

Religion, Religiosity and Employment Inequalities in France: Accounting for Religious Diversity

1. Research Context and Theoretical Focus

The influence of migratory origin as a factor exposing French citizens to employment penalties has been well documented: direct descendants of Maghrebi and Turkish/Middle Eastern populations face the greatest disadvantages, expressed notably through lower employment rates and higher inactivity risks (Abdelgadir & Fouka, 2020; Adida et al., 2010; Galember, 2024). While much of the existing literature has studied these penalties focusing in migrant origin, this study extends the analysis by exploring the role of religious affiliation and religiosity in shaping employment outcomes, while accounting for origin effects.

Understanding the multidimensional nature of religion is crucial for this analysis, as religion cannot be reduced to formal affiliation alone. Within a single religious group, individuals exhibit diverse modes of relating to religion — ranging from nominal identification to active religiosity (Drouhot et al., s. d.). These varying configurations of religious practices and beliefs are consequential for individual life trajectories. Regarding employment outcomes, religious markers — such as first names, surnames, or visible symbols of faith — can in France heighten individuals' exposure to workplace discrimination and reduce their chances of being hired (Adida et al., 2010, Valfort, 2017). However, research also indicates that, for Muslim women, wearing the headscarf may signal a legitimate engagement with Islam and is often associated with longer and more successful educational trajectories, which in principle should facilitate labour market integration (Beaugé, 2023). Beyond individual markers, participation in religious communities can also function as a form of social capital, offering access to networks and employment opportunities that help immigrants and their descendants overcome structural barriers (Haapajarvi, 2014).

Religion can therefore operate both as a resource and as a constraint in processes of socioeconomic inclusion. Examining religion not only through affiliation but also through forms of religiosity offers a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms underlying the “Muslim disadvantage” in the French postcolonial secular context.

2. Data and measures

The analyses are based on the Trajectories and Origins 2 (TeO2) survey (INED-INSEE, 2019-2020). The database is overrepresented in immigrants and descendants of immigrants — individuals most likely to declare a religion compared to children of French-born parents. This survey is one of the rare national datasets in France including a wide range of questions on religion and religious practices and beliefs, making it a crucial resource. The initial sample contains 27,181 respondents, but was filtered to include only individuals of working age likely to have stable employment: aged 30 to 60, French citizens who are descendants of immigrants or of French-born parents (who may themselves be third-generation descendants).

Independent variable

I. Religious Typology (Clusters)

This variable is derived from the partitioning work conducted by Drouhot et al., who developed a typology of religiosity based on indicators of religious importance, practice, and visibility. Five clusters were identified, capturing the diversity of ways individuals relate to religion in contemporary France. The *Affiliated* group represents those with a nominal religious identity but low levels of belief and infrequent practice, serving as the reference category. The *Cultural* group combines strict observance of fasting with limited religiosity and rare engagement in other religious practices. Individuals in the *High subjective religiosity* group express strong personal faith yet do not practice regularly. The *Private practitioner* cluster gathers respondents with high levels of religiosity and frequent practices that remain largely private or non-communal, often without visible religious markers. Finally, the *Visible practitioner* group is characterized by intense religiosity expressed through both regular community participation and visible signs of faith, such as wearing religious symbols.

II. Religious Affiliation (Declared)

In the TeO2 survey, religious affiliation is derived from two questions: “*Do you currently have a religion?*” and, if so, “*Which one?*” Respondents’ answers were grouped into four main categories. The first group comprises atheists or individuals reporting no religion, who serve as the reference category. The second group includes Catholics, the historically dominant religious tradition in France. The third group consists of Muslims, most of whom have Maghrebi or Sub-Saharan backgrounds. Finally, the Christian category encompasses a heterogeneous set of respondents, including Protestant, Orthodox, and Evangelical denominations, as well as those who simply identified as “Christian” without further specification.

III. Control Variables

The following control variables were included to account for sociodemographic factors that could influence the relationship between religion and employment outcomes: age (reference category: 30-40 years), educational attainment (reference: degree higher than *baccalauréat* +2), family situation (reference: single without children), parental social class (reference: households with a dominant executive status), parental migratory origin (reference: both parents born French), and sex (reference: male).

Descriptive Statistics by Religious Affiliation

Characteristic	Catholics, N = 5,860	Muslims, N = 619	Christians, N = 1,197	Overall, N = 7,676
Cluster				
Cultural	8.1% (n=238)	42% (n=648)	8.7% (n=67)	11% (n=953)
Affiliated	70% (n=1,893)	7.4% (n=127)	62% (n=386)	64% (n=2,406)
Private practitioner	8.7% (n=279)	44% (n=795)	16% (n=180)	13% (n=1,254)
Believer	11% (n=346)	2.4% (n=57)	9.7% (n=73)	10% (n=476)
Visible practitioner	1.8% (n=75)	3.8% (n=62)	2.8% (n=21)	2.1% (n=158)
NA	120	22	62	204

Source: TeO2 data, real effectives, percentage weighted.

3. Analytical strategy

After identifying a Muslim penalty regarding labor market participation in previous analyses, the question guiding this study is whether this penalty varies according to relationship to religion. What is the role of religiosity type in the penalties found in the literature thus far attributed to religious affiliation? Is there a form of religiosity that disadvantages individuals regardless of affiliation? The final objective is to examine whether there are disadvantage trends associated with one specific religious type that would be shared among individuals from different clusters. To answer these questions, a series of logistic regressions were performed and, according to the suggestions of (Mood, 2010), the results will be presented as averaged marginal probabilities.

First, a baseline model was estimated to assess the correlation between religious affiliation and employment outcomes, holding all other factors constant. This model serves to identify the disadvantage associated with Muslim affiliation. Next, a second model tested the effect of religiosity clusters, also controlling for the same covariates. When significant effects were observed, the analysis was extended to a third model, which estimated the cluster effect while controlling for affiliation. This specification allows us to detect the influence of the *relationship to religion* independently of formal affiliation, effectively forcing statistical independence between these two dimensions. Finally, a fourth model focused on the interaction between affiliation and religiosity cluster, in order to examine how active religiosity — involving, for example, the wearing of religious symbols, fasting, attending worship, or praying weekly — modifies employment chances within different affiliation groups (Catholics, Christians, and Muslims).

Not aiming to explain these penalties by investigating mechanisms, this analysis constitutes a first step toward understanding the role of other dimensions of religion in producing social inequalities affecting French citizens while accounting for their social and migratory origin. The following results are expected from these models :

H1: Clusters in which Muslims constitute the majority — namely the *Cultural* and *Private Practitioner* groups — are expected to show lower probabilities of being active in the labour market, consistent with prior findings on the “Muslim penalty” associated with religious affiliation.

H2: The *Affiliated* cluster, characterised by weak religious commitment and infrequent practices, is expected to show no significant correlation with access to employment.

H3: Conversely, clusters marked by regular practice and high levels of belief are expected to display negative associations with employment participation.

5. Preliminary Findings

Comparing the three regression models reveals how the introduction of religiosity clusters and interaction terms modifies estimated effects on employment outcomes.

Results confirm a significant Muslim affiliation effect: Muslim respondents, especially women, are more likely to be inactive (but not unemployed), even after controlling for parental origin. Muslim women regardless of parents' origin: both Muslim women who are children of Maghrebis and of French-born parents show lower chances of participating in the labor market. When introducing clusters, being a private or visible practitioner is positively correlated with inactivity — effects that remain significant even after controlling for affiliation. This suggests that, beyond affiliation, active religiosity independently reduces the likelihood of employment participation.

Results of Logistic Regressions (log(OR)) on the Effect of Affiliation, Cluster, and Cluster with Controlled Affiliation on Inactivity

	Category	Coefficient
Cluster	Affiliated	—
	Cultural	-0,3
	Believer	0,04
	Private practitioner	0.78**
	Visible practitioner	0.89*
Cluster (affiliation controlled)	Affiliated	—
	Cultural	-0,4
	Believer	0,1
	Private practitioner	0.76**
	Visible practitioner	1.00**

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01

Source: TeO2 data, weighted.

These preliminary results indicate that the disadvantage is not solely driven by Muslim affiliation but also by the *intensity and visibility* of religious commitment. Further analyses will test whether these patterns hold across Christian and Catholic subgroups.

Next Steps

The preliminary findings reveal that religiosity type — specifically being a practicing individual — is associated with reduced labor market participation independent of religious affiliation. This suggests that the Muslim employment penalty documented in previous literature may be partially driven by religiosity patterns rather than affiliation alone.

Further analyses will determine whether this effect is driven by being Muslim or whether it is also present among individuals of Christian and Catholic affiliation. These results have important implications for understanding religious discrimination in the French labor market and the mechanisms through which religion influences social stratification in postcolonial secular contexts.

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