



**FACT SHEET:**  
**Protecting Individuals**  
**from Discrimination Based on Actual or Perceived**  
**Shared Ancestry or Ethnic Characteristics**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights (ODICR) enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations, 43 C.F.R. Part 17 (Title VI) which protects individuals from discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance from the Department. This fact sheet describes ways this protection covers members of the public who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, or of another religious group.

**Title VI's protection from race, color, or national origin discrimination extends to:**

1. Individuals who experience discrimination, including harassment, based on their actual or perceived:
  - shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or
  - citizenship or residency in a country with a dominant religion or distinct religious identity.
2. Title VI prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin against persons of any religion, such as individuals who are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, or Buddhist, when the discrimination, for example, involves:
  - racial, ethnic, or ancestral slurs or stereotypes;
  - how a member of the public appears, including skin color, physical features, or style of dress that reflects both ethnic and religious traditions; and
  - foreign accent; a foreign name, including names commonly associated with particular shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics; or speaking a foreign language.
3. Because Title VI does not protect individuals from discrimination based on religion, ODICR refers complaints of discrimination based exclusively on religion to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), which may have jurisdiction on this issue.



**U.S. Department of the Interior**  
**Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights**

**Examples of the kinds of incidents that may, depending upon facts and circumstances, raise Title VI concerns include:**

- While applying for services with staff of an organization that received financial assistance from the federal government, a Pakistani member of the public overhears a staff person make derogatory comments about their accent and their traditional religious attire and refuses to let them apply.
- At a facility owned by an organization that received financial assistance from federal the government, Jewish members of the public are told they must pay in cash rather than by credit card and are charged higher prices than other customers because, the recipient says, “Jewish people control financial systems.”
- A Sikh individual, who wears a turban, is called a “terrorist” and is harassed by employees at the local Environmental Quality Office when trying to get a permit. The individual reports this and the Office does not take effective actions to document and address these reports.

**What may individuals do if they experience discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics?**

Anyone who believes an organization that received financial assistance from the federal government has discriminated against a member of the public based on race, color, or national origin can file a complaint of discrimination with ODICR.

**To file a complaint, visit <https://www.doi.gov/pmb/eeo/Public-Civil-Rights>.**

*Please note this resource does not have the force and effect of law. DOI's enforcement of Title VI stems from Title VI and its implementing regulations.*