

A MIXED-METHODS STUDY ON OUT-GROUP HOSTILITY AND RELIGIOSITY AMONG MUSLIMS IN GERMAN YOUTH PRISONS

The Role of Religious Discrimination and Opportunity Structure

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This article addresses the perceived religious discrimination and lack of religious opportunity structure among imprisoned young Muslims and how these religion-related prison experiences affect their out-group hostility. Furthermore, it examines whether the link between these experiences and out-group hostility depends on religiosity. Building on general strain theory, religion-related prison experiences are conceptualized as events potentially leading to out-group hostility. The coping literature is used to identify different dimensions of religiosity that can either strengthen or weaken the relationship of interest. Data from German youth prisons were analyzed. Qualitative findings ($N = 22$) indicate imprisoned Muslims experience disadvantages in practicing their religion but feel grateful rather than discriminated against. Quantitative results ($N = 311$) show perceived religious discrimination is positively linked to out-group hostility, while lack of religious opportunity structure is not. Religiosity did not moderate the association between perceived religious discrimination and out-group hostility.

Keywords: out-group hostility; Islam; youth prison; discrimination; general strain theory

INTRODUCTION

As religious pluralization is an integral part of German society due to continued immigration (Pickel, 2017; Steinmann, 2024b), different religions have also found their way into youth prisons. Most youths in prison identify as either Christian or Muslim (Stelly et al., 2022).

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Unlike other religions, Christianity is firmly established in German prison structures. As Muslims are a minority in German prisons, this environment may pose certain challenges, which are increasingly being discussed for imprisoned Muslims in general (Becci & Roy, 2015; Jahn, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2022). We contribute to this discussion by investigating young (male) Muslims' religion-related prison experiences during their incarceration. By these experiences, we mean perceived religious discrimination (PRD) and lack of religious opportunity structure (LROS). These experiences shape attitudes and behaviors, potentially fostering hostility toward out-groups. Out-group hostility aligns with the concept of prejudice (Brown & Zagefka, 2005), defined as an intergroup phenomenon in which one's own group (ingroup) is viewed more favorably than other groups (out-groups). Thus, we build on recent research that has discussed religiously motivated out-group hostility among the general population (Kanol, 2021; Kollar & Fleischmann, 2022; Koopmans, 2015; Steinmann, 2023; Steinmann & Pickel, 2025). We also explore whether the link between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility varies by religiosity. In line with research on the paradoxical effects of religiosity (Allport, 1966), we propose that religiosity can act both as a protective and as a detrimental force.¹ We address the following three research questions:

Research Question 1: How can Muslim youths' religion-related prison experiences be described?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between Muslim youths' religion-related prison experiences and their out-group hostility?

Research Question 3: Does the relationship between Muslim youths' religion-related prison experiences and their out-group hostility depend on their religiosity?

Numerous empirical studies of the general population provide substantial evidence that Muslims, a minority group, are often rejected by majority members (e.g., Helbling & Traunmüller, 2020) and lack sufficient religious opportunity structure, which prevents them from religious participation (e.g., Diehl & König, 2013). Since the pioneering work of Beckford and Gilliat (1998), who documented the struggle for equal opportunities in multi-faith prisons, it has been clear that Muslims have similar experiences in prison: Privileges granted to imprisoned Christians in Europe are not given to the same extent to Muslims, a finding that has also been confirmed in later studies (Quraishi, 2008; Wilkinson et al., 2022). Such an unequal treatment is particularly problematic because it can serve as a source of radicalization in prison (Awan, 2013).

To theoretically link religion-related prison experiences, religiosity, and out-group hostility, we draw on general strain theory (Agnew, 1992). Muslim youths' religion-related prison experiences can be conceptualized within this framework as difficult events that may have consequences. We empirically investigate our three research questions using data from the "Young Muslims in Prison" project (Stelly et al., 2022). The mixed-methods approach involved both quantitative and qualitative data and followed a sequential explanatory design (Ivankova et al., 2006). The first research question is answered with the qualitative data; the second and third are answered with the quantitative data. Employing this mixed-methods research design allows more comprehensive insights into imprisoned Muslims' everyday life in German youth prisons and implications for out-group hostility.

RELIGION IN GERMAN PRISONS

Muslims and Christians are equally represented in German youth prisons, highlighting Muslim overrepresentation (Schaffer & Obergfell-Fuchs, 2018; Stelly et al., 2022). Muslim

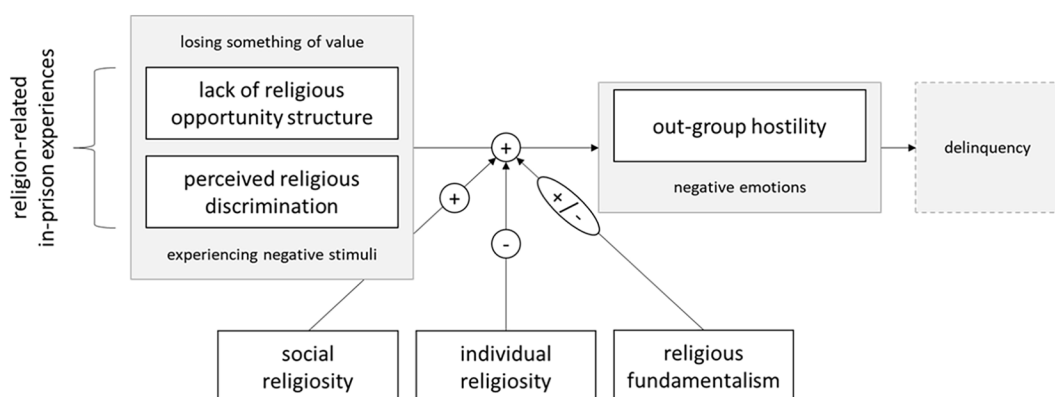


Figure 1: Theoretical Explanation Linking Religion-Related Prison Experiences and Out-Group Hostility With Religiosity Dimensions as Moderators

youths in prison show strong religiosity, exceeding that of imprisoned Christians and non-incarcerated Muslims (Stelly et al., 2022).

In general, the legal framework regulating the practice of religion in all German prisons is quite religion-friendly, allowing privacy and religious freedom (Jahn, 2020). However, minority religions' institutionalization in German prisons varies significantly on a subnational level (Harms-Dalibon, 2017). Some federal states are more open to the concerns of religious minority groups than others. Stelly et al. (2022) have described these differences based on four youth prisons in Germany. In all prisons, Qur'ans and prayer rugs are provided, and fasting during Ramadan is permitted. However, eating according to Islamic dietary restrictions (halal) is only possible through private purchase. Otherwise, the structure of religious opportunities in the prisons varies greatly. Participation in Friday prayers is often not allowed. Muslims rarely have their own prayer room and usually use rooms intended (and furnished) for Christian church service and prayer. Spiritual care services for Muslims also differ from prison to prison. In the facility with the highest number of Muslims, only one Muslim spiritual caregiver was available for 8 hr per week. In another facility, however, two Muslim spiritual caregivers were employed, each working 25 hr per week. The provision of Muslim spiritual care services within any given institution lagged well behind its Christian counterpart. In addition, the celebration of religious festivals, such as Eid, must be organized by the Muslim community outside of prison. Despite the LROS, young Muslims acknowledge that they can practice their religion in prison (Lutz et al., 2021). However, the LROS also leads some young Muslims to disengage from their religion and gradually drift away from their religious beliefs (Bergmann et al., 2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We conceptualize religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility as building blocks of general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), as illustrated in Figure 1. Applying this theory to the prison context aligns with research linking prison strain to prison misconduct (Blevins et al., 2010; McGrath et al., 2012).

RELIGION-RELATED PRISON EXPERIENCES AND OUT-GROUP HOSTILITY

According to general strain theory, delinquent behavior emerges as a response to undesirable experiences. By explicating the underlying social-psychological mechanisms, Agnew (1992) postulated that negative relationships with others can produce strain, which elicits negative emotions and predisposes one to delinquency. Three ideal types of strain are differentiated: (a) *Goal blockage* prevents a person from achieving a desired goal; (b) *losing something of value* means the removal of something a person values; and (c) *experiencing negative stimuli* signifies a person's exposure to something negative.

Prisons can be a threatening environment for incarcerated Muslims due to them being part of a religious minority group (Beckford & Gilliat, 1998; Wilkinson et al., 2022). Applying general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) to the case of imprisoned Muslim youths in Germany elucidates the deeper logic underlying the analyzed scenario. From studies with adult samples, we know that imprisonment can be especially challenging for Muslims who face obstacles in practicing their religion as intended and encounter discrimination during their time in prison (Beckford, 2013; Jahn, 2015; Marcus, 2009). Two religion-related prison experiences are conceptualized as strain:² An LROS can be interpreted as losing something of value, and PRD can be understood as experiencing negative stimuli. Previous studies have extensively documented both strains for Muslim adults in prisons. Jahn (2015) shows that the presence of Muslim organizations in German prisons remains rare. This LROS for Muslims is due to the deep Christian heritage of German prisons. In Britain and France, Joly and Beckford (2006) report that many Muslims report discrimination.³ According to general strain theory (Agnew, 1992), experiencing strain produces negative emotional states, such as anger, depression, and fear. With negative emotions typically arises a desire for corrective actions, with delinquency being one possible response. Here, we focus on only the first part of general strain theory, and disregard the second, the link between negative emotions and delinquent behavior. As we address the relationship between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility, we are interested in a negative affective state as an outcome. As Agnew (1992) pointed out, this is a very important negative emotion because "strain may lead to a hostile attitude—a general dislike and suspicion of others" (p. 61).

To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to explore the link between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility. A growing body of research has already established a broad link between prison strains and negative emotions. Quantitative studies have shown that imprisoned men who experience prison strains (firsthand and vicariously) may respond with violence or substance use due to their increased negative emotionality (McGrath et al., 2012). Men who experienced prison victimization and were dissatisfied with correctional officers reported increased levels of fear of victimization and anger, which in turn were positively associated with prison deviance (Jang, 2020). Qualitative studies have pointed out that one of the most common responses is physical retaliation, especially when the strains trigger anger (Leban et al., 2016). These findings confirm the basic assumptions of general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) within the prison context: Prison strains stem from negative relations with others. Such situations are often followed by negative emotions, especially anger. As religion is of great importance to imprisoned Muslim youths (Stelly et al., 2022), strains involving their religion may be especially consequential and thus lead to out-group hostility. Experiencing an LROS and religious discrimination serves

to reinforce the bright boundaries between insiders (majority members) and outsiders (religious minority members). Bright boundaries imply that a strong sense of “us versus them” exists in a society, while blurred boundaries mean that belonging to multiple groups is possible, such as being German and Muslim (Alba, 2005). If religion-related prison experiences contribute to the narrative of belonging to an undesirable group, young Muslims are likely to exhibit increased out-group hostility in prison. Thus, the following hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Religion-related prison experiences (LROS and PRD) are positively associated with out-group hostility.

INTERPLAY BETWEEN RELIGION-RELATED PRISON EXPERIENCES AND RELIGIOSITY

Definitions of religiosity vary and highly depend on the dimensions that are put in focus (Holdcraft, 2006). For our research purpose, we lean on a concept by Kirkpatrick and Hood (1990) who divided religiosity into behavior and identity. In line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Van Camp et al. (2016) suggest that the religious self-concept comes from one’s individual and social identities. For some, “religion takes place more at an individual level, for others religiosity is primarily a collective identity involving membership in a social group” (Van Camp et al., 2016, p. 4). We indirectly map the two types of religious identity by using a person’s individual and social approach to practice religion to address our research question on the interplay between religion-related prison experiences and religiosity. We recognize that separating individual and social religiosity oversimplifies the issue. A more nuanced approach to understanding the link between Islamic religiosity and out-group hostility involves the concept of distinct Islamic worldviews, as developed from a recent study of imprisoned Muslims in England, France, and Switzerland (Wilkinson & Quraishi, 2024). Worldviews serve as comprehensive frameworks that shape both perception and behavior. A large majority of imprisoned Muslims identify with a worldview of Mainstream Islam (76%), which emphasizes the equality of all people before God. In contrast, out-group hostility is expected among those with a worldview of Islamism (19%) or Islamist Extremism (5%), both of which emphasize a rigid distinction between “us” and “them.” These views are more prevalent among men than women in prison (Schneuwly Purdie et al., 2021). Islamism exaggerates the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, whereas Islamist Extremism not only devalues non-Muslims but also condemns other Muslims deemed morally wrong (Wilkinson & Quraishi, 2024). While we value the concept of worldviews, it merges religiosity with out-group hostility, which we prefer to keep analytically distinct for our research. Therefore, we maintain our dichotomization between individual and social religiosity.

Religion fulfills various roles, such as offering meaning and connecting with a higher power (Pargament et al., 2000). For Muslims, it serves as a unique source of social identity, offering comfort and acceptance (Jang et al., 2018; Leszczensky et al., 2020). Religious involvement has been extensively linked to improved mental health and emotional stability (Koenig et al., 2012), reducing stress (Bradshaw & Ellison, 2010) and anxiety (Ellison et al., 2009). The mechanisms behind these effects, also known as “religious coping,” were first described by Pargament (1997). Religious coping is understood as the “religiously

framed cognitive, emotional, or behavioral response to stress, encompassing multiple methods and purposes” (Wortmann, 2020, p. 1873). Positive religious coping generally centers on collaborative actions, such as seeking spiritual support from God, a spiritual caregiver, or a member of one’s religious group (Pargament et al., 2000). It seems to positively affect mental and physical health through increased healthy behavior, social support, and overall enhanced psychological strength (Oman & Thoresen, 2002). For high-risk youth, religious coping and spirituality are associated with lower rates of delinquency (Salas-Wright et al., 2013). Positive effects on physical and mental health have been observed across religious groups in the general population, including Muslims (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). For Christian adolescents, evidence suggests that social support from members of their community is beneficial for coping with crises in general (Torralba et al., 2021) or mitigating depressive symptoms (Carleton et al., 2008). Studies that have examined the relationship between discriminatory experiences and religious coping or general religiosity within Muslim populations are rare and none have focused on young people. Alsubaie et al. (2021) investigated how religious coping and perceived discrimination influence posttraumatic growth. According to their results, religious coping can increase posttraumatic growth for individuals who experienced moderate discrimination, fostering personal growth, greater appreciation of life, and meaningful relationships. Jasperse et al. (2012) found that religious involvement weakened the link between PRD and negative psychological symptoms (i.e., depression, anxiety) for Muslim immigrants. Adam and Ward (2016) examined acculturative stress, finding that religious practice mitigates its adverse effects on life satisfaction.

Religiosity offers the necessary basis for religious coping and is strongly linked to religious coping mechanisms (Carpenter et al., 2012). Positive religious coping, centered on social support, may mitigate negative affective states caused by strain (e.g., depression, discrimination), potentially preventing a hostile state. Thus, we derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): The positive association between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility is mitigated by social religiosity.

However, higher levels of religiosity and religious coping may not always result in positive outcomes when dealing with strain. Some coping mechanisms can lead to a negative outcome (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Pargament et al., 2004). Negative religious coping methods can be considered spiritual struggle. A person may redefine the stressor as a punishment from God or be dissatisfied with the relationship with God or religious others (Pargament et al., 1998, 2000, 2004). When accompanied by spiritual discontent or feelings of anger, coping may become dysfunctional (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005). Although Muslims from the general population seem to use negative religious coping less often than positive religious coping (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015), it can have an equal or even greater impact on physical and mental health (Carpenter et al., 2012; Pargament et al., 2000). For imprisoned young Muslims, it is probable that the institutional context itself promotes negative religious coping mechanisms. They are disconnected from their religious community, which likely causes feelings of isolation and abandonment possibly resulting in spiritual struggle (Bergmann et al., 2024). We assume that these adverse conditions could especially affect young Muslims who practice their religion more often on their own, for example, reading the Qu’ran and praying in private. For our research purpose, we assume that a

higher level of individual religiosity makes negative religious coping mechanisms more likely, leading to a dysfunctional handling of the experienced strain. Taken together, we hypothesize that the following:

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): The positive association between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility is reinforced by individual religiosity.

When examining out-group hostility in relation to religiosity, fundamentalism, an exclusivist form of religiosity, may play a key role. Religious fundamentalism is often characterized by a literal interpretation of sacred texts and rejection of secular influence. According to Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992, p. 118), it is the belief that “there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inherent truth about humanity” and that “this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought.” Islamic fundamentalism seeks to establish Islamic law (Sharia) as the basis of society and politics, representing a conservative and politicized interpretation of Islam (Kramer, 2003). Certainly, there is more than one type of Islamic fundamentalism. For instance, Wilkinson and Quraishi’s (2024) concept of worldviews offers a more nuanced perspective by distinguishing between Islamism and (nonviolent and violent) Islamist Extremism. While we recognize the value of this concept in describing processes of (de-)radicalization, it also blends fundamentalism with out-group hostility. However, for our research, maintaining a clear analytical distinction between these constructs is essential.

Although most of the research on religious fundamentalism explores its negative implications (Hood et al., 2005), the concept of religious coping can also explain positive outcomes: It helps to mark one’s religious boundaries and supports a strong religious focus and spiritual cleansing (Pargament et al., 2000; Phillips & Ano, 2015). On the contrary, fundamentalism often comes with hostility toward others, especially those who threaten the fundamentalists’ religion (e.g., religious others), reinforcing the initial assumption of a strong link between fundamentalism and out-group hostility. Thus, we will test whether and how religious fundamentalism moderates the link between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility:

Hypothesis 2c (H2c): The positive association between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility is moderated by fundamentalism.

DATA AND METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND CONTEXT

As part of the “Young Muslims in prison” project (Stelly et al., 2022), surveys were conducted in four youth prisons in Germany in 2019. In Germany, individuals aged 14 to 17 who commit a crime are sentenced under juvenile criminal law and put in youth prisons to be rehabilitated. Individuals aged 18 to 21 may also receive a juvenile sentence, depending on their level of maturity. A total of 790 male participants (766 valid cases) answered the questionnaire, representing about a quarter of Germany’s male youth prison population. For this study, only data from imprisoned Muslims were included, resulting in a final sample of $N = 311$ for quantitative analysis. The ages ranged from 15 to 25 ($M = 20.0$, $SD = 1.98$) years. Participants represented 36 different nationalities, with German citizenship being the

most common (41%), followed by Turkish (18%), Syrian (9%), and Afghan (7%). Many participants (43%) were not born in Germany, with an average stay of 2.42 years. About three quarters of those not born in Germany (32% of the entire study cohort) had immigrated to Germany within the last 5 years, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, Morocco, and Algeria.

PROCEDURE

A mixed-methods approach was employed to investigate the role of religion in youth prisons. The approach followed a sequential analysis, wherein quantitative data were initially gathered, followed by qualitative interviews (Ivankova et al., 2006). The quantitative data were collected inside prisons in the form of paper-and-pencil interviews (PAPIs). Participants, grouped in 15 to 20, completed the questionnaire in designated rooms, communal areas, or cells due to institutional restrictions. Participants filled out their questionnaire in the presence of a researcher to help in case of language barriers or illiteracy. Support was provided in German, English, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, French, and Romanian, resulting in a high participation rate, with 87% of questionnaires completed in German. Participants were selected for interviews based on their self-identification with Islam and its impact on their lives, both inside and outside prison. The prison staff made the final decision, considering security reasons. The qualitative interviews were conducted one-on-one in German inside the prison, lasting between 24 and 78 min (averaging 48 min). Guided by a thematic framework derived from preceding quantitative survey findings (Morse, 1991), the objective of these interviews was to explore the research topic in depth while gathering the comprehensive views of incarcerated Muslim youths.

MEASURES⁴

Out-Group Hostility

We operationalized out-group hostility through a multi-item measure, which is commonly used to assess social distance to a certain group (e.g., Hewstone et al., 2002). We asked participants how they would feel about a member of a certain group as their neighbor, followed by a list of "out-groups" to be rated separately (e.g., Jews, homosexuals). Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale from *very pleasant* to *very unpleasant*. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .76$, which is considered an acceptable level.

Lack of Religious Opportunity Structure

LROS reflects perceived opportunities to practice religion in prison. Participants rated 10 items regarding the opportunity structure in prison on a 4-point Likert-type scale (e.g., "I can't talk to my religious spiritual caregiver because he doesn't speak my language"). We reversed the coding of five items (e.g., "The religious spiritual caregiver of my religion has enough time to care for my needs and problems") so that higher values indicate stronger LROS. Internal consistency was relatively low, with $\alpha = .60$.

Perceived Religious Discrimination

To measure PRD, participants were asked about the frequency of various situations involving personal experiences of discrimination related to their religion. The scale covered

different forms of discrimination, including interactions with individuals in general and, more specifically, experiences with staff members (e.g., how often they faced verbal insults). Internal consistency was again acceptable, with $\alpha = .76$.

Individual and Social Religiosity

Due to data limitations, we could not measure religious coping mechanisms directly. Instead, we focused on two closely related aspects: individual and social religiosity. We measured individual religiosity by asking the participants questions about their general religious beliefs on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating greater importance (e.g., “I believe in God,” “My relationship with God is important”). The items were taken from the scale “belief in God” (Schweitzer et al., 2018). We omitted three items from the belief scale to reach an acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .73$).⁵ Participants also rated how often they read the Qur’an on a 3-point scale and the frequency of private prayer during incarceration on an 8-point scale. To combine these items into a single scale, we normalized the data using a *z*-score transformation. However, internal consistency dropped to $\alpha = .53$. We captured social religiosity by asking the participants four questions about their religious practice involving interaction with others on a 3-point Likert-type scale (e.g., “I meet with a priest/imam/other religious counselor”). Internal consistency was $\alpha = .60$, which we consider acceptable given the small number of items. We conducted a principal component analysis (PCA) for individual and social religiosity. The given Kaiser-Guttman criterion (Kaiser, 1991) justified a one-factor solution for both measures with eigenvalues over 1, which accounted for 51.9% (individual religiosity) and 45.6% (social religiosity) of the total variance. All factor loadings were above 0.50.

Religious Fundamentalism

In this study, we considered religious fundamentalism largely in terms of the definition by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992). Our measure consists of three *z*-transformed items, with two rated on a 4-point scale and one on a 5-point scale. The internal consistency was $\alpha = .61$, reflecting the small number of items.

Control Variables

Control variables were included based on their status as confounders. This approach follows the concept of “good” and “bad” controls (Cinelli et al., 2024). The analysis accounted for the following confounders: religious denomination (Sunni Muslims vs. other Muslims), duration of incarceration (in months), education (no degree vs. degree), age (in years), country of origin (Germany vs. another country), and prison.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The qualitative interviews ($N = 22$) were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2004). The interviews were transcribed, and codes reflecting the research categories were established. These codes were then applied to the transcriptions and analyzed using MAXQDA 20 to explore the participants’ experiences concerning religion within the prison environment. Excluding all participants with missing values from our quantitative

TABLE 1: Mean Values and Standard Deviations for All Main Variables (*N* = 247–311)

Main Variables	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Out-group hostility	1.0	8.0	3.96	1.21
2. Lack of religious opportunity structures	1.0	4.0	2.57	0.52
3. Perceived religious discrimination	1.0	4.0	1.42	0.56
4. Individual religiosity ^a				
Religiosity	1.0	7.0	6.21	0.84
Prayer frequency	1.0	8.0	4.85	2.56
Reading the Koran	1.0	3.0	1.85	0.73
5. Social religiosity			2.17	0.48
Meeting with a religious counselor	1.0	3.0	1.77	0.72
Diet	1.0	3.0	2.49	0.70
Celebrating holidays	1.0	3.0	2.44	0.76
Talking with fellow inmates about religion	1.0	3.0	2.03	0.67
6. Religious fundamentalism ^a				
"Islam is the one true religion."	1.0	4.0	3.28	1.11
"The Koran is the one true holy scripture one has to follow."	1.0	4.0	3.22	1.10
"To follow the rules of my religion is more important to me than the laws of the country in which I live."	1.0	5.0	3.54	1.51

^a*z*-values.

sample would have resulted in a loss of approximately 18% of the respondents. To maintain the original sample size and keep standard errors unbiased (Rubin, 2018), we apply multiple imputation using fully conditional specification (Van Buuren et al., 2006). We use all variables of the present study and create five imputed data sets.⁶ All analyses were conducted using SPSS 28. We briefly describe the quantitative data, present our qualitative results, and linear regressions (with interaction terms) to test our hypotheses.

RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The mean values and standard deviations of all main variables are displayed in Table 1. Values for out-group hostility, LROS, and social religiosity were distributed around the mean values of the respective scales, whereas values for PRD were low on average and positively skewed. We chose a log transformation to normalize the variable for further statistical analysis. For the *z*-transformed variables (individual religiosity and fundamentalism) and social religiosity, we report the mean values of the individual items/variables. Items on religious fundamentalism showed rather high mean values, from *M* = 3.2 to 3.5.

In Table 2, bivariate correlation analysis reveals a significant association between PRD and LROS. Consistent with prior research (Pollack & Pickel, 2003), we found strong correlations between all dimensions of religiosity. Out-group hostility only correlated with religious fundamentalism.

HOW CAN MUSLIMS' RELIGION-RELATED PRISON EXPERIENCES BE DESCRIBED?

The qualitative interviews aimed to gauge the extent of support or discrimination Muslims experienced in practicing their religion in prison. When asked directly about discrimination, most participants responded negatively. In contrast, their responses expressed gratitude for

TABLE 2: Bivariate Pearson Correlations for All Variables (*N* = 247–311)

Main Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Out-group hostility					
2. Lack of religious opportunity structures	.047				
3. Perceived religious discrimination	.076	.193**			
4. Individual religiosity	-.009	.028	.219**		
5. Social religiosity	.105	.002	.223**	.514**	
6. Religious fundamentalism	.116*	.005	.093	.330**	.226**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

the unexpected chance to exercise religious freedom, which hinted at an underlying expectation of unequal treatment in a predominantly Christian society:

I am in a Christian country, and yet I have so many opportunities. (Participant B, Prison 4)

While denying direct discrimination, narratives revealed clear experiences of disadvantage:

I had my prayer beads with me, and they were confiscated directly after the first warning. . . . And then I see Christians, for example, who go out every day with a rosary. Then you just feel a little bit fooled, to be honest. (Participant D, Prison 2)

Their denial of discrimination highlights a discrepancy. Despite mentioning instances of it, they hesitated to acknowledge it, fearing they might seem ungrateful:

We are definitely lacking some things. I must honestly say I am grateful to the institution that we have such an opportunity at all. However, there are things missing, things that we truly need to practice our faith properly. (Participant C, Prison 3)

Although the participants mostly reported supportive behavior from the prison staff, they also described negative experiences:

I believe I've been here for about two months, and then someone came to me. I said that I am a Muslim, that I don't eat pork. Despite that, he still threw it into my cell and said, "You're not a real Muslim anyway, so you can eat it." (Participant A, Prison 3)

Moreover, prison staff openly displayed negative attitudes toward Islam and Muslims on an individual and a general level:

There was one [employee] here who dared to do it. Not many have the courage to call us "damn Muslims" because many here are Muslims. But there was one person who shouted really loudly at the window and insulted us, insulted Allah, insulted our book. (Participant E, Prison 4)

Negative interactions of this nature are not limited to prison staff but also occur in day-to-day conversations with imprisoned fellows:

There was a thunderstorm. A really strong lightning struck, followed by a loud thunder. And I was like, "Wow, that's intense, Allahu Akbar," which means "God is great." Then someone said, "Don't say that; only people who commit attacks say that." And I looked at him and said, "What are you talking about?" (Participant E, Prison 4)

Most participants had prayer beads, the Qur'an and a prayer rug but struggled to practice individual religious rituals, especially ablutions due to limited shower access. Social religious practices were also restricted, mainly by the lack of a mosque or prayer room:

The Christians have a church here; they can always go there on Sundays and such. For the Muslims, there is nothing like that, no kind of mosque. It's just a cold room; they put blankets there, and that's it. (Participant A, Prison 3)

While there are partial efforts to celebrate Islamic holidays, Muslims still observed a significant inadequacy compared with the time and effort made for Christian holidays:

They are not offering any celebrations for Ramadan or Bayram either. (Participant A, Prison 3)

This apparent inequality underscores a perceived asymmetry in institutional recognition of religious plurality. This also became apparent concerning spiritual guidance:

I have also calculated: Half are Muslims. There are two Christians for spiritual care, which means they have 320 hours a month for half. For Muslims 32 hours a month. Not even a tenth. (Participant A, Prison 1)

Participants emphasized the crucial role of spiritual caregivers in providing religious guidance to incarcerated Muslims. They expressed concern about a lack of spiritual support due to insufficient representation of Muslim spiritual caregivers:

I know many people here, Muslims, but unfortunately, they can't pray, and they would like to learn, but they don't have an imam . . . For example, they have been brought up in Islam, but they have never read the Qur'an or prayed in their lives; they have never been to a mosque. . . . And when they come in here, they think, "Now is the time to start before it's too late." Then they arrive here and . . . they can at least read the Qur'an, but they still can't pray, . . . Yes, and who teaches them then? (Participant D, Prison 4)

In conclusion, the qualitative findings reveal a nuanced image of how Muslims experience and interpret the given opportunities to practice their religion in prison. While many perceive limitations and inequalities, others express gratitude for the available religious services.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSLIMS' RELIGION-RELATED PRISON EXPERIENCES AND THEIR OUT-GROUP HOSTILITY?

We tested our first hypothesis with a multiple linear regression to analyze the relationship between religion-related prison experiences (LROS and PRD) and out-group hostility. The overall model was significant $F(13, 233) = 2.2\text{--}3.3, p = .001\text{--}.01$ with an $R^2 = .11\text{--}.16$, indicative of a moderate goodness-of-fit. Table 3 shows that PRD but not LROS positively predicted out-group hostility. We also found religious fundamentalism positively predicted out-group hostility. Individual religiosity tended to negatively affect out-group hostility, but the association did not reach statistical significance.

TABLE 3: Multiple Linear Regressions on Out-Group Hostility (N = 247)

Predictor Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	B	SE	Sig.	B	SE	Sig.	B	SE	Sig.	B	SE	Sig.
Constant	4.19	1.07	<.001	4.22	1.07	0.00	4.40	1.14	0.00	4.20	1.07	0.00
<i>Prison experiences</i>												
LROS	−0.03	0.15	0.86	−0.04	0.15	0.82	−0.04	0.16	0.80	−0.03	0.15	0.86
PRD	0.54	0.26	0.04	0.48	0.26	0.06	−0.03	1.26	0.99	0.54	0.26	0.04
<i>Religiosity</i>												
Individual religiosity	−0.21	0.15	0.17	−0.30	0.17	0.10	−0.22	0.15	0.14	−0.22	0.15	0.15
Social religiosity	0.11	0.21	0.62	0.09	0.21	0.67	0.05	0.27	0.85	0.11	0.21	0.60
Religious fundamentalism	0.26	0.11	0.02	0.26	0.11	0.02	0.26	0.11	0.02	0.26	0.14	0.06
<i>Covariates</i>												
Religious denomination	−0.23	0.17	0.19	−0.22	0.17	0.20	−0.22	0.17	0.21	−0.23	0.17	0.19
Duration of incarceration	0.06	0.06	0.32	0.06	0.06	0.31	0.06	0.06	0.33	0.06	0.06	0.32
Education	−0.03	0.18	0.84	−0.04	0.18	0.83	−0.03	0.18	0.87	−0.03	0.18	0.85
Age	−0.05	0.04	0.25	−0.05	0.04	0.28	−0.05	0.04	0.25	−0.05	0.04	0.25
Country of origin	0.64	0.18	<.001	0.63	0.18	<0.001	0.63	0.18	0.001	0.64	0.18	0.00
Prison 1 (dummy)	0.11	0.30	0.71	0.11	0.30	0.71	0.11	0.30	0.71	0.11	0.29	0.71
Prison 2 (dummy)	0.15	0.27	0.58	0.12	0.27	0.65	0.15	0.27	0.59	0.15	0.27	0.58
Prison 3 (dummy)	0.00	0.24	0.97	−0.01	0.24	0.96	0.00	0.24	0.98	0.01	0.24	0.97
<i>Interactions</i>												
PRD × Individual Religiosity				0.31	0.33	0.34						
PRD × Social Religiosity							0.24	0.56	0.67			
PRD × Fundamentalism										0.01	0.35	0.97
R ²				.11–.16*	.11–.16**			.11–.16**			.11–.16**	

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

Note. Models 2 to 4 show interactions between PRD and religiosity. LROS = lack of religious opportunity structure, PRD = perceived religious discrimination.

DOES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSLIMS' RELIGION-RELATED PRISON EXPERIENCES AND THEIR OUT-GROUP HOSTILITY DEPEND ON THEIR RELIGIOSITY?

We conducted further multiple linear regressions to test whether our religiosity measures moderated the relationship between religion-related prison experiences and out-group hostility. Because LROS did not significantly predict out-group hostility, we limited our analysis to models only testing the interaction between the religiosity measures and PRD. As shown in Table 3, Models 2 to 4 were all significant, Model 2: $F(14, 232) = 2.2-3.1$, $p = .001-.01$; Model 3: $F(14, 232) = 2.0-3.1$, $p = .002-.02$; Model 4: $F(14, 232) = 2.0-3.1$, $p = .002-.02$) with $R^2 = .11-.16$, but none of the interaction terms reached significance. Individual ($B = .33$) and social religiosity ($B = .24$) tended to positively affect the relationship between PRD and out-group hostility, but religious fundamentalism did not.

DISCUSSION

Our research aimed to explore the association between religion-related strain in prison and out-group hostility. In addition, we examined whether religious coping would moderate this relationship. Using a qualitative approach, we aimed to describe the religion-related experiences of young Muslims in prison. According to the qualitative interviews, participants felt they had adequate opportunities to practice their religion individually but faced limitations in social religiosity. They expressed a sense of disadvantage compared with their Christian peers, particularly regarding spiritual care, joint celebrations of religious festivals, and access to Friday prayer. Nonetheless, they rarely labeled these limitations as discriminatory. In fact, they expressed gratitude toward the institution for allowing them to engage in religious practices at all while also downplaying the problematic discriminatory behavior of prison staff. In line with the qualitative data, we found relatively low rates of PRD in the quantitative data but relatively high values for perceived LROS, which suggests a disadvantage for Muslims in prison. But what could explain this lack of awareness of situations that others would interpret as discriminating? It might be indicative of the so-called “paradox of integration,” which has been observed among immigrants in Germany (Steinmann, 2019) and Muslims in the United States (Lajevardi et al., 2020). The authors posit that perceptions of discrimination are more pronounced among those who are better integrated (e.g., those with higher education). One important reason for this is that integration brings increased awareness of one's facing a persistent minority status in society. This insight could help to explain the unexpected finding of less PRD among Muslims in prison. Imprisoned Muslims, on average, have lower levels of education (Stelly et al., 2022), which may prevent them from reflecting on their enduring marginalized status and interpreting certain incidents as discriminatory. LROS was not predictive of out-group hostility, which calls into question the extent of the affective impact it has on Muslims in prison. The finding is consistent with the assumption of a positive reinterpretation of LROS. Muslims do not experience the lack of opportunity inside of prison as a strain; instead, they appreciate the opportunities that are present. This could also be explained by a generally high gratitude of young Muslims (Al-Seheel & Noor, 2016). Although PRD was not common, it was positively associated with out-group hostility. This could indicate a relevant affective impact resulting in feelings of strain. Rippy and Newman (2006) showed that PRD among Muslims related to expressions of increased vigilance and suspicion. Also, experiences of discrimination differ from LROS in terms of the context of strain. PRD has a stronger association with Agnew's idea of a negative relationship as a source of strain, while LROS depicts

a negative experience caused by a rather abstract entity (i.e., the institution, the federal state, or politicians). Scheitle et al. (2023) suggest that interpersonal discrimination affects well-being more than discrimination by an organization, based on research indicating that adverse experiences from organizational norms or structures are more predictable, making coping mechanisms easier to implement to manage them (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). All religious dimensions correlated with each other, but only religious fundamentalism significantly predicted out-group hostility. This aligns with the fundamentalist perspective, as it excludes people with different worldviews and beliefs. Multiple linear regression revealed that none of the religiosity measures moderate the relationship between PRD and out-group hostility. It is possible that the relationship between religious coping strategies and the two facets of religiosity is particularly weak due to the unique setting of incarceration. In general, Muslims seem to be more likely to adopt interpersonal (collective) coping strategies when dealing with adversity (Fischer et al., 2010). During incarceration, prison limits those possibilities—if not in quantity, then in quality. Although the sample had relatively high social religiosity scores, the conditions differed from those they were used to (e.g., celebrating with families and congregation). Religious fundamentalism was the weakest moderator. Considering the work of Ano and Vasconcelles (2005), who point out both positive and negative influences of the fundamentalist view, it is possible that the lack of moderation is the result of two opposing effects. First, imprisoned Muslims may positively cope with PRD by finding strength in their conservative and strong religious focus, helping them to deal with negative emotions and preventing hostility. Second, the fundamentalist's rather exclusionary attitude may feed hostility toward others. An alternative explanation could be a missing link between PRD and religious fundamentalism in our sample. The data show significant correlations between social and individual religiosity and PRD. This finding concurs with other empirical evidence where PRD was higher in subjects with stronger religious identification (Jasperse et al., 2012; Ysseldyk et al., 2014). However, this does not seem to apply to religious fundamentalism, as PRD does not seem to predict religious fundamentalism (Koopmans, 2015).

LIMITATIONS

Our qualitative findings do not explain why incarcerated Muslims feel gratitude rather than perceive discrimination. Future research should examine potential reasons for this finding, considering influences from both their origin country and their host country. As our quantitative results are based on cross-sectional data, we cannot determine the causal impact of prison experiences on out-group hostility. While unfair treatment may lead to out-group hostility, preexisting hostility could also shape perceptions of treatment. Prospective research could clarify this relationship. Furthermore, we assessed three dimensions of religiosity, aligning them with positive and negative religious coping. Although this approach is supported by past research (Sherkat & Reed, 1992), our null findings suggest that indirect measures may not fully capture religious coping's moderating effects. Using established tools like RCOPE (Pargament et al., 2000) may better reveal the underlying mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

We found that while imprisoned Muslims face challenges in practicing their religion, they tend to feel gratitude rather than perceiving discrimination. When PRD is an issue, it is associated with increased out-group hostility, whereas the LROS does not have this effect.

Religiosity did not moderate these relationships. Our study underscores that religion-related experiences in prison can have consequences, particularly in fostering an “us” versus “them” worldview (Wilkinson & Quraishi, 2024).

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SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental Table S1 is available in the online version of this article at <http://journals.sagepub.com/home/cjb>

NOTES

1. Religiosity has shown paradoxical effects on various crime-related outcomes, including fear of crime (Steinmann, 2024a) and juvenile delinquency (Steinmann, 2024c).
2. Goal blockage could certainly also be a relevant strain. However, in the case of imprisoned Muslims, their religion-related prison experiences cannot be conceptualized as the inability to achieve valued goals.
3. Recent research has shown that Muslim prison officers also experience discrimination (Quraishi & Wilkinson, 2023).
4. Supplemental Table S1 (available in the online version of this article) includes all model variables, questionnaire items, and encodings.
5. We omitted the items “What I believe is for me to decide,” “I only believe what’s scientifically proven,” and “Faith doesn’t play a role in my everyday life” due to low discriminatory power ($<.3$).
6. We did not impute missing values for lack of religious opportunity structure (LROS). Instead, to avoid a significant sample reduction, we calculated the LROS total score for respondents missing up to three items.

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