



Illinois Muslims: Assets, Needs, and Opportunities

Illinois has the largest per capita Muslim population in the nation, with every race, class, and background represented. This means a snapshot of Illinois Muslims is a snapshot of America's diversity.

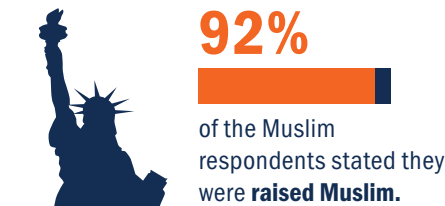
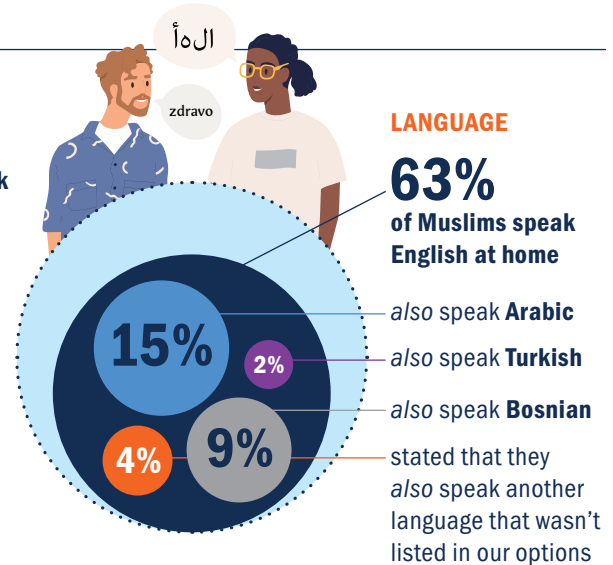
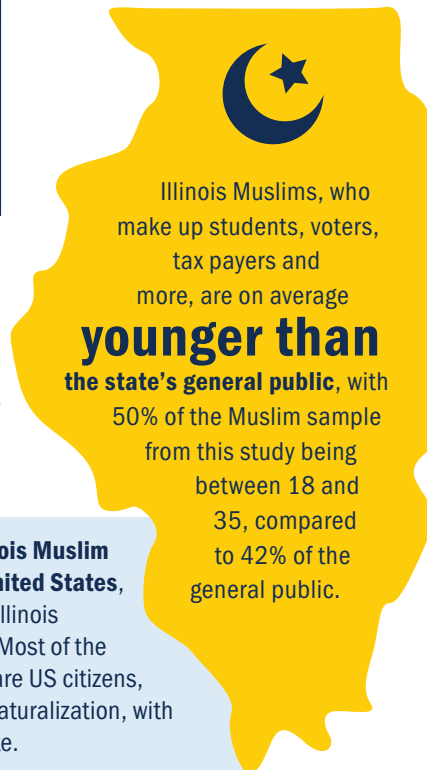
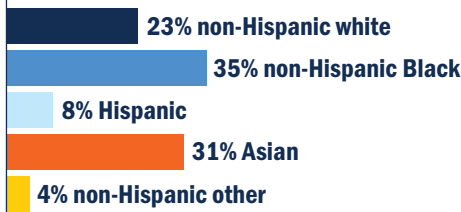
Who are Illinois Muslims, and what are their assets and needs? What opportunities exist for leaders, officials, volunteers, policymakers, corporations, media members, and social/civic/philanthropic organizations to better understand and support diverse communities? Research convened by the Muslim Civic Coalition and partners and conducted by the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement at the University of Illinois Chicago (IPCE) and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) provides answers to these questions for the first time.

All results below are based on nearly 1,800 completed surveys collected from October 15, 2021 to January 31, 2022 from residents of Illinois who identify as Muslim, compared against a sample of the general public in Illinois fielded by Qualtrics as well as four focus groups with Illinois Muslims held between March 22 and March 25, 2022.

WHO ARE ILLINOIS MUSLIMS?

RACIAL/ETHNIC MAKEUP

Estimates from SSRS, a nationally recognized polling firm, reveals the following very diverse racial/ethnic makeup of Illinois Muslims. It is important to note that these estimates did not include "Arab" as a separate racial/ethnic category in line with the Census¹, which is available in ISPU's nationally representative American Muslim Poll.² According to these representative national surveys, the racial representation of American Muslims is **28% African American or Black and 19% Asian**.

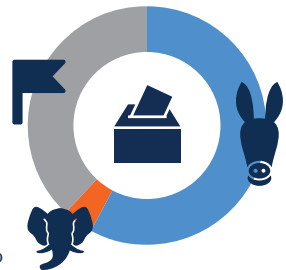


More than 50% of the Illinois Muslim sample was born in the United States, compared to 89% of the Illinois general public sample. Most of the Illinois Muslim sample are US citizens, either through birth or naturalization, with 92% being eligible to vote.

POLITICAL AFFILIATION

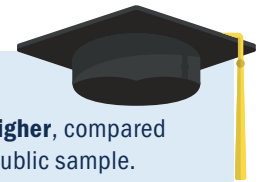
among the Illinois Muslim sample provides an opportunity for deep engagement by all parties:

- **58% identify as a Democrat**
- **4% identify as a Republican**
- **38% identify as independent**, more likely than the general public in the state where only 8% claim this political description.



EDUCATION

- **40% have a college degree or higher**, compared with 28% of the Illinois general public sample.
- An additional one third (33%) completed some college or a technical degree, compared with 42% of the Illinois general public.
- Similar proportions of the Muslim sample (22%) and general public (26%) have graduated high school.



94% of the Illinois Muslim sample reported that it is 'somewhat' or 'very' important that their purchase decision be **halal**. Halal means 'permissible' in Arabic and is most often used in reference to food or consumable goods, but also includes many other products/services.



8% have a disability. Nationally, one in three Muslims reports they or an immediate family member have a disability.

¹ Per Census definitions, "Arab" is categorized as "white."

² According to these representative national surveys, the racial representation of American Muslims is 28% white, 27% African American or Black, 18% Asian, 12% Arab, 8% Hispanic, and 7% some other race.

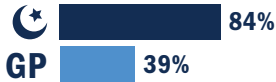
ASSETS

☾ = ILLINOIS MUSLIMS

GP = GENERAL PUBLIC

INDIVIDUAL

Individual respondents report a **strong faith identity**: Around 84% of Muslim respondents stated their faith was very important to their self-perception, compared with 39% of the Illinois general public respondents.



COMMUNITY

Illinois Muslims give **generously**. 83% of Muslim respondents donated to a cause or institution associated with their faith community in the prior year, compared with 46% of the Illinois general public.



FAMILY

A higher proportion of Muslims have **strong intergenerational support** in their households with 29% of the Muslim sample caring for elderly relatives, compared with 21% among the general public.



BROADER SOCIETY

Illinois Muslims create jobs. 12% of Muslim respondents identify as self-employed, compared with 7% of Illinois general public. We estimate that Muslims in Illinois create more than **350,000 jobs**—that's nearly 6% of all jobs in Illinois.

NEEDS

INDIVIDUAL

Study respondents indicated a need for more affordable, culturally appropriate mental healthcare. Muslims within our sample were less likely than the general public to seek out therapy services (13% vs. 24%) despite suffering from mental illness symptoms at the same rate as the general Illinois population (47% and 51%, respectively). Roughly one-third (35%) of respondents in the Illinois Muslim sample who reported mental health symptoms but did not seek treatment cite cost as a barrier to seeking treatment.

Respondents indicated a need for access to halal food. More than one-third of Muslim respondents with school-aged children and of college students said they lacked access to halal food at their school.

FAMILY

Respondents indicated a need for more support for domestic violence survivors. Muslim respondents face similar rates of domestic violence as the Illinois general public respondents, yet were less likely than the Illinois general public to report the abuse to law enforcement (35% vs. 58%) or a faith leader (31% vs. 53%).

COMMUNITY

Respondent answers indicated a need for greater investment in nontraditional nonprofits. While 80% of Muslims do donate to nonprofit organizations, only 9% give to “civic” or civil rights organizations and just 3% donate to family and youth organizations or research organizations associated with their faith community. A lack of funding to these organizations may leave the community with less capacity to inform and advocate for their needs with policymakers.



BROADER SOCIETY

Many Muslims face religious discrimination in various spheres. 52% of Muslim respondents stated they faced religious discrimination from outside of their community, compared with 24% of Illinois general public respondents. Discrimination poses a significant challenge to the Illinois Muslim community and was a consistent theme among focus group respondents:



“ In my view the greatest challenge is Islamophobia which is causing a security issue for Muslims. Being an Imam, we had to hire a security guy to protect us... It is hard for me when we have a security guy who is armed. He must be present at the door when people come to worship and it's hard to see him when children come and they ask why he has to be here... Just to have him we feel insecure. When will we feel safe again to go back to normal? – White male focus group participant ”

OPPORTUNITIES

The survey and focus group results presented in this report describe a vibrant, complex, and diverse Muslim community in Illinois—a community that brings tremendous assets to Illinois’ civic, economic, and cultural spheres, yet also has important and urgent needs.

Based on the assets and needs identified in this research, we offer recommendations for stakeholders including: funders and philanthropists; educators; direct social service providers; the business community; Muslim community members and leaders; government and policymakers; allies, advocates, and practitioners; and future researchers.

The full list of assets, needs, and opportunities, as well as additional report materials, are available at ISPU.org/Illinois-Muslims and www.IllinoisMuslims.org



This report presents an empirical assessment of the strengths and struggles of the Illinois Muslim community based on nearly 1,800 completed surveys collected from October 15, 2021 to January 31, 2022, with a comparison to the Illinois general public, and four focus groups with Illinois Muslims held between March 22 and March 25, 2022. The focus groups consisted of two with Muslim respondents of any age, race or ethnicity, one with African American Muslims only, and one with young Muslim adults aged 18-29. The topics examined, in both the survey and focus groups, were curated with community stakeholder input to reflect community priorities.

This report is the product of three years of tireless effort by Illinois leaders and researchers to define, fund, and execute this historic study. This research was convened by the Muslim Civic Coalition and partners and conducted by the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement at the University of Illinois Chicago (IPCE) and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). The results of this research can help guide leaders, officials, volunteers, policymakers, corporations, and social/civic organizations on how best to understand and support Muslim communities in Illinois. This report has deep implications across the nation.

REPORT SPONSORS

We would like to acknowledge our generous supporters whose contributions made this report possible, including lead sponsor Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA).



Sponsoring organizations include: IL Muslim Civic Coalition, The Field Foundation, Bank of America, Waraich Family Fund, Pillars Fund, Affinity Health, MAC Corporation, The Chicago Cubs, Zakat Foundation of America, Movement Voter Project, Tides Foundation, Zakat Chicago, The Mecca Center

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