

APOSTATE REPORT: LEAVING ISLAM IN NORTH AMERICA

- Authors: Sarah Haider, Muhammed Syed, Hasan Tauha, Jason Mickevich
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A 2021 survey by Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA), in collaboration with George Mason University, provides a groundbreaking look at the lives of individuals who have left Islam in the U.S. and Canada. This first-of-its-kind study surveyed over 550 ex-Muslims, shedding light on their motivations for leaving Islam and the positive and negatives experiences associated with leaving.

Ex-Muslims in North America are predominantly young, well-educated, and diverse. Most are first-generation immigrants from regions like South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. A slight majority are men, and many are under 35, with nearly 20% identifying as LGBTQ+. Educationally, 82% hold at least a bachelor's degree, often in STEM fields. Politically, most identify as progressive, reflecting broader trends among non-religious individuals in the West. Many were devout and active in their religious communities before leaving Islam.

The process of leaving Islam is gradual, happening over the course of years, but often starting before age 22. Key motivators include human rights concerns, particularly conflicts with women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Other reasons include contradictions between Islam and science and inconsistencies in religious teachings, mentioned by more than three-quarters of participants. These findings show that leaving Islam is often driven by ethical and intellectual conflicts rather than social disconnection or personal circumstances.

Leaving Islam often comes with significant social and familial challenges. Over two-thirds of respondents reported concealing their loss of faith from all or some individuals, particularly family, to protect relationships or reputations. Those who are partially or fully open about their atheism frequently face consequences like emotional manipulation, loss of friendships, loss of financial support, threats of violence, and verbal and physical abuse. These risks are higher for those who are fully open, which may contribute to many remaining partially "closeted". Most also struggle to adjust to previously prohibited activities, like dressing freely or drinking alcohol.

Despite the challenges, many ex-Muslims reported experiencing a greater sense of freedom, increased happiness, and the ability to live more authentic lives. Their journeys are often marked by resilience and the pursuit of truth.

This survey amplifies the voices of an often-overlooked community, challenging stereotypes and highlighting the pursuit of integrity and truth that defines many ex-Muslims' journeys. Such studies are vital for raising awareness, fostering understanding, and including ex-Muslims in broader conversations about religious disaffiliation.