

The American Mosque 2020: Growing and Evolving

Key Findings of Report 2 of the US Mosque Survey 2020: Perspectives and Activities

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](#).

Islamic Approaches

The US Mosque Survey questionnaire offered the option of four approaches in making an Islamic decision.

- “Follow a particular madhhab”; “Refer to Qur’an and Sunnah and follow an interpretation that follows the opinions of the great scholars of the past”; “Refer to Qur’an and Sunnah and follow an interpretation that takes into account its purposes (*maqasid*) and modern circumstances”; “Follow the Salafi minhaj (way of thought).”

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- The majority of mosques (55%) follow the more flexible approach of taking into account the purposes of Islamic law and modern circumstances.
- The madhhab approach is declining. In 2020, only 4% of mosque leaders followed the madhhab approach, as opposed to 11% in 2010. The only approach that showed an increase is the approach of following the great scholars of the past: 31% in 2010 and 39% in 2020. Apparently, the mosques that preferred to follow one madhhab in the past are now choosing to identify as mosques that follow all madhhabs, which is represented by the approach of following the great scholars of the past.
- The Salafi approach has practically disappeared: Less than 1% in the Mosque Survey identified themselves as Salafi.

Perspectives on American Society

Over the past 20 years, a strong majority of mosque leaders consistently agree Muslims should be involved in American civic institutions.

- American mosques are virtually unanimous in their endorsement of the proposition that Muslims should be involved in American society in both civic and political life. Over 98% of mosque leaders agree with the statement that Muslims should be involved in American civic institutions; 95% agree that Muslims should be involved in American politics.
- This consensus on involvement in American society has been in place since 2000, but the percentage of those who “strongly agree” with the idea of involvement has increased since 2000: 78% of mosque leaders “strongly agree” with involvement in civic institutions in 2000, and in 2020 the figure was up to 83%; 72% “strongly agree” with political involvement in 2000, and in 2020 the figure was 77%.
- Because of the near unanimity of mosque leaders on involvement in the civic life of American society, there were no significant differences among various types of mosques.

Strong agreement that Muslims should participate in politics is on the rise across mosques of all Islamic approaches.

- While all mosques, no matter the ethnicity, endorse political participation, some African American mosques and those mosques dominated by newer immigrants were slightly less enthusiastic. Among the newer immigrant groups, 66% “strongly agree” with involvement in politics, and among African American mosques 70% “strongly agree.”
- Among all other ethnicities, over 80% “strongly agree” with political involvement. Possible explanations are that some new immigrant groups are uncomfortable with involvement and some African American mosque leaders, reflecting their experience in America, are cynical about the efficacy of political involvement.
- Mosque leaders who prefer the more flexible approach of looking to the purposes of Islamic law are the most enthusiastic in supporting political involvement: 85% of these mosque leaders “strongly agree” that Muslims should be involved in politics.
- Among mosque leaders who look to the scholars of the past, 67% of them “strongly agree” with political involvement.
- Among mosque leaders who follow a madhhab, 77% “strongly agree” with political involvement. In 2010, only 65% of mosque leaders who follow a madhhab “strongly agreed” with involvement in American politics. In 2020, 16% of mosque leaders who follow a madhhab were neutral or disagreed with political involvement, and now that figure is down to 6%.

Fewer mosque leaders see American society as hostile to Islam.

- Only 18% of mosque leaders agree that Americans are hostile toward Islam, indicating that the vast majority of mosque leaders feel that Muslims are accepted in America.
- There is a modest change from 2010 in that there is an increased sense of America’s acceptance of Islam: In 2010, 25% of mosques leaders agreed that America is hostile to Islam, and in 2020 only 18% agreed. The Trump years have apparently not soured mosque leaders in their overall view of America’s lack of hostility toward Islam and Muslims.

Few mosque leaders say American society is immoral.

- The vast majority of mosque leaders do not view American society as immoral: only 19% agree with the statement that American society is immoral as compared with 49% who disagree. There is little significant change from 2010 to 2020.
- African American mosques are much more critical of American society’s morals than immigrant mosques: 53% of African American mosques agree that American society is immoral, but only 15% of immigrant mosques agree.
- Those mosques that believe American society is immoral score slightly lower in political involvement: Only 18% of mosques that agree that America is immoral score high in political involvement as opposed to 27% of mosques that do not agree or are neutral about America’s immorality.

Mosque Activities

Most mosques hold five daily prayers.

- Almost three-fourths of all mosques (73%) hold all five of the ritual prayers (salah), a significant increase from 2010 when 60% of mosques held all five prayers.

- Over 80% of mosques hold the morning prayer (before sunrise), the sunset prayer, and the evening prayer—times at which most people are not working.
- Only 11% of mosques do not hold any of the daily prayers.
- Almost three-fourths of mosques (72%) use only English for the main message of the Jum'ah sermon. In 2010 that figure was 70% and in 2000 it was 53%.

Most mosques offer religious education programs.

- 83% of mosques hold some type of Islamic study class, and 76% of mosques have a weekend school for kids. There has been no change in these figures since 2010.
- A more recent phenomena is the emergence of Qur'an memorization schools, ranging from full-time to part-time. Over one-fourth of mosques (27%) have such memorization schools.
- In 2010, 23% of mosques had new Muslim activities/classes, and in 2020 that figure increased to 36%. There has always been a recognition of the need for new Muslim activities, and now mosques are slowly beginning to address that need.

In 2020, more than half of mosques have women's and youth groups, up from one-third in 2010.

- Women and youth activities are the second and third most common mosque activities. The percentage of mosques that have a women's group grew from 32% in 2010 to 55% in 2020, and youth groups grew from 32% in 2010 to 52% in 2020.
- In 2010, only 9% of mosques had a senior program, but in 2020 that figure was up to 15%.
- Almost half (46%) of mosques score high on a scale¹ for basic mosque activity while only

Mosques are extremely active in charity and social service activities.

- On average, mosques collect \$40,640 for zakah, with a median amount of \$15,000. Multiplying the average amount collected for zakah times the number of mosques (2,769), mosques collect and distribute \$112 million in charity every year.
- 78% provide family and marital counseling services, which is usually the job of the imam. This is a slight decline from 86% in 2010.
- In 2020, two-thirds (66%) had a food program as compared to 47% in 2010. Almost one-third of mosques (32%) provide in-house counseling or referrals for mental health counseling. In large cities, Muslim mental health clinics are growing in number, and mosques are taking advantage of their services.

Most mosques participate in various interfaith activities.

- Overall, in 2020, 78% of mosques are involved in at least one interfaith activity. Involvement in interfaith activities has not changed since 2010, but there is a marked change from 2000 when 66% participated in some type of interfaith activity.
- Mosques which follow the approach of looking to the purposes of the law tend to participate more in interfaith worship services. Only 27% of mosques that follow the

¹ The scale consists of six activities: (1) all five salah, (2) weekend school, (3) community gatherings, (4) Islamic study classes, (5) youth activities, and (6) women activities. A mosque scores high if it conducts all six of the activities; it scores medium if it conducts 4-5 activities; and it scores low if it conducts 0-3 activities.

great scholars of the past participate in interfaith worship services versus 40% of mosques that follow a madhhab participate and 66% of mosques that follow a more flexible approach.

Creating a scale for community involvement²

- Only 29% of mosques score high on the community involvement scale. In comparison, 46% of mosques scored high regarding mosque worship, educational programs, and group activities. Overall, mosques give priority to the basic activities of a mosque and a lower priority to community involvement.
- Mosques with the flexible approach of looking to purposes of foundational sources tend to score higher in community involvement than the other approaches: 37% of mosques that look to the purposes score high in community involvement as compared to 22% of mosques that look to the great scholars of the past and 17% of mosques that follow one of the traditional madhhabs.

Mosque leaders endorse the idea that Muslims should participate in American politics, but mosques have an uneven record of getting involved as an institution.

- In 2020, only 37% of mosques had within the last 12 months held a meeting, class, or event to discuss politics.
- In 2020, over half of mosques (54%) hosted or conducted voter registration in the mosque. This figure is an increase from 2010, when 48% of mosques held a voter registration drive.
- 51% of mosques hosted a politician's visit and talk.
- Only one-fourth (25%) of mosques score high on the scale³ of political involvement; 39% score medium and 36% score low. These scores are lower than community involvement, showing that mosques consider political involvement a lower priority.

Number of grades offered at mosque Islamic schools continue to climb.

- In 2020 18% of mosques had a full-time Islamic school, on par with 19% in 2010. However, these percentages mean that the total number of Islamic schools have increased: in 2010, 19% represent 400 Islamic schools, and 18% in 2020 represents 498 schools—a 25% increase.
- Islamic schools also increased in number of students: In 2010, the average number of students was 180, and in 2020 the average was 207.
- Islamic schools also grew in the number of grades offered. In 2020, 77% of all Islamic schools were either elementary to middle or elementary to high school. Islamic

² A scale was developed to better gauge mosque involvement in local communities and includes seven items: (1) interfaith educational activity, (2) interfaith community service activity, (3) food pantry or food distribution, (4) health education/health services, (5) social justice activities/advocacy groups, (6) answering agree or strongly agree to the statement that their mosque is actively involved in the local community, and (7) answering agree or strongly agree to the statement that Muslims should be involved in American civic institutions.

³ A scale of high/medium/low was created to better analyze mosque political involvement. Political involvement comprises four items: (1) agree that Muslims should be involved in American politics, (2) conduct at least one voter registration drive, (3) discuss politics at least once, and (4) invite a politician to the mosque at least once.

elementary-only schools decreased from 73% in 2000 to 28% in 2010 to just 19% in 2020.

Women and the Mosque

No change in use of divider in mosque since 2000.

- The percentage of mosques with a divider has remained steady since 2000 at two-thirds, and the percentage of mosques that do not have a divider is still one-third. The issue has been raised and the discussion has been initiated, but the culture of mosques regarding dividers has remained unchanged.
- African American mosques have the highest percentage of mosques with no divider: Two-thirds of African American mosques (66%) have no barrier as compared to 31% of immigrant mosques that do not use a divider.
- The effect of the American experience vs. cultural heritage from overseas can be seen in the statistic that full-time paid imams who are American born are much more likely to lead mosques with no divider: 50% of mosques with a full-time paid, American-born imam do not have a divider as compared to 31% of mosques with a full-time paid foreign-born imam.
- Those mosques that are actively involved in their local communities and highly politically involved are more likely to have no divider in the mosque. More than half of mosques (54%) that score high in both community and political involvement do not have dividers. Only 22% of mosques with low community involvement have no dividers in their mosques.
- Islamic approach is another variable associated with whether a mosque has a divider or not. Those mosques that prefer the more flexible approach of looking to the purposes of Islamic law are much more likely to have no divider than the other approaches. Almost half (49%) of mosques that look to purposes have no divider. In comparison, only 17% of mosques that look to the great scholars of the past and 24% of mosques that follow a madhhab have no dividers in their mosques.

Women's participation on mosque boards climbs in 2020 vs 2000.

- Over two-thirds of mosques (67%) have women serving on their mosque boards as compared to 59% in 2010 and 50% in 2000.
- The argument that women should not serve on governing bodies of Muslim organizations has clearly been defeated: Only 7% of mosques still uphold that argument, down from 31% in 2000.
- African American mosques have a much higher percentage of women on their boards: 83% have women serving on their boards.
- Those mosques that look to the purposes have a much higher percentage of women on their boards: 79% of these mosques have women serving on their boards, compared with 47% of mosques that look to the great scholars of the past and 59% of mosques that follow a madhhab.

Juma'ah attendance for women remains stable over the past 20 years.

- In 2020, the percentage of women attending Jum'ah prayer was 19%, in 2010 it was 18%, and in 2000 it was 15%.

- African American mosques have a higher percentage of women attendees at Jum'ah prayer: 23% of their Jum'ah attendance comprises women as compared to 18% for immigrant mosques.
- Small immigrant mosques, whose overall attendance is 100 and below, have a smaller percentage of women attendees: For these small mosques, about 14% of their Jum'ah attendees are women. In larger mosques with Jum'ah attendance over 100 people, the average percentage of women attendees is 20%.
- As with dividers in the mosque, a mosque that has a full-time paid, American-born imam is more likely to have a higher attendance rate for women.
- Mosques with women on their boards have 21% of Jum'ah attendees comprising women as compared to 13% for mosques who do not allow women on their boards and 15% for mosques that allow women but do not have a woman on their board.

Mosque have become more women-friendly over the past decade.

- The good news is that scores for women-friendly mosques⁴ improved from 2010 to 2020. In 2020, 19% of mosques scored excellent while in 2010 only 14% scored excellent; in 2020, 30% of mosques scored well in comparison to 23% in 2010.
- The bad news is that the needle has not moved significantly as the majority of mosques (52%) score fair or poor in 2020. Only 19% of mosques can be truly designated as women-friendly mosques.
- High scores for being women-friendly is associated with five factors: high Jum'ah attendance, being an African American mosque, high scores for community and political involvement, preferring the more flexible Islamic approach of looking to the purposes, and having a full-time paid, American-born imam.
- High scores for community and political involvement are also associated with women-friendly mosques. For example, 39% of mosques that score high for community involvement score excellent in being women-friendly mosques.
- Mosques that follow the flexible Islamic approach of looking to the purposes of the texts are much more likely to be women-friendly: 29% of mosques that follow the flexible approach score excellent as compared to 8% of mosques that follow the great scholars of the past and 6% of mosques that follow a madhhab.

Spotlight on Shi'ite mosques

Shi'ite perspectives and activities

- The main differences between the Shi'ite and Sunni mosques relate to worship activities. Only 14% of Shi'ite mosques hold all daily prayers as compared to 77% of Sunni mosques.
- One regular worship activity that is found in Shi'ite mosques but not Sunni mosques is the Thursday evening gathering where special prayers are recited. The special prayer is called Du'a Kumail. Almost all Shi'ite mosques (93%) hold the Thursday evening service.
- A growing phenomenon in Sunni mosques is the Qur'an memorization school which meets throughout the week. A parallel activity is not found in Shi'ite mosques. Only 7% of Shi'ite mosques organize such a school as compared to 28% of Sunni mosques.

⁴ A scale for the women-friendly mosque was devised in 2010 and repeated in 2020. The scale for both surveys consisted of four indicators: (1) no dividers in the mosque; (2) women serve on the mosque board; (3) women's attendance at Jum'ah averages about 19%; (4) women's activities and/or a women's group are present.

- There is virtually no difference between Shi'ite and Sunni mosques in terms of group, social service, and interfaith activities.
- There is no significant difference between Shi'ite and Sunni mosques in community involvement.
- Sunni mosques are more likely than Shi'ite mosques to be politically active. For example, approximately 54% of Sunni mosques are involved in voter registration and inviting politicians to their mosques; in comparison, 29% of Shi'ite mosques are involved in these activities.
- Shi'ite and Sunni mosques are virtually identical when it comes to issues concerning women. More than one-third of Shi'ite mosques score good or excellent on scale measuring women-friendly mosques