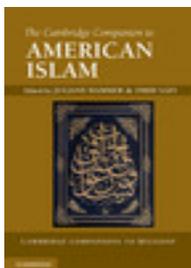


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6 Demographics, Political Participation, and Representation

AMANEY JAMAL AND LIALI ALBANA

The factors that shape the political incorporation of Muslim Americans are multifaceted. They stem primarily from challenges in the mainstream political environment, an environment that is structured by a general climate of Islamophobia. Further, the vast multiethnic nature of Muslim Americans makes it more difficult to gain intracommunal consensus and political clout in the United States. In this chapter, we offer a general demographic overview of the Muslim American community and discuss general patterns of political participation among the Muslim American community. We consider individual patterns of political participation and also highlight the role of the mosque in structuring patterns of participation more broadly. Finally, we provide an overview of the external and internal challenges the community faces and continues to confront when it deals with issues relating to political representation.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The American Muslim community stands at around 9–10 million individuals. The Pew Research Center estimates that the Muslim population is at 2.8 million. Muslim organizations like the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) place the size of the community near 10 million. Most scholars who study the American Muslim community place the number at closer to 8 million. The actual number of Muslims generates significant political discussion because at the heart of the matter is the issue of political representation. Those who are skeptical of the higher number of Muslims, charge that community leaders are deliberately inflating their numbers for greater political representation.

Demographic data on the Muslim community have only more recently become available. Since 9/11, there has been a concerted effort to collect reliable data on the Muslim community. Scholars and community organizations are invested in collecting reliable data on the

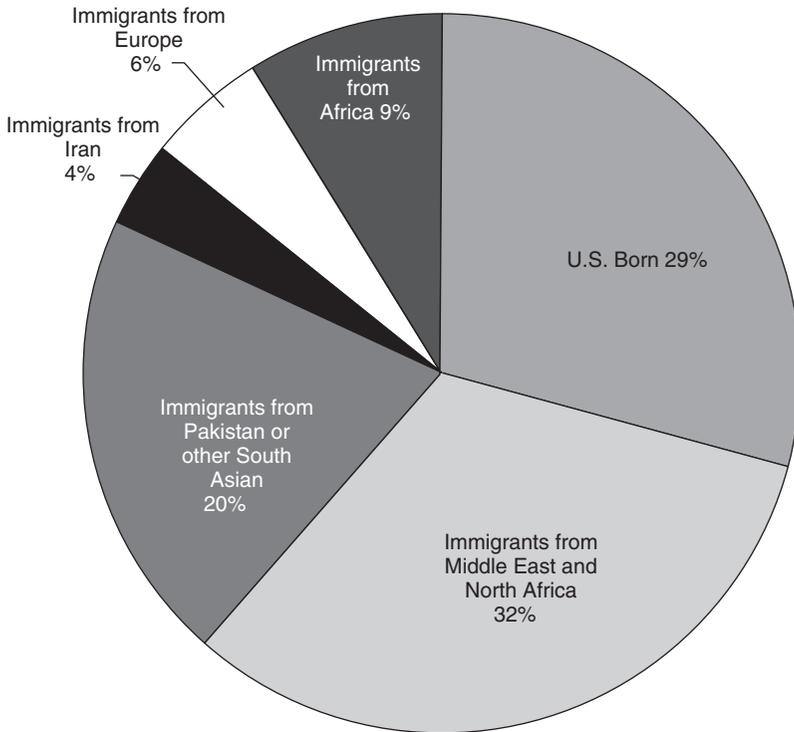


Figure 6.1. Muslim American demographics, 2011

Muslim American community in order to dispel existing stereotypes and misperceptions. Yet, other agencies are often linked to government surveillance.

According to a survey taken in 2011, 63 percent of the community are foreign born, while 37 percent were born in the United States. Muslim immigrants came from at least sixty-eight different countries. A regional breakdown shows 32 percent of the Muslim population emigrating from the Middle East and North Africa, 20 percent from Pakistan or another South Asian country, 4 percent from Iran, 6 percent from Europe, and 9 percent from Africa (see Figure 6.1). Of the Muslim population, 71 percent are relatively new, having arrived after 1990, and 40 percent arrived after 2000. Most American Muslims (81 percent) are U.S. citizens. Among native-born Muslims, more than half (59 percent) are African American: 20 percent of the community converted to Islam, whereas 80 percent were born into the faith. Muslims immigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons. Education and economic opportunities were cited by almost equal percentages of the

population (26 percent and 24 percent, respectively); 20 percent of the Muslim population said that they came to the United States to escape conflict and persecution in their home country.¹ Of all Muslim immigrants, 70 percent are U.S. citizens. No single racial group constituted a majority among the Muslim American population: 30 percent described themselves as white; 23 percent, as Black; 21 percent, as Asian; and 21 percent, as mixed race. Thus, the Muslim American community is both racially and ethnically diverse.²

INCOME AND EDUCATION

Muslim Americans generally resemble the mainstream population when we examine their levels of education and income. More than a quarter (26 percent) of the Muslim population is enrolled in college or university classes.

Economically, family income among Muslim Americans is slightly lower than that of the general U.S. population. Among U.S. adults, 43 percent report household incomes of \$50,000 or more annually, while household incomes of more than \$50,000 are enjoyed by 35 percent of Muslim Americans. At the highest end of the income scale, Muslim Americans are about as likely to report household incomes of \$100,000 or more as are members of the general public (14 percent for Muslims compared with 16 percent among the general public). Muslim Americans are more likely to be concentrated at the lower end of the economic spectrum. Close to half of the Muslim population (45 percent) reports household incomes below \$30,000, while only a third (35 percent) of the general population reports similar household incomes.

Although American Muslims' economic status lags behind the general population, these levels of economic attainment stand in direct contrast to the experience of Muslims in Europe. Surveys of Muslim populations in Great Britain, France, Germany, and Spain conducted in 2006 as part of the Pew Global Attitudes Project found Muslims to fare much worse than their average European counterparts. For example, 53 percent of Muslims in Germany report family incomes of less

¹ Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," 2007, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2007/05/22/muslim-americans-middle-class-and-mostly-mainstream/>; Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," 2011, <http://www.people-press.org/2011/08/30/muslim-americans-no-signs-of-growth-in-alienation-or-support-for-extremism>.

² Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," 2011.

than 18,000 euros annually, compared to only 25 percent of Germans overall. A similar trend existed in France. In Great Britain, 61 percent of Muslims report incomes of less than 20,000 pounds annually, compared to only 39 percent of the general public. Among Spanish Muslims, 73 percent report incomes of less than 14,500 euros, compared with half of the Spanish public nationwide.³ All in all, Muslim Americans are doing better than other Muslims in Western societies.

MUSLIM AMERICANS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The Muslim American community has seen a tremendous growth in its political organizations and institutions in the past century. In the mid-1920s, Muslim American representation was limited. By the early 2000s, there were more than two thousand organizations of all types representing Muslim Americans.⁴

Muslim political activism became more prominent in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, the American Muslim Council (AMC) was established with the mission to increase American Muslim political participation. AMC's goal was to increase awareness and recognition of the Muslim American community. It brought the community much needed political visibility. The AMC, for example, arranged for Imam Siraj Wahhaj of New York to deliver the first Islamic invocation before the House of Representatives, in 1991 and in 1992. Since 1996, Muslims have been invited to the White House to commemorate the Eid al-fitr holiday and feast. The Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) was established in the mid-1990s to defend Muslims against discrimination and defamation. By the 2000s, CAIR was the chief defender of Muslim political and civil liberties across the United States. Having defended the rights of thousands of Muslims in the United States, it continues to be the most influential advocacy group on behalf of the Muslim American community.⁵

American Muslim community organizing often emerged from the efforts of dedicated leaders. Dr. Agha Saeed, for example, played an influential role in Muslim advocacy. Dr. Saeed had his first hands-on

³ Pew Research Center, "Muslims in Europe: Economic Worries Top Concerns about Religious and Cultural Identity," 2006, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2006/07/06/muslims-in-europe-economic-worries-top-concerns-about-religious-and-cultural-identity/>.

⁴ Mohamed Nimer, "Social and Political Institutions of American Muslims: Liberty and Civic Responsibility," in Philippa Strum and Danielle Tarantolo, eds., *Muslims in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 2003), pp. 45–61.

⁵ Nimer, "Social and Political Institutions," p. 51.

involvement in U.S. politics in 1984 while working on the campaign of Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson. This experience helped set the stage for the creation of the American Muslim Alliance (AMA) that he founded in October 1994.

By the end of its second year, the AMA had forty local chapters, and by 1997, this number had increased to seventy-five. The national board was diverse both geographically and in ethnic backgrounds. Board members, who must approve all important AMA decisions, represent the South Asian, Arab, Iranian, and Turkish Muslim immigrant communities as well as African American Muslims. This diversity helps assure access to mosques representing all branches of Islam.⁶

Muslim political participation in 1996 included a meeting with Bill Clinton to discuss implications of U.S. policy toward Bosnia. Clinton was seen as a pro-Muslim initiator for his recognition of Ramadan and for hosting the Eid al-fitr celebration at the White House. Hillary Clinton recognized the tremendous growth of the Muslim community and wished Muslims well. The first Muslim chaplains to the U.S. military were appointed during the Clinton administration.⁷

By 1999, nine major organizations had joined forces: Arab American Institute (AAI), Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG), American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), American Muslim Alliance (AMA), American Muslim Council (AMC), Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Coalition for Good Government (CFGG), Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA). Their main areas of cooperation included four major issues: the future of Jerusalem, civil and human rights, Arab and Muslim participation in the electoral process, and access and inclusion in political structures. The AMC assembled and mailed out voter registration kits. The AMA devoted its second annual conference in Detroit to political education and raising awareness in the minds of elected legislators of the presence of the Muslim community in America.⁸

National Muslim advocacy groups, such as CAIR, the Muslim American Society (MAS), and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) have carried out voter registration drives, encouraged mosque

⁶ Richard H. Curtiss, "Dr. Agha Saeed: Dynamic Leader of Expanding American Muslim Alliance," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, December 1997, pp. 23–25.

⁷ Abdus Sattar Ghazali, *Chronology of Islam in America, 1178–2011* (January 2012), appendix V, pp. 2–3, http://www.amchronology.ghazali.net/AM_Chro_2012_Edition.pdf.

⁸ Ghazali, *Chronology*.

members to vote, and appealed to a wider constituency through mosque outreach campaigns. The coalition-building efforts of these Muslim organizations across mosques and Arab American groups were so effective that the unified Muslim bloc vote in 2000 is thought to have been significant in many states.⁹ By and large, Muslim Americans threw their support behind George W. Bush. This was a departure from their previous two-to-one support for Bill Clinton in 1996. The American Muslim Political Coordinating Council Political Action Committee included several national Muslim organizations, including CAIR, the still functioning American Muslim Council, the American Muslim Alliance, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council. The American Muslim Political Coordinating Council endorsed President Bush.¹⁰

Muslim Americans see the American political system as a place where they can actively express their opinions and concerns. In a poll administered by the Muslims in the American Public Sphere (MAPS) project at Georgetown University in 2001, 93 percent of Muslims report that Muslims should participate in the U.S. political system, and 77 percent report that they were involved with organizations to help the poor, the sick and homeless, or the elderly.¹¹ There has been concern among Muslim communities, especially after September 11, that American Muslims do not participate enough in U.S. politics because of the secular nature of the United States. The Muslim Fiqh Council issued an extensive *fatwa* (Islamic legal edict) on the issue of participation in U.S. politics, basically stating that political participation in the United States was not only allowed but in fact a duty.¹² And patterns of civic engagement among mosque participants illustrate that this group of Muslims is actively engaged in American civic life through their local mosques.

While there are many issues that unify Muslim Americans, namely issues relating to civil and political liberties, there remain

⁹ Analysts of Arab and Muslim political mobilization in the United States have suggested that the Arab vote and the Muslim vote have historically canceled one another. The 2000 elections witnessed a more unified stance between the two groups.

¹⁰ *American Muslim Pac Endorses George W. Bush*, retrieved August 15, 2004, from http://www.amaweb.org/election2000/ampcc_endorses.htm.

¹¹ Muslims in the American Public Square (MAPS) Project, "American Muslim Poll," December 2001, <http://www.islamicity.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=MA0112-385>, accessed January 28, 2012 (the Project MAPS Web site does not exist anymore).

¹² MAPS Project, "American Muslim Poll," 2001, *Fatwa Bank: Muslim Participation in the Political Science in the U.S.* (2004), retrieved October 15, 2004, from <http://islam-online.net/fatwa/english/FatwaDisplay.asp?hFatwaID=16542>.

several underlying issues within the Muslim community that remain problematic and divisive. As Dr. Saeed highlights, "I also became aware that there was no internal cohesion or clarity within the American Muslim community. For a system to be created, the whole community has to be involved. There must be fundamental thinking by the community about its own mission and its own vision."¹³ The multiethnic makeup of the American Muslim community, along with different aspirations of the various groups, may have been a factor that hindered political success and rendered the Muslim voice inaudible. While immigrants of Arab descent were mostly concerned with America's foreign policy in the Middle East, the African American community was primarily concerned with domestic social justice issues. Muslim immigrant populations increased substantially by the 1970s, and their immediate concern as an aspiring community was building mosques and schools. They were extremely concerned with U.S. foreign policy, with particular attention for the Palestine-Israel conflict, conflicts in Kashmir and Chechnya, and sanctions against Iraq. African American Muslim communities, on the other hand, were more concerned with domestic issues. Urban development, education, and economic and racial justice were among the concerns of their community. This internal friction in the community often stifles collective mobilization.¹⁴

Another factor that affected Muslim political involvement may have been the lack of endorsements by religious scholars and leaders. "Some have argued that American Muslims might be reluctant to participate and compete in American politics, perhaps for ideological reasons. While caustic debates on the merits and desirability of political participation among American Muslims were frequent up until the 1990s, the increase in the size of the American Muslim community, the realization that Muslims are here to stay, and increased infringements on civil liberties after 9/11 attacks have all but ended these debates."¹⁵

Before 1990, Muslims voted overwhelmingly Republican and had conservative tendencies on economic and social issues. They were strongly pro-family, fiscally conservative, opposed abortion, and did not oppose the death penalty.¹⁶ However, in 1996, they set aside their conservative

¹³ Curtiss, "Dr. Agha Saeed," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, December 1997, pp. 23–25.

¹⁴ Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V, p. 1.

¹⁵ Abdulkader Sinno, "Muslim Underrepresentation in American Politics," in Abdulkader Sinno, ed., *Muslims in Western Politics* (Bloomington, 2009), pp. 69–95; p. 81.

¹⁶ Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, *American Muslim Engagement in Politics* (Washington, D.C., n.d.).

inclinations and endorsed Bill Clinton for the presidency. Muslims felt the xenophobic and stereotypical attitudes toward Islam at all levels of the Republican Party and thus felt unwelcome. The MAPS poll in 2001 showed that 46 percent of Muslims considered themselves Democrat, comparable to the general population at 39 percent Democrat; 16 percent of Muslims identified with the Republican Party as opposed to 34 percent of the general public; and 26 percent of Muslims and 27 percent of the general public were independent.¹⁷

BLOC VOTING

The 2000 presidential elections saw the first American Muslim bloc vote. In a postelection survey by CAIR, 72 percent of the respondents said they voted for Bush, 19 percent for Ralph Nader, and 8 percent for Al Gore. Of those surveyed, 85 percent indicated that the endorsement by AMPCC-PAC had influenced their decision. Paul Findley, author of *Silent No More*, estimated that 3.2 million Muslims voted that year. He states that 65 percent of the 70 percent of all Muslims eligible to vote voted for Bush. He believes that Bush owes his Florida victory to a 64,000 Muslim bloc vote.¹⁸

The determining factors for the 2000 Muslim bloc vote included civil rights issues, hopes for improved Middle East policies, and the endorsement by AMPCC-PAC. Bush's promise to halt the use of secret evidence in deportation hearings tilted the electorate scale in his favor. Salman Al-Marayati, director of MPAC, departed from his customary allegiance to the Democratic Party and had great influence on the Muslim bloc vote for Bush. However, the chief engineer of Muslim bloc voting was Dr. Agha Saeed.¹⁹

In the 2004 Presidential elections, Muslims supported Senator John Kerry not because of any political strategy but more out of frustration and disappointment with Bush. A Zogby International/Arab American Institute poll showed 78 percent disapproval with Bush's Middle East policy.²⁰ CAIR exit polls indicated 93 percent of Muslims voted for Kerry despite his support for Israel. Civil rights was still the main concern for 60 percent of Muslims polled.²¹

¹⁷ MAPS Project, "American Muslim Poll."

¹⁸ Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V, p. 6.

¹⁹ Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V, p. 7.

²⁰ Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V, p. 10.

²¹ Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V.

By 2004, the Muslim vote swung to the democratic campaign, a pattern that continued to 2008. According to James Zogby, in the past, Muslims and Arabs have voted along social and ethnic lines. "Many business-owning Arabs, for example, are Republicans, but African-American Muslims vote for Democrats,"²² he said. In 2004 many predicted correctly that ethnic consciousness and conservative beliefs would take a back seat. The erosion of civil liberties and the unresolved Iraqi War and Israeli-Palestinian conflict were major issues unifying the community.²³

According to a survey conducted by MuslimVotersU.S.A on November 4–5, 2008, 94 percent of Muslims voted for Obama while 3 percent voted for McCain. Results show that 17 percent of the voters were first-time voters and 25 percent did not vote in 2004. The Muslim vote has been overwhelmingly Democratic in the 2004 and 2008 elections, though most voters view themselves as politically moderate. Demographically, almost half of the voters were female.²⁴

AMERICAN MUSLIMS AND 9/11

In the wake of September 11, American Muslims were quickly thrust onto the defensive and shared a feeling of estrangement as Islamophobia became an increasing threat. There emerged a common goal and an agreed-upon agenda from within the community to assuage American-Muslim relations. According to a poll released on September 10, 2003, by CAIR, American Muslims have increased their participation in political and social activities since 9/11. Of all American Muslims surveyed, almost half said that they increased their social (58 percent), political (45 percent), interfaith (52 percent), and public relations activities (59 percent) since the 9/11 terror attacks.²⁵

The attacks on 9/11 exposed the deep misunderstandings that exist about Muslims and Islam. Mainstream America knew very little about the religion before 9/11. What little they did know was often based on the portrayals of the popular media – where Muslims were seen as terrorists well before 9/11. Through the lens of these types of portrayals, the American mainstream has come to learn about Islam and Muslims. A July 2005 Pew survey revealed that 36 percent of the American population

²² Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V, p. 11.

²³ Ghazali, *Chronology*, appendix V, p. 11.

²⁴ Farid Senzai, *Engaging American Muslims: Political Trends and Attitudes* (Washington, D.C., 2012), p. 76, <http://www.ispu.org/GetReports/35/2457/Publications.aspx>.

²⁵ Ghazali, *Chronology*, p. 11.

believes Islam encourages violence; another 36 percent report that they had unfavorable opinions about Islam, while 25 percent have no opinion about the religion. When asked whether they knew what Allah and the Qur'an stood for, only half of the U.S. population could identify "Allah" as the word Muslims use to refer to God and the Qur'an as their holy book. In fact, those Americans who knew what Allah and the Qur'an stood for were more likely to have favorable opinions about Islam and Muslims.²⁶

Negative American attitudes about Islam in the United States emanate from decades-old misunderstandings about Islam and the Middle East. In fact, the July 2005 Pew poll found those Americans who know more about Islam are more likely to hold the most favorable opinions of American Muslims. The less informed Americans are about Islam, the more hostile they are to Muslims and the religion itself. In this post-9/11 period, one notes the continued growth of a startling pattern: an ongoing and mutually reinforcing relationship between government policies that target Muslims and tacit approval by mainstream America. The government continues to misrepresent Islam and Muslims in both domestic and international circles. The anti-Muslim rhetoric this nation consumes only increases levels of hate. Statements like those issued by Representative Peter King of New York are alarming. In 2004 King declared that most American Muslim leaders are "enemies living amongst us." He then added that he would say that 80–85 percent of mosques in the United States are run by "Islamic fundamentalists."²⁷ Since there has never been a comprehensive investigation of mosque leaders in the United States, these statements were astonishing, to say the least. Other U.S. political leaders, like Governor (and 2012 presidential candidate) Mitt Romney, have raised the prospects of wire-tapping U.S. mosques in order to prevent future terrorist attacks. Governing officials consistently asserted a direct and unsubstantiated link between U.S. mosques and terrorists abroad.

It is against this backdrop that Muslim Americans continue to strive to exercise their political rights and voices. When asked by the Pew survey of 2007 to identify the most important problem facing U.S. Muslims, 60 percent of response patterns among Muslims center on issues pertaining to discrimination, misunderstandings, and stereotyping.²⁸ Specifically, 19 percent report that discrimination, racism, and

²⁶ <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=252>.

²⁷ "Congressman: Muslims 'Enemy Amongst Us,'" *WND (WorldNetDaily)*, February 13, 2004, <http://www.wnd.com/2004/02/23257/>.

²⁸ Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," 2007.

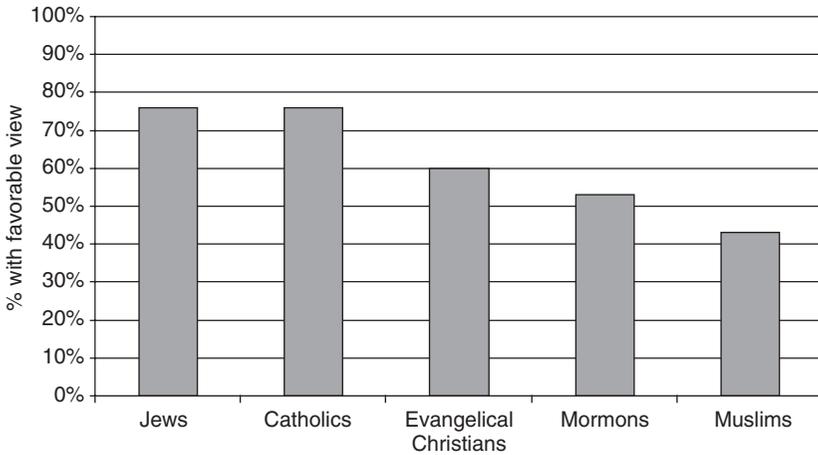


Figure 6.2. Favorability of U.S. religious groups: Pew 2009 (<http://people-press.org/2009/09/09/muslims-widely-seen-as-facing-discrimination/>)

prejudice are major problems; 15 percent report the major challenge centers on their image as terrorists; 14 percent indicate that ignorance and misconceptions about Islam continue to be problematic; and 12 percent add that generalizations and stereotypes about all Muslims are of great concern. In fact, 53 percent of Muslims believe that it is much more difficult to be a Muslim in the United States, after the events of 9/11. These concerns have remained stable and were expressed again in the Pew survey in 2011.

The Pew survey of 2007 also revealed that, specifically because of their faith, 37 percent of the Muslim population in the United States worry about job security, 31 percent about being monitored, and 51 percent that women who wear the hijab are subjected to unfair treatment. A full quarter of the Muslim population has fallen victim to acts of discrimination. Of those polled, 26 percent report non-Muslims acting suspicious of them; 15 percent had been called offensive names; and 9 percent had been singled out by law enforcement. Yet discrimination is not the only mode through which Muslims interact with mainstream society. A full third of the Muslim population report that they had been the recipients of support since the attacks from members of the mainstream population. Nevertheless, as the response patterns above indicate, American Muslims remain rather vulnerable to the ways in which the mainstream society views and treats them. In fact, as Figure 6.2 illustrates, Muslim Americans are the least favored religious group in the United States.

Thus, addressing this overall environment of Islamophobia continues to be a primary concern of U.S. Muslims. Unfortunately, in the last few years, especially after the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008, it appears to have become more publicly acceptable for the mainstream to disclose biases against Muslims.²⁹ Some of these tensions were heightened with accusations launched against President Obama that he may be Muslim. That the Tea Party and its supporters could use an Islamophobic platform to discredit the president was not only astonishing, but the response from the White House was equally frightening. The administration has consistently denied that President Obama is Muslim and has maintained that he is a Christian. Seldom has the White House questioned the accusation on its merits. What if President Obama were Muslim? The denials themselves have fed into the Islamophobic frenzy that dominated much of mainstream America. Polls taken after 2008 continue to show that Americans were biased against the religion. In 2010 the Public Research Institute found that 45 percent of Americans agreed that Islam is at odds with American values. A *Time Magazine* poll released in August 2010 found that 28 percent of voters did not believe that Muslims should be eligible to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court, and nearly one-third of the country thought adherents of Islam should be barred from running for president.³⁰ Further, in 2012, GOP candidates met in New Hampshire in a debate carried by CNN. Candidate Herman Cain maintained that he would treat Muslims differently from members of other faiths because he questioned their loyalty to the United States. These sentiments were echoed by other public officials like Newt Gingrich, who consistently maintains that shari'ah could replace the Constitution.³¹

Between 2010 and 2012, the Muslim American communities witnessed anti-Muslim bias spiral out of control and enter mainstream politics. Along with allegations that Obama is Muslim and political efforts to curb the influence of shari'ah law (when no such laws exist) in multiple states, the efforts to halt the expansion of the Park51 Mosque in fall of 2010 in New York gained widespread attention.³² Further, Representative Peter King of New York conducted congressional hearings to determine whether elements in the Muslim youth population were becoming

²⁹ Mat Creighton and Amaney Jamal, "How it Became Acceptable to Publicly Reveal Bias against Muslims in America," *Huffington Post*, April 14, 2011.

³⁰ <http://www.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,2011680,00.html>.

³¹ "Same Hate: New Target," CAIR, June 2011.

³² See Rosemary R. Hicks and Akel Ismail Kahera, Chapters 9 and 13 respectively in this volume.

radicalized.³³ Many of the defamation campaigns against Muslims were mobilized by more conservative but mainstream political elements. It is no surprise, therefore, that in 2011, Muslim Americans were far less likely to identify as Republican; of the Muslim American population, 46 percent identified as Democratic, compared to 33 percent of the general population. Only 6 percent of Muslims – compared to 24 percent of the general population – identified as Republican.³⁴

MOSQUE LIFE

The number of American mosques is almost as much a subject of debate as that of Muslim Americans. Often estimated at approximately 1,500, a 2011 survey counted 2,106 mosques in the United States.³⁵ Most mosques (87 percent) were built after 1970 and constituted a 62 percent increase since the 1980s. Within a four-year period, New York City itself witnessed a twofold increase in the number of mosques.³⁶ More than 20 percent of U.S. mosques are associated with Islamic schools, and mosque attendance has increased 75 percent in the past five years, with approximately 1,625 Muslims linked to each mosque.³⁷ U.S. mosques gather Muslims from all branches and generations, creating spaces for community and worship. Approximately 90 percent of contemporary U.S. mosques assemble congregations with mixed ethnic background. However, it is fair to say that specific ethnic groups – primarily African Americans, Arab Americans, and South Asians – dominate most mosques. Although segregated along ethnic lines, these mosques foster a sense of pan-ethnic Muslim identity. Political participation is a dominant theme within major Muslim-American organizations.

³³ Peter T. King is the U.S. representative for New York's Third congressional district and a member of the Republican Party. As chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, King held hearings to discuss the radicalization of Muslims in America. He claimed that American mosques were breeding grounds for homegrown terrorists.

³⁴ Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," 2011.

³⁵ Ihsan Bagby, *The American Mosque*, 2011 (Washington, D.C., 2012), <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/Thepercent20Americanpercent20Mosquepercent202011percent20web.pdf>.

³⁶ In 1980, the five boroughs contained only eight or nine mosques, a number that expanded, according to Marc Ferris, to about thirty-seven in 1991. By 1994 there were more than seventy mosques; the number of mosques in New York City had doubled in three years. See Jerrilynn Dodds, *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York City* (New York, 2002).

³⁷ Ihsan Bagby, Paul Perl, and Bryan Froehle, "The Mosque in America: A National Portrait," CAIR (2001), http://www.cair-net.org/mosquereport/Masjid_Study_Project_2000_Report.pdf, accessed January 11, 2007.

Patterns of civic engagement among mosque communities illustrate that this group of Muslims is actively engaged in American communal life through specific – and specifically mosque-authored – political avenues. The mosque, therefore, not only forms a crucial link between the Muslim community and mainstream political society; as an institution, it also serves as a civic community center, an educational facility, and a social hall. Within the walls of their mosques, Muslims gather to discuss, learn, engage, and exchange ideas. That the assault against Muslims has concentrated on mosques raises several points of inquiry about the mosque participant's perspective on post-9/11 discrimination practices. Muslims who frequent the mosque are more likely to experience discrimination since 9/11, and it is they who feel most vulnerable. If the goal of law enforcement is to ensure that Muslim-Americans remain partners in the "War on Terror," then one would expect mosque communities to feel the most reassurance, comfort, and safety in this post-9/11 era.

Approximately 40 percent of U.S. Muslims report attending mosque at least once a week. In many instances, the mosque remains a central vehicle of civic incorporation for the Muslim American community. Studies have found that mosques have a positive impact on political participation. In a study conducted in New York with the Muslims in New York Project (2003), Jamal found that Muslims who frequented a mosque were more likely to work with others to resolve a community problem and more likely to have contacted a local representative. In fact, mosques remain crucial to linking U.S. Muslims to the mainstream political process.³⁸

AMERICAN MOSQUES AND 9/11

Ten years after 9/11, attacks on American Muslims and mosques were still on the rise. Each year since 9/11, acts targeting Muslims increased. The 2003 levels of hate crimes against Muslim Americans represented a threefold proliferation of cases of bias, harassment, and hate crimes since 9/11. And these numbers have steadily risen since 2003.³⁹ Because Islam is still a greatly misunderstood religion in the United States, representations of Islam and Muslims generated by the American media and entertainment industries continue to dominate conventional structures of

³⁸ Amaney Jamal, *Mosques and Political Participation Project*, 2003.

³⁹ CAIR, "Unequal Protection: The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States," 2005, <http://www.cair.com/civilrights/civilrightsreports/2005report.aspx>.

cultural knowledge. This conventional wisdom has colored even political debate in highly ambivalent terms. U.S. politicians seem to acknowledge that Muslim Americans are a growing source of political power in the United States, and some extend their efforts to acquire Muslim votes. Congressman David Bonior, for instance, a Democratic representative from Michigan, reports, "It was once the kiss of death to be involved with that community. Now a large number of people seek their support."⁴⁰ Yet, other politicians have been less willing to accept the political support of the Muslim community. During the hotly contested Senate elections in New York, Rick Lazzio accused Hillary Clinton of accepting "blood money" when a member of the Muslim Public Affairs Council donated \$50,000 toward her campaign. Leaving Muslim leaders exasperated and speechless, she returned the money to the generous donor.

Although the United States offers American Muslims unique forms of political expression and religious observance, the political climate surrounding this community remains overshadowed by the propagation of stereotypes and misperceptions. Community mobilization resources have been increasingly employed to alter the view of the American public toward American Muslims. Campaigns championed by CAIR like the "Not in the Name of Islam Petition" seem to have done very little to win over mainstream public support.⁴¹ In addition to serving as sites for political incorporation and mobilization, mosques are increasingly becoming sites where Muslims attempt to bridge the gaps created by stereotypes between Americans and Muslim Americans. Open houses and interfaith dialogues have been initiated at many mosques across the country, as Muslims tried to reach out to members of other religious denominations and communities. When faced with local or national issues that concern the Muslim community, like the AMC call to support the USPS Eid stamp, mosque members initiate phone drives and petitions. Today, the American Muslim mosque is not only a house of worship or merely a community center; in many ways, it has also become a locus of advocacy work to address misconceptions and anti-Muslim discrimination.

ATTACKS ON MOSQUES

Attacks on mosques also appear to be on the rise. These attacks include vandalism, bombs, and assaults on congregants. Mosques across the

⁴⁰ Sam Afridi, "Muslims in America: Identity, Diversity and the Challenge of Understanding Islam," Carnegie Challenge (2001), Carnegie Corporation, New York (January 11, 2007), ERIC ED465008.

⁴¹ Adopted in 2004, <http://www.cair.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?midI=777&&ArticleID=8761&&name=n&&currPage=1>.

United States have become easy targets for hate crimes and often leave members of the Muslim community feeling vulnerable, insecure, unsafe, and unwelcome. Of more concern still is that the majority of the mosques are linked to full-time or part-time Islamic schools. Muslim children and youth, therefore, are often the witnesses of such acts of racism and discrimination.

Not only have hate crimes galvanized around mosques; mosques have also been singled out as government-targeted surveillance sites. In September 2005, it was disclosed that American mosques were being monitored by the U.S. government for radiation. In 2003, the FBI announced that it was counting the number of mosques within its jurisdictions in order to account for all Muslim centers. Illegal spying has taken place within mosques, and government officials do not deny that mosques are closely monitored in the United States. Some leaders have even gone so far as to accuse American mosques of harboring terrorists. Thus, the American mosque has become the focal point of both governmental and social hostility.

Unlike other religious institutions like churches and synagogues, American mosques are seen to hinder civic life in ways that undermine democracy. The mosque is seen as a threat, and the actions emanating from government officials reinforce the stereotype of mosques as security risks to American society. Mosque expansion projects are often met with fierce resistance from local neighbors. The debates surrounding the expansion of the Park51 mosque in New York during summer 2010 are but one example of the controversies shaping the institutionalization of the Muslim American presence. Opponents of the expansion project claimed that the site was too close to Ground Zero and therefore offensive to Americans. Muslim Americans responded that they as a community were not responsible for 9/11, and it was their right to have a community center to absorb the growing needs of the New York Muslim population. In the community, Muslim Americans worried about the consequences of these overt and public efforts to stifle the institutional needs of the community. If efforts to curb the Park51 expansion could gain such widespread acceptance, what would this mean for mosque expansion projects elsewhere? A CNN poll revealed that 68 percent of the mainstream American population was opposed to this project.⁴² Thus, as the American Muslim community remains one of the fastest-growing religious communities in the United States, its communal needs are becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate

⁴² CNN Opinion Research Poll, August 6–10, 2010, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/35731051/Cnn-Mosque-Poll>.

through mosque expansion frameworks. That these very vital and vibrant community organizations have emerged as key targets in the War on Terror poses great and conflicting challenges. The American mosque is not only an institution that links Muslim Americans to the mainstream but also one where the mainstream can and should reach out to Muslim Americans. Mediating mainstream attitudes toward mosques through the lenses of security and suspicion certainly hinders the pivotal role mosques play – or can play – in the civic and political incorporation of American Muslims.

MUSLIMS AND NATIONAL REPRESENTATION

The year 2000 saw at least 152 American Muslim candidates for various public offices get elected out of 700 who ran that year. Ninety-two were elected from Texas. The candidates were elected as members of precinct committees, delegates to Democratic and Republican Party conventions, city councils, state assemblies, state senates, and judgeships. Saghir Tahir, president of the New Hampshire chapter of the AMA, was elected to the State Assembly from the Thirty-Eighth District. Larry Shaw was reelected in North Carolina. Hassan Fahmy was elected to Prospect Park City Council in New Jersey. In 2002 there were only seventy American Muslim candidates running for office. Three were running for Congress: Syed Mahmood (Thirteenth District, California), Maad Abu Ghazalah (Twelfth District, California), and Ekram Yusri (Fifth District, New Jersey). There were also three candidates for state assemblies and three for state senates. Further, Dr. Mohammad Saeed was a candidate for governor in Washington State.⁴³

In recent years, Muslim American groups and individuals have gained visibility as they continue to champion the rights of the community. Currently there are two representatives in Congress who are Muslim: Keith Ellison and Andre Carson. Ellison became the first Muslim member of the U.S. Congress. Both have been vocal about Muslim American issues, and in fact Keith Ellison gave moving testimony on behalf of the Muslim community during the King hearings of 2011. There are several other Muslim Americans in high-profile political positions. For example, Farah Pandith was appointed to head the Office of the United States Special Representative to Muslim Communities, Arif Ali Khan was appointed to serve as assistant secretary for the office of Policy and Development at the Department of Homeland Security, and Kareem

⁴³ Ghazali, *Chronology*, pp. 8–9.

Shohra was appointed to the Homeland Security Advisory Council, all in 2009; and Rashad Hussain has served as the United States' special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference since 2010.

American Muslim candidates find a formidable opponent in politically dominant groups that have established roots and authority in the American government. Having overcome the internal debate, American Muslim political candidates have found that their patriotism was being questioned because of their proclaimed faith. Corey Saylor, legislative director for CAIR, with more than a decade of nonprofit political communications, legislative advocacy, and media relations experience, describes the challenges Muslims face when running for office as "Islamic Whackamole." He maintains that when Muslim candidates access power and begin to rise to higher positions, these candidates get attacked for their faith. This discourages many potential candidates from running for higher offices. Muslims that get elected or appointed to high offices get attacked and labeled as terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. Strong Christian-Zionist groups attack pro-Palestinian candidates, while neocons/Republicans/conservatives attack on the premise of national security issues, claiming that Muslims may want to overthrow the U.S. government if they grow in strength. In most cases, Muslims are attacked because it works. Candidates use Islamophobia and tie it to their pet issues like immigration to gain popular support. In a CNN interview, Saylor voiced concerns that "those who promoted Islamophobia poisoned our public discourse, appealing to fear and stereotypes. They promoted conspiracy theories such as the idea that Muslims are here to remove the Constitution or that our faith compels us to wage endless war against America."⁴⁴ Islamophobes have created hysteria and used fear mongering tactics to persuade the public that Muslims want to replace the Constitution with shari'ah. They claim that Islam and democracy are and always will be at odds.⁴⁵

Conservatives have changed the tone of discussion about American Muslims. They have become harsher and increasingly more critical of Islam and Muslims. They have objected to mosques, banned shari'ah, and attacked passages in the Qur'an. American Muslims find themselves struggling for "self-preservation in the face of encroachments on their civil rights and liberties, of developing credibility as equal participants in the face of religious and cultural hostility, of defending themselves against

⁴⁴ CNN, "Corey Saylor: Concern That Islamophobia Is Trending toward Mainstream in the U.S.," June 23, 2011, http://coreysaylor.blogspot.com/2011_06_19_archive.html.

⁴⁵ Ghazali, *Chronology*, p. 390.

suspicions of double loyalty, of protecting labor rights from institutional ignorance or malice, and of attempting to support the rare sympathetic political candidate in the face of the formidable AIPAC-Evangelical alliance."⁴⁶ Muslims born in the United States are becoming more active as their numbers increase and they become more established and organized. The exact number of Muslims in elected positions has never been documented and is still difficult to estimate. The numbers could range anywhere from two hundred nationwide in various capacities to more than two thousand Muslims in elected offices in the United States today. There is a consensus that the numbers are increasing and Muslims are achieving higher positions in elected offices. Despite the apparent challenges facing the Muslim community in U.S. politics, American Muslims seem somewhat optimistic and united in their political goals.⁴⁷

GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Muslim women enjoy political opportunities in the United States and utilize their rights to represent their own and their community's interest. Several groups in the United States are designed to represent the needs of Muslim women specifically. These include organizations that seek to empower women within the spirit of Islam. The Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity (WISE) led by Daisy Khan seeks to advance equity among Muslim women and men through a more woman-friendly interpretation of the Qur'an and sunnah. There are other organizations in the United States that specifically address pressing problems like domestic violence. For example, Wafa House in Clifton, New Jersey, offers services to Muslim women in a culturally supportive environment.

A third of all American Muslim women work full time, with another 16 percent working part time. Half of American Muslim women are unemployed. This number is slightly below the U.S. national average which estimates that slightly more than 60 percent of women are in the U.S. labor force.⁴⁸

Muslim women are as equally involved in American political life as are their male counterparts. According to the Pew study of 2011, 70 percent of women turned out to vote in the 2008 election. The same percentage of American Muslim men voted in that election as well. Muslim women were more likely, however, to vote for Obama than were

⁴⁶ Abdulkader H. Sinno, *Muslims in Western Politics* (Bloomington, 2009), p. 90.

⁴⁷ Ghazali, *Chronology*, p. 528.

⁴⁸ Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," 2011.

Muslim men. Although an overwhelming 88 percent of American Muslim men voted for Obama, women topped these numbers by lending 93 percent of their vote to the president. This is not so surprising, since according to the study Muslim women are more likely to identify as Democrats than are Muslim men (52 percent to 42 percent respectively).⁴⁹

Muslim women are as devout as their male counterparts, with about a quarter showing a high level of religious commitment, measured by prayer, importance of God, and mosque attendance. They are active mosque goers and are vocal in addressing community problems.⁵⁰ A third of Muslim women wear the hijab on a regular basis.⁵¹

CONCLUSION

The attacks on 9/11 made the lives, political participation, and religious practice of Muslim Americans infinitely more difficult. However, the challenges facing them as a religious minority community under surveillance and suspicion has also created the need for the communities to come together on a similar platform – one that needs to address Islamophobia and the consequences of such policies and discrimination. Yet other challenges remain for the American Muslim community. First, although there are many Muslim national organizations, there is not one body that clearly represents the Muslim American community. In recent years, ISNA's efforts to institutionalize Ramadan and Eid dates have become more successful. Yet, on other matters – especially those linked to political representation – there remain multiple organizations and communities that are not in a tight coalition.

Second, although American Muslims have forged a tight consensus on domestic matters relating to the post-9/11 environment, they disagree on foreign policy matters. By and large the Muslim American community is sympathetic to causes like the Palestinian issue. However, there is disagreement within the community – especially between Asians and Arabs – as to how salient the Palestinian issue should be in matters relating to an American Muslim political agenda. In other words, some

⁴⁹ Pew Research Center, "Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism," 2011.

⁵⁰ Jamal argues that because Muslim women are more likely to be involved in mosques, they are more likely to have a stronger level of group consciousness than their male counterparts, and therefore they are more likely to vocalize their opinions when they perceive a discriminating act. See Amaney Jamal, "Mosques, Collective Identity and Gender Differences among Arab American Women," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1:1 (Winter 2005): 53–78.

⁵¹ This is an estimate by the authors of this chapter.

in the Muslim community believe that this issue in particular can hold back the community and would rather have Muslim Americans focus on domestic issues.

Third, there appears to be a growing schism between first-generation immigrants and their second-generation children. The issues that divide the generation are not only related to matters concerning assimilation and acculturation. However, the second generation is far less likely to tolerate discrimination in the name of 9/11. Whereas, the immigrant generation accepted abuse as a way to cope and weather the 9/11 storm, the second generation has been less likely to do so and tends to be much more vocal about not tolerating discrimination and abuse.⁵²

Fourth and finally, Muslims remain easy targets for attack. Given the general political and social environment – which sanctions Islamophobia and where mainstream public opinion which is very skeptical of Muslims – it looks like attacks on this population and its institutions and representatives will persist. To combat this Islamophobic tide, it will be imperative for other mainstream organizations, individuals, and government representatives to unequivocally denounce such acts against the community, which are not only injurious but hold the community back from greater political integration.

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⁵² Amaney Jamal, "Inside and Outside the Box: The Politics of Arab American Identity and Artistic Representations," in Paul DiMaggio and Patricia Hernandez-Kelly, eds., *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States* (New York, 2010), pp. 72–89.