

# 10 Essential Facts on Perspectives and Activities of American Mosques<sup>1</sup>

## AMERICAN MOSQUE SURVEY

### 1 AMERICAN MOSQUES ARE NOT SIMPLY PLACES OF WORSHIP.

The typical American mosque hosts a wide variety of worship, educational, and group activities every day throughout the week. The American mosque has embraced the ideal that a mosque is to be a **worship-community center** that strives to be a nexus for all types of activities for the entire mosque community.

### 2 AMERICAN MOSQUES SUPPORT CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT.

The American mosque is virtually unanimous in approval of involvement in American civic and political life: 98% agree with civic engagement, and 95% agree with political participation.



CIVIC 98%

POLITICAL 95%



### 3 MOST MOSQUES ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

Most American mosques are involved in their neighborhoods and cities: 66% have a **food pantry** or food distribution program; 50% are involved in **social justice activities**; 76% participate in **interfaith educational programs**; and 59% have been involved in an **interfaith community service** project.



### 4 HALF OF MOSQUES HOLD POLITICAL ACTIVITIES.

American mosques are engaged in political activities: 54% of mosques hosted **voter registration drives** in the 12 months previous to survey collection; 51% **hosted politicians** to visit and speak at their mosques; and 37% held an **event or class** to discuss politics.



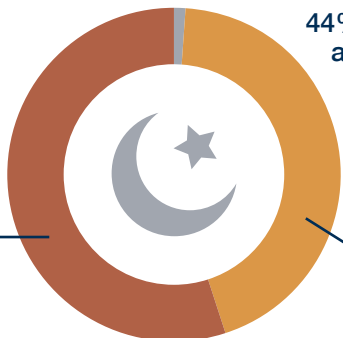
### 5 YOUTH ACTIVITIES ARE ON THE RISE, BUT STILL LAG BEHIND OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES.

Activities targeting young adults (18-35) lag in comparison with churches and synagogues; nevertheless, there was some improvement from the 2010 Mosque Survey.

## 6 MOST MOSQUES FOLLOW A “CONTEXTUAL” APPROACH TO ISLAM.

More than half (55%) of American mosque leaders lean toward an understanding of Islam that adheres to the foundational, textual sources of Islam (Qur’an and Sunnah) but are open to interpretations that look to the purposes of Islamic law and modern circumstances—a “contextual” approach.

**55%**  
contextual approach



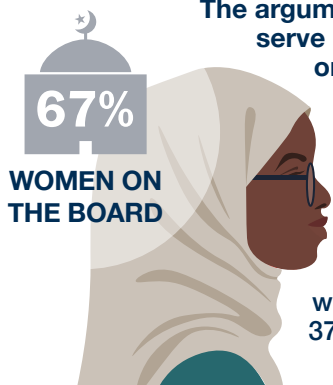
44% of mosques follow approaches that adhere to the foundational sources but prefer interpretations embedded in traditional views of the past—a “traditional” approach. Although this approach is varied, it tends to be more religiously conservative.

**44%**  
traditional approach

## 7 THERE’S BEEN SOME PROGRESS FOR WOMEN IN THE MOSQUE, BUT FEW MAJOR CHANGES.

Women serve on mosque boards in two-thirds (67%) of mosques—an increase from 59% in 2010. Mosques that do not allow women on their boards have dropped to 7% as compared to 31% in 2000 and 13% in 2010.

The argument that women should not serve on governing bodies of Muslim organizations has largely been defeated. However, only 19% of mosques scored ‘excellent’ as women-friendly mosques, but this does represent an increase from 14% in 2010<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 49% scored ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ in being women-friendly as compared to 37% in 2010.



## 8 MOSQUES FOLLOWING “CONTEXTUAL APPROACH” ARE MORE WOMEN-FRIENDLY AND COMMUNITY AND POLITICALLY INVOLVED.

Mosques that follow the “contextual” approach, by looking to the purposes of Islamic law, score significantly higher in their mosques’ community involvement, political involvement, and women-friendly position.



## 9 AFRICAN AMERICAN MOSQUES STAND APART.

African American mosques stand apart in that they score higher than other mosques in three areas: They are more women-friendly, community-involved, and adopt the “contextual approach” to interpreting Islamic law.



## 10 SHI’ITE AND SUNNI MOSQUES VARY ONLY IN WORSHIP.

Shi’ite mosques are virtually identical to Sunni mosques in all aspects of mosque life except worship activities, which are part of the long-standing traditional differences between Shi’ite and Sunni mosques.

<sup>1</sup> Bagby, Ihsan. July 2021. The American Mosque 2020: Growing and Evolving Report 2 of the US Mosque Survey 2020: Perspectives and Activities. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding.

<sup>2</sup> The scale for the women-friendly mosque 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. A mosque scored as excellent if it had all four indicators; good if it had three; fair if it had one or two indicators; and poor if it had none.

The US Mosque Survey 2020 is a comprehensive statistical study of mosques located in the United States. The survey is an ongoing decadal survey which was conducted previously in 2000 and 2010. Reports featuring the results will occasionally include results from a 1994 survey which was conducted by the Islamic Resource Center, using the same methodology as the US Mosque Surveys.

All of the US Mosque Surveys (2000, 2010, and 2020) were conducted in collaboration with a larger study of American congregations called Faith Communities Today (FACT), which is a project of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership (CCSP), a multi-faith coalition of numerous denominations and faith groups headquartered at Hartford Seminary. The strategy of FACT is to develop a common questionnaire and then have the member faith groups use that questionnaire to survey their respective congregations. The US Mosque Surveys took the FACT common questionnaire and modified it to fit the mosque context.

## METHODOLOGY

The first phase of the Mosque Survey was a count of all mosques, which was conducted from June to November 2019. Starting from the 2010 mosque database, an initial internet search was conducted to verify mosques, identify new mosques, and eliminate mosques that no longer exist. This internet search depended primarily on the excellent databases found on the websites of Muslim Guide and Salatomatic. Mosques were verified via the mosques' websites, Google Maps, and phone calls. The internet search resulted in an initial count of 2,948. After the internet search, a first-class (address correction) letter and a short questionnaire were sent to all mosques to solicit basic information. Various options for completing the questionnaire were offered, including an online version. Of the 2,948 mailings, 164 responses were received—a 5.5% response rate. This low response rate is the rationale for not depending on an online version for the comprehensive survey. Returned mail was checked with Google Maps and a general internet search. The final result was a count of 2,769 mosques.

The second phase was the comprehensive survey conducted via telephone interview of a mosque leader using a long questionnaire. The comprehensive survey entailed a random sampling from the list of 2,769 mosques. To achieve the goal of a margin of error of +/- 5%, 337 questionnaires had to be completed. The sample of mosques was stratified by state, such that each state had a set number of mosques for which the questionnaire had to be completed. The Mosque Survey randomly sampled 700 mosques; 470 questionnaires were completed, fulfilling the target for each state. The work of completing the questionnaires started in November 2019 and ended in October 2020. The COVID-19 crisis made the task of finding a mosque leader more difficult; thus, completion of the survey was delayed.

The results of the US Mosque Survey are all pre-COVID. Thus, interviewers asked mosque leaders about the situation of their mosques before the COVID-19 outbreak.

For the Mosque Survey, mosques were defined as a Sunni or Shia Muslim organization that organizes Jum'ah prayer, conducts other Islamic activities, and controls the space in which activities are held. This definition would include "musallas" which have an organization that does more than just conduct Jum'ah prayers. This definition excludes those places where only Jum'ah prayer is held, like a hospital or airport. Some Shi'ite religious organizations do not hold Jum'ah prayer due to the absence of a resident scholar or because they consider themselves an Imambargah or Hussainiya. These Shi'ite organizations were classified as mosques. The Mosque Survey did not include organizations outside of the Sunni and Shia American Muslim community like the Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, Ismailis, and Ahmadiyyah.