

A PORTRAIT OF DETROIT MOSQUES:

Muslim Views on Policy, Politics and Religion



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ihsan Bagby is an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Kentucky and a Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. He has conducted numerous research projects and written extensively about the Muslim community in the United States.

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Since the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, government officials and the American public have become increasingly interested in the Muslim community and the activities of local mosques. Consequently, the community has been placed under a microscope and “experts” have been brought in to share their insight and opinions. Unfortunately, the barrage of information that has inundated the airwaves has done little to clarify things, and left many Americans scratching their heads trying to decipher fact from fiction.

Despite the claims of these “experts”, very little is actually known about mosques in the U.S. and far less about the activities and views of its participants. It is clear there is a need for in-depth empirical research that properly reflects the demographic diversity of mosques as well as the numerous views of Muslim Americans.

It is with this goal in mind that the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) initiated the Detroit Mosque Project. We are confident this initial study will contribute greatly to that goal. Under the capable hands of Dr. Ihsan Bagby, the report offers one of the first glimpses into a community that is often maligned, yet not fully understood. The yearlong study provides a wealth of statistics and a penetrating look at Muslim views on policy issues, politics and religion.

We would like to thank Dr. Ihsan Bagby for his painstaking fieldwork and comprehensive study. The report draws out the major themes from the fieldwork and offers lessons and recommendations for policy makers and community leaders. It deserves a wide readership and should be of great benefit to government officials, researchers, and the general public.

Farid Senzai
ISPU Director of Research
April, 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish first to give thanks to all the mosque leaders of Detroit, who trusted us in these difficult times to come into their mosques asking so many sensitive and probing questions. I hope the results will be beneficial to the mosque community of Detroit. The Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan, Syed Salman, President, and Abdullah El-Amin, Vice-President, deserves our heartfelt gratitude for endorsing the project and encouraging all Detroit mosques to cooperate with us. The Council's assistance was invaluable.

A special thanks goes out to the Study's research assistants who diligently worked through the summer of 2003 to conduct the Study and I would like to give my own appreciation to Ameena Qazi who served as Research Coordinator for the project and oversaw the work of the research assistants. As part of our research team, Nausheen Masood developed the code book and along with Nida Syed did all the data entry. Misbah Shahid worked beyond the summer and helped me with the data collection. The research assistants were: Ameena Qazi, Fahad Ashraf, Ousmane Bah, Patrick Cates, Zarinah El-Amin, Farhan Latif, Saba Maroof, Nausheen Masood, Eram Minhajjudin, M. Misbah Shahid and Nida Syed.

Finally, thanks go to the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding for their vision in initiating and supporting the Study through to its completion. Iltefat Hamzavi, Farid Senzai, Saeed Khan, and Muzammil Ahmed were all instrumental in shaping and conducting the Study and in producing this report.

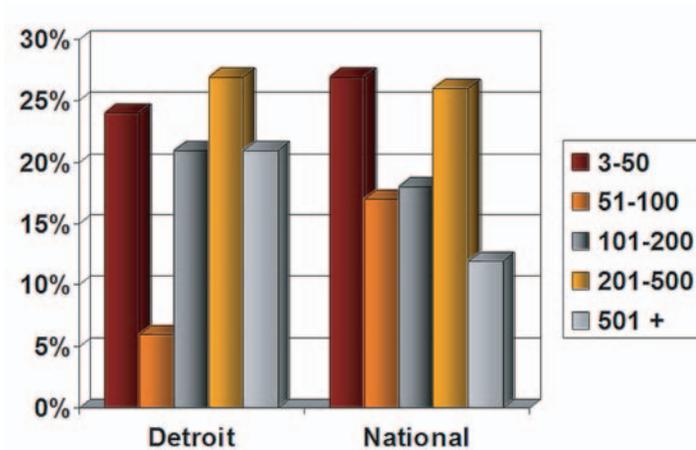
Ihsan Bagby

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mosque is the cornerstone of the Islamic experience in America. It plays a unique and vital role, helping Muslims in America compensate for the absence of supporting institutions found in the Muslim world and mirroring America's own impulse toward congregationalism. Understanding the mosque, therefore, is essential for Muslim leaders as they attempt to steer and nurture the Muslim community, and is also essential for the American public and American policy makers as they attempt to comprehend a little-understood, often maligned, religious community that has been thrust into the spotlight, especially since the events of September 11, 2001.

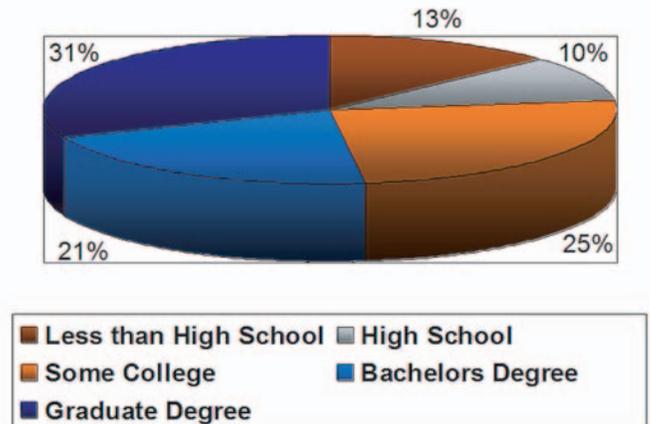
This report presents the findings of the Detroit Mosque Study, a comprehensive survey of Detroit mosques and their participants. The purpose of the Detroit Mosque Study is to generate a detailed statistical overview of Detroit mosques and their attendees. This assessment shall provide a base line of definitive data that will serve mosque leaders in analyzing their institutions and will serve the American public in trying to sift rumor from reality in regards to American mosques. This Study is unique and ground breaking in two ways: it is the first study of all the mosques of a single metropolitan area and it is the first comprehensive study of mosque participants for such an area.

Friday Prayer Attendance Grouped According to Size



*The total for Detroit mosques equals 99% because sometimes the decimals on all the figures are low.
(Detroit N=33)

Education Level of Mosque Participants



(N=952)

This report focuses on two components of the Detroit Mosque Study: a mosque leader survey and a mosque participant survey.

The mosque leader survey consists of an interview of all Detroit mosque leaders in order to develop a comprehensive profile of mosque demographics, activities, organization, finances, history and the views of mosque leaders on Islam and American society.

The questionnaire used for the mosque leader survey is the same questionnaire used in the Masjid Study Project 2000- the first-ever national study of U.S. mosques- which was conducted as part of FACT (Faith Communities Today), a study of all religious congregations in America. Based on a common FACT questionnaire, a mosque survey questionnaire was developed by Ihsan Bagby (principle investigator for this Study), Lawrence Mamiya (Vassar College) and Muhammad Nimr (Director of Research, CAIR) to suit the language and priorities of the mosque community. By using the same questionnaire, the Detroit Mosque Study is able to compare its findings for Detroit mosques with the findings of the Masjid Study Project 2000 for U.S. mosques.

The second component of the Detroit Mosque Study is the mosque participant survey. The overall purpose of this component is to produce a portrait of Detroit mosque participants, including their demographics, level of participation in the mosque and views on Islam and certain public policy issues.

A mosque participant questionnaire was prepared by ISPU and distributed at 12 mosques during Friday Prayer (Jum'ah) and on other occasions when mosque participants gathered (77% of all questionnaires were collected at Friday Prayers). The twelve mosques were selected using as the primary criteria, ethnicity, and as a secondary criteria, age of the mosque (an "old" mosque is defined for the Study as one founded before 1990 and a "new" mosque as one founded during or after 1990). The twelve mosques were composed of 3 Arab mosques (two old and one new mosque), 3 South Asian mosques (two old and one new), 3 African American mosques (all of them are old because there are no new African American mosques), and 3 ethnically mixed mosques (one old and two new).

Of the twelve mosques, the Study had good coverage in eight of the mosques: two Arab mosques (one new and one old), two South Asian (both old), all three of the African American mosques (three old) and one of the ethnically mixed mosques (new). A proper mosque distribution of ethnicity and age was, therefore, maintained. In each of these mosques, the number of mosque participant questionnaires collected equaled about half of the Friday Prayer attendance. The total questionnaires collected were 1298. The results of the mosque participant questionnaire accurately reflect and represent the composition of these four types of mosques.

RESEARCH PLAN

Ihsan Bagby, as lead researcher, directed a group of research assistants in carrying out much of the study during the summer of 2003. The research assistants worked in teams to conduct the mosque leader interview and distribute the mosque participant questionnaire at Friday Prayer and other times. The entire mosque participant survey was completed in the summer of 2003, with mosque leader interviews extending through the summer of 2003 to March 2004.

This Study defines a mosque as an Islamic institution that conducts Friday Prayer (the weekly congregational prayer) and organizes other religious activities to serve a group of Muslims. Places such as rooms in hospitals or even apartments, where either only the daily prayers are held or only the Friday Prayer is held, are not defined for the Study as a mosque. A mosque leader is defined as the Imam (religious leader) or President/Chairman of the mosque. The Study focused on the three counties of Metropolitan Detroit: Wayne, Oakland and Macomb. Mosque participants had to be at least 15 years old to be counted in the mosque participant survey.

Mosque Attendance Compared to Friday Prayer Attendance*

	Every Week	3 times a month	1-2 times a month	Several times a year	Rarely
Regular mosque Attendance ("very often" or "often")	48%	38%	30%	41%	18%
Irregular mosque Attendance ("sometimes" or "rarely")	52%	62%	70%	59%	82%

*Results are only for questionnaires collected at Friday Prayer
(N=1276)

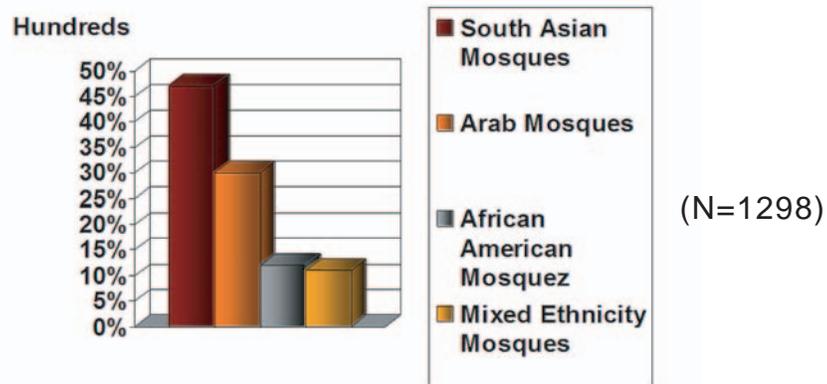
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The overall picture of Detroit mosques that emerges from the Study is a very positive one: mosques are growing in number and size; mosque participants have a positive view of their mosques; the views of mosque leaders and mosque participants on important issues facing Muslims are moderate and fairly united; mosques are fairly active in programming and activities. On a less positive note, the Study reveals that Detroit mosques are largely divided along ethnic lines; the percentage of African American mosque participation seems low; conversion rates are lower than the national average for U.S. mosques; and the median amount of money donated to the mosque is low.

A summary of findings of each chapter follows.

1. DETROIT MOSQUES: BASIC CHARACTERISTICS. The Study charts the tremendous growth and fairly large size of Detroit mosques. Institutionally, Detroit mosques are relatively young, the majority being founded since 1980. Mosques are largely ethnically based, divided into five types: South Asian (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi), Arab (largely Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Iraqi and Egyptian), African American, Mixed (evenly divided between South Asian and Arab), and “Other Ethnicities” such as Bosnian and Albanian. Unlike U.S. mosques, Detroit mosques are more ethnically homogeneous. Conversions are lower than the national average, apparently due to fewer conversions among African Americans. Euro-Americans comprise almost half of the conversions in Detroit.

Percentage of Mosque Participants from the Four Groups of Mosques



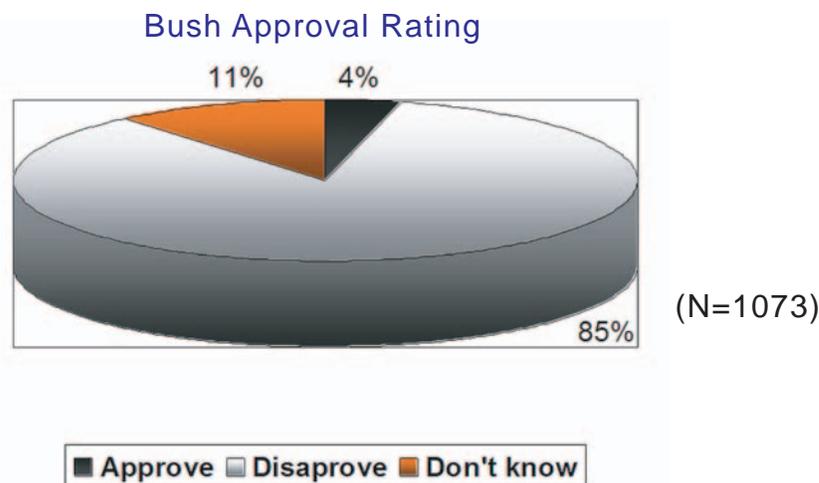
2. MOSQUE PARTICIPANTS: BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS. The average mosque participant is 34 years old, married with children, an immigrant, college educated and fairly well to do. Second-generation immigrants are a significant group in Detroit mosques, comprising about one-fifth of mosque participants, with about half of them entering adulthood.

3. MOSQUE PARTICIPANTS: VIEW OF THE MOSQUE. Overall, mosque participants have a positive relationship with their mosques: they attend regularly; are excited about the future of the mosque; and have a sense of belonging to the mosque. The median giving rate of \$39 per month, however, is low. Mosque participants have two distinct views of the purpose of the mosque: about 58% see the mosque as a place of ritual and increasing faith, while 42% view the mosque as primarily a center of activities and learning. Mosque participants are united in placing Islamic education and youth as top priorities for the mosque.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

4. ATTITUDES TOWARD ISLAM. Mosque participants are united in accepting the holy texts of Islam as authoritative, but they are divided in their approach to interpreting Islam. The largest segment prefers a flexible approach in understanding Islam; another significant segment prefers the more traditional approach of one of the classical legal schools (madhhab) and a third segment prefers to follow the views of the great classical scholars without necessarily following any one traditional classical school. An extremely small group does not view the Islamic holy texts as authoritative, while another small segment adopts the very conservative view of the salafi approach. Mosque participants are united in supporting the idea of cooperation between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

5. ATTITUDES TOWARD INVOLVEMENT IN AMERICAN SOCIETY AND PUBLIC POLICY. Mosque participants agree on most issues regarding involvement in American society and public policy. They are virtually unanimous in supporting community and political involvement, and most mosque participants demonstrate their engagement in civic matters by being registered to vote. Because of these moderate views, mosque participants cannot be described as isolationists, rejecters of American society, or extremists. A significant number of mosque participants are unhappy with the moral climate in America, viewing certain aspects of American society as immoral. Mosque participants strongly support universal health care, affirmative action, tougher environmental laws, and cutting the income tax. An overwhelming number (85%) of mosque participants disapprove of President Bush's job performance.

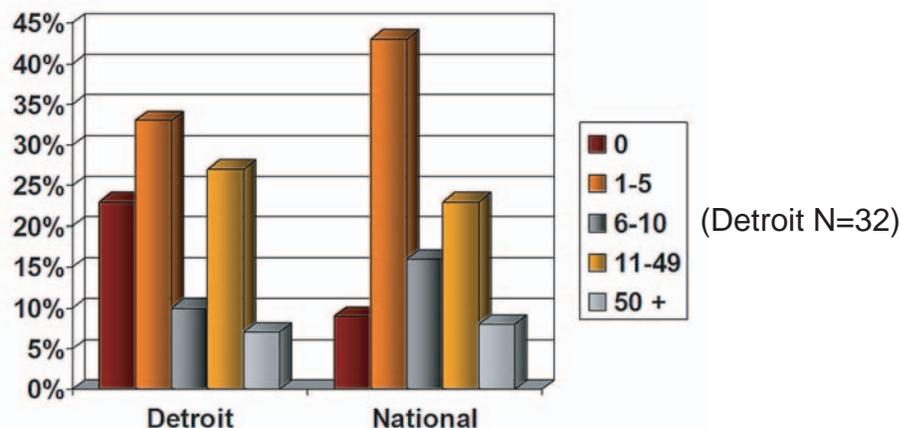


6. MOSQUE PROGRAMS AND ORGANIZATION. Overall, Detroit mosques are fairly active in organizing religious activities, full-time Islamic schools, social services, outreach activities and political activities. However, compared to U.S. mosques, Detroit mosques are less active in the areas of Islamic activities, social services and outreach activities, and more active in the area of politics. Detroit mosques have many more trained Imams than the national average, but virtually all of the trained

MOSQUE DEMOGRAPHICS

- As of 2003, the number of Detroit mosques is 33. In 2000, 28 mosques were counted.
- A count of all people attending the Eid al-Fitr Prayer was made. The average Eid prayer attendance was 1375 and the total number was 41,235.
- The total number of Muslims associated with Detroit mosques averages about 1968 Muslims per mosque, for a total of 64,950 Muslims.
- Based on these two figures, and using the projection that “mosqued” Muslims constitute one-third of all Muslims, a reasonable estimate of the total Muslim population in Metropolitan Detroit is 125,000-200,000.
- The average attendance at Detroit Friday Prayers (Jum’ah) is 473, which is larger than the national average of 292 for U.S. mosques.
- The average size of Detroit mosques is larger than the average size of U.S. mosques.
- Mosque growth has been substantial in Detroit. Over 85% of Detroit mosques have experienced some growth over a five year period, and 67% have benefited from a growth of 10%. The growth rate for Detroit mosques is slightly higher than the national average for U.S. mosques.
- Immigration and conversions are the main reasons for mosque growth.
- A little over a half (51%) of mosque participants have immigrated since 1980.
- The conversion rate per mosque over a 12 month period is about 12.2 people, which is lower than the national average. About 41% of new converts are Euro-Americans. The conversion rate for African Americans seems to be slowing.

Conversions per Mosque over a 12-Month Period



- Of the 33 Detroit mosques, 11 (33%) are attended largely by South Asians, 10 (30%) are Arab, 6 (18%) are attended by African Americans, 2 (6%) are evenly mixed between Arab and South Asian, and 4 (12%) are a mixture of various ethnic groups.

STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- About 53% of the all the Muslims who attend the congregational Friday Prayer are Arab; 34% are South Asian, 7% are African American and 6% are other ethnic groups.
- The relatively low percentage of African American Muslims attending Friday Prayer is surprising and is possibly indicative of the declining fortunes of African American mosques.
- Institutionally, Detroit mosques are young. Two-thirds of present Detroit mosques were founded since 1980.
- About 70% of Detroit mosques are located in city neighborhoods and about 30% are located in the suburbs.

MOSQUE PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS

- Mosque participants in the Study came from 42 countries.
- Almost two-thirds of mosque participants are first-generation immigrants.
- Over half of the immigrants in the mosque participant survey came to America since 1990. Only 15% of the immigrants arrived before 1980.
- About one-third of the immigrants in the mosque participant survey who arrived in America before 1990 want to return to their homeland, and about 60% who immigrated after 1990 want to return.
- The average mosque participant is 34 years old, married with children, has at least a Bachelors degree and makes about \$75,000.

VIEW OF ISLAM AND AMERICA

- The largest group (38%) of mosque participants prefer a flexible approach to understanding Islam. Only 8% follow the salafi approach, which can be described as very conservative. About 28% follow a traditional, classical school. One-quarter of mosque participants prefer not to follow one classical school but to pick from the varied views of classical scholars.
- Approximately 93% of mosque participants endorse both community and political involvement. Over 87% of mosque leaders support participation in the political process. Radicalism and isolationism are not evident in Detroit mosques.
- Over 80% of mosque participants would like to see an enhanced role for Islamic Law in Muslim lands.
- About 68% of mosque participants are registered to vote.
- Civil rights, education and foreign policy are the most important policy issues for mosque participants.
- Mosque participants endorse overwhelmingly universal health care, tougher environmental laws, affirmative action and cutting the income tax.
- About 85% of mosque participants disapprove of President Bush's job performance.

About the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding

The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) is an independent and nonprofit organization committed to solving critical social problems in the United States through education, research, training, and policy analysis. ISPU provides cutting-edge analysis and policy solutions through publications, public events, media commentary, and community outreach. Major areas of focus include domestic politics, social policy, the economy, health, education, the environment, and foreign policy. Since its inception in 2002, ISPU's research has worked to increase understanding of key public policy issues and how they impact various communities in the United States.

US society is far from being monolithic, whether culturally, socially or politically. It is therefore imperative that the thoughts and insights of each aspect of this heterogeneity play a contributory role in the discourse and debate of issues that affect all Americans. ISPU was established and premised on this idea – that each community must address, debate, and contribute to the pressing issues facing our nation. It is our hope that this effort will give voice to creative new ideas and provide an alternative perspective to the current policy-making echelons of the political, academic and public-relations arenas of the United States.

ISPU firmly believes that optimal analysis and treatment of social issues mandates a comprehensive study from several different and diverse backgrounds. As social challenges become more complex and interwoven, ISPU is unique in its ability to bring this new approach to the human and social problems facing our country. Through this unique approach, ISPU will produce scholarly publications, incorporating new voices and adding diversity to the realm of ideas. Our multidisciplinary work in partnership with universities and other research institutes serves to build understanding and create programs that effect lasting social change.

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