

Religion Versus Religiosity: What Matters for Hiring?

Abstract

Religious discrimination in hiring is rarely studied independently from ethnic discrimination, and little is known about whether employers respond to job candidates' religious affiliation or to how religious they are perceived to be. We fill this gap using a preregistered factorial survey experiment in which professional recruiters evaluate candidate profiles that independently vary by ethnic majority versus minority names, visual religious signals, and volunteering activities signalling either Christian or Muslim religious affiliation. This design allows us to isolate the effects of religion from those of ethnicity. Beyond hiring intentions, we measure recruiters', colleagues', and customers' anticipated willingness to work with candidates, as well as recruiters' HEXACO personality assessments of the candidates, as proxies for productivity-related beliefs. We capture religion in three ways: the affiliation recruiters attribute to a candidate, the religiosity they attribute, and the religious signals we assign. Candidates whose religious position recruiters identify receive lower interview ratings than candidates whose position remains unclear to them, and this penalty does not differ between Christian, Muslim, and atheist attributions; interview propensity declines further as attributed religiosity rises; and among the assigned signals, only religious volunteering reduces hiring chances. Religious candidates are not regarded as less diligent or less honest, but as less likely to be accepted by others.

JEL classification

C83, J61, J71

Keywords

religion, hiring, discrimination, factorial survey experiment

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1. Introduction

Religion is a protected ground for discrimination in employment (Council Directive 2000/78/EC, 2000). At the same time, religion is increasingly regarded as a private matter with no place in the workplace in Western societies (Casanova, 1994; Héliot et al., 2020). This norm may not be applied even-handedly, however: expressions of the majority religion may be tolerated at work while comparable expressions by religious minorities are not (Sleijpen et al., 2020). Meanwhile, migration has made Islam the largest minority religion in many Western countries (Kramer et al., 2024), and applicants with a migration background face a persistent labour market disadvantage that is steepest for those originating from Muslim-majority countries (Devos et al., 2025; Vandenberghe, 2025). Part of that disadvantage may reflect discrimination based on the religion employers presume these applicants to hold, rather than on ethnic origin as such. Establishing whether it does begins at the hiring process, where access to employment is decided.

However, identifying the effect of religion on hiring is challenging for two reasons. First, religion and ethnicity are closely intertwined. Applicants' names signal ethnic origin and, with it, the religious affiliation commonly associated with that origin (Heath & Martin, 2013), so a hiring penalty attached to a name cannot be assigned to either. Second, religious identity comprises both religious affiliation, the religious category to which an individual belongs, and religiosity, the degree to which an individual is religious (Helbling & Traunmüller, 2020). These components need not coincide: applicants sharing the same affiliation may differ substantially in how religious they are, and employers may respond to the category, to its intensity, or to neither. Identifying which of these drives hiring penalties is a precondition for targeting policy at the ground on which discrimination actually operates.

Existing research on religious hiring discrimination has left both difficulties largely unresolved. The first and largest body of evidence concerns the Muslim headscarf, for which experiments consistently document substantial hiring penalties (Fernández-Reino et al., 2023; Ghumman & Ryan, 2013; Leckcivilize & Straub, 2018; Unkelbach et al., 2010; Weichselbaumer, 2020). Because the headscarf is worn only by Muslim women, these studies observe religion, gender, and ethnic origin jointly. A second strand signals religious affiliation on the résumé itself. Correspondence studies find that applicants who disclose any affiliation receive fewer employer responses than those who disclose none (Wallace et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2013). These applicants carry ethnic majority names, however, so the evidence speaks only to the majority. A third strand extends the comparison to the minority, holding origin constant and varying religion within it: Valfort (2020) compares Christian, Muslim, and Jewish applicants of a single origin, and

Di Stasio et al. (2021) attach a Muslim connotation to otherwise identical volunteering of ethnic minority candidates. Both report substantial penalties for Muslim applicants, but neither establishes whether the same signals carry a penalty for majority candidates. Moreover, none of these studies records the religion or the degree of religiosity that employers themselves attribute to a candidate.

We build on this work with a preregistered factorial survey experiment among professional recruiters in Belgium, who evaluated candidate profiles for a vacancy in their own organisation, presented in an emulated professional HR software interface. Each profile independently varied a visual religious signal, religious versus general volunteering activities, the religion signalled, the ethnicity conveyed by the candidate's name, and gender. Belgium is a well-suited setting for this research. A strongly secularised but nominally Christian majority coexists with a Muslim minority that is the country's largest minority religion and is projected to grow (Hackett et al., 2025), so that Christian and Muslim signals are both socially meaningful to recruiters. Belgium also hosts sizeable Polish and Turkish communities, which are predominantly Christian and Muslim respectively, allowing us to signal ethnic origin through names that recruiters recognise as realistic combinations while still varying origin and religion independently. Finally, the labour market disadvantage of applicants with a migration background is well documented in Belgium (Devos et al., 2025) and persists across Europe (Vandenberghe, 2025), making the contribution of religion to that disadvantage a pressing question.

The design yields four contributions. First, it identifies the effect of religion independently of ethnicity: religious signals are assigned to ethnic majority and ethnic minority candidates alike and cover Christian as well as Muslim identities, so that religion is not confounded with minority status. Second, it separates the signals employers observe from the inferences they draw. Alongside the signals we assign, we ask recruiters which religion they believe each candidate belongs to and how religious they consider that candidate to be, which allows us to distinguish affiliation from religiosity. Third, we compare the signals through which religion reaches the employer. A name, a visible religious symbol, and religious volunteering differ in the intensity of the religiosity they convey and in how readily an applicant can withhold them. Nevertheless, they are rarely varied within a single design. Fourth, we examine the drivers of any penalty we observe. Beyond hiring intentions, we ask recruiters how willing they themselves, their colleagues, and their customers would be to work with each candidate, capturing the distaste on which taste-based discrimination rests (Becker, 1957), and we ask them to rate each candidate on the six HEXACO personality dimensions as proxies for expected productivity. Because these dimensions predict distinct facets of work performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Pletzer et al.,

2019, 2021), they capture the productivity beliefs underlying statistical discrimination (Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972).

We find that recruiters penalise religious volunteering: candidates who list volunteer work in a church or a mosque are markedly less likely to advance to the next selection round, and Christian and Muslim candidates are equally affected. The religious identity recruiters attribute to a candidate points in the same direction: candidates whose religious position recruiters felt able to identify received lower interview ratings than candidates whose position remained unclear to them, with no significant difference between Christian, Muslim, and atheist attributions. The penalty does not appear to stem from doubts about candidates' diligence or integrity, since candidates identified as Christian or Muslim are rated more favourably on honesty–humility, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. What declines instead is the anticipated willingness of colleagues to work with the candidate and, as candidates are perceived as more religious, of customers as well. Religious volunteering thus appears to widen the distance recruiters expect others to perceive between the candidate and the workplace mainstream, and it is this anticipated resistance rather than doubt about ability that lowers hiring chances.

Section 2 develops the theoretical framework and hypotheses; Section 3 describes the design, experimental procedure, data, and empirical strategy; Section 4 presents the results; and Section 5 concludes.

2. Background

2.1. Theoretical framework

Identity economics explains how social categories become salient in hiring evaluations: Akerlof and Kranton (2000) argue that individuals derive utility from acting in line with the categories to which they assign themselves and others, implying that employers may favour candidates whom they perceive as culturally proximate and who share their own group membership (Rivera, 2012). Social identity theory describes the same mechanism psychologically, holding that people draw part of their self-concept from group membership and evaluate in-group members more favourably than out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Religion becomes such a category whenever an application makes it visible—through a name, a symbol, or an activity—and visible markers of faith may then function as stigmatising signs of group identity (Goffman, 1963). Secularisation theory explains why these markers carry a negative connotation in Western labour markets: as societies modernise, religion is increasingly confined to the private sphere and regarded as inappropriate in public life, including at work (Casanova, 1994; Roudometof, 2014).

Expressing faith in an application may therefore be read as a breach of a prevailing norm, with the perceived distance increasing with the degree of religiosity a signal conveys rather than with the affiliation it reveals (Helbling & Traunmüller, 2020).

Two economic accounts specify how this categorisation translates into unequal hiring outcomes. Under taste-based discrimination (Becker, 1957), unequal treatment stems from a distaste for interacting with out-group candidates that is unrelated to their productivity. This distaste need not be the employer's own: employers also anticipate the preferences of their coworkers and customers and act on them, so that the cost of hiring a candidate who signals a religious affiliation is borne by the firm irrespective of that candidate's qualifications. Contact theory indicates where such distaste is most likely to persist: prejudice endures where intergroup contact is limited, and is therefore strongest toward the smallest and least familiar groups (Lippens et al., 2022; Pettigrew, 1998). Correspondence evidence on religious signals has typically been interpreted in these terms (Wallace et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2013).

Statistical discrimination offers the complementary account. Lacking complete information on a candidate's productivity, employers rely on beliefs about group averages as proxies for unobservable traits (Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972). Religious affiliation and religiosity can serve as such proxies when employers believe they predict work-relevant dispositions, such as diligence, cooperativeness, or openness to new ways of working—dispositions that personality inventories capture and that predict work outcomes (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Lee et al., 2005). Such beliefs need not be accurate, and inaccurate beliefs reduce hiring efficiency by leading employers to undervalue suitable candidates whose true productivity they cannot observe (Altonji & Pierret, 2001).

2.2. Empirical evidence and hypotheses

Employers rarely observe a candidate's religion directly. They infer it from the signals an application conveys, forming subjective attributions about the religion a candidate belongs to and how religious that candidate appears. These attributions are the proximate basis for both taste-based and statistical discrimination. Across Europe, survey evidence documents a hierarchy of social exclusion in which Muslims experience the strongest rejection and Christians the weakest (Gesthuizen et al., 2021), and correspondence studies reveal a similar pattern in recruitment (Wallace et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2013). We therefore hypothesise that candidates who are attributed a Muslim identity are less likely to be invited for an interview than candidates attributed a Christian identity (**H1**). Affiliation, however, need not be what employers react to. Strong public expressions of religiosity provoke negative reactions regardless of the religion

concerned (Helbling & Traunmüller, 2020), and secularisation theory implies that the visibility of faith, rather than its content, breaches the prevailing workplace norm. We therefore expect interview propensity to decline as attributed religiosity increases (**H2**). Because attributed religiosity is itself shaped by what an application conveys, we further examine whether it mediates the relationship between religious signals and hiring outcomes.

Which signal conveys religion is consequential in its own right, since signals differ in the degree of religiosity they express and in how far an applicant can choose to withhold them. A visible expression of religion, such as religious attire or a religious symbol, is the most immediate of these. Existing evidence has concentrated almost exclusively on Muslim women wearing a headscarf, for which substantial hiring penalties are consistently documented (Fernández-Reino et al., 2023; Ghumman & Ryan, 2013; Leckcivize & Straub, 2018; Unkelbach et al., 2010; Weichselbaumer, 2020). Whether this reflects a reaction to Muslim identity specifically or to visible religiosity more generally remains unresolved, as Christian symbols have hardly been tested. If employers respond to public displays of religion rather than to a particular religion, visible religious symbols should reduce hiring prospects irrespective of the affiliation they denote. We therefore hypothesise that candidates displaying a visual religious signal are less likely to be invited for an interview than otherwise identical candidates without such a signal (**H3**).

Religion also reaches employers through what candidates do outside work. Volunteering generally improves employability, because it signals civic engagement and valuable non-cognitive skills (Kang et al., 2016; Rivera, 2011), and in Belgium it has been shown to reduce ethnic hiring discrimination (Baert & Vujić, 2016). This advantage may disappear, or even reverse, when the activity reveals a potentially stigmatised identity (Kang et al., 2016; Ragins, 2008). Consistent with this, Muslim applicants receive fewer callbacks when their volunteering reveals a Muslim identity than when the same activity is framed in secular terms (Di Stasio et al., 2021; Valfort, 2020). Evidence on Christian volunteering is far scarcer, and what exists concerns applicants of minority origin (Valfort, 2020), leaving open whether the same reaction arises when the volunteer belongs to the ethnic majority. We hypothesise that religious volunteering reduces hiring chances relative to otherwise comparable non-religious volunteering (**H4**).

3. Methods

3.1. Experimental design and materials

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a preregistered factorial survey experiment among genuine recruitment professionals (Devos et al., 2026a). Factorial survey experiments confront

respondents with descriptions of hypothetical situations—here, candidate profiles—that systematically vary along predefined factors and levels, combining the internal validity of experimental manipulation with the contextual richness of surveys (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014). Because each profile bundles several independently randomised characteristics, the method is particularly suited to disentangling signals that co-occur in reality, such as ethnicity and religion, and to probing the perceptions underlying differential treatment; it has accordingly been applied widely in research on hiring decisions (Baert et al., 2024; D’hert et al., 2026; Devos et al., 2026d; Sterkens et al., 2023; Van Belle et al., 2018).

Each candidate profile varied along five dimensions, summarised in **Table 1**. Four of these dimensions have two substantive levels but are specified with three, because the majority (non-religious) level is deliberately assigned twice as often as the minority (religious) level. This imbalance mirrors the composition of real applicant pools and enhances the experiment’s external validity, in line with Van Borm et al. (2022) and Devos et al. (2026b). It also implies that a substantial share of profiles carries no religious indication, providing a natural benchmark against which the religious signals can be evaluated. The first dimension was a visual signal of religion (absent in two levels, present in one), operationalised through the profile photograph: a cross pendant for Christian men and women, a headscarf for Muslim women, and a beard for Muslim men. The second was the candidate’s extracurricular activity (general volunteering in a local community organisation in two levels, religious volunteering in a Catholic church or a mosque in one). The third dimension was the religion signalled (Christianity in two levels, Islam in one). This dimension does not appear on the profile itself; it governs how the other religion-related dimensions are implemented, determining whether a religious signal, where present, is Christian or Muslim. Profiles that carry no religious or ethnic minority signals convey no religion to the recruiter and are therefore coded into a fourth, no-religion category, which serves as the reference. The fourth dimension was the ethnicity of the candidate’s name (Belgian in two levels, minority in one), with the minority ethnicity matched to the signalled religion: Polish names represented the Christian minority and Turkish names the Muslim minority. These pairings reflect strong real-world associations: 88.1% of migrants worldwide born in Turkey identify as Muslim and 83.5% of those born in Poland as Christian (Kramer et al., 2024). The names were drawn from the validated set of Martiniello and Verhaeghe (2023). The fifth dimension was candidate gender, conveyed through the name, the profile photograph, and an explicit profile field.

< Table 1 about here >

Fully crossing the five characteristics yields 162 possible candidate profiles ($3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 2$). We applied a D-efficient design (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014) that arranged these combinations into 41

decks of four profiles each, with each profile in a different deck so that recruiters never evaluate the same candidate twice. This design achieves a D-efficiency score of 99.87 out of 100 when accounting for all two-way interactions. Participants were randomly assigned to one deck; the order of profiles within decks was also randomised; and the photographs were randomly allocated so that no depicted person appeared twice within a deck. Following the benchmark of a minimum of five evaluations per deck recommended by Auspurg and Hinz (2014), we set a target sample of 205 respondents (5×41).

We developed the profile photographs specifically for this experiment. Following Weichselbaumer (2020), who used a single applicant whose appearance was plausibly both Turkish and German and then added a headscarf to that same applicant in order to isolate the effect of wearing a headscarf on hiring chances from the effect of ethnicity, we aimed for ethnic ambiguity so that ethnicity would be signalled exclusively through names and not through appearance. To this end, we drew 48 photographs of men and women aged 18 to 21 from the academic database of Generated Photos and refined them with ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) into professional, front-facing CV headshots; we showed women with tied-back hair in all photographs to minimise contrast with the headscarf condition. We then pre-tested all 48 photographs, presented without any religious cues, among 142 independent raters with hiring experience recruited and incentivised through a research agency, each rating 12 photographs on physical attractiveness and perceived ethnic background (0–10 scales).⁴

Because two is the maximum frequency with which a given gender–ethnicity combination appears across decks, it was sufficient to retain two photographs per combination to ensure that no respondent would see the same photograph twice. For each combination, we selected the two photographs with ethnic ambiguity scores closest to 5, the midpoint of the scale indicating equal likelihood of majority and minority background. Using two one-sided tests with an equivalence interval of one point around the midpoint, and clustering standard errors at the rater level throughout, the retained photographs are statistically equivalent to perfect ambiguity within each combination, with mean ambiguity scores ranging from 4.97 to 5.41 and 90% confidence intervals contained in [4, 6] throughout (largest $p = 0.024$). Perceived ethnicity does not differ significantly across the four combinations ($F(3, 132) = 0.51$, $p = 0.676$), but attractiveness does ($F(3, 132) = 3.92$, $p = 0.010$). We therefore include fixed effects for the base photograph in all regressions, which absorb residual differences in attractiveness and perceived ethnicity

⁴ The preregistration for this pretest is available via the AEA RCT Registry (Devos et al., 2026c). All tested photographs, along with the corresponding data and preregistration for this pretest, can be consulted on OSF (<https://osf.io/c6ufh>).

between photographs. Descriptive statistics for all 48 photographs, indicating which were retained, are reported in Appendix **Table A1**. We then added the visual religious signals to these eight base photographs.

The candidates applied to one of eight occupations that jointly varied three job characteristics: the required educational level (upper secondary diploma versus professional bachelor's degree), the degree of customer contact, and the degree of internal contact, the latter two operationalised with the O*NET (2026) indicators 'deal with external customers' and 'work with work group or team'. We selected these characteristics because prior research links each of them to the intensity of religious and ethnic hiring discrimination: penalties tend to be larger in more highly educated professions (Leckcivilize & Straub, 2018; Weichselbaumer, 2020) and in customer-facing roles (Fernández-Reino et al., 2023; Leckcivilize & Straub, 2018), while anticipated colleague attitudes may weigh on hiring decisions where team collaboration is close (Lippens et al., 2023). Spreading the candidate profiles across occupations that differ along these dimensions ensures that our estimates are not tied to a single job context and enhances the realism of the evaluation task. Every profile explicitly stated that the candidate met the required educational level, ruling out the effects of under- or overqualification. In addition, based on Statbel (2026), we verified that no occupation had a male or female representation of 5% or less. The occupations are listed in **Table A2** in the Appendix.

3.2. Experimental procedure and measures

The survey was administered via Qualtrics in both Dutch and French to cover Belgium's main language regions. It consisted of four parts: an introduction, instructions, the experimental task, and a post-experimental questionnaire. To keep the decision context as close as possible to participants' work context, recruiters assessed candidates for a position within their own organisation. The instructions explained that the participant's company sought to recruit a school-leaver, presented the corresponding vacancy, and stated that a colleague had preselected four eligible candidates—all school-leavers with sufficient language proficiency—whose exploratory interview notes were summarised on the following pages. These notes were displayed in a professional HR software template (Appendix, **Figure A1**), and participants were invited to give their professional judgement by evaluating the candidates in any order.

For each of the four profiles, the primary outcome captured hiring intentions on an 11-point Likert scale (0 'completely disagree' to 10 'completely agree'): "I advise inviting this candidate to participate in the next round of the application process." Recruiters subsequently rated each candidate on three sets of perception items (**Table 2**): the candidate's religion and religiosity,

three statements relating to taste-based discrimination, and the six HEXACO personality dimensions. They first assessed how religious the candidate appeared (11-point scale) and classified the candidate as Christian, Muslim, atheist, or ‘I do not know’—the subjective counterparts to our experimental manipulations. Perceptions related to taste-based discrimination were measured using three statements assessing whether the recruiter, colleagues within the company, and customers would like to work with or interact with the candidate (Becker, 1957). Perceptions related to statistical discrimination covered the six HEXACO dimensions, with one statement per dimension adapted from the HEXACO-60 inventory (Ashton & Lee, 2008). Following Baert et al. (2024), we used a single item per dimension to keep the evaluation task feasible. We phrased each item with explicit reference to the workplace, as recommended by Soto and John (2017) for the Big Five and applied here to the HEXACO dimensions. These statements capture the personality traits a recruiter infers from a candidate’s profile. Their relevance for productivity is well documented, though it differs across dimensions and across the outcome considered: conscientiousness is the strongest personality predictor of task performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), honesty–humility the strongest predictor of counterproductive work behaviour (Pletzer et al., 2019), and all HEXACO dimensions except emotionality predict organisational citizenship behaviour, with extraversion and conscientiousness contributing most (Pletzer et al., 2021).

< Table 2 about here >

The post-experimental questionnaire first collected firm characteristics: size, profit orientation, and the presence of an explicit diversity policy, all of which have been linked to the level of hiring discrimination in previous studies (Ghumman & Jackson, 2010; Lippens et al., 2023; Weichselbaumer, 2020). We then recorded recruiter characteristics, including frequency of involvement in hiring decisions, gender, age, educational attainment, religious identity, and political preferences. Religious identity was measured using three items from the European Social Survey that captured religious belonging, the specific denomination, and self-assessed religiosity; the first two were combined into a single categorical variable distinguishing Roman Catholics, Muslims, other religions, and non-religious respondents. Political preferences were elicited by asking respondents which party they would vote for if Belgian federal elections were held the following day. Responses were subsequently recoded into broad ideological categories ranging from far left to far right, with a residual category for blank, invalid, or other responses.

3.3. Recruitment and sample

We collected email addresses of professional recruiters with open vacancies matching the job descriptions in our experimental context via the contact information of the Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels public employment services (VDAB, Forem, and Actiris). Data collection took place between April and June 2026. Of the 483 recruiters who started the survey, 231 did not complete it, 2 did not consent to the GDPR terms, and 73 failed one or both attention checks. This yielded a final sample of 177 recruiters, each evaluating four candidate profiles, for a total of 708 observations. Data collection was closed before the preregistered target of 205 respondents was reached because the supply of newly identifiable eligible recruiters declined substantially at the start of the summer period. The public employment agencies posted few new vacancies with usable contact information, leaving limited scope for further recruitment through the preregistered sampling procedure.

Table 3 summarises the descriptive statistics of the participating recruiters and their companies. The sample is predominantly female (71.2%), consistent with the overrepresentation of women in recruitment roles in the Belgian labour market (European Social Survey, 2023). Ages range from 21 to 67 years, and the sample is highly educated: 46.3% hold a bachelor's degree and 35.0% a master's or doctoral degree, in line with earlier Belgian studies (D'hert et al., 2026). The target audience was effectively reached: 47.5% of the sample makes hiring decisions daily, and a further 23.2% at least weekly. In terms of religious affiliation, the large majority (67.2%) is non-religious, followed by Catholics (28.8%), and only a very small share identifies as Muslim (1.1%). Regardless of affiliation, recruiters rate their own religiosity at 2.96 on a 0–10 scale, on average. The largest ideological bloc was right-leaning: 44.6% of respondents reported that they would vote for a right-wing party if Belgian federal elections were held the following day, closely mirroring the distribution reported in the March 2026 Belgian Election Study (Walgrave et al., 2026). Company characteristics show a decent spread across firm sizes, and diversity policy presence is reasonably balanced (43.5% present, 56.5% absent or unknown). Notably, 75.7% of respondents work for a non-profit organisation or organisation with an unknown for-profit status.

< Table 3 about here >

3.4. Empirical strategy

Empirically, we approach our hypotheses from two directions: through the experimentally manipulated candidate characteristics, which capture the effect of the signals we assign, and through the religious affiliation and religiosity that recruiters attribute to a candidate, which capture what those signals convey once processed. Our first specification regresses interview

propensity on all manipulated candidate characteristics jointly, testing **H1**, **H3**, and **H4**. The second and third regressions replace these manipulations with attributed affiliation and attributed religiosity, respectively, providing a second test of **H1** and a test of **H2**. Because attributed religiosity is itself shaped by the signals a profile carries, we model it as a function of the manipulated characteristics and enter religiosity alongside them in the hiring-intention equation, allowing us to examine whether it mediates their effects. To identify the mechanism behind any hiring penalty, we then replace interview propensity with each of the perception items related to taste-based and statistical discrimination as the dependent variable, regressing these in turn on the manipulated characteristics, on attributed affiliation, and on attributed religiosity.

Identification rests on random assignment. The candidate dimensions were randomised independently of one another and of recruiter and firm characteristics, so their coefficients recover the causal effect of each signal on stated hiring intentions. The attributed measures are not assigned but reported, and are realised after the profile has been observed. These attributions may co-vary with recruiter-level factors that also shape hiring evaluations, such as attentiveness to religious cues. We therefore read the attributed-identity estimates as recruiter-side associations and use them alongside, rather than in place of, the experimental estimates. For the same reason, we interpret the mediation results as indicative rather than as formal causal mediation.

All specifications are estimated by ordinary least squares, with the exception of the weighted least squares regressions correcting for social desirability through the Bayesian truth serum, described below. Every model controls for the job, firm, and recruiter characteristics described in Subsection 3.2, for the respondent's Marlowe–Crowne social desirability score, and for the external ratings of perceived religiosity and social class attached to the names used in the profiles (Martiniello & Verhaeghe, 2023), which purge the coefficient on ethnicity of these two correlates of names. All models include photograph fixed effects at the base photograph level. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level.

Socially desirable responding is a standing concern in factorial survey experiments (Forster & Neugebauer, 2024), and we address it with two instruments. The first is the 13-item Marlowe–Crowne social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Reynolds, 1982); after recoding the reverse-scored items, the summed score serves both as a control in all specifications and as the basis for a robustness check restricting the sample to the recruiters scoring lowest on the scale. The second is the Bayesian truth serum (Prelec, 2004), applied here as in Devos et al. (2026b). Respondents indicated how much they trust Christians, Muslims, and atheists on a four-point scale, and then, for each group separately, distributed 100 Belgian HR professionals across

those same four categories according to how many they expected to select each. From these two inputs, the method scores the likelihood that a respondent answers truthfully: it rewards answers that are more common than respondents collectively predict—a statistical signature of honest responding—as well as accurate predictions of the overall response distribution. For each trust statement, a normalised Bayesian truth score was calculated; the average of the three scores was normalised again to obtain a respondent-level weight, which we use in weighted least squares regressions that replicate all specifications. Gift vouchers were awarded to the participants with the highest scores, making truthful responding incentive-compatible (Bartoš et al., 2016; Frank et al., 2017).

A third robustness check concerns insufficient-effort responding, to which factorial survey experiments are vulnerable because respondents face no real consequences (Neumark, 2018). We recorded the time each participant spent on the task and re-estimate all specifications excluding the 5% of respondents with the shortest total response time.

Finally, because each regression tests several coefficients simultaneously, we adjust for multiple hypothesis testing. We report three corrections that differ in what they assume about the dependence between tests: Bonferroni–Holm controls the family-wise error rate under any dependence structure and is the most conservative (Holm, 1979); Šidák–Holm is slightly less conservative but assumes independence across tests (Šidák, 1967; Holm, 1979); and Westfall–Young resampling, based on 1,000 bootstrap replications resampled at the recruiter level, exploits the empirical correlation between the test statistics and therefore has greater power when coefficients are correlated (Westfall & Young, 1993). Tests are grouped into families corresponding to the distinct claims we make: for interview propensity, the manipulated dimensions and the attributed-affiliation contrasts form separate families; for the perception outcomes, the three taste-based items and the six HEXACO items do.

4. Results and discussion

Subsection 4.1 examines how attributed religious affiliation, attributed religiosity, and the experimentally manipulated candidate characteristics relate to hiring intentions, and tests attributed religiosity as a potential mediator. Subsection 4.2 turns to the perception outcomes—three taste-based items and the six HEXACO dimensions—to probe the mechanisms behind the hiring estimates. Subsection 4.3 assesses the robustness of our findings to social desirability, to the exclusion of insufficient-effort responders, and to corrections for multiple hypothesis testing.

4.1. Religious identity and hiring intentions

Table 4 reports three specifications. The first two relate the religious affiliation and the religiosity that recruiters attribute to a candidate to interview propensity; the third relates the experimentally manipulated candidate characteristics to the same outcome.

Specification (1) shows that every attributed religious category is penalised relative to candidates whose affiliation is left unknown. The gap amounts to -0.721 points on the 11-point scale for candidates attributed as Christian ($p < 0.001$), followed by atheist ($\beta = -0.642$, $p = 0.093$) and Muslim ($\beta = -0.478$, $p = 0.016$). A Wald test cannot reject equality of the three coefficients ($F(2, 176) = 0.42$, $p = 0.661$).⁵ The data therefore support neither the ordering posited in **H1** nor any alternative ordering; what they indicate is that being attributed a religious position at all, rather than a particular affiliation, goes together with lower hiring propensity. Specification (2) is consistent with this reading and provides marginal support for **H2**: attributed religiosity is negatively associated with interview propensity ($\beta = -0.068$, $p = 0.056$), so that the more religious a candidate is perceived to be, the lower their hiring chances.

Specification (3) turns to the randomised signals. Religious volunteering lowers interview propensity by 0.676 points relative to secular volunteering ($p = 0.004$), supporting **H4**; exploratory two-way interactions reveal no significant heterogeneity, indicating that this penalty applies equally to Christian and Muslim candidates. The visual religious signal does not reach conventional significance ($\beta = -0.271$, $p = 0.243$), so **H3** is not supported. The signalled religion, our experimental test of **H1**, leaves interview propensity unaffected for both Christian ($\beta = +0.426$, $p = 0.192$) and Muslim profiles ($\beta = +0.151$, $p = 0.685$) relative to the no-religion reference. Religious volunteering is thus the only signal that measurably reduces hiring chances.

< Table 4 about here >

Table 5 examines whether attributed religiosity mediates the effects of the manipulated signals on hiring outcomes. To this end, we proceed in two stages: the first stage regresses attributed religiosity on the manipulated candidate dimensions, and the second stage re-estimates the hiring regression with attributed religiosity added alongside those dimensions. The first stage confirms that the manipulated signals shape attributed religiosity as intended. Religious volunteering is its strongest driver ($\beta = +1.611$, $p < 0.001$), followed by a minority ethnic name ($\beta = +1.119$, $p = 0.018$) and the visual religious signal ($\beta = +0.634$, $p = 0.008$); both Christianity and

⁵ The test evaluates the joint null that the Christian, Muslim, and atheist coefficients are equal, imposing two linear restrictions on the estimates of specification (1). Pairwise tests likewise reject none of the equalities; the Christian–Muslim contrast, the one **H1** speaks to directly, amounts to -0.244 points ($F(1, 176) = 0.83$, $p = 0.364$)

Islam raise attributed religiosity relative to no religion ($\beta = +1.231$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = +1.031$, $p = 0.006$), and male candidates are perceived as less religious than female candidates ($\beta = -0.624$, $p = 0.033$). The second stage, however, breaks the mediation chain: once attributed religiosity is entered alongside the manipulated characteristics, it is no longer associated with interview propensity ($\beta = -0.023$, $p = 0.646$), while the religious-volunteering penalty is essentially unchanged ($\beta = -0.639$, $p = 0.008$). Attributed religiosity therefore does not account for the volunteering penalty: how religious a candidate is perceived to be does not explain why recruiters downgrade religious extracurricular activities.

< Table 5 about here >

Instead, the penalty appears to rest on what the volunteering setting conveys about a candidate's position relative to the majority. Where a secular community organisation places an applicant within mainstream social life, a church or a mosque places them within a community that stands apart from it, and our estimates track this contrast rather than the specific faith. The equal penalty for Christian and Muslim candidates fits this reading, since both settings mark the same kind of separateness. It also squares with the compensatory value that volunteering ordinarily carries in Belgian hiring (Baert & Vujić, 2016): the very feature that makes secular volunteering an asset, namely what it says about an applicant's embeddedness in majority society, is what religious volunteering reverses.

4.2. Religious identity and perceptions

To understand what drives these hiring estimates, we examine how our signals of religious identity relate to perceptions associated with taste-based and statistical discrimination.

Beginning with attributed affiliation (**Table 6**), we find that attributed atheist candidates are rated more favourably than candidates of unknown affiliation on anticipated customer willingness to interact ($\beta = +0.951$, $p = 0.008$), anticipated coworker willingness to collaborate ($\beta = +0.713$, $p = 0.040$), the recruiter's own willingness to collaborate ($\beta = +0.626$, $p = 0.071$), openness to experience ($\beta = +0.908$, $p < 0.001$), and, marginally, agreeableness ($\beta = +0.784$, $p = 0.082$). Christian and Muslim attributions, by contrast, leave the taste-based items untouched relative to candidates of unknown affiliation, but lift the moral and work-related personality dimensions: both are associated with higher honesty-humility ($\beta = +0.426$, $p = 0.039$; $\beta = +0.445$, $p = 0.036$), agreeableness ($\beta = +0.427$, $p = 0.021$; $\beta = +0.635$, $p = 0.003$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = +0.356$, $p = 0.024$; $\beta = +0.726$, $p < 0.001$), with Muslim candidates additionally rated higher on openness ($\beta = +0.417$, $p = 0.042$). That both religious attributions raise—rather than lower—these traits points to a positive, not a stigmatising, personality stereotype of religious candidates, consistent

with evidence that the religious are seen as moral and conscientious (Erentzen et al., 2023; Grove et al., 2020).

< Table 6 about here >

Attributed religiosity, examined as a continuous predictor in **Table 7**, reveals two opposing perception channels that the categorical affiliation analysis masks. Each additional point of perceived religiosity is associated with lower anticipated coworker willingness to collaborate ($\beta = -0.071$, $p = 0.041$), lower anticipated customer willingness to interact ($\beta = -0.074$, $p = 0.031$), and lower perceived extraversion ($\beta = -0.073$, $p = 0.044$), yet with higher perceived agreeableness ($\beta = +0.060$, $p = 0.088$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = +0.085$, $p = 0.006$). Attributed religiosity thus works through two opposing channels: it accompanies a deterioration in the anticipated quality of interactions with colleagues and customers alongside more favourable assessments of a candidate's diligence and cooperativeness.

< Table 7 about here >

The manipulated characteristics, reported in **Table 8**, confirm this picture. Religious volunteering lowers anticipated coworker willingness to collaborate ($\beta = -0.649$, $p = 0.004$) and perceived openness to experience ($\beta = -0.578$, $p = 0.005$), marginally lowers extraversion ($\beta = -0.483$, $p = 0.085$), and marginally raises conscientiousness ($\beta = +0.378$, $p = 0.068$). The visual religious signal marginally reduces anticipated coworker collaboration ($\beta = -0.377$, $p = 0.081$) and customer interaction ($\beta = -0.365$, $p = 0.100$), leaving the remaining outcomes unaffected. The signalled religion produces a more favourable profile for Muslim candidates, who score higher than no-religion candidates on anticipated coworker collaboration ($\beta = +0.615$, $p = 0.035$) and openness ($\beta = +0.615$, $p = 0.027$), whereas Christian candidates score lower on conscientiousness ($\beta = -0.567$, $p = 0.032$).

< Table 8 about here >

4.3. Robustness checks

To assess the robustness of our findings to social desirability, we draw on two complementary strategies, both reported in Appendix **Table A3**. Following Devos et al. (2026b), we first reweight respondents using their Bayesian truth serum score. Recruiters' stated trust in the three religious groups, as reported in **Table 3**, is the response distribution against which these weights are calculated. Trust is highest for atheists ($M = 3.15$ on a 1–4 scale), marginally higher than trust in Christians ($M = 3.11$, $p = 0.096$), which is in turn significantly higher than trust in Muslims ($M =$

2.97, $p < 0.001$), according to Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, an ordering that mirrors the hierarchy documented in the broader European literature (Gesthuizen et al., 2021; Ponce, 2019).

Under this weighting, the attributed-affiliation penalties for Christian ($\beta = -0.729$, $p < 0.001$) and Muslim ($\beta = -0.467$, $p = 0.012$) candidates and the marginal religiosity effect ($\beta = -0.060$, $p = 0.083$) remain virtually unchanged, while the atheist penalty attenuates to -0.542 and loses significance ($p = 0.140$). Among the manipulated dimensions, none reaches significance: the religious-volunteering penalty attenuates to -0.309 ($p = 0.141$), and both signalled-religion coefficients turn negative without approaching conventional levels. Our second strategy restricts the sample to the recruiters who score below the mean plus one standard deviation on the Marlowe–Crowne scale ($N = 628$) and are therefore least prone to socially desirable responding. Here the experimental effects grow stronger: the religious-volunteering penalty rises to -0.848 ($p = 0.001$), the visual signal becomes marginally significant ($\beta = -0.447$, $p = 0.071$), and signalled Christianity turns marginally positive ($\beta = +0.653$, $p = 0.065$), so that candidates signalling Christianity are rated somewhat more favourably than candidates signalling no religion. The attributed-affiliation penalties remain stable (Christian $\beta = -0.657$, $p < 0.001$; Muslim $\beta = -0.415$, $p = 0.060$). The attributed-affiliation results are thus insensitive to how social desirability is addressed. For religious volunteering, the two strategies diverge: the penalty is substantially larger among respondents whose answers are least likely to be distorted, suggesting that the full-sample estimate is, if anything, conservative, but this is not corroborated under Bayesian truth serum weighting.

A second critique of factorial survey experiments concerns insufficient-effort responding, whereby some respondents may not engage fully with each profile (Forster & Neugebauer, 2024). To address this, we re-estimate the models after excluding the 5% of respondents who spent the least time on the task ($N = 672$, **Table A4**). The full-sample pattern is closely reproduced: the attributed Christian ($\beta = -0.695$, $p < 0.001$) and Muslim ($\beta = -0.345$, $p = 0.069$) penalties, the marginal religiosity effect ($\beta = -0.065$, $p = 0.067$), and religious volunteering as the only significant manipulation ($\beta = -0.592$, $p = 0.008$) all persist.

A final check examines whether the results of our main regressions—the effects of religious identity on hiring chances—are inflated by testing several hypotheses at once. Because each regression estimates multiple coefficients simultaneously, we adjust for multiple hypothesis testing using Westfall–Young, Bonferroni–Holm, and Šidák–Holm corrected p-values, treating the attributed-affiliation contrasts (**Table A5**) and the manipulated vignette dimensions (**Table A6**) as two distinct families of tests. The first family comprises the three attributed-affiliation categories tested jointly (atheist, Christian, and Muslim); the second comprises the six vignette-

dimension levels tested jointly (the two signalled-religion contrasts, the visual signal, religious volunteering, ethnic name, and gender). The attributed-Christian penalty is highly robust, surviving every correction ($p = 0.003$ under Westfall–Young, $p < 0.001$ under both Holm-type corrections), and the attributed-Muslim penalty remains significant under both Holm-type corrections ($p = 0.033$) and marginal under Westfall–Young ($p = 0.054$). Among the manipulated dimensions, the religious-volunteering penalty survives the Holm-type corrections ($p = 0.028$) but not Westfall–Young ($p = 0.117$), while no other dimension approaches significance under any correction.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined how signals of religious identity contribute to hiring outcomes once religion is disentangled from ethnicity, and how religious affiliation and religiosity each shape these outcomes. This isolates a component of the migrant hiring gap that policy addresses under a distinct legal ground and establishes which signals employers actually observe carry the penalty. We conducted a preregistered factorial survey experiment in which professional Belgian recruiters evaluated fictitious candidate profiles for a vacancy within their own organisation. The profiles independently varied visual religious cues, religious versus general volunteering, signalled Christianity or Islam, and ethnic majority versus minority names, for both male and female candidates. Beyond hiring intentions, we elicited the religious affiliation and the degree of religiosity that recruiters attributed to each candidate, measured recruiters' own—and their anticipated colleagues' and customers'—willingness to work with the candidates, and collected personality assessments along the six HEXACO dimensions as proxies for productivity-related beliefs.

We find that having an identifiable religious affiliation lowers a candidate's hiring prospects. Candidates whom recruiters attribute a Christian, Muslim, or atheist identity receive lower interview ratings than candidates whose position remains unknown, and these three penalties do not differ significantly from one another. Recruiters therefore discount religious identification as such rather than a specific affiliation, and interview propensity declines further as attributed religiosity rises. Of the signals through which religion reaches the recruiter, religious volunteering is the one that carries the penalty. Listing volunteer work at a church or a mosque significantly lowers the probability of advancing in the selection process, and does so to the same extent for Christian and Muslim candidates. Rather than signalling devotion, it conveys attachment to a community outside the mainstream. Volunteering in a mainstream community organisation is known to improve employability and attenuate ethnic hiring discrimination, plausibly because it

signals convergence towards the majority; volunteering within a religious community signals the opposite, and recruiters penalise this cultural distance.

The perception outcomes point to anticipated third-party resistance as the mechanism underlying this hiring penalty. Religiously identified candidates are rated higher, not lower, on honesty–humility, agreeableness, and conscientiousness—dimensions that predict valued behaviour at work—so they are credited with work-relevant qualities and penalised nonetheless. What declines is the recruiter’s expectation that colleagues and customers will be willing to work or interact with them: religious volunteering directly lowers anticipated coworker willingness, and higher attributed religiosity lowers both coworker and customer expectations.

Our findings carry implications for policy and practice. First, of the individual religious signals a CV can carry, recruiters penalise involvement in a religious community, not the affiliation that involvement points to. Second, that signal is largely invisible to standard anti-discrimination monitoring, which typically focuses on names and visible group characteristics. Because the penalty operates through anticipated third-party resistance rather than productivity beliefs, structured and standardised screening procedures that reduce recruiters’ ability to act on anticipated colleague and customer preferences are likely to be more effective than employer awareness programmes alone. For applicants, the results nuance the received wisdom that volunteering enhances employability: its compensatory value can reverse when the activity reveals a religious identity, so disclosing religious extracurricular activities on a CV can be costly. Which interventions actually neutralise this penalty remains an important question for future research.

Declarations

Preregistration. The experiment was preregistered at the AEA RCT Registry before data collection: <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.18254-1.0>.

Ethics approval and consent to participate. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Ghent University. Ex ante ethical approval was not required for this type of research. All participants provided informed consent before completing the survey.

Data and code availability. The anonymised dataset and accompanying code are available at OSF: <https://osf.io/c6ufh>;

Declaration of competing interest. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding. LD and SB acknowledge financial support from the Belgian Federal Science Office (BELSPO-LAMIE project, grant number B1/233/P3/LAMIE). LL acknowledges funding from FWO (Research Foundation – Flanders) under grant number 12AM824N.

CRedit authorship contribution statement. **Louise Devos:** Conceptualisation, methods, formal analysis, data curation, writing (original draft, review & editing), visualisation. **Louis Lippens:** Conceptualisation, methods, writing (original draft, review and editing), and supervision. **Stijn Baert:** Conceptualisation, methods, writing (review and editing), supervision, and funding acquisition.

Use of generative AI. ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) was used to edit the profile photographs into standardised CV headshots and to add the visual religious signals, as described in Section 3.1. Claude (various models) was used between June and August 2026 for language editing and for support in drafting analysis code.

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Tables

Table 1

Candidate characteristics as experimental factors, and their levels

Candidate characteristics	Levels	Operationalisation
Visual signal of religion	{Not present (x2), Present}	Profile photograph. Christianity: cross pendant (women and men); Islam: headscarf (women), beard (men).
Extracurricular activities	{General volunteering (x2), Religious volunteering}	Field on candidate profile. General: volunteer in a local community organisation; religious: volunteer in a Catholic church/in a mosque.
Signalled religion	{Christianity (x2), Islam}	Determines the implementation of the other religion- and origin-related dimensions; recoded to 'no religion' when no religious minority signal is present.
Ethnic background	{Majority (x2), Minority}	Name. Majority: Belgian name; minority ethnicity matches the religion dimension (Polish for Christianity, Turkish for Islam). Names from Martiniello & Verhaeghe (2022).
Gender	{Male, Female}	Field on candidate profile, profile photograph, and name.

Note. The majority or non-religious level occurs twice for every single minority or religious level.

Table 2*Clusters and statements*

Cluster	Statements
A. Religious identity	
Religiosity	“How religious is this candidate, in your opinion?”
Religious affiliation	“In your opinion, this candidate is” {Christian, Muslim, atheist, I do not know} (categorical; order randomised).
B. Statistical discrimination	
Honesty–Humility (R)	“This candidate seems like someone who [would take advantage of others at work if it yields personal benefit.]”
Emotionality	...quickly worries or is emotionally affected by problems or uncertainty at work.
Extraversion (R)	...stays in the background and takes little initiative in social interactions at work.
Agreeableness (R)	...quickly becomes irritated or responds angrily during disagreements at work.
Conscientiousness	...performs tasks carefully and attaches great importance to planning and accuracy at work.
Openness to experience	...is open to new ideas and different ways of approaching work.
C. Taste-based discrimination	
Employer taste	“This candidate seems someone with whom [I would like to work with myself.]”
Coworker taste	...other colleagues in the company would like to work.
Customer taste	...customers would like to interact.

Notes. (R) denotes reverse-coded items, recoded prior to analysis. The order of the discrimination statements was randomised. All statements use 11-point Likert scales, unless indicated otherwise. The HEXACO items used to measure statistical discrimination were contextualised within workplace settings, as recommended by Soto and John (2017). Statements are translated from Dutch and French to English.

Table 3*Descriptives of recruiter and company characteristics*

	Fraction of total sample for indicator variables	Average score (standard deviation) for scale variables
Recruiter characteristics		
Gender		
Women or others	0.71	
Men	0.29	
Age		
21 to 31 years	0.25	
32 to 37 years	0.25	
38 to 47 years	0.26	
47 to 67 years	0.23	
Educational level		
Primary or secondary	0.19	
Bachelor's	0.46	
Master's or PhD	0.35	
Recruitment involvement		
Less than once a year	0.02	
Once a year	0.05	
Once per semester	0.07	
Monthly	0.06	
Biweekly	0.09	
Weekly	0.23	
Daily	0.48	
Religious affiliation		
Catholic	0.29	
Muslim	0.01	
Not religious	0.67	
Other religion	0.03	
Trust in religion		
Trust in Christians (1–4)		3.11 (0.64)
Trust in Muslims (1–4)		2.97 (0.73)
Trust in atheists (1–4)		3.15 (0.61)
Political orientation		
Far left	0.03	
Left	0.24	
Center	0.12	
Right	0.45	
Far right	0.04	
Blank or other orientation	0.12	
Religiosity score (0–10)		2.96 (2.59)
Marlowe-Crowne score (0–13)		7.63 (2.51)
Company characteristics		
Size		
Micro firm ([0, 10) FTE)	0.11	
Small firm ([10, 50) FTE)	0.29	
Medium firm ([50, 250) FTE)	0.29	
Large firm ([250, ∞) FTE)	0.31	
Diversity policy		
Present	0.44	
Not present or unknown	0.56	
Profit status		
For profit	0.24	
Not for profit or unknown	0.76	

Note. Abbreviation used: FTE (full-time equivalent employees). The sample consists of 177 respondents each evaluating 4 vignettes, yielding 708 observations.

Table 4*Linear regressions of interview propensity on religious identity*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Attributed religious affiliation			
(ref. = unknown)			
Atheist	-0.642† (0.382)		
Christian	-0.721*** (0.185)		
Muslim	-0.478* (0.197)		
Attributed religiosity (s.)		-0.068† (0.036)	
Candidate characteristics (vignette factors)			
Signalled religion			
(ref. = none signalled)			
Christianity signalled			0.426 (0.326)
Islam signalled			0.151 (0.371)
Visual religious signal			-0.271 (0.232)
(ref. = no visual signal religion)			
Religious extracurricular activity			-0.676** (0.236)
(ref. = secular extracurricular activity)			
Ethnic minority			-0.316 (0.361)
(ref. = ethnic majority)			
Male candidate			0.162 (0.248)
(ref. = female candidate)			
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	8.495*** (1.764)	8.487*** (1.812)	8.326*** (1.748)

Notes. N = 708. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), s. (scale variable, ranging from 0 to 10). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table 5*Attributed religiosity: determinants and association with interview propensity*

	First stage	Second stage
	Attributed religiosity	Interview propensity
Attributed religiosity (s.)		−0.023 (0.050)
Candidate characteristics (vignette factors)		
Signalled religion (ref. = none signalled)		
Christianity signalled	1.231*** (0.311)	0.454 (0.335)
Islam signalled	1.031** (0.377)	0.175 (0.383)
Visual religious signal (ref. = no visual signal religion)	0.634** (0.237)	−0.256 (0.232)
Religious extracurricular activity (ref. = secular extracurricular activity)	1.611*** (0.243)	−0.639** (0.239)
Ethnic minority (ref. = ethnic majority)	1.119* (0.470)	−0.290 (0.356)
Male candidate (ref. = female candidate)	−0.624* (0.292)	0.147 (0.254)
Controls	Yes	Yes
Constant	6.068** (2.046)	8.466*** (1.784)

Notes. N = 708. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), s. (scale variable, ranging from 0 to 10). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table 6

Attributed religious affiliation and discrimination statements

	Taste-based discrimination				Statistical discrimination				
	Employer	Coworker	Customer	H	E	X	A	C	O
Attributed religious affiliation (ref. = unknown)									
Atheist	0.626† (0.346)	0.713* (0.346)	0.951** (0.357)	0.639 (0.488)	0.236 (0.434)	0.425 (0.464)	0.784† (0.450)	0.727 (0.459)	0.908*** (0.232)
Christian	0.057 (0.167)	0.098 (0.176)	0.235 (0.170)	0.426* (0.206)	-0.115 (0.185)	-0.241 (0.189)	0.427* (0.185)	0.356* (0.157)	-0.053 (0.156)
Muslim	0.113 (0.188)	0.116 (0.206)	0.018 (0.185)	0.445* (0.212)	0.011 (0.205)	-0.033 (0.215)	0.635** (0.211)	0.726*** (0.199)	0.417* (0.204)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	7.335*** (1.438)	4.809** (1.520)	3.701* (1.628)	4.810* (2.283)	4.979* (2.044)	4.128† (2.233)	4.536* (2.060)	2.736 (1.795)	3.293† (1.761)

Notes. N = 708. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), H (honesty/humility), E (emotionality), X (extraversion), A (agreeableness), C (conscientiousness), O (openness). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table 7*Attributed religiosity and discrimination statements*

	Taste-based discrimination				Statistical discrimination				
	Employer	Coworker	Customer	H	E	X	A	C	O
Attributed religiosity (s.)	-0.047 (0.038)	-0.071* (0.035)	-0.074* (0.034)	0.003 (0.040)	-0.048 (0.036)	-0.073* (0.036)	0.060† (0.035)	0.085** (0.031)	-0.041 (0.035)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	7.797*** (1.541)	5.557*** (1.628)	4.539** (1.706)	5.202* (2.408)	5.329* (2.093)	4.556* (2.246)	4.325* (2.117)	2.199 (1.834)	3.573† (1.856)

Notes. N = 708. Abbreviations: s. (scale variable, ranging from 0 to 10), H (honesty/humility), E (emotionality), X (extraversion), A (agreeableness), C (conscientiousness), O (openness). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table 8*Candidate characteristics (vignette factors) and discrimination statements*

	Taste-based discrimination				Statistical discrimination				
	Employer	Coworker	Customer	H	E	X	A	C	O
Candidate characteristics (vignette factors)									
Signalled religion (ref. = none signalled)									
Christianity signalled	-0.182 (0.244)	0.191 (0.264)	0.037 (0.267)	-0.212 (0.337)	-0.277 (0.324)	-0.165 (0.312)	0.210 (0.318)	-0.567* (0.264)	-0.090 (0.246)
Islam signalled	0.371 (0.267)	0.615* (0.291)	0.061 (0.311)	0.083 (0.381)	0.215 (0.325)	0.001 (0.384)	0.518 (0.340)	-0.152 (0.316)	0.615* (0.277)
Visual religious signal (ref. = no visual signal religion)	-0.128 (0.201)	-0.377† (0.216)	-0.365† (0.222)	0.132 (0.226)	0.161 (0.235)	0.122 (0.235)	-0.143 (0.226)	0.179 (0.189)	-0.199 (0.199)
Religious extracurricular activity (ref. = secular extracurricular activity)	-0.306 (0.208)	-0.649** (0.221)	-0.374 (0.228)	0.093 (0.239)	-0.267 (0.232)	-0.483† (0.280)	-0.168 (0.211)	0.378† (0.207)	-0.578** (0.203)
Ethnic minority (ref. = ethnic majority)	-0.125 (0.354)	0.037 (0.356)	0.174 (0.403)	0.279 (0.373)	0.142 (0.311)	0.767† (0.442)	-0.272 (0.315)	-0.556 (0.374)	0.104 (0.376)
Male candidate (ref. = female candidate)	-0.448† (0.252)	-0.406 (0.265)	-0.231 (0.306)	-0.521† (0.288)	0.110 (0.292)	-0.080 (0.318)	-0.219 (0.286)	-0.513† (0.269)	-0.209 (0.251)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	7.686*** (1.500)	5.324*** (1.566)	4.652** (1.689)	4.850* (2.370)	4.501* (2.077)	3.368 (2.265)	4.946* (2.142)	3.487† (1.792)	3.413† (1.769)

Notes. N = 708. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), H (honesty/humility), E (emotionality), X (extraversion), A (agreeableness), C (conscientiousness), O (openness). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Appendix

Table A1

Descriptives of pretested profile pictures

Female					Male				
Photo ID	N	Attractiveness	Ethnicity	Selected	Photo ID	N	Attractiveness	Ethnicity	Selected
A. Eastern European									
1	39	6.69 (1.99)	6.87 (2.54)	No	13	38	6.71 (1.41)	5.82 (2.06)	No
2	35	7.09 (2.06)	5.80 (2.60)	No	14	36	6.89 (1.95)	5.86 (2.40)	No
3	41	7.12 (2.25)	6.46 (2.76)	No	15	34	6.62 (1.65)	5.35 (1.84)	Yes
4	32	6.72 (1.69)	4.88 (3.00)	Yes	16	39	6.62 (2.07)	5.79 (2.43)	No
5	32	6.41 (2.06)	6.72 (2.19)	No	17	31	5.39 (2.47)	4.42 (2.03)	No
6	36	7.19 (1.58)	7.19 (1.94)	No	18	38	6.08 (2.29)	6.18 (2.63)	No
7	31	7.06 (2.14)	6.06 (2.61)	No	19	33	6.79 (2.27)	6.48 (2.49)	No
8	33	7.70 (1.38)	6.15 (2.65)	No	20	37	5.49 (2.60)	5.46 (2.24)	Yes
9	33	7.03 (1.49)	5.76 (2.28)	Yes	21	35	6.34 (1.73)	6.37 (2.99)	No
10	31	6.97 (1.76)	6.32 (2.45)	No	22	37	6.38 (2.18)	6.11 (2.17)	No
11	38	7.68 (1.36)	6.63 (2.19)	No	23	34	7.00 (2.04)	6.44 (2.22)	No
12	39	7.74 (1.65)	6.03 (2.76)	No	24	35	7.54 (1.82)	7.31 (1.88)	No
B. Maghrebian									
25	33	6.61 (1.82)	4.76 (2.21)	No	37	34	5.29 (2.33)	3.79 (3.08)	No
26	31	7.52 (1.84)	5.23 (2.51)	No	38	34	6.56 (1.48)	5.18 (2.91)	No
27	32	6.47 (1.92)	4.91 (2.61)	No	39	30	6.77 (1.28)	5.03 (2.19)	Yes
28	21	6.95 (1.69)	4.52 (2.50)	No	40	61	6.36 (2.02)	5.13 (2.18)	Yes
29	36	7.31 (1.58)	4.22 (2.34)	No	41	41	6.83 (1.94)	5.49 (2.72)	No
30	38	7.13 (1.56)	3.53 (2.25)	No	42	37	6.51 (1.73)	5.68 (2.53)	No
31	32	6.72 (2.17)	4.53 (2.58)	No	43	35	5.74 (2.01)	5.51 (2.16)	No
32	34	7.50 (1.76)	5.21 (2.52)	No	44	37	6.51 (2.12)	4.86 (2.52)	No
33	37	6.92 (1.66)	4.97 (2.73)	Yes	45	34	5.74 (2.33)	4.41 (2.39)	No
34	37	7.24 (1.85)	5.27 (2.38)	No	46	29	5.86 (2.53)	3.45 (2.56)	No
35	38	7.24 (1.79)	4.97 (2.84)	Yes	47	35	6.46 (2.02)	4.86 (2.2)	No
36	38	7.21 (1.56)	5.26 (2.45)	No	48	35	5.94 (2.36)	4.51 (2.47)	No

Notes. All photographs were presented without visual religious signals (e.g., headscarf, cross pendant). Attractiveness and ethnicity were rated on 0–10 scales (0 = not at all attractive/Belgian origin, 10 = very attractive/minority [Eastern European or Maghrebian] origin); means with standard deviations in parentheses. Photo ID corresponds to the identifier under which the respective image can be retrieved from the OSF repository (<https://osf.io/c6ufh>). N denotes the number of ratings per photograph. Selected indicates whether the photograph was ultimately used in the main experiment.

Table A2*Selected jobs and job characteristics*

Job	Required educational level	Level of customer contact	Level of internal contact
Quality controller	Secondary degree	Low	Low
Courier	Secondary degree	Low	High
Door-to-door salesperson	Secondary degree	High	Low
Customer service employee	Secondary degree	High	High
Credit analyst	Bachelor's degree	Low	Low
HR officer	Bachelor's degree	Low	High
Insurance broker	Bachelor's degree	High	Low
Event manager	Bachelor's degree	High	High

Notes. Customer contact is operationalised using the O*NET (2026) indicator 'deal with external customers' and internal contact using 'work with work group or team'. According to Statbel (2026), no occupation has a male or female representation of 5% or less.

Table A3*Bayesian truth serum weighted linear regressions of interview propensity on religious identity*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Attributed religious affiliation			
(ref. = unknown)			
Atheist	−0.542 (0.366)		
Christian	−0.729*** (0.174)		
Muslim	−0.467* (0.186)		
Attributed religiosity (s.)		−0.060† (0.035)	
Candidate characteristics			
(vignette factors)			
Signalled religion			
(ref. = none signalled)			
Christianity signalled			−0.037 (0.301)
Islam signalled			−0.254 (0.370)
Visual religious signal			
(ref. = no visual signal religion)			−0.044 (0.222)
Religious extracurricular activity			
(ref. = secular extracurricular activity)			−0.309 (0.209)
Ethnic minority			
(ref. = ethnic majority)			−0.272 (0.283)
Male candidate			
(ref. = female candidate)			0.209 (0.237)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	8.957*** (1.412)	8.451*** (1.498)	8.414*** (1.425)

Notes. N = 704. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), s. (scale variable, ranging from 0 to 10). All specifications are estimated using weighted least squares, where respondent-level weights are derived from the Bayesian truth serum (Prelec, 2004). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table A3

Linear regressions of interview propensity on religious identity: subsample low tendency to socially desirable responding

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Attributed religious affiliation			
(ref. = unknown)			
Atheist	−0.507 (0.388)		
Christian	−0.657*** (0.187)		
Muslim	−0.415† (0.220)		
Attributed religiosity (s.)		−0.060 (0.038)	
Candidate characteristics			
(vignette factors)			
Signalled religion			
(ref. = none signalled)			
Christianity signalled			0.653† (0.354)
Islam signalled			0.352 (0.404)
Visual religious signal			
(ref. = no visual signal religion)			−0.447† (0.247)
Religious extracurricular activity			
(ref. = secular extracurricular activity)			−0.848** (0.258)
Ethnic minority			
(ref. = ethnic majority)			−0.230 (0.407)
Male candidate			
(ref. = female candidate)			0.128 (0.274)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	7.872*** (1.928)	7.789*** (1.971)	7.850*** (1.950)

Notes. N = 628, subsample excluding respondents scoring higher than the mean + 1 standard deviation on the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), s. (scale variable, ranging from 0 to 10). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table A4*Linear regressions of interview propensity on religious identity: subsample sufficient time*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Attributed religious affiliation			
(ref. = unknown)			
Atheist	−0.609 (0.389)		
Christian	−0.695*** (0.193)		
Muslim	−0.345† (0.189)		
Attributed religiosity (s.)		−0.065† (0.035)	
Candidate characteristics			
(vignette factors)			
Signalled religion			
(ref. = none signalled)			
Christianity signalled			0.273 (0.293)
Islam signalled			0.170 (0.378)
Visual religious signal			
(ref. = no visual signal religion)			−0.165 (0.209)
Religious extracurricular activity			
(ref. = secular extracurricular activity)			−0.592** (0.224)
Ethnic minority			
(ref. = ethnic majority)			−0.438 (0.370)
Male candidate			
(ref. = female candidate)			0.088 (0.258)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	8.237*** (1.802)	8.398*** (1.830)	8.114*** (1.781)

Notes. N = 672, subsample excluding respondents with the 5% lowest time investment in the experiment. Abbreviations: ref. (reference category), s. (scale variable, ranging from 0 to 10). Controls include job, recruiter, and firm characteristics as described in Section 3. Standard errors are clustered at the recruiter level and are reported in parentheses. Significance is indicated as *** when $p < .001$, ** when $p < .01$, * when $p < .05$, and † when $p < .10$.

Table A5

Multiple hypothesis testing correction linear regression of interview propensity on attributed religious affiliation

	Original p-value	Westfall-Young p-value	Bonferroni-Holm p-value	Šidák-Holm p-value
Attributed religious affiliation				
(ref. = unknown)				
Atheist	0.094	0.129	0.094	0.094
Christian	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.000
Muslim	0.016	0.054	0.033	0.033

Notes. Family-wise corrections for multiple hypothesis testing applied to the three attributed religious affiliation contrasts tested jointly as a single family. The underlying coefficients and original p-values are those of the regression of interview propensity on attributed religious affiliation reported in Table 4, specification (1). P-values are obtained through 1,000 bootstrap replications resampled at the recruiter level.

Table A6

Multiple hypothesis testing correction linear regression of interview propensity on candidate characteristics (vignette factors)

	Original p-value	Westfall-Young p-value	Bonferroni- Holm p-value	Šidák-Holm p-value
Candidate characteristics (vignette factors)				
Signalled religion (ref. = none signalled)				
Christianity signalled	0.193	0.553	0.772	0.576
Islam signalled	0.685	0.727	0.772	0.685
Visual religious signal (ref. = no visual signal religion)	0.244	0.560	0.772	0.576
Religious extracurricular activity (ref. = secular extracurricular activity)	0.005	0.117	0.028	0.028
Ethnic minority (ref. = ethnic majority)	0.383	0.665	0.772	0.619
Male candidate (ref. = female candidate)	0.117	0.553	0.585	0.464

Notes. Family-wise corrections for multiple hypothesis testing applied to the six levels of candidate characteristics tested jointly as a single family. The underlying coefficients and original p-values are those of the regression of interview propensity on candidate characteristics (vignette factors) reported in Table 4, specification (3). P-values are obtained through 1,000 bootstrap replications resampled at the recruiter level.

Figure A1

Example of candidate presentation in the HR-software template



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Eva Segers

Profiel handmatig toegevoegd door je collega

Bron Verkenkend gesprek ✕

Profielvelden

Toevoegen v



Gender	Vrouw
Nationaliteit	Belg
Rijbewijs	B (+ eigen auto)
Pendelafstand	30 minuten (enkel)
Hoogste diploma	Secundair onderwijs
Relevante werkervaring	Geen werkervaring
IT-kennis	Voldoende
Extracurriculair	Trainer in volleybalclub