

REPORT ANALYSIS

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Report Analysis

Implications of the Detroit Mosque Study for other American Muslim Communities

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The data from the Detroit Mosque study will equip community members and policymakers with tools to understand challenges faced by American Muslims in the twenty-first century.



During the summer of 2004, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) released the results of an extensive study on Detroit metropolitan area mosques. Dr. Ihsan Bagby of the University of Kentucky conducted the study, surveying more than 1,300 participants from twelve different local mosques. An additional thirty-two mosques were also profiled in detail.

Focusing on the mosque is important for several reasons. First, understanding the mosque is integral to understanding the American Muslims today since it is the cornerstone of the Muslim community. The study provides valuable information for mosque leaders as well as insight for policymakers to better understand American Muslims and the challenges of the future. Second, the ISPU study of mosques also provides, for the first time, a basis of empirical data for further research into mosque activities in the United States.¹ Finally, by focusing on Muslims that attend the mosque, the study also counters the oft-repeated assertion that mosques are a place of violence and extremism.¹

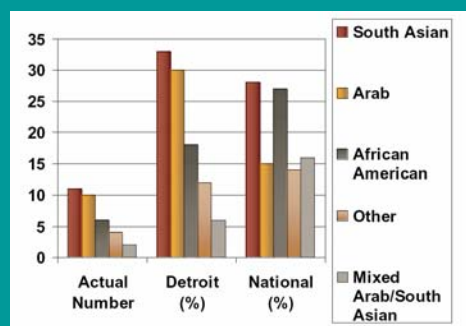
While the study has given the outside world a rare glimpse into the mosque, it has also served as a tool for Muslim communities and their leaders to strategically plan for the future. Specifically, the trends and demographics identified in the survey highlight important social and religious

challenges that American Muslims living in metropolitan areas face. Without adequately understanding and preparing for these challenges, American Muslim leaders and community activists risk becoming irrelevant to their respective constituents. The conclusions drawn from the data collected will also benefit Muslim communities in other cities. The study data will equip community members and policy makers with tools to understand challenges faced by American Muslims in the twenty-first century. This brief overview will highlight six major challenges that were discovered from the study. It will also examine the impact of these challenges on the development of the American Muslim community over the next decade.

Major Findings

1. A large number of metropolitan Detroit mosques house predominantly one ethnic group (24 percent vs. 7 percent nationally). The study found very little interaction as well as poor coordination between the leadership of any two mosques and the activities they plan. This phenomenon is not true of all metropolitan areas.
2. The majority of immigrants in Detroit – 58 percent – have been in the country since 1990. Furthermore, the American Muslim community saw

Mosque Grouped According to Dominant Ethnic Group



an influx of immigrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds prior to September 11. Newer immigrants are drastically more intent on returning to their own homeland. Consequently, these new immigrants have a lower sense of belonging to the community. However, their sense of belonging increases with length of time they spend in the United States.

3. The second generation of immigrant Muslims in the city is growing in number and attendance. Well over half of the people attending the mosques are under the age of 39: 43 percent are ages 21 to 39, while 54 percent are in the 15 to 20-year-old age bracket. However, this growth of the youth sector also brings with it a very negative attitude toward the mosque and the community. The second-generation community ranked as having the lowest sense of belonging to the mosque. They also had the lowest interest in Islamic schools – 25 percent interest vs. 50 percent interest among first generation immigrants.

4. American Muslims in Detroit stated that community priorities are as follows, in order of preference: 1) education, 2) schools, 3) youth, 4) unity, and 5) spiritual growth. There is relatively little support for involvement in the surrounding non-Muslim community, as the focus appears to be on the self. However, there is a strong support – more than 90 percent – for political involvement of some kind.

5. The role of women in the Detroit Muslim community is limited at best. Women are allowed to attend and serve or have served on the board of only a little more than one-half of the mosques surveyed. The other half was split almost evenly

between mosques that allowed women to serve, but simply had none that were serving, and mosques that restricted women from serving on the board. Moreover, total attendance of women at the congregational Friday prayer averaged less than 15 percent. When taking different ethnicities into account, African American communities were the most open to female involvement, while South Asian communities were the most restrictive, and Arab communities were in between.

Segregation and Ghettoization of American Muslims

There is significant racial and ethnic segregation among Muslims in the metropolitan Detroit area. This fact is true to varying degrees for other metropolitan areas nationwide. Language may play a role in this segregation since numerous mosques still do not utilize English in their *khutbahs* (sermons) or offer only a brief English translation. The use of one particular language other than English in regular lectures, classes, and other activities may also play a divisive role. Another factor contributing to the segregation includes cultural barriers. Minority ethnic groups within a community that is predominately Arab or Indian-Pakistani, for example, may feel alienated by cultural practices that are implemented in the mosque.

Specific programs are needed to counter this phenomenon. The revival or creation of regional councils is of vital importance. In metropolitan Detroit, the Council of Islamic Organizations of Michigan (CIOM) used to play a unifying role. Other metropolitan areas, such as Chicago and Houston, have actively functioning councils that allow representatives of each community to coordinate activities. Youth group

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regional councils and exchange programs can be created either conjointly within larger community-based councils or independently. In the Detroit study, we noted that the Michigan Muslim Youth Council effectively serves this unifying function.

Other examples of programs to reduce segregation include the formation of athletic leagues, incorporation of mainstream languages and cultural practices into programs and *khutbahs*, creation of advisory committees consisting of minority members, and greater interaction between existing Islamic schools. While it is natural for similar ethnicities to congregate together, it is problematic to allow one ethnicity to dominate the leadership apparatus of the mosque. This is a recipe for tension and misunderstanding. It also promotes an insular ghetto environment in which individuals can avoid integration and interaction with the larger society.

The effect of the segregation can be inferred from analyzing the data on conversions. The metropolitan Detroit Muslim community, with its higher number of segregated mosques, also has a much lower rate of Americans who convert to Islam. The lack of conversions reflects two important aspects of the Detroit Muslim community. First, it reflects its inability to communicate effectively with the surrounding non-Muslim community. Second, and more importantly, it reflects an inability to reach out even to potentially active Muslims in the community.

Many converts face similar barriers as Muslims of non-dominant ethnicities who are interested in joining a particular community. These barriers include cultural segregation as well as most mosques' inability to effectively cater to standard American norms of communication. Although conversions

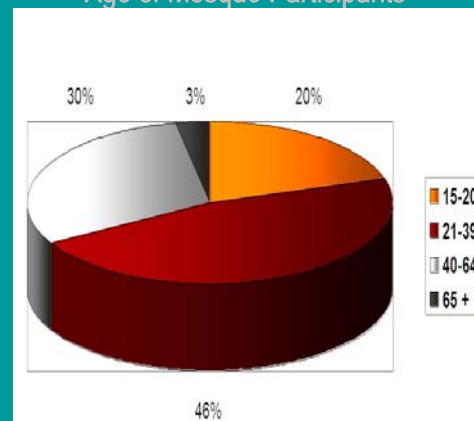
are not necessarily a goal of the community, they are a natural measure of the community's impact on its surroundings and its ability to integrate.

To effectively combat this problem with integrating, Muslim communities need to make an effort to establish successful outreach programs and classes to assist both Muslims and non-Muslims. These outreach efforts should specifically attempt to introduce the community to the surrounding society and vice versa. Many Detroit mosques have outreach activities that are educational or missionary in nature, such as open houses and lectures; but, very few civic outreach activities exist.

Specifically, few Muslim communities in the city are consistently involved in local clean-up activities, homeless programs, diversity councils, and arts programs, among other endeavors. There are notable exceptions, particularly among the youth, but these efforts are still quite preliminary. In 2004, more than \$51 million in federal funds was awarded to faith-based groups for community service in Michigan. Almost none of this money went to Muslims organizations, partly because most did not have programs that would qualify. This is another indication of the lack of Muslim civic involvement. Increasing civic responsibility will allow greater exposure of both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities to each other. An increase in conversions and integration should naturally follow.

Outreach activities to other Muslims are also vital to reversing the segregation that is present within some Muslim communities. It is estimated that only one-third of American Muslims are associated with a mosque. Serious attempts need to be made in each community to identify the needs of these people and how the mosque can become more relevant to them. As mentioned above, this may necessitate

Age of Mosque Participants



American Muslim leaders recognize the importance of the second generation, but there does not appear to be any specific strategy aimed directly at drawing them closer to the community.

Age of Second Generation Immigrants

15-20	52.5%
21-39	43%
40-64	4%
65 +	.5%

(N=200)

Without an active program for new immigrants, their natural tendency to congregate with those of similar ethnicities will take precedence, and will lead to more segregation and ghettoization of Muslim communities.

reducing the cultural barriers and improving lines of communication. The end result will be an integrated and growing Muslim community that has a positive impact on its surrounding metropolitan area.

The presence of segregated Muslim communities will decline with increased emphasis on promoting diversity as a value itself within the community. By bridging the many differences between ethnicities and religious sects and uniting *within* the community, American Muslims will have the tools to effectively deal with the plethora of challenges waiting *outside* the community. Only when there is intra-faith dialogue can meaningful steps be taken on the road to effect positive change in larger context of American society.

Impact of Immigration

The Detroit Mosque Study showed a very large influx of immigrants who have very different needs and perspectives. The immigrants actually accounted for the greatest source of growth in numbers for the Detroit mosques. This is true nationwide. Although creating ethnically divided mosques and communities is dangerous, as described above, new immigrants benefit greatly from the moral and social support of their fellow ethnic cohorts. There is a fine balance between keeping a community diverse and accommodating the needs of the new immigrants. It is a challenge faced by many Western nations as Muslim immigrants flock to their borders.

In many countries, several cultural practices become religious practices and many immigrants bring these practices to the United States, expecting them to be followed and accepted. Effective mechanisms for integration of these individuals involve education and

support services. These services can include classes, job assistance, youth activities, help in navigating bureaucracies, and more. By utilizing valuable services, new immigrants' sense of belonging to the community will increase, as will their acceptance of the diversity. Without an active program for new immigrants, their natural tendency to congregate with those of similar ethnicities will take precedence, and will lead to more segregation and ghettoization of Muslim communities. In addition, programs to help immigrants with such services are a potential source for faith-based initiative grants.

Second Generation American Muslims

Second-generation Muslims will serve a unique role in the Muslim community in the upcoming century. They are a bridge between the American society at large and the vast number of immigrant Muslims who established many of the Muslim community's institutions in the United States. However, the Muslims second generation ranked lowest in terms of sense of belonging to mosques, were less likely to send their children to Islamic school, and were also less likely to attend events at the mosque.

American Muslim leaders recognize the importance of the second generation, but there does not appear to be any specific strategy aimed directly at drawing them closer to the community. The needs of second generation Muslims are very different than the needs of first generation or immigrant Muslims. Specific programs and services that the second generation will find useful need to be identified. Some examples provided in Detroit mosques include playgroups, education programs, matrimonial activities and dinners, job placement assistance, and recreational activities. Although this list

may be similar to the list of activities that new immigrants may need, there is a difference: The cultural paradigm in which these take place is vastly different.

To help the second generation increase their sense of belonging to the community, providing them with leadership roles in local mosques may be necessary. The second generation has a deeply vested interest in American society in that it is typically their only home. They are more readily accepted as American than their fellow Muslims who have a different cultural identity. The involvement of second generation Muslims in leadership positions would be reassuring to the

into increased revenue. Subsequently, this process will allow communities to increase capacity in the form of new infrastructure and sustained sources of revenue. In the long term, this increased revenue source will allow communities to finally move away from individual donations and towards establishing permanent endowments. None of the Detroit mosques had a significant endowment, and most relied on regular individual donations to sustain services and operations. When compared to other religious communities, Detroit mosques have significantly lower donation levels than their Christian and Jewish counterparts.

New sources of revenue and creative

Are Women Allowed to Serve on the Governing Board

	Detroit	National
Women allowed and they served	52%	50%
Allowed but not served	26%	19%
Not allowed	22%	31%

(Detroit N=31)

Women need to be effectively integrated in the community's power structures in order to better cater to the needs and demands of women in the community.

greater American society that the mosques are not a threat.

Economic Challenges

As noted above, the Detroit Mosque Study reported that, in terms of sense of belonging to the mosque, the second generation ranked the lowest. In order for the mosque to survive financially, creating a sense of belonging, providing leadership opportunities, and instilling a sense of involvement in the community's events and policies is necessary, as the survey showed a strong correlation between those with a strong sense of belonging to the mosque and higher levels of donation. Therefore, as the second generation of Muslims and new immigrants enter the professional workforce, and the first generation moves on to retirement, an increased sense of belonging will directly translate

fundraising techniques need to be explored. The utilization of regular fundraising dinners, gift certificate programs, membership fees, facility usage fees and a monthly deduction directly from checking accounts are common. Most of the money raised comes from local sources. Most mosques have thus far not used state and federal resources, nor have they tapped into foundations, charitable trusts, and bequests. Each of these options should also be explored.

Community Programs

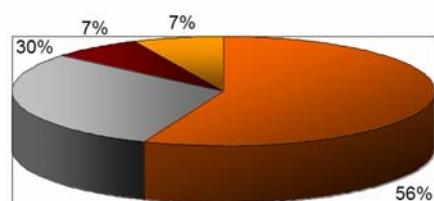
The data has clearly shown the types of programs most mosque-goers would like to see implemented in their communities. More than one-third of the respondents indicated that these activities could be significantly improved. Programs having to do with

Decade of Arrival and Intent to Return to One's Homeland

Decade Arrived	Percentage of immigrants intending to return
Before 1970s	33%
1970s	33%
1980s	36%
1990s	56%
2000s	73%

(N=634)

Religious and Educational Needs Are Fulfilled



■ Yes ■ Somewhat ■ No ■ Don't Know

By understanding the problems and challenges facing the community, Muslim leaders and community activists can begin to proactively work for a better future. In doing so, Muslims can also hope for healthier communities that are better equipped for religious, social, and spiritual development for *all* mosque members.

educating Muslims, appealing to youth, unifying the mosque community and surrounding communities, and pursuing spiritual growth should be among the top priorities for community leaders. These programs may include classes, sporting events, and social gatherings. Mosque communities should not fear outsourcing some of their educational curriculum to other community-based organizations they feel comfortable with, such as the American Learning Institute for Muslims (ALIM.), based in Canton, Michigan; the Nawawi Foundation based in Chicago, Illinois; and the Zaytuna Institute, based in Hayward, California. Many organizations devoted to education, including some of those mentioned, now offer regular semester courses via teleconference and the Internet.

According to the study data, many Muslims also felt political action should be a priority for the community. Many have already registered to vote, and the contentious national elections have increased the political savvy among many. However, more attention needs to be placed on local city, county, and state elections. Voter turnout during these events and participation by Muslims is quite low.

Ironically, although many American Muslims ranked political involvement as a high priority, they ranked community involvement as one of their lowest priorities. This is an untenable position to hold. One cannot expect to reap the rewards of political involvement when he or she is not contributing to the civic society. One of the lessons that increased political involvement will hold is perhaps that more community involvement is required for any political action to become more effective.

Muslims must ask the questions: Are Muslim communities doing enough to

reach out to society at large? By focusing on themselves, do Muslims risk further alienation? How can the community seek to help the society around them?

While many mosques have programs and services, each of these needs to be critically examined to determine its audience, its effectiveness, and how it can be improved.

Role of Women

The involvement of women in the mosques is varied. Their role in positions of authority and decision-making are often absent, and there must be more effort to include and involve them. All community leaders must answer the following questions to gain insight into the problem: Are programs being developed to reach out to Muslim women? Does the community know what the needs of women are? How does the community react to suggestions by women or women who are seeking a more active role in community policymaking? What will it take to draw women into the community? How can the mosque become relevant for this half of the Muslim community?

Women need to be effectively integrated into the community's power structures in order to better cater to the needs and demands of women in the community. In this effort, women must also be willing and ready to provide their time, effort, and skills. Moreover, mosques need to better equip their buildings and institutions for women who want to become more actively involved, but are turned away by prayer areas that are less than cordial and a stereotype that the women's role in community activities is cooking for dinners. Unfortunately, this is a stereotype that has more fact behind it than many Muslim

communities like to believe.

Conclusion

The American Muslim community faces several challenges. The first is the challenge of inclusion, as there is still much segregation present between the many communities. The Detroit situation may be unique due to its large Arab population. However, the lack of integration between immigrant and African American communities, for example, is a nationally recognized problem. Part of the challenge of inclusion is the ability to effectively incorporate new immigrants into the community. These immigrants share a different historical experience and have vastly different views on the role of the mosque and the local community. However, recognizing these differences and finding strategies to accommodate them will reduce tensions and future misunderstandings.

The second major challenge is outreach to the greater non-Muslim community. American Muslims must understand that they live in a broader society with which they must interact. Continued isolation and ghettoization into ethnic groups should be avoided as much as possible, as it will lead to increased misunderstanding, tensions, and unnecessary restrictions against them by the outside community.

A third challenge involves the booming second generation. The community will need to develop effective programs to engage this population and must find specific ways to remain relevant to this increasingly large segment of the community. There are already signs that many younger Muslims feel a lower sense of belonging to the mosque. Whether new activities are sufficient to keep the newer

generations of Muslims satisfied and willing to donate to the community will be an important test for the future and may prove to lead to the success or failure of the American Muslim community.

A final challenge for the Muslim community over the next decade deals with the role of women in the mosque. Mosques and community-based institutions need to find a way to integrate women into their power structures so that the needs of women may be adequately addressed. By alienating 50 percent of the Muslim community, 50 percent of the human resources of the community are not utilized. The Muslim communities thereby fail to recognize and benefit from the skills that women have, which could be used to better fulfill the needs and responsibilities of a community. The common denominator of the Muslim community is the family, made up of men, women, and children alike. A successful community can only thrive when the needs of all three of these groups are fully understood and implemented, and all of their goals are therefore met.

By understanding the problems and challenges facing the community, Muslim leaders and community activists can begin to proactively work for a better future. In doing so, Muslims can also hope for healthier communities that are better equipped for religious, social, and spiritual development for *all* mosque members.

¹ The full report, which includes the methodology of the study as well as its detailed findings, is available online.

² It is assumed that the mosque is the cornerstone of the Muslim community, the terms "mosque," community center, and Muslim community are used interchangeably

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