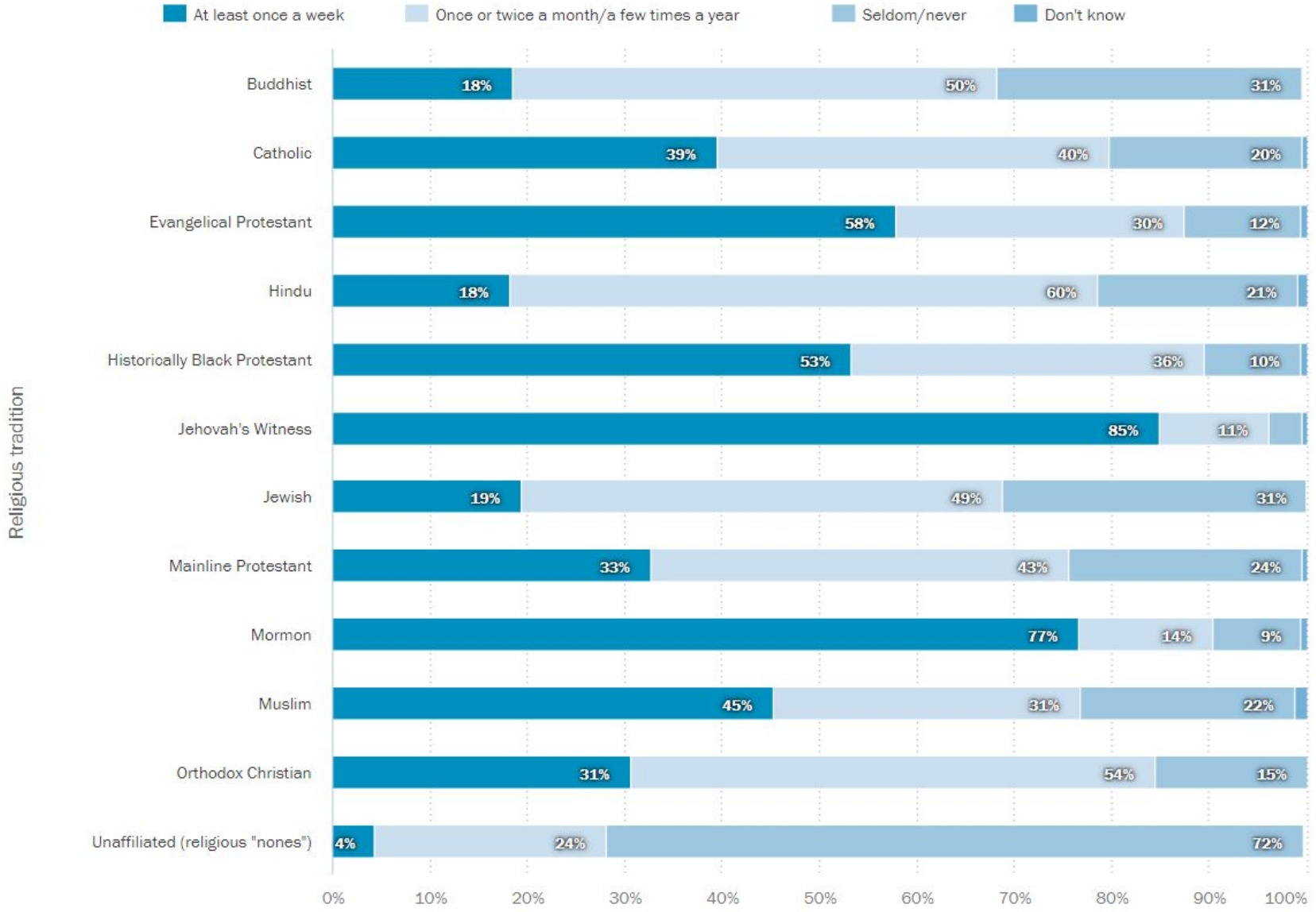
(Pew Forum, "Religion in Everyday Life" 7)

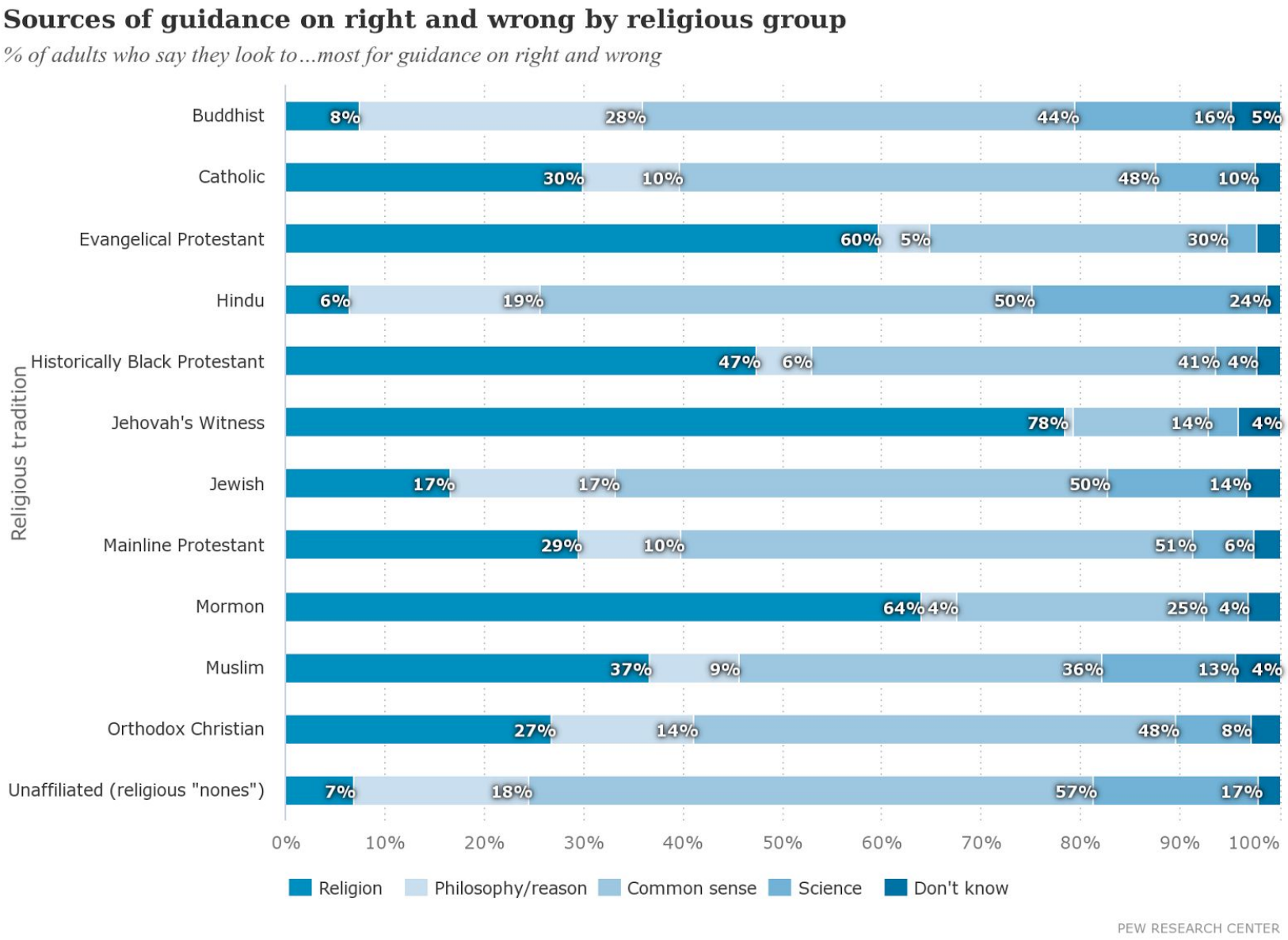
In the categories “Frequency of prayer,” “Attendance at religious services,” and “Sources of guidance on right and wrong,” Muslims can be compared to other religious group in the United States a 2014 survey. (See the study for more categories.)



Attendance at religious services by religious group

% of adults who attend religious services...



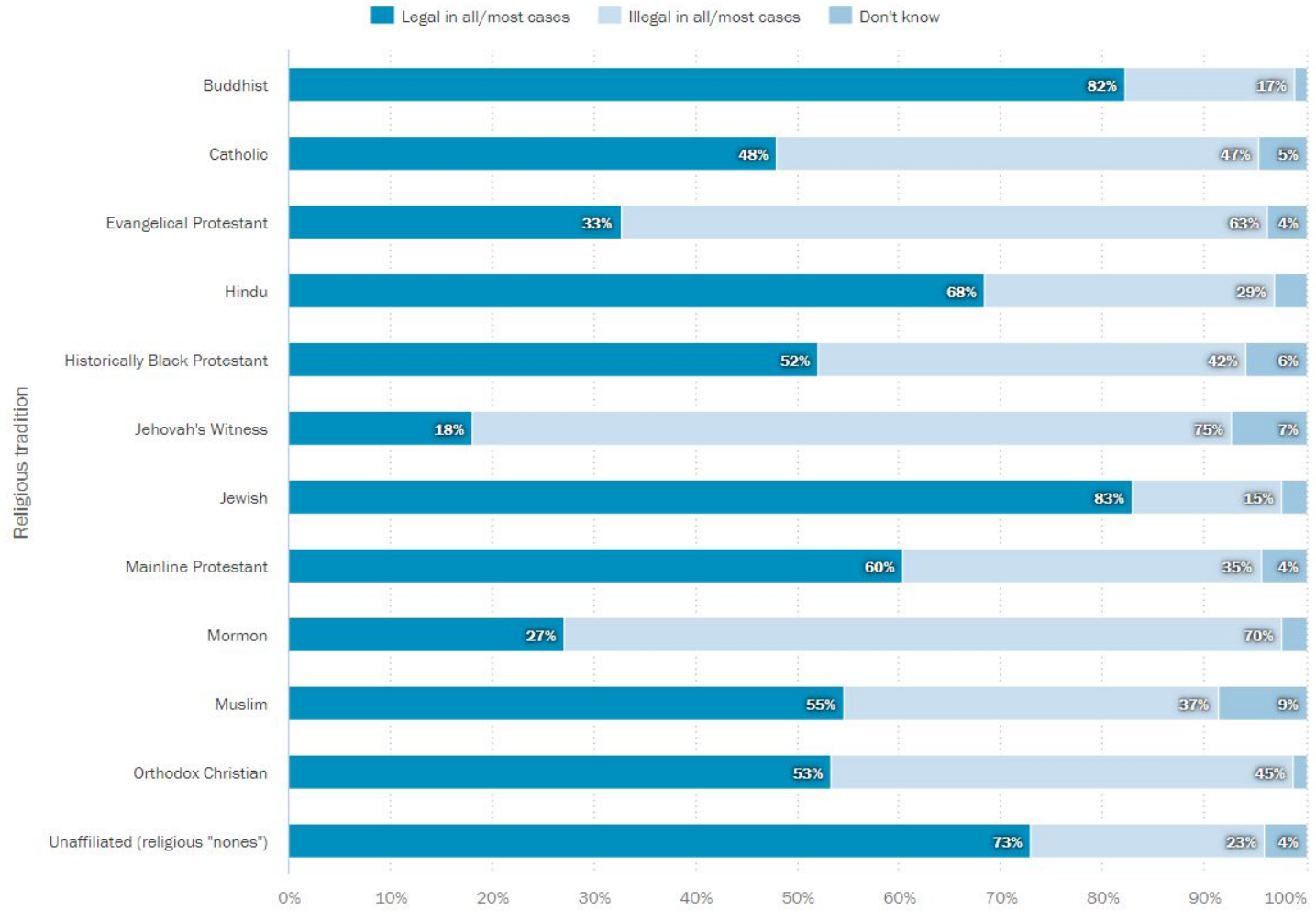


("Religious Landscape Study")

In social issues in a 2014 study, Muslims were split on the legality of abortion. Twice as many Muslims said government aid "does more harm than good" than said "does more good than harm." Muslims were more likely than not to say that "stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost." (See the study for more categories.)

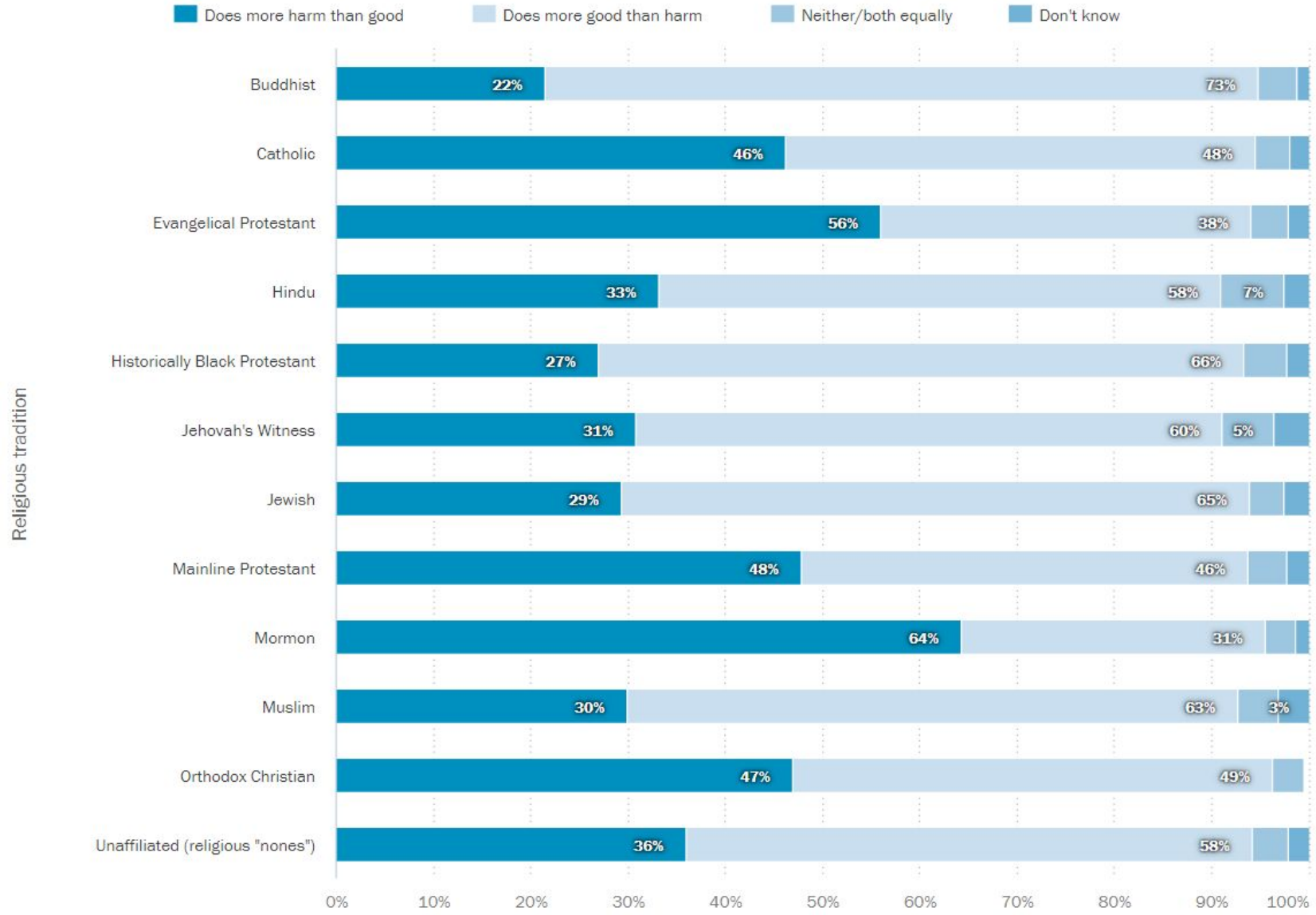
Views about abortion by religious group

% of adults who say abortion should be...



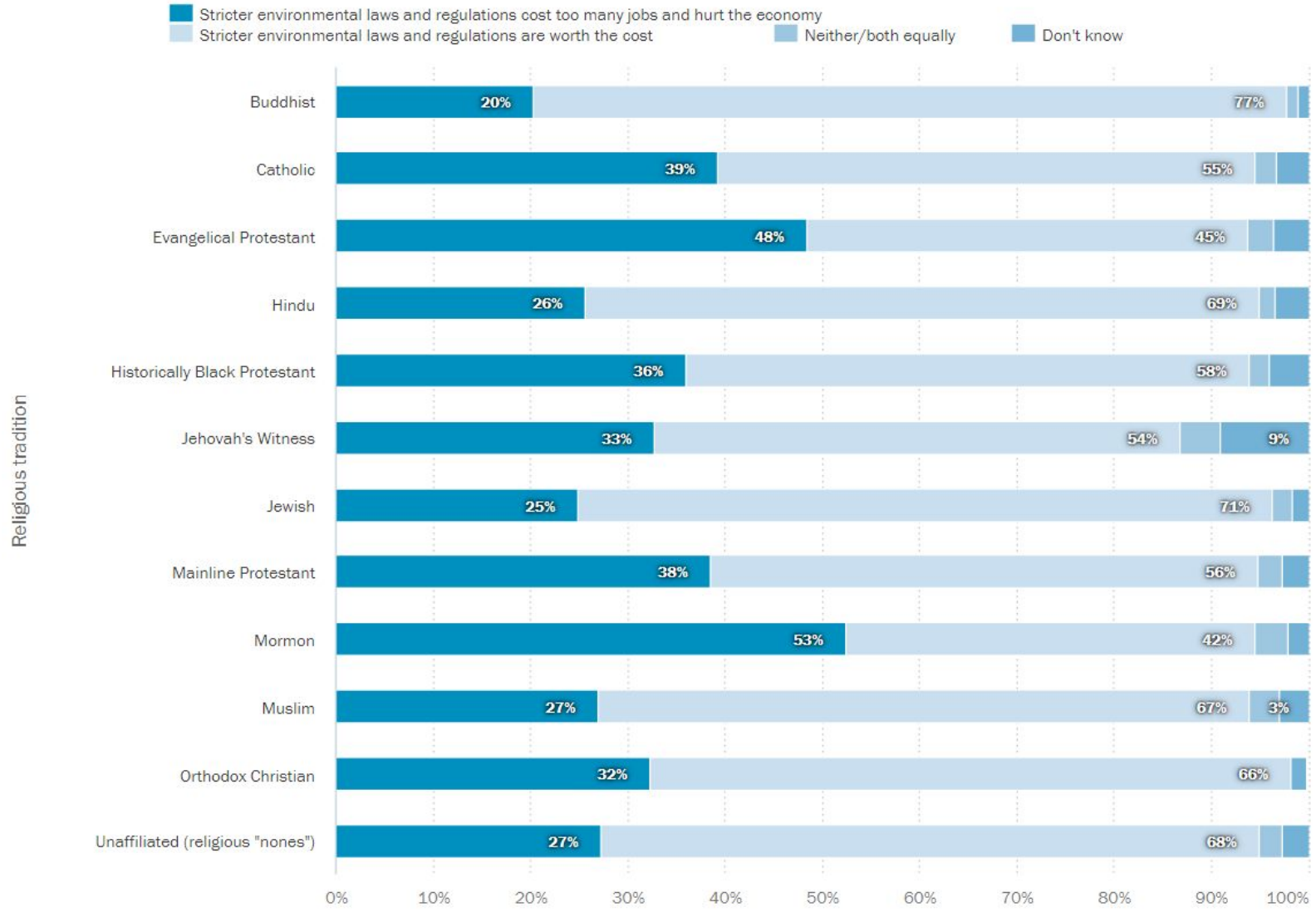
Views about government aid to the poor by religious group

% of adults who say government aid to the poor...



Views about environmental regulation by religious group

% of adults who say…



("Religious Landscape Survey")

One aspect of Muslim life that often fascinates students is the role of women in Islam. As with other aspects of Muslim faith and practice, it is difficult and often counterproductive to generalize. Students may be interested in studying statistics and points of view from Muslim women.

- In the United States in 2017, "about four-in-ten Muslim women say they always wear hijab in public, almost identical to the share who said this in previous surveys" (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 105). "The percentage of U.S. Muslim women who say they wear the hijab all the time in public has remained steady over the past decade: About four-in-ten say they always wear the headcover or hijab in public (38%) or that they do so most of the time (5%). Just 15% say they wear hijab some of the time, and 42% say they never wear it" (Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 111).

- When Leila Ahmed first came to the United States from Egypt, she found that the women's studies conferences she attended "focused primarily on white women and were overwhelmingly attended by white women," and those women would approach her "with furious questions and declarations openly dismissive about Islam" while ignoring the similar "patriarchal vision" in Judaism and Christianity. For Ahmed, "the further implication was that, whereas they - white women, Christian women, Jewish women - could rethink their heritage and religions and traditions, we had to abandon ours because they were just intrinsically, essentially, and irredeemably misogynist and patriarchal in a way that theirs (apparently) were not" (*Columbia Sourcebook* 184-5).

- Asma Gull Hasan explains different opinions about the *hijab*: "For Americans, the *hijab* looks repressive and may serve as symbolic proof that Muslim women are oppressed.... To some [American Muslims], wearing *hijab* is a way of showing physically a preservation of traditional Islam, as it was practiced in the country from which the immigrants came... To others, wearing *hijab* is an act of devotion, a way of serving God." She discusses the Qur'anic passage that directs that "men and women be modest in their appearance and lower their gaze with with the opposite sex," which is interpreted by ""the majority of world Muslims" to mean that "women should cover their heads when out in public," as well as one that "instructs that men and women should cover their heads while praying" (208).

- For herself, Asma Gull Hasan makes her own decision: "I don't think the Qur'an and God are asking me to wear *hijab*. I could be wrong, but I believe modesty comes from the inside-out, not the outside-in" (209).

- In response to those who generalize about Islam and misogyny, Asma Gull Hasan responds, "Women *are* oppressed in *some* countries where the majority of the population is Muslim… However, such oppression is not mandated by the Qur'an. It is in fact condemned by it" (211).

- Azizah al-Hibri, in an essay with "emphasis on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the prophet" as sources, explains women's rights in Islam: "Islam guarantees for women, among other things, the right to an education similar to that of the male, the right to financial independence, and even the right to engage in *ijtihad* [interpretation of the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet]. Islam also views marriage as an institution in which human beings find tranquility and affection with each other… the Muslim wife is a companion to her husband and not a maid" (216, 218, 425).

- Azizah al-Hibri also details the mis-application of women's rights by those outside the Muslim community: "Significantly, while Muslim women struggled repeatedly in international fora to raise basic issues of survival and development, such as hunger, water, war, and disease, patriarchal Western women have insisted on making the veil, clitoridectomy, and polygyny their primary preoccupations instead" (223).

- Amina Wadud writes clearly about the equality of women and men in the Qur'an: "There is no indication that the Qur'an intends for us to understand that there is a primordial distinction between males and females with regard to spiritual potential." Views that there is an "inherent distinction between males and females" and that "men represent the norm and are therefore fully human" are problematic and lead to "stereotypes" and "restrictions"; for Wadud, "I do not hold these views, nor do I find support in them in the Qur'an" (225).

- In 2016, The Huffington Post collected statements from women about the many reasons why they choose to wear hijab. The author, Yasmin Nouh, writes, "#HijabToMe is showing the world how truly diverse Muslim women who wear the headscarf can be," and highlights these personal statements, among many others:

    - "I support choice. I support an (un)veiled woman's right to body autonomy." - @_shireenahmed_ on Twitter
    - "Hijab to me reflects personal identity, and not where you stand in your religion... We are not tied down by hijab, but by people's conception of how a hijabi should look and act like... Every hijabi has a message to tell the world that she sends through the way she wears it. So let every girl write her message with her own unique brush!" - sara__alsharif on Instagram
    - "#hijabtome is having the freedom to live and express myself in my own way while still holding on to my beliefs and values. It also allows me to combat the negative stereotypes that are all over the media in this islamophobic environment. #hijabtome is also a sign of strength and forces people to see me for who I am and not for whatever unrealistic standard of beauty is being idolized at the moment." - fifi_hijabista on Instagram
    - "When starting to wear hijab you have to be content and confident about yourself before you step forward. Although it took me a while, I realized the only obstacle was myself, and when I overcame the thoughts of what other people might think, I understood that the only reason why I'm doing this is for God and nothing else matters." - austereattire on Instagram
    - "I wear it because it tells a story of who I am, where I'm from, and what I believe in before I even speak." - jojzii on Instagram
    - "Living in a society where the standards of beauty are unrealistic, #hijabtome made me realized that many of the stereotypical and sexist ideologies that plague today's societies stem from the judgement of women based on their physical look. #hijabtome is the freedom to rewrite my path, the path where the people I meet do not have a choice but to get to know me for the highly intelligent, confident and funny woman that I am." - thepeulhprincess_ on Instagram
    - "#HijabToMe is an everyday reminder of who I aspire to be. It keeps me in moral and mental check. It encourages me to put my best self out there. I love that Hijab makes me visibly Muslim." - hassanah_pfh on Instagram (Nouh)

The Crusades

Students who study the Crusades should note the mix of motives involved: “Recent Western scholarship on has emphasised the wide range of motives held by the Crusaders, which included fairly crudely materials ones,” such as travel, land, and money, but also “a considerable measure of religious motivation, including the longing to make the pilgrimage to the Holy Land as well as the desire to secure eternal salvation” (Goddard 84).

As recently as the year 2000, though, Hugh Goddard argues strongly about the difference between Christian and Muslim views of the Crusades: “What is absolutely clear is that even modern Westerners continue to see the Crusades as positive examples of heroic and self-sacrificial enthusiasm for a good cause,” while at the time of the Crusades, “Muslim reactions varied from puzzlement to horror” and have “left a powerful legacy of mistrust in the Arab world and throughout the Muslim world, and the crusading era is not forgotten” (90-91).

According to Edward Curtis, the legacy of the crusades can be seen today in the way that many Muslims react to public insults to the Prophet Muhammad. These “attacks on Muhammad are never just about a religious insult" but are instead “scary” to many Muslims, because of the legacy of the Crusades and the fear that an insult to Muhammad may lead to violence, as it has in the past (Curtis, National Endowment for the Humanities).

The Attacks of September 11, 2001

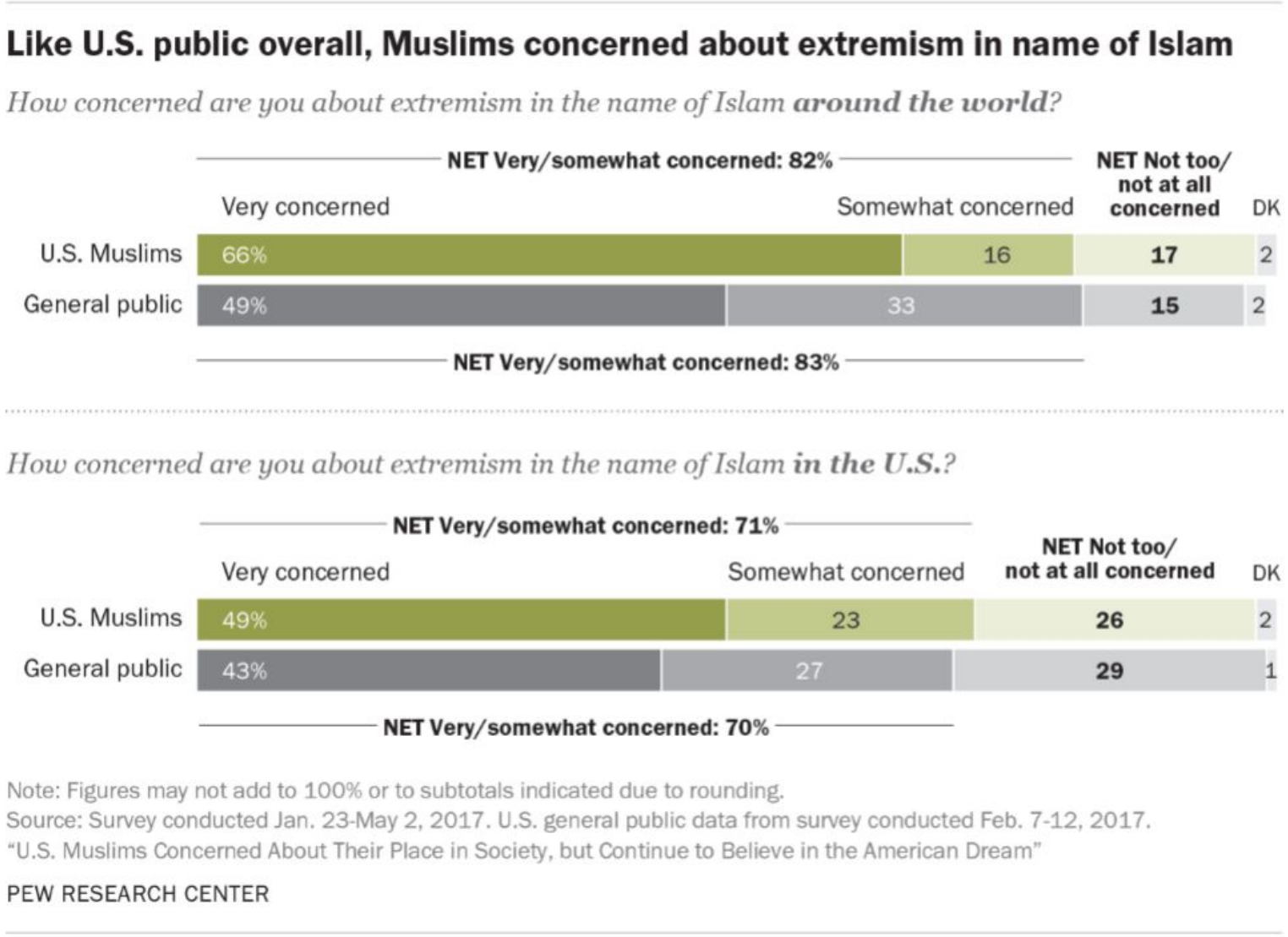
Among many statements against terrorism and violence after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Fiqh Council of North America released "a *fatwa*, an authoritative interpretation of Islamic law and ethics" that was almost "universally recognized as legitimate or binding my American Muslims" with approval by "every major American Muslim organization" and "over three hundred mosques and local Islamic centers." The statement clearly "condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism" (*Columbia Sourcebook* 293).

Perceptions of Islam and Violence

The American Academy of Religion includes a special note about this misconception:
"Is Islam a violent religion? Islam (like Christianity, Buddhism, Paganism, etc.) is neither violent nor nonviolent. In the hands of believers, all religious expressions are capable of being interpreted in ways that can inspire the full range of human agency from the heinous to the heroic. It is one of the clearest manifestations of religious illiteracy when any tradition is classified with a singular characterization. The widespread association in non-Muslim communities of Islam with violence is due to a host of factors, including media coverage of violent activities perpetrated by a minority of Muslims. In the absence of opportunities to study Islam in its rich and full diversity, these depictions are often wrongly interpreted as comprehensively representative of the tradition itself" (American Academy of Religion 17).

Students who have misconceptions about the violence caused by Muslim-Americans may be interested in the statistics kept by the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security at Duke University:
"The 54 fatalities caused by Muslim-American extremists in 2016 brought the total since 9/11 to 123. More than 240,000 Americans were murdered over the same period. In 2016 alone, 188 Americans were killed in mass shootings. This figure does not include the victims of Muslim-American extremists" (Kurzman 2).

Muslims are as concerned or more concerned than others in the U.S. about extremism:



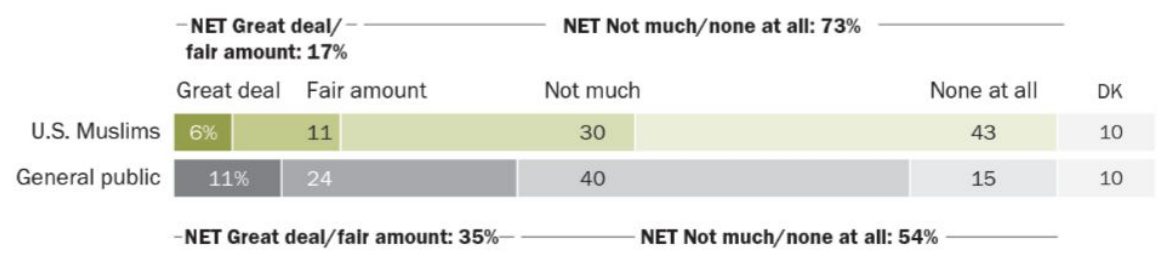
(Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 9)

Fewer Muslims than the general public see connections between U.S. Muslims and extremism, and Muslims are less likely to justify killing of civilians.

(Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 10-11)

Three-quarters of Muslims see little or no support for extremism among U.S. Muslims

% who say there is_____support for extremism among Muslims living in the U.S.

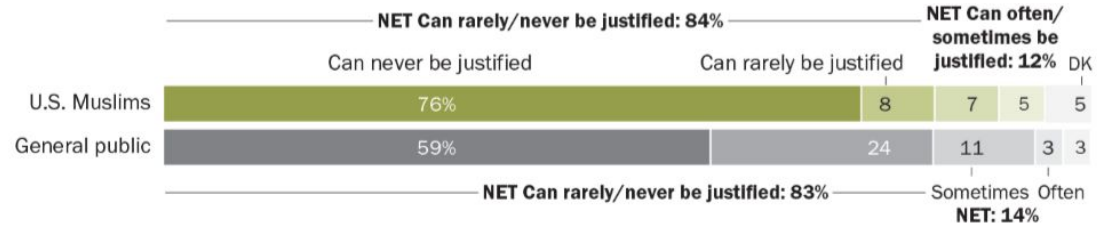


Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. U.S. general public data from survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.
"U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Compared with general public, Muslims more likely to say targeting, killing civilians is never justifiable

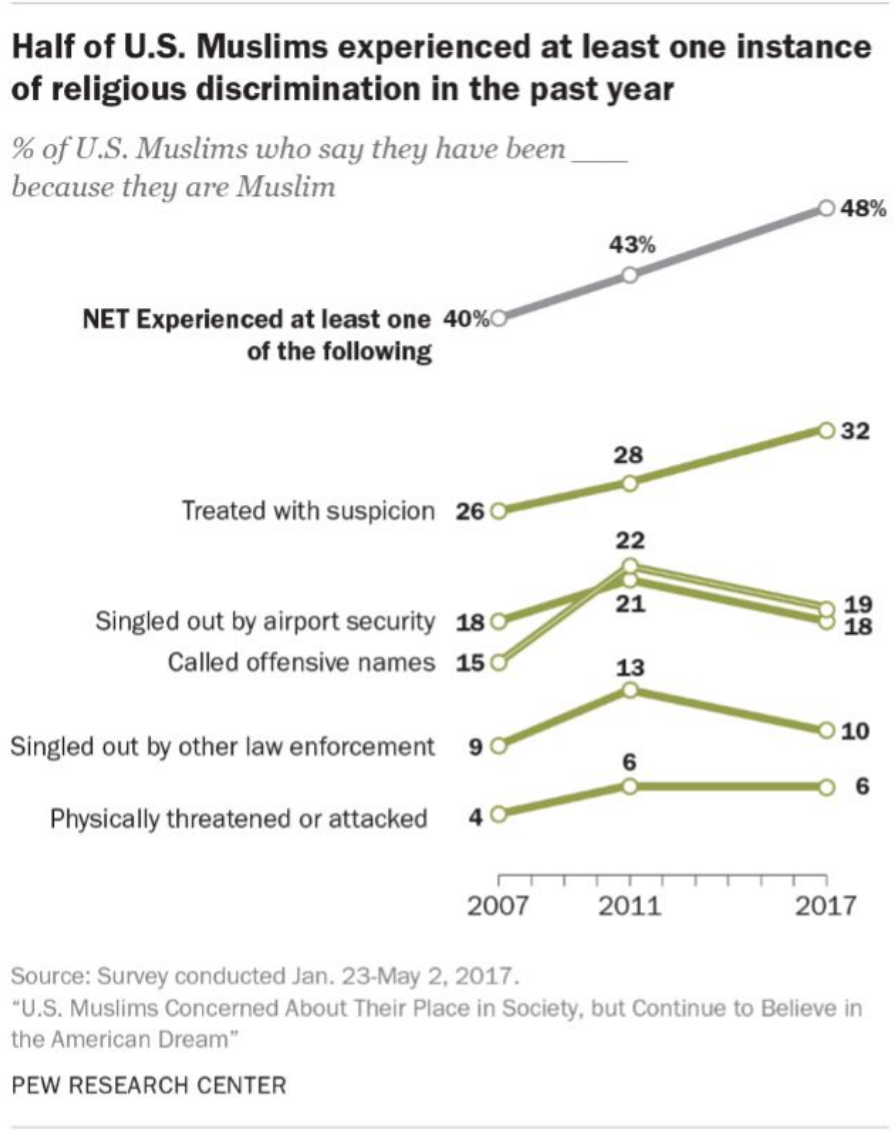
Some people think targeting and killing civilians can be justified in order to further a political, social or religious cause. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence can never be justified. How do you personally feel?



Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. U.S. general public data from survey conducted Feb. 7-12, 2017.
"U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Many U.S. Muslims report experiencing religious discrimination:

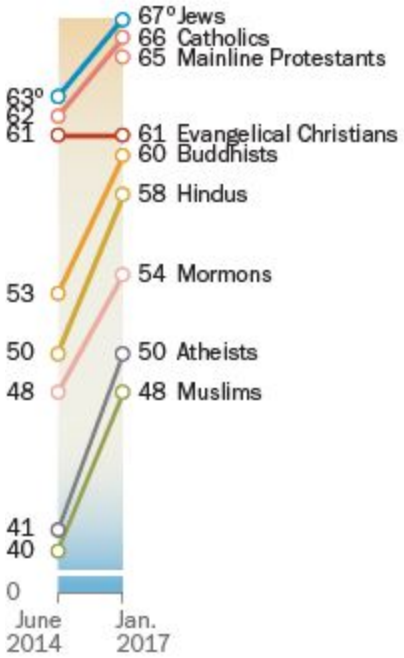


(Pew Forum, "U.S. Muslims" 13)

On the hopeful side, American impressions of Muslims have been improving over the past few years, according to a recent Pew study.

Americans feeling warmer toward variety of religious groups

Mean thermometer ratings



Note: Based on respondents who received version of "feeling thermometer" question that used slider; see topline for more detail. In June 2014, respondents were not asked to rate mainline Protestants.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.
"Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Religious groups rated more warmly by those with personal connections

Mean thermometer ratings

		Know anyone from group?	
	Total	Yes	No
Jews	67°	72°	58°
Catholics	66	67	59
Mainline Protestants	65	71	56
Evangelical Christians	61	66	54
Buddhists	60	75	56
Hindus	58	70	54
Mormons	54	58	51
Atheists	50	59	38
Muslims	48	56	42

Note: Based on respondents who received version of "feeling thermometer" question that used slider; see topline for more detail.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.
"Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

More say they know a Muslim, fewer know an evangelical Christian

% of U.S. adults who know someone who is ...

	June 2014	Jan 2017	Change
Catholic	87%	86%	-1
Not religious	77	77	–
Evangelical Christian	70	61	-9
Jewish	61	61	–
Atheist	59	60	+1
Mainline Protestant	n/a	58	n/a
Mormon	44	43	-1
Muslim	38	45	+7
Buddhist	23	23	–
Hindu	22	22	–

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-23, 2017.
"Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

("Americans Express")

This resource was originally created as a resource for Catholic school teachers, based on the following curriculum outline. I hope all teachers will find it useful, while being aware that some of the original focus on the relationship of Islam to Christianity and Catholicism may remain in this version.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). "Option E. Ecumenical and Interreligious Issues," *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. 49-53. *USCCB*, 2008, http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/upload/high-school-curriculum-framework.pdf.

Recommended Resources

The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States, edited by Edward E. Curtis IV, Columbia University Press, 2008.

American Academy of Religion on Religion in the Schools:
https://www.aarweb.org/about/religion-schools

Pew Research Center on Religion & Public Life:
http://www.pewforum.org/

Qur'an in Arabic and English, with audio files:
https://quran.com/

Teaching Tolerance:
http://www.tolerance.org/

Works Cited

American Academy of Religion. "Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K–12 Public Schools in the United States." AAR, May 2010, https://www.aarweb.org/about/teaching-about-religion-aar-guidelines-for-k-12-public-schools.

"Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings Toward Religious Groups." *Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life*, 15 February 2017, http://www.pewforum.org/2017/02/15/americans-express-increasingly-warm-feelings-toward-religious-groups/.

"The Amman Message." *The Official Website of the Amman Message*, 2017, http://ammanmessage.com/.

Bill, James A. and John Alden Williams. *Roman Catholics & Shi'i Muslims: Prayer, Passion, & Politics*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

"Chapter 6: Interfaith Relations." The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society. *Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life*, April 30, 2013, http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-interfaith-relations/.

The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States, edited by Edward E. Curtis IV, Columbia University Press, 2008.

Curtis, Edward. National Endowment for the Humanities: Muslim American Identities, Past and Present, 25 July 2017, Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis. Seminar Notes.

Curtis, Edward. "Sharia." National Endowment for the Humanities: Muslim American Identities, Past and Present, 10 July 2017, Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis. Lecture Notes.

Elias, Jamal J. "Beliefs, Rituals, and Practices." *Religions of the World: Islam*. Prentice Hall, 1999. pp. 61-81.

GhaneaBassiri, Kambiz. *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

"The Global Religious Landscape." *Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life*, 18 December 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/.

Goddard, Hugh. *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. New Amsterdam Books, 2000.

"Ikhtilāf." *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions*, edited by Wendy Doniger, Merriam-Webster, 1999, p. 499.

Kurzman, Charles. "Muslim-American Involvement with Violent Extremism, 2016." *Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security at Duke University*, 26 January 2017, https://sites.duke.edu/tcths/.

Lipka, Michael. "Muslims and Islam: Key findings in the U.S. and around the world." *Pew Research Center*, May 26, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/26/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world.

Moore, James R. "Islam in Social Studies Education: What We Should Teach Secondary Students and Why It Matters." *The Social Studies*, July/August 2006, pp. 139-144.

The New American Bible, Revised Edition. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, http://www.usccb.org/bible/. Accessed 24 July 2017.

Nouh, Yasmin. "The Beautiful Reasons Why These Women Love Wearing A Hijab." *The Huffington Post*, 11 May 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-beautiful-reasons-why-these-women-love-wearing-a-hijab_us_57320575e4b0bc9cb0482225.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. "U.S. Muslims Concerned about Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream." Pew Research Center, 26 July 2017. [Link to online version: http://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/]

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. "Religion in Everyday Life." Pew Research Center, 12 April 2016. [Link to online version: http://www.pewforum.org/2016/04/12/religion-in-everyday-life/]

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. "The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity." Pew Research Center, 9 August 2012. [Link to online version: http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/]

Quraishi-Landes, Asifa. Understanding Sharia in an American Context. *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding*, 26 July 2011, https://www.ispu.org/understanding-sharia-in-an-american-context/.

"Religious Landscape Study." *Pew Research Center Religion and Public Life*, 2014, http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

Renard, John. "Themes in Prayer and Mystical Theology." *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective*. University of California Press, 2011. pp. 202-222.

"Sharia." *What is the Truth About American Muslims? Questions and Answers*. *Teaching Tolerance*. The Interfaith Alliance and Religious Freedom Project of the First Amendment Center, http://www.tolerance.org/publication/sharia. Accessed 27 July 2017.

Sharing Mary: Bible and Qur'an Side by Side, edited by Marlies ter Borg, CreateSpace, 2010.