Title: Accepting the mask, accepting the mosque? The effects of COVID-19 related face covering on prejudice towards religious veiling.

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Abstract: Using a large scale lab-in-the-field experimental setting, we study how the mitigation efforts for COVID-19 in the form of covering the face through masks affect the behavior and perception of subjects towards others. In particular, we study whether the subjects, when primed to wearing the mask, have different perceptions and behaviors towards others who also cover their face or their hair for religious reasons. To uncover such effects, we combine our elicitation of perception of others with an experimental variation of mask exposure, a behavioral game and a survey questionnaire. Our identification strategy exploits the variation we introduce through priming, one’s own perception of mask-wearing, one’s own perception of religious clothing, combined with the intensity of the outbreak in the subject’s own location. We test several potential mechanisms ranging from whether the effects for primed subjects depend on their altered perception of others wearing masks or their altered perception of others covering their face in general. We also assess whether acceptance of masks generally or specific to certain public interactions, whether non-religious factors such as political views, violation of liberty and the economic loss incurred by the subject impact their behavior towards others who cover their faces.

Data Description: We collect our data through an experimental setting varying the salience of masks, through a behavioral game and a survey questionnaire for a representative sample of the US population. The data includes variables relating to the subject’s perception of others such as their competence, possible acceptable interactions with other people, their altruism, as well as their view of COVID-19, the economic situation before and during the lockdown.

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