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## Muslim Minority of New Zealand in Global Context: Demographic Perspective

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### *Abstract*

*This article focuses specifically on the population of Muslims in New Zealand, and highlights their demographic and socio-economic characteristics in a worldwide comparison. Globally, Islam is the fastest-growing religion and Muslims are the second largest religious group. In particular, the population of Muslim migrants in the multicultural and western societies is also remarkably growing fast. This also applies to the multicultural setting of New Zealand where have witnessed a substantially increasing growth of Muslim population during the recent decades. Holding a wide range of ethnic and religious groups from throughout the world as well as a variety of Muslims from different parts of the Islamic world, the multicultural field of this study serve as a unique human and cultural laboratory to approach properly the key research objectives of this analysis. The discussion is mainly based on the customized data of population census. This article specifically addresses the main demographic and socio-economic patterns and differentials associated with the population of Muslims in this multicultural context in a global comparison.*

### Introduction

The population of Muslims in New Zealand has undergone substantial increase over the past decades, increasing from about 6000 in 1991 to approximately 46,000 in 2013; which is projected to reach more than 100,000 by 2030.<sup>1</sup> This sits well with the global pattern identifying the religion of Islam as the world's fastest-growing religion. According to the findings of this analysis, the underlying conclusion emphasizes the fact that the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of New Zealand Muslims vary substantially across ethnic origins so that without paying attention to the role of ethnic origin, they will also remain "misunderstood population".

This analysis focuses on the status of Muslim population in New Zealand and compares them with other religious groups from a demographic and socio-economic perspective. The discussion is mainly based on the 2006 population census data, unless otherwise other censuses are specified. In general, the total population of Muslims in New Zealand has increased substantially over the past decades: from about 6000 in 1991 to approximately 36,000 in 2006 (i.e. 6 times population growth). In the latest census in 2013, this number increased to 46,149. According to *The Future of the Global Muslim Population*,

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the population of New Zealand Muslims is projected to increase to 101,000 by 2030, which will comprise 2.0% of the country's total population.<sup>2</sup>

In comparison with other religious groups, Muslims in New Zealand are the third largest religious group and currently comprise almost 1% of the country's total population. The corresponding proportion is greater for Hindus (1.6%) and Buddhists (1.3%) as the first and second largest religious minorities in New Zealand, respectively. It is also interesting to mention that Christians are the predominant religious group in New Zealand so that about half of the country's total population in both 2006 and 2013 censuses were Christians. More importantly, a substantial and growing proportion of New Zealand population comprise those who are affiliated with "no religion" (27.0% in 2001, 31.5% in 2006, and 42.0% in 2013). This tends to accord with the global pattern of secularism, which is particularly a more visible pattern in the Western settings.<sup>3</sup>

### **Ethnic Diversity**

The results of this analysis show that in terms of migration status, New Zealand Muslims are predominantly overseas-born: about 75% of them are immigrants and only approximately a quarter of them were born in New Zealand. This pattern remains almost the same in 2001, 2006, and 2013. Further, the distribution of New Zealand Muslim migrants by birthplace indicates that they came from a wide range of the countries from throughout the world. Fijians are the largest Muslim community including almost one-fifth of New Zealand Muslims. Iraqis are the second largest ethnic group of Muslims, followed by Afghans who contain about 8% and 6% of New Zealand Muslims, respectively. The remaining major birthplaces of New Zealand Muslims are Somalia, Pakistan, India, Iran, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These 11 birthplaces together include about 80% of total Muslim population in New Zealand. The remaining 20% of New Zealand Muslims are extensively distributed across a wide range of countries from throughout the world, which mainly include countries such as South Africa, Egypt, other Middle Eastern countries, Turkey, England, Singapore, and Australia. Again, about a quarter of them were born in New Zealand.

Moreover, we can compare Muslims with non-Muslims in terms of ethnic origin. It should be mentioned that this comparative analysis is based on the 11 major birthplaces mentioned above which account for birthplaces of about 80% of New Zealand Muslims. Accordingly, two major patterns can be addressed. The first pattern refers to a group of birthplaces in which Muslims exceed non-Muslims. This particularly applies to Afghanistan-born and Somali-born migrants. This means that 95% of each of these two groups of migrants are Muslims. The corresponding proportion is also markedly high both for Bangladesh-born migrants (86%) and for Pakistan-born migrants (76%). Also, slightly more than half of Iran-born migrants are Muslims (53%). Second, the opposite applies to a group of birthplaces in which non-Muslims exceed Muslims. For instance, only about 5% of India-born and Malaysia-born populations are Muslims and their remaining majority are non-Muslims. Also, although Fijians are the largest migrant community of New Zealand Muslims, only 17% of Fiji-born migrants are Muslims.

### **Gender Composition**

Generally speaking, New Zealand holds a female-dominated population. This means that, on average, there are almost 96 males per 100 females. However, further analysis by religious groups shows that while this general pattern applies to both Christians and

Buddhists, other religious groups are male-dominated. In particular, this gender disparity becomes more visible when we compare Christians and Muslims: while Christian population is predominantly female-dominated (about 85 males per 100 females, on average), Muslims hold a significantly male-dominated population (about 115 males per 100 females, on average).

Moreover, detailed analysis reveals that the gender composition of New Zealand Muslim population varies substantially in terms of their ethnic groups. On the one hand, the population of Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Muslims born in New Zealand are male-dominated. This is substantially a more visible observation among Pakistani Muslims for whom sex ratio is almost 140 (males per 100 females). On the other hand, the gender composition of Indonesian, Malaysian, Fijian and Somali Muslims is female-dominated. This pattern particularly applies to Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims for whom sex ratio is less than 80 (males per 100 females). These varying patterns of gender composition among these two groups of Muslims can be partly explained by their major types of migration. This means that the traditional male-dominated pattern of migration tends to apply to the first group, particularly Pakistani Muslims. On the contrary, this traditional male-dominated pattern of migration does not exist for the second group particularly Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims for whom other types of migration such as tertiary education tend to play a more important role, which gives more chance to female-dominated migration.

### **Age Structure**

It is well-known that age plays a vital role in the life and status of human beings. Because of such a crucial place, it is important to consider age in our demographic analysis on religion. In general, the age structure of New Zealand population varies substantially by religious affiliation. According to our analysis, two varying patterns can be addressed. On the one hand, Christians hold the oldest age structure with a median age of 40 years: half of them are older than 40 years and the other half are younger than that age. Then, Jews also have a relatively older age structure with a median age of 35 years. On the other hand, two groups have a substantially younger age structure: those affiliated with “no religion” and Muslims with median age of 25 years.

Although Muslims as a whole represent one of the youngest age structures in New Zealand, this does not necessarily applies to all Muslims when their ethnic origin is also taken into account. Our analysis indicates the fact that age structure of Muslims is substantially associated with their birthplaces. According to this analysis, two main patterns can be addressed. First, a group of Muslims have a relatively older age structure with a median age around 30 years old. This includes New Zealand Muslims born in Iran, Bangladesh, Fiji, Iraq, India, and Indonesia. Second, the opposite exists among Muslims born in Somalia, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Afghanistan. They hold a younger age structure with median age of 20 years. In particular, Muslims born in New Zealand are exceptionally young with a median age of around five years. This suggests that they are predominantly the children of Muslim immigrant parents.

From a comparative perspective, the age structure of Muslims and non-Muslims in New Zealand by birthplace indicates a key pattern: Muslims are younger than non-Muslims. Although this key pattern exists in almost all places of birth, it is a more visible observation for two groups: Pakistan-born Muslims and non-Muslims (with median age of 20 years and 55 years, respectively) and New Zealand-born Muslims

Table 1. Selected demographic characteristics by religious affiliation.

Demographic characteristics	Muslims	Christians	Buddhists	Hindus	Jewish	No religion
Median age	25.1	40.1	30.2	30.1	35.1	25.0
Duration of residence more than 10 years (%)	23.8	56.8	39.4	27.8	47.1	48.1
High education (%)	21.6	13.3	22.1	31.2	31.7	17.2
Unemployment rate (%)	11.6	4.4	8.0	6.0	6.1	5.3
Professional and managerial occupations (%)	32.6	39.2	39.1	37.6	52.3	37.8

Source: Computed from the customized data of 2006 Population Census, Statistics New Zealand. Also, see the information provided in the "Introduction" section of this article.

and non-Muslims (with median ages of 5 years and 30 years, respectively). However, the only exception to this key pattern is the case of Somali-born population holding equally a very young age structure (with a median age of 20 years), among Muslims and non-Muslims (Table 1).

### **Duration of Residence**

There is also a large body of literature documenting the fact that the status and success of migrants is closely associated with the duration of residence in the receiving country.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned before, New Zealand Muslims are also largely overseas-born. Accordingly, this critical determinant has also been considered in the present analysis. The results of this analysis show that the distribution of New Zealand population in terms of duration of residence varies substantially by religious affiliation. According to these results, two main patterns can be addressed. First, Christians are longest-term residents: almost 60% of them have lived in New Zealand for 10 years or more. The corresponding proportion is also markedly high both for those affiliated with "no religion" and for Jews (almost 50%). Second, the opposite applies to the rest of religious groups, demonstrating that they are mostly recent arrivals in New Zealand. This is particularly the case for Muslim and Hindu populations: approximately 75% of them have lived in New Zealand for less than 10 years.

However, detailed analysis reveals the fact that the length of residence among New Zealand Muslims is substantially associated with their birthplace. While one-third of Fijian Muslims are long-term residents in New Zealand, the corresponding proportion for Afghan Muslims is less than 10%. Also, New Zealand Muslims born in Iraq, Iran, Bangladesh, and Indonesia are relatively long-term residents: approximately a quarter of them have lived in New Zealand for 10 years or more. The corresponding proportion is about 15% for the rest (including Muslims born in India, Somalia, Malaysia, and Pakistan), which indicates that they are predominantly recent arrivals in New Zealand.

Further, according to the findings of this analysis regarding the comparison between New Zealand Muslims and non-Muslims, there is one major pattern: non-Muslims are relatively longer-term residents than Muslims. This major pattern exists in almost all categories of birthplaces. However, it particularly applies to migrants born in Malaysia and Pakistan: half of non-Muslims are long-term residents in New Zealand, whereas the corresponding proportion is only 15% for Muslims.

## **Educational Status**

It has been widely documented in the literature that educational attainment as the most important part of human capital plays as a vehicle of socio-economic development.<sup>5</sup> The literature also identifies education as a key determinant of migrants' settlement and success. Accordingly, this important factor has also been included in this analysis.<sup>6</sup>

The results of this analysis show that the distribution of New Zealand population in terms of education level varies markedly by religious affiliation. According to these results, two main patterns can be addressed. On the one hand, Jews and Hindus hold the highest education level so that almost one-third of them are highly educated (i.e. with tertiary education). The corresponding proportion is also high both for Buddhists and for Muslims (about 22%). On the other hand, Christians and people affiliated with "no religion" are substantially less educated. In fact, a quarter of Christians and more than one-fifth of people with "no religion" have no qualifications. These general patterns also apply both to males and to females. It appears that these educational differentials can be partly explained by the more recent migration policies targeting individuals with high skill and high qualification. This tends to be particularly the case for Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus who are predominantly recent migrants as compared with Christians, which has been discussed in the previous section of this study.

Moreover, the detailed analysis on New Zealand Muslims' educational level shows that there are substantial variations among them across their birthplace. According to this analysis, the typical variation exists among two major groups of Muslims: while half of Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims are highly educated (i.e. with tertiary education), the corresponding proportion is only 5% for Afghan and Somali Muslims. In fact, about one-third of Afghan and Somali Muslims hold no qualifications. Further, Pakistani and Iraqi Muslims are relatively highly educated as more than one-third of them hold tertiary education. The corresponding proportions for Malaysian, Indonesian and Iranian Muslims are also relatively high (i.e. 25%, 23%, and 21%, respectively). More importantly, the largest migrant Muslim community (i.e. Fijian Muslims) also holds a very low education level: only one-tenth of them are highly educated (i.e. with tertiary education).

The comparisons between Muslims and non-Muslims in New Zealand demonstrate that there are varying patterns regarding their educational differentials by birthplace. According to the results of this analysis, two major patterns can be addressed. First, in three cases, Muslims hold a higher education level than non-Muslims. This pattern exists when we compare Muslims and non-Muslims born in India, Pakistan, and Iraq: Muslims born in each of these three birthplaces are more educated than non-Muslims from the same birthplaces. Second, the opposite exist in the rest of birthplaces. This particularly applies to three birthplaces (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Iran): non-Muslims born in each of these birthplaces are more likely to be highly educated than Muslims from the same birthplaces (Table 2).

## **Employment Status**

According to the literature, market employment serves as a sound indicator of human life style and that of migrants' settlement and success<sup>7</sup>. The results of this analysis show that the employment status of New Zealand population varies substantially by religious affiliation. According to these results, two main patterns can be addressed. On the high end, Christians and people affiliated with "no religion" are most likely to be employed as

Table 2. Selected demographic characteristics of Muslims by place of birth.

Country of birth	Median age	Duration of residence 10+ years (%)	Tertiary education (%)	Unemployment (%)	Professional and managerial occupation (%)
New Zealand	5.2	–	11.2	8.6	40.2
Fiji	30.1	35.2	10.6	5.3	26.9
Iraq	30.2	26.0	36.5	14.0	49.8
Afghanistan	20.1	9.1	6.2	20.4	16.4
Somalia	20.2	16.4	4.2	26.2	10.6
Pakistan	20.1	15.2	43.1	6.8	31.5
India	30.1	17.8	50.3	3.9	35.4
Iran	30.2	24.7	20.8	12.0	37.1
Bangladesh	30.2	23.5	50.5	8.2	34.7
Malaysia	20.2	15.3	25.1	10.2	27.6
Indonesia	30.1	22.6	23.4	11.0	20.5

Source: Computed from the customized data of 2006 Population Census, Statistics New Zealand. Also, see the information provided in the “Introduction” section of this article.

they hold the lowest unemployment rate. Almost similar patterns apply to Jewish. For instance, the unemployment rates of these three religious groups have never reached 10% over the past decades. On the low end, the rest of religious groups hold a relatively higher unemployment rate. This particularly applies to Muslims who are the least likely to be employed and hold the highest unemployment rate. These two main patterns exist almost constant over time in 1996, 2001, and 2006 censuses. Furthermore, the unemployment rate decreased in 2006 relative to the previous years. While this pattern applies to all religious groups, it is a more evident observation for Muslims: the fall of unemployment rate from 20% in 1996 and 2001 to 12% in 2006. However, they still hold the highest unemployment rate: in particular, Muslims are three times more likely to be unemployed than Christians (with unemployment rate of 12% and 4%, respectively).

Detailed analysis indicates that there is no one single pattern of employment status for Muslims in New Zealand. This suggests that the employment patterns of New Zealand Muslims vary substantially across the major birthplaces. According to the detailed findings of this analysis, two typical patterns can be addressed. First, Indian and Fijian Muslims hold a substantially high employment level so that only about 7% of them are unemployed. Second, the opposite applies to Somali and Afghan Muslims: about one-third of Somali Muslims and one-fifth of Afghan Muslims are unemployed. It is also important to mention that Indonesian and Pakistani Muslims hold a relatively high level of employment as only about 10% of them are unemployed. However, unemployment rate is relatively high (approximately 15%) for Iraqi, Iranian, and Malaysian Muslims.

In addition, the comparison between Muslims and non-Muslims in New Zealand in terms of employment status indicate a key general pattern: Muslims are less likely to be employed than non-Muslims. Although this pattern applies to all birthplaces, the magnitude of these employment differentials is significantly associated with the birthplaces: On the high end, among both Pakistan-born and Somali-born migrants, Muslims are about three times more likely to be unemployed than non-Muslims. The gap is also high among individuals born in Malaysia: Muslims are approximately twice more likely

to be unemployed than non-Muslims. On the low end, there are smaller employment differentials for other birthplaces. This applies to the three ethnic groups of Muslims who hold the highest level of employment. This refers to the employment differentials between Muslims and non-Muslims from India, Fiji, and Indonesia: although Muslims are more likely to be unemployed than non-Muslims, this Muslim/non-Muslim difference is small. The gap is also small between Muslims and non-Muslims from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. For example, 15% of Muslim Iranians and 11% of non-Muslim Iranians are unemployed. However, it should be mentioned that the only exception to these key general patterns of employment refers to the situation of Bangladesh-born Muslims and non-Muslims. This suggests that contrary to the general pattern, among Bangladeshi migrants, non-Muslims hold relatively higher unemployment rate than Muslims. However, this is not really a significant gap: about 15% and 13%, respectively.

### **Occupational Status**

The final theme considered in this analysis is occupational status. The results of this analysis suggest that the occupational status of working population in New Zealand varies by religious affiliation. According to this analysis, three general patterns can be addressed. First, the most evident occupational pattern refers to the fact that Jews hold a greater proportion of managerial and professional occupations than other religious groups. This key pattern remains constant over time (i.e. 1996, 2001, 2006). Second, in the past (i.e. in 1996 and 2001 censuses), people with “no religion” and Christians had the lowest occupational level. Third, in the more recent 2006 census, a particular religious group holds the lowest level of managerial and professional occupations than all other religious groups in New Zealand: Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

This study has highlighted the main demographic and socio-economic patterns of Muslims in New Zealand from a comparative perspective. The total population of New Zealand Muslims has increased substantially from about 6000 in 1991 to approximately 46,000 in 2013, and estimated to reach more than 100,000 by 2030. This accords with the global pattern which identifies the religion of Islam as the fastest-growing religion in the world.<sup>8</sup>

According to the results of this analysis, both Muslims and those affiliated with “no religion” hold the youngest age structure in New Zealand, with a median age of about 25 years. In terms of gender composition, the population of New Zealand Muslims is predominantly male-dominated, which is particularly in contrast to the substantially female-dominated population among Christians. As in the case of many religious minorities, Muslims are also new arrivals in New Zealand so that only about a quarter of them are long-term residents and the majority of them have lived less than 10 years in New Zealand. Moreover, the results of this analysis have shown that about one-fifth of New Zealand Muslims are highly educated. Yet, Muslims also hold the highest unemployment rate as compared with other religious groups in New Zealand.

However, the present analysis has explored a more important point: these general demographic and socio-economic patterns vary substantially across ethnic origins of New Zealand Muslims. For instance, while the proportion of those highly educated is 50% for Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims, it is only 5% for Afghan and Somali



Muslims. Also, the proportion of long-term residence in New Zealand for Fijian Muslims is three times greater than the corresponding proportion for Afghan Muslims. The same patterns of ethnic variation apply to the remaining demographic and socio-economic characteristics of New Zealand Muslims as discussed above.

Finally, the findings of this analysis provide further research-based evidence to support the author's key argument documented in *Misunderstood Population?: Methodological Debate on Demography of Muslims*<sup>9</sup> that Muslims share one basic common item in the datasets used in our studies and other demographic analyses: ticking the same category of response for the question related to religious affiliation—that is, they all self-identify as Muslims. But this does not necessarily mean that Muslims can be considered homogenous as their compositional differentials arising from ethnic origins cannot be ignored in our studies and other demographic analyses. As long as this vital methodological caution is overlooked, then Muslims in the Western contexts still remain misunderstood populations. Accordingly, it is critically important that in order to provide accurate information and reliable knowledge on New Zealand Muslims, they should also be considered and studied by their ethnic origins and not just simply under a single category as “Muslims in New Zealand”.

## NOTES

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