

# **The American Mosque 2020: Growing and Evolving**

## **Key Findings of Report 1 of the US Mosque Survey 2020: Basic Characteristics of the American Mosque**

*The US Mosque Survey 2020 is a comprehensive statistical study of mosques located in the United States authored by Dr. Ihsan Bagby. The US Mosque Survey is an ongoing decadal survey which was conducted previously in 2000 and 2010. Find full methodology information [here](#).*

### **The Number of Mosques Continues to Grow**

- In 2020, the US Mosque Survey counted 2769 mosques, which is a 31% increase from the 2010 count of 2106 mosques. Undoubtedly, the primary driving force for the increase of mosques is the steady expansion of the population of Muslims in America due to immigration and birth rate.
- Mosques are becoming more suburban as major declines occurred in the number of mosques located in towns/small cities and in downtown areas of large cities. Mosques in towns/small cities decreased from 20% in 2010 to 6% in 2020. The apparent cause is the dwindling population of Muslims in these towns/small cities due to the drying up of jobs in these areas and the moves of young adults, children of mosque founders, and activists to large cities for education and jobs. In 2010, 17% of mosques were found in downtown areas, but in 2020 that figure is down to 6%. This decrease is most probably tied to the decrease of African American mosques and the general move of mosques to suburban locations.

### **The Number of Mosque Participants Continues to Grow**

- Jum'ah prayer (the weekly Muslim congregational prayer held on Friday) averaged 410 attendees in 2020, as compared to 353 in 2010, which equals a 16% increase. Almost three-fourths (72%) of mosques recorded a 10% or more increase in Jum'ah attendance.
- The total number of mosque participants, which is measured by the number of Muslims who attend the high holiday Eid prayer after Ramadan, increased to 1445, which is a 16% increase from the 2010 count of 1248.
- Using the Eid prayer count, the number of “mosqued” Muslims is approximately 4 million.

### **Conversions Decreased**

- The number of converts to Islam in mosques declined dramatically. From 15.3 converts per mosque in 2010, the average number of converts in 2020 is 11.3. The primary reason is the decline in African American converts, especially in African American mosques.

### **Sharp Decrease in African American Mosques and the Number of African American Attendees**

- In 2020, African American mosques comprised 13% of all mosques, but in 2010 African American mosques accounted for 23% of all mosques—a 43% decrease (dominant ethnic groups within mosques are calculated as: any group over 55% of all mosque participants; 50%-59% of one group and all others less than 40%; 40-49% of one group and all others less than 30%; 35-39% of one group and all others less than 20%). This is especially

noteworthy considering African American Muslims account for roughly 28% of all American Muslims according to ISPU.

- In 2020, African American Muslims comprised 16% of all attendees in mosques, but in 2010 that figure was 23%—a 33% decrease.
- More study is needed to understand this phenomena, but apparent causes are the decline of African American converts (which constitutes the life-blood of growth in African American mosques), the inability of mosques to attract and maintain African American young adults, and the overall aging of African American Muslims, many of whom converted in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Young Adult Muslims—Good News and Bad News**

- Good news. Almost one-fourth (24%) of mosque participants are aged 18-34, roughly the ages of Generation Z and young Millennials. This is a very respectable percentage when compared to churches where about 11% of their attendees are 18-34.
- Bad news. ISPU found that in 2020, 54% of adult Muslims are aged 18-34 (the American Muslim community is a very young community). Eliminating the children's age group of 1-17, the US Mosque Survey 2020 estimates that 29% of adult mosque attendees are 18-34, which is far below ISPU's data indicating 54% of the American Muslim population are young adult Muslims (ages 18-34). Based on this large difference, mosques are not attracting a significant percentage of Generation Z and young Millennials. Mosques have not lost the battle for the hearts and minds of young adult Muslims, but they have not won the battle either.

### **The Number of Purpose-Built Mosques Continues to Grow**

- In 2020, 37% of all mosques were built as a mosque. This is a substantial increase from 2010, when 30% of mosques were purpose-built. Taking into consideration actual numbers instead of percentages, 37% of all mosques in 2020 means that 1,025 mosques were purpose-built. In 2010, 30% of mosques equaled 632 purpose-built mosques. In 2000, only 314 mosques were purpose-built. The American Muslim community maintained its building spree for the past few decades.

### **Neighborhood and Zoning Board Resistance to Mosque Development Has Increased**

- In the past decade (2010-2019), 35% of mosques encountered significant resistance from their neighborhood or city when they tried to obtain permission to move, expand, or build. In comparison, from 1980-2009 the average percentage of mosques that met resistance was 25%. Apparently, negative attitudes toward Muslims grew in the last decade. Mosque opposition represents an institutional form of anti-Muslim discrimination. According to ISPU's American Muslim Poll 2020, more than any other group that experiences religious discrimination, Muslims do so on an institutional, not just interpersonal, level.

### **More Imams are Full-Time and Paid, and More are American-Born**

- Half of American mosques have a full-time paid imam as compared to 2010 when 43% of mosques had a full-time paid imam. This percentage is well short of churches and synagogues that have full-time paid religious leaders. Nevertheless, it shows steady progress.

- Of full-time paid imams, 22% were born in America which is an increase from 15% in 2010. The inevitable evolution to the preference of hiring American-born imams is slowly manifesting.
- Only 6% of all imams received their Islamic degree (BA, MA, PhD) from an American institution, and no one seminary, university or institute is predominant in granting these degrees. The absence of a leading US-based Islamic seminary is an impediment for increasing the number of American-born imams.

### **Mosque Governance is Still Varied and Evolving**

- No one governance model typifies mosques.
- Almost half (48%) of mosques have one volunteer governing body (usually called a board of directors or an executive committee), which manages the day-to-day activities of the mosque. In larger mosques with Jum'ah attendance over 500, the more common governing structure is to have two bodies: a board of trustees, which provides oversight, and an executive committee, which manages the mosque.
- Only a handful of very large mosques have paid staff to manage the mosque; therefore, the vast majority of mosques (76%) are managed entirely by volunteers.
- The imam is considered the leader of the mosque in only 30% of all mosques. Lay leadership dominates most mosques.
- In 77% of mosques, imams have no managerial role. Over half of mosques (54%) have a shared governance arrangement between lay leadership and the imam, with the lay leadership taking charge of management and the imam taking responsibility for religious affairs. In 23% of mosques, the lay leadership runs all aspects of the mosque including religious affairs, and the imam leads the prayers. Only in a few instances (almost all African American mosques) does the imam have both religious and management responsibilities. Typically, in the shared governance model, mosque leadership and the final decision-making power lie with lay leadership and not the imam.

### **Mosque Income Continues to Grow**

- The average mosque budget in 2020 was \$276,500 and the median budget \$80,000. This is a substantial increase from 2010's average budget of \$167,600 and the median budget of \$70,000. (These figures do not include capital campaigns to build or expand mosques.)
- Mosques collect on average \$40,640 for zakah (a required charity which is to be given to poor people).
- Combining budget and zakah, mosques collect on average \$317,140.
- Mosque and church incomes are roughly the same, but churches achieve their income levels with far fewer people. Churches average \$311,782 with 180 regular participants. Mosque income averages \$317,140 with an average Jum'ah attendance of 410. Dividing income by participants, church participants give \$1732 per year, and mosque participants give \$674 per year.