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# Religion and Public-Health Compliance: Mechanisms, Influences, and Interventions

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## ABSTRACT

Religious beliefs and institutions have played a significant role in shaping public-health compliance during infectious disease outbreaks, particularly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper examines the mechanisms through which religion influences compliance with public-health measures, including mask wearing, physical distancing, vaccination, and other disease prevention behaviors. It explores the influence of religious beliefs, social norms, trust in religious authorities, moral framing, sacred narratives, rituals, and community structures in promoting or hindering adherence to health recommendations. The paper further analyzes variations across religious traditions, denominations, and cultural contexts, highlighting how differences in governance, leadership, and theological interpretation affect public-health outcomes. It also evaluates religion-informed interventions such as faith-based communication strategies, collaboration with religious leaders, community-driven approaches, and efforts to counter misinformation and resistance. Drawing upon comparative case studies and existing empirical evidence, the paper demonstrates that religious institutions can serve as valuable partners in promoting public-health compliance when interventions are culturally sensitive, ethically grounded, and aligned with community values. The study concludes that integrating religious perspectives into public-health planning strengthens trust, enhances community engagement, improves the effectiveness of health communication, and contributes to more inclusive and sustainable responses during public-health emergencies. It recommends stronger partnerships between public-health agencies and faith communities to improve preparedness and compliance in future health crises.

**Keywords**: Religion, Public-health compliance, COVID-19, Religious leadership and Health communication

## INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has drastically affected the entire planet, but Indigenous and rural communities across various countries experienced substantial disruption, with the crisis highlighting pre-existing inequalities [1]. The pandemic influenced religious aspects of numerous communities, generating disruptions in practices and conveying a range of messages through different media. Religious belief represents a significant variable for understanding aspects of human behavior and decision-making [2]. Decision-making regarding public-health compliance is fundamental to epidemic containment and mitigation. Important public-health behaviors include mask-wearing, physical distancing, vaccinations, and many others [3]. Further exploration is crucial to enhance the understanding of the role of religious belief in public-health compliance across varying degrees of religion and religious systems regarding both compliance and underlying mechanisms [3]. Specifically, focus should be directed towards the influence and engagement of religious institutions, propagation roles in the transmission of religious narratives and norms, and subsequently impacting public-health compliance during situations such as COVID-19; the potential foundation for shared religious principles, scriptures, and narratives across faiths serves to advance this exploration [4]. Compliance represents an important and multi-faceted concept across numerous fields, including law, criminology, education, and public health [1]. Public-health compliance continues to garner substantial attention given its pivotal role in disease containment and mitigation, especially during pandemic scenarios [2]. Public-health compliance encompasses a wide variety of behavioral activities, and the motivation and ability to comply with recommended solutions constitute two critical elements for adherence [3]. Religion is defined as the social-cultural institution for systematizing and regulating individual engagement with the supernatural [4]. The relationship between religion

and individual behavior has been extensively documented through various systematic reviews, and significant relationships between certain religious systems and behaviors and values are perceptible [1].

**Conceptual Frameworks: Religion, Compliance, and Public Health**

Religion constitutes a complex phenomenon, encompassing systems of beliefs and behaviors oriented toward transcendent, sacred, or spiritual concerns [2]. Religious systems may include beliefs about the existence, nature, and effects of God or other spiritual beings; doctrines regarding the nature of humanity; teachings about moral behavior; ritual practices; and communal organizations [3]. Although related, faith (the individual conviction that sacred beliefs are true) and spirituality (the inwardly directed quest for ultimate meaning) are more narrowly defined [4]. At the practical level, religion often expresses itself through congregations, temples, and intercessory groups. Compliance eludes a uniform definition but typically refers to the extent to which observed behavior corresponds to an external regulation [5]. The term is often also applied to fully voluntary but externally framed behavior, such as health recommendations framed as requests from authority. Broadly, People comply because they believe that a behavior will ultimately benefit them and/or because they are influenced by important others, including perceived normative, trust, and authoritative obligations [6]. The mechanisms through which these broad compliance-related influences operate vary across contexts and behaviors. Health behaviors and the factors that influence them at the individual level have been extensively studied within the past several decades [7]. Much research has been motivated by the desire to develop theory-based interventions to modify behaviors that contribute to chronic disease [8]. Understanding the relevant factors in the specific context of religion can therefore help develop religion-sensitive and evidence-based efforts to promote compliance with health recommendations. Individuals are thus motivated to engage in public-health actions that they trust but not to engage in actions that they perceive to undermine their or others' long-term spiritual interests[9].

**3. Mechanisms Linking Religious Belief and Public-Health Behaviors**

Existing research helps to identify mechanisms that may facilitate public-health compliance in religious settings. Beliefs, practices, and institutions associated with religious adherence shape [5, 6, 7]. Social norms exert a strong influence on behavior in many contexts, including a range of health-related activities. Norms develop within communities and group members often conform to them [3]. Spiritual communities have their own distinctive beliefs, practices, and doctrines that may translate into health-related expectations and strengthen overall compliance. Normative expectations within religious gatherings, such as prayers, sermons, or hymn singing, further reinforce the settings' collective influence on behavior [4]. Beliefs regarding trust, authority, and moralization exert additional sway over compliance. Individuals are more inclined to follow health directives when they believe these instructions emanate from trustworthy sources [5]. Religious leaders, scriptures, and associated teachings may thus become trusted facilitators of healthy behavior [6]. Moreover, positioning health practices as moral imperatives further enhances adherence, establishing a virtuous dimension to compliance [7].

**Social Norms and Community Influence**

Compliance with regulations designed to slow the spread of contagious diseases is often rooted in established social norms and practices within communities [7]. Religious groups can strongly influence these norms, as members frequently look to their institutions, leaders, and peers for guidance on acceptable behaviors [8]. Norm-focused interventions, which leverage the key role of religion in shaping community standards, can thus be especially effective for promoting adherence to public-health regulations, such as physical distancing and mask wearing [9]. Developing normative compliance mechanisms is particularly important in religious settings characterized by communal, ritualized adherence to doctrine, such as congregations, fellowship groups, and faith-based organizations [10]. Research on how social norms evolve within communities suggests that the beliefs and behaviors of peers who are perceived as credible and relevant exert a strong influence on individual decision-making [11]. Numerous specific factors determine whether an individual adopts a particular behavior, including the perceived riskiness of the action [12]. When the health risks associated with a behavior are already considered low, the potential value of social norms as well as other nudges explicitly aimed at promoting the activity may be limited 9. Nonetheless, when members of a group perceive a behavior to be normative, they are likely to engage in it, adhering to the unwritten rules of their community, regardless of the associated risks [13].

**Trust, Authority, and Moral Moralization**

Most individuals differ in how much they trust various types of sources: some may trust only certain nominated authorities, and some may additionally trust other kinds of referrals like local individuals who are not officially appointed authorities but have well-known expertise [10]. Those who have substantive confidence in designated authorities generally experience greater compliance with the messages they send; among the abiding strategic options is to promulgate those messages through the authorities or sources people recognize as authorities [11]. Those who instead favor certain forms of moral reasoning may find it effective to establish that extensive social framing or guidance about health practices is pertinent to the relevant moral reasoning[12]. A further mechanism of pertinence relates to portrayals of health-related actions as enjoyably virtuous and approvable [13]. Respectful religious audiences are disposed to regard a variety of well-established actions of public health on the part of their

leaders or designated verbal sources, including printed notices of public health actions, as morally commendable and worthy of priority indeed[14]. Attention to the relevant moral reasoning in the habitual presentation of messages and styles of engagement may significantly improve the effectiveness of any health-related communications and actions consequently [15].

**Rituals, Sacred Narratives, and Health Messaging**

Beliefs and community practices influence collective behaviors and guide compliance with health measures. Specifically, rituals affect behavioral expectations and programming [2]. Institutionalized ritualized behaviors shape community members' perception of risk, normative expectations for compliance, and receptivity to health-related guidance. Health messages aligned with the sacred narratives and meta-narratives of an institution facilitate interpretation and enhance acceptance [3]. Consequently, worship formats dictating ritual frequency, congregational rituals that mark time and place, and exposure to sacred narratives, within the institution and beyond, can influence the public health promotion of specific acts at critical epidemiological junctures [4]. Rituals serve as frameworks for interpreting experience [5]. Institutionalization of public health measures within worship rituals affects the community's perception of risk and normative expectations for compliance [6]. Rituals and rituals-involving guidance are perceived as authorities for sound conduct and safe practices [7]. Rituals direct attention and help frame comprehension of messages received, signaling how to position speculation or remark about their import [12]. Messages delivered during rituals or reported with ritualistic style, along with messages that reflect the congregation's sacred narratives, tend to be heard constructively and enhance public-health engagement when these messages accord with the congregation's meta-narrative about its origin and permanent end goal [4, 8].

**Variations across Contexts: Denominations, Sectors, and Cultures**

The doctrine and practice of different religions provide comparative insights into the relationship between religious adherence and health security [6]. Christianity and Islam have complex attitudes towards health security, which shape compliance behaviors [7]. Both religions advocate restrictions on harmful substances, such as tobacco and alcohol, which have an established public-health rationale [8]. Thus, it would be expected that churches and mosques would integrate pandemic-mitigation recommendations from governments and videoconferencing links to faith-based gathering platforms with little resistance. However, around the world, including in the United States, many political leaders and segments of the population have resisted practices designed to limit the spread of the virus [9]. When leaders do not espouse a set of standards that promote health security, then congregants are less likely to support compliance measures [13]. Within both Christianity and Islam, the Catholic Church and the Wahhabi sect of Islam have similar doctrinal teachings concerning public health. Leaders within both communities have historically supported adherence to protocols such as mask wearing and vaccinations 12 and continue to do so in regard to the coronavirus pandemic [10].

**Comparative Perspectives across Religions**

When religion was first conceptualized, its beleaguering intertwining with socio-political structures led to the generalization of a monological perspective encompassing the vague dimensions of the metaphysical and the moral [10]. Secularization and post-secularization debates tend to neglect faith-based organizations as relevant actors [11]. Exemplary phenomenological term "faith" symbolizes subjective irrevocable relations allowing acknowledgement of large-scale beliefs without specificities of currents, doctrines, and practices excluding sociopolitical interference [12]. Fifty-five percent of humankind professes an affiliation linked to documented faith. Although its diverse and complex modern contours exhibit unclear distinctions, outright commonality of direct or indirect interplay with diverse social-ecological systems persists [3]. In recent public-health challenges, pre-inoculation hesitance and non-compliance witnessed were influenced partly by religious beliefs [13]. Orthodoxy, minority status, and mystical spirituality positively correlated with dimensions of cosmological imbedding, such as sacralisation and ritualization, further amplifying these correlations. Complementary narratives further justified exemption from health regulations [2].

**Denominational and Congregational Differences**

Denominational differences can shape how compliance is approached and endorsed. Some denominations favour congregational forms of governance, encouraging diverse and context-specific public-health responses, whereas others favour hierarchical structures and centralized directives [13]. Even within congregational forms of governance, adherence to public-health guidance varies depending on the leadership styles of religious actors and their willingness to work with state authorities [1, 3]. Membership in hierarchical denominations is associated with higher infection rates, peak levels of infection, and lower rates of compliance than in congregational bodies. Congregationalist denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Assemblies of God have more permissive positions than those of more hierarchical congregations, such as the Catholic Church, the Orthodox church, and some mainline Protestant circles [14].

## Cultural Contexts and Secular Intersections

The emergent religious-secular hybridism shapes global health campaigns. Mega-campaigns leverage the cross-border transmission of hybrid discourses and employ quasi-religious frames that align with existing faith-based belief systems [14]. Religious-secular hybrids intermingle even within secular contexts [13]. In Sierra Leone, Freetown's health authorities incorporate Islamic teachings related to hygiene into urban sanitation campaigns, despite citywide religious-secular tension [12]. The rise of secularization raises questions about religious relevance; in the post-Cold War era, public normative secularism competing with quasi-religious norms globally stimulate health-centric hybrid construction [13]. Pre-pandemic, mainstream messaging upheld public health as a global common good; faith-based representation was sidelined, yet religious engagement remained prominent, as illustrated by the World Bank–UNDP–WHO during the 2022 period of geopolitical uncertainty [15].

## Public-Health Compliance Interventions Informed by Religion

Preventive and control measures against COVID-19 emphasize compliance with positions expressed by official health authorities [1]. Religious beliefs and institutions have been recognized as important influencers in this domain. Although many studies have addressed the influence of religion on health during the pandemic, limited attention has been paid to mechanisms and pathways through which religion influences compliance [5]. Research indicates that religious leaders may possess more legitimacy than public authorities in some contexts concerning regulations on gatherings, masking, and vaccination [14]. Communication and action programs driven by regulatory agencies or civil society can benefit from systematic consideration of how religion shapes compliance with official public-health messages and actions. Insights into varied influences and relevant arrangements among different religious communities contribute to the design of interventions [15]. Alignment of public-health messages with religious beliefs, values, and vernacular optimizes understanding, acceptance, and adherence [16]. The informational and normative dimensions of public-health directives intersect with religious tenets and conventions in comparable manners across diverse regions and faiths. Interventions co-developed through hubs or coalitions of public and religious authorities enhance legitimacy, reciprocity, and social capital, facilitating attitudinal and behavioral change [17]. Communities initiating participatory protocols to define public-health measures demonstrate stronger ownership, agency, and sustainability. Common messages across health sects and movements foster collaboration and joint acquisition of evidence, strengthen counter-misinformation campaigns, and diminish public-defiance narratives [18].

## Communication Strategies and Message Framing

Public-health compliance interventions may more effectively reach religious communities when communication strategies and key messages resonate with religious beliefs, values, and linguistic norms [15]. Messages that address the tenets of faith or emphasize the well-being of families and communities may be particularly persuasive. Tailoring communication to specific religious contexts also includes recognizing appropriate vocabulary, selected communication modes, and adherence to speech characteristics [16]. Religious principles about culturally sanctioned forms of communication help inform, combine, or filter public-health guidance, making appropriate adherence less contentious [17]. Religious institutions outside formal organizational structures may have significant communicative authority. Messages that display overreach, however, may cause suspicion [18]. Religious leaders can help gather further information from groups with greater health risk exposure and facilitate adjustments to messaging that mitigates difficulty in accessing fresh insights [19].

## Engagement and Collaboration with Religious Leaders

Religious leaders can serve as important conduits for public-health compliance messaging when they explicitly endorse the behavior, either collectively or as trusted individuals within their religious context [12]. Their fundamental task is to develop stronger compliance messaging that aligns with religious doctrine, caters to local or sub-group levels of religiousness (as distinguished from general adherence), and remains highly relevant to the community[13]. Nevertheless, religious leaders engage in the promotion of public health more frequently than proscriptive norms [14]. They respond to concerns about the lack of attention given to health matters in scripture and sermons, highlighting the need for greater engagement relative to existing prohibitions [15, 16]. Confirmation of Religion and Public-Health Compliance Hypothesis is essential for effective design of compliance strategies and, therefore, additional substantive religious components [17].

## Community-Driven Interventions and Co-Production

Community-driven interventions complement health initiatives by offering locally relevant solutions aligned with religious, cultural, and socio-political contexts [23]. Such approaches effectively engage religious actors and public-health organizations, promote co-ownership, address local concerns, enhance implementation, and sustainably shift attitudes and behaviors [16]. Co-production has become critical in an era of hyper-partisanship and distrust among institutional authority figures, where public-health narratives struggle against devaluation and misrepresentation [17]. Deploying community-driven strategies, participatory-design exercises help mobilize community knowledge around disease and enable co-production of public-health strategies [17].

## Addressing Misinformation and Resistance

Misinformation can have pernicious effects on the public's response to health issues, necessitating a better understanding of its origins and credible counterstrategy development [7]. Religious communities are especially vulnerable to misinformation about health measures, or to general resistance against government policies. Misinformation can exploit longstanding distrust in authorities by suggesting that those in power are actively concealing the truth from the populace [18]. Countering misinformation requires appealing to values and sources of authority trusted within religious communities [19]. Simply validating individuals' beliefs or asserting the accuracy of official messaging is often ineffective; indeed, such approaches may backfire and reinforce the resistance. Counterstrategies must instead draw upon the beliefs, values, and narratives of the community [20]. At the outset, disseminating factual explanations that clarify why a particular course of action seems warranted can usefully orient a faith community to public-health health recommendations [21]. The situation has intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting extensive speculation on how to manage public communication [20].

## Ethical Considerations: Autonomy, Harm, and Inclusivity

Public authorities have a duty to protect the population from the spread of infectious diseases by promoting public compliance with precautionary health measures [6]. The enforcement of these measures may infringe upon certain freedoms. The extent of this infringement, and the justifications for imposing it, depend on the consideration of complex ethical questions: How harmful are the health measures? [7]What is the likelihood and scope of harms to particularly vulnerable groups? How reasonable and effective are the proposed alternatives? It is necessary to take into account the social-structural inequalities in society. Although health measures serve a public interest, they may simultaneously infringe upon other interests [8]. For many, public health compliance is not motivated by health needs or a sense of morality, but rather by religious compliance. If public health measures are perceived to be in conflict with various religious observances, these regulations may not be followed [9]. Local and national public health agencies are often perceived as outsiders, and their endorsement of certain practices is frequently qualified by religious considerations. In addressing compliance within religious communities, the foundations of these ethical considerations arise at the interface between religion and public health [21].

## Methodological Approaches to Studying Religion and Compliance

Variations among contexts denominations, sectors, and cultures affect the relationship between religion and public-health compliance. Comparative analyses reveal that different religions articulate diverse syntheses of doctrine, practice, and health policy [9]. Among Christians, Catholicism and Orthodoxy typically recover, while Evangelicalism often escalates resistance. Inter-religious engagement can cultivate wider receptivity, yet Evangelical congregations may pursue stricter doctrine within non-communicative contexts [10]. Within subsumed denominations, variations in authority structures, leadership styles, and congregational contexts yield additional disparate influences on national policy [11]. These inward and outward distinctions determine engagement frequency with religious leaders and messages. Secular discourses shape public health as significant qualifiers [12]. Religion, when viewed as faith, remains influential among countries experiencing secularization. Secularization stimulates hybrid justification, broadening permissible religious participation, yet also incubates differential secular constructs. Secular discourses emerging alongside accompaniment considerably reshape religious interactions during high-receptivity periods [13]. Emerging public joking further complicates transnational contagion across Church Radicals and through culturally renowned clerics [14]. Evaluative cases and empirical evidence demonstrate substantial yet limited influence concerning the Americas, Europe, and South-Eastern Asia [14]. Public-health compliance receives modest religious input globally. Mechanisms, interventions, and variance elucidate this influence's nature, scope, channels, and constraints under selected conditions [15]. Religious orientation motivates compliance more robustly in pandemic, epidemiological, and health crises. As data and observations often coalesce during major crises, future research may investigate transitional specification and temporal diversity into closely related, concern-driven global issues [16]. The engagement of religious authorities during pandemic initiation remains well documented, yet guiding or companioning integrative transitions towards adjacent topics facilitated by either sustained conservation or evolving shift involving unchanged content eludes comprehensive exploration [17].

## Policy Implications and Practice Guidelines

Public-health agencies should develop guidance for religious communities that outlines effective interventions to promote compliance with health directives [15]. Religious organizations should adapt these interventions to align with their doctrinal beliefs and practices while maintaining the intent of the public-health message [16]. Although guidelines from public-health agencies establish a baseline for compliance, congregations frequently modify and contextualize them [17]. Attention to the moral framing of public-health directives, the role of religious commitment in the moralization of health behavior, and ongoing community consultation facilitates greater compliance that is consistent with religious beliefs and congregational norms [22]. Multiple opportunities exist for communication among public-health agencies and officials, religious leaders, and congregational members at every intervention stage, as the values, beliefs, and linguistic preferences of these communities are a central concern [18].

Further, health authorities and researchers can actively participate in community-led co-production of health interventions, drawing on established sources of community feedback and input during their development [19].

## Case Studies and Empirical Evidence

The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on religion and religious practitioners is evident around the world. Overall, religious organizations have had both negative and positive effects on compliance with public-health measures during the pandemic [10]. This section highlights three representative cases that illustrate the diverse ways that religious belief and practice are related to compliance, and the potential for public-health campaigns to be designed in light of these contexts [11]. Each case summarizes relevant background on the religion involved, describes the mechanisms connected to public-health compliance in that context, and outlines interventions and their outcomes. The cases include Tibetan Buddhism [3], the Roman Catholic Church in France [12, 13], and the Greek Orthodox Church in Greece [1]. Each example is drawn from different religious traditions, geographic areas, and specific public-health measures, collectively illustrating the varied interactions exhibited between religious settings and compliance with secular health recommendations during the pandemic [12]. The first case examines how belief and practice associated with Tibetan Buddhism relate to compliance with public-health measures taken during COVID-19. To explore how these relationships operate, the authors conducted a cross-sectional survey with a sample of Tibetan Buddhists from China and India [13]. Participants reported on their religious beliefs, compliance with a range of precautionary measures, and their motivation for taking such measures. A focus on measures of compliance and motivation allows for the investigation of beliefs and practices that support adherence to rules designed to protect oneself from contracting and transmitting the virus. Results showed that higher levels of belief in karma, purification, and deity protection were linked to greater compliance [14]. Several messages were also disseminated through religious organizations emphasizing the precautionary measures and encouraging adoption of such behaviors, suggesting that attention to religion has the potential to support public health efforts [15]. The second case illustrates the role of the Roman Catholic Church in promoting compliance with public-health recommendations in France. Although the initial closing of public gatherings provoked pushback from various groups, including Catholic congregations, the Church ultimately supported closure and promoted adherence to health guidelines [16]. Catholic social teaching framed compliance within the community of the faithful as both a moral imperative and an act of charity. Bishops referenced both scientific sources and the example of Christ to build trust in health authorities and convey vaccination messages. The Church has since begun to advocate again for a halt to restrictive measures, with some leaders urging prioritizing of churches and schools and promotion of vaccination in light of new variants [17]. The third case reflects the Greek Orthodox Church's role during the pandemic. At the outset of the pandemic, leaders openly challenged the necessity of restrictions [18]. When guidelines were instituted, there was initial resistance to compliance. However, church authorities later acquired legitimacy through convening a synod to approve guidelines, which in turn lent authority to health messages concerning mask wearing, vaccination, and updates on sanitary measures [17]. A survey indicated that while only 16% of the population believed leaders had positively influenced compliance with health measures, 72% felt that following the Holy Synod's recommendations would set a good example [18].

## Future Directions and Research Gaps

Worldwide, a vast and growing body of evidence indicates that religious belief and affiliation shape individual and community health behavior, both positively and negatively [15]. It has become increasingly clear that one of the primary public-health behaviors shaped by religious belief and affiliation is compliance with health guidelines during public-health emergencies. Nevertheless, the landscape of empirical research remains uneven and uncertain. Important gaps persist in theory, measurement, and methodology [17]. A critical priority for future research is the development and testing of multisector health-behavior models that explicitly integrate religious variables. Investigators need to move beyond the measurement of simple intra- and interreligious differences and focus instead on the specific religious dimensions involved [16]. Priority should be given to identifying, understanding, and systematically measuring core constructs such as authority, moralization, community, leadership, trust, risk, and sacred narratives, along with the mechanisms and processes connecting these constructs to compliance across diverse religious contexts [18]. As a matter of principle, qualitative and mixed-methods research should be prioritized [22]. Such work not only sheds light on the relevant religious dimensions, mechanisms, and processes involved but also generates the hypotheses on the basis of which testing can and should proceed [19]. Longitudinal studies of the ways in which these dimensions, mechanisms, and processes evolve across diverse public-health crises constitute a promising avenue of empirically oriented investigation [20]. Partly in response to an anticipated political backlash, health authorities within certain countries have sometimes sought to dissuade researchers from documenting the influence of religious belief and affiliation on public-health compliance and associated health behavior [21]. Nevertheless, a growing body of evidence confirms that in certain contexts, faith communities exert a significant positive influence on compliance. Microsoft and affiliated global health experts have accordingly issued guidelines aimed at enhancing regulatory leadership capacities, promoting and sustaining adherence to regulations, and counteracting misinformation and conspiracy theories [22]. In particular, the preparation of guidelines

governing political–epistemic authority, religious epistemic authority, message framing, misinformation, and political–religious factors may benefit from further attention [23].

## CONCLUSION

Religion remains one of the most influential social institutions affecting human attitudes, values, and behavior, making it an important determinant of public-health compliance during health emergencies. This review demonstrates that religious beliefs, moral teachings, social norms, trusted leadership, and community structures can either facilitate or hinder adherence to public-health recommendations depending on how they are interpreted and communicated within different faith communities. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, religious organizations served not only as centers of worship but also as influential platforms for disseminating health information, encouraging preventive behaviors, and supporting community resilience. However, misinformation, conflicting theological interpretations, and distrust of governmental authorities also contributed to resistance in certain contexts, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between religion and public health. The evidence further suggests that public-health interventions are more effective when they acknowledge the religious values, cultural practices, and communication preferences of target populations. Collaboration between public-health authorities and religious leaders enhances trust, increases message credibility, and promotes greater community ownership of health initiatives. Faith-based communication, community participation, culturally appropriate message framing, and co-produced interventions are particularly valuable for improving compliance while respecting religious autonomy and ethical considerations. Despite the growing body of evidence, important gaps remain in understanding the specific mechanisms through which different dimensions of religion influence health behavior across diverse cultural and denominational contexts. Future research should employ interdisciplinary, longitudinal, and mixed-methods approaches to better understand these relationships and develop evidence-based, religion-sensitive public-health strategies. Ultimately, religion should not be viewed solely as a potential barrier or facilitator of public-health compliance but as a critical social resource capable of strengthening public-health systems when appropriately engaged. Building sustained partnerships between governments, healthcare institutions, researchers, and faith communities will enhance preparedness for future public-health emergencies, improve compliance with health interventions, and contribute to healthier, more resilient, and socially inclusive societies.

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