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 Census, which is available in ISPU’s nationally representative American Muslim Poll. According to these representative national surveys, the racial representation of American Muslims is 28% African American or Black and 19% Asian.

92% of the Muslim respondents stated they were raised Muslim.

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.

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.

63% of Muslims speak English at home

15% also speak Arabic

9% also speak Turkish

4% also speak Bosnian

2% stated that they also speak another language that wasn’t listed in our options

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.

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.
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

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.

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– White male focus group participant
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

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