

MUSLIMS & ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES

Fact Sheet

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics about Muslims in the United States are often hard to come by, as the U.S. Census is forbidden by law from asking about religious beliefs and affiliation. For that reason, numbers cited for the total number of Muslims in the U.S. vary greatly. Some estimates are as high as 6-7 million. A 2011 study by the Pew Research Center puts the number at **2.6 million Muslims in the U.S.**, which is 0.7% of the total population.

U.S. BORN MUSLIMS make up **35% of the U.S. Muslim population**, with **African Americans** comprising **20% of the total U.S. born Muslim population**.

FOREIGN-BORN MUSLIMS (65% of the total U.S. Muslim population)

- 24% are from Arab countries
- 18% are from South Asia
- 8% are from Iran
- 5% are from Europe
- 4% are from non-Arab African countries
- 6% are from other countries

U.S. MUSLIMS COMPARED TO THE GENERAL U.S. POPULATION

Racial/Ethnic Identity	Muslims	General Public
White	38%	77%
Black	26%	11%
Asian	20%	5%
Other/mixed	16%	7%

According to *Newsweek* magazine (2007) "Muslim Americans represent the most affluent, integrated, politically engaged Muslim community in the Western world."ⁱ

There are approximately 700,000 plus **MUSLIMS in NEW YORK CITY**, and they are one of the fastest growing and most ethnically diverse faith communities in the city.ⁱⁱ

NEW YORK'S U.S. BORN MUSLIMS

- 20 to 25% are African American
- Fewer than 10% are Latino and Non-Hispanic White

NEW YORK CITY'S FOREIGN BORN MUSLIMS AND THEIR OFFSPRING make up the largest percentage and collectively represent between 16 to 20% of the city's entire foreign born population. These newcomers come from over 40 countries and represent vast geographic, social, linguistic and cultural diversity.ⁱⁱⁱ

MUSLIM STUDENTS IN THE U.S.: Due to restrictions on asking students about religious belief and affiliation, it is difficult to find a reliable estimate for the number of Muslim students in U.S. schools. A 2008 report from Dr. Louis Cristillo of Columbia University Teacher's College estimates that there are 120,000 Muslim students in New York City public schools, roughly 12% of the city's student population.^{iv}

MUSLIMS IN THE U.S. WORKFORCE: A 2009 Gallup poll found that roughly 70% of Muslim adults (18 and over) are employed (compared to the U.S. population at 64%). Among those who say they have a job, Muslim workers are also slightly more likely (30%) than the general public (26%) to work in professional occupations.^v

INSTITUTIONS

According to a preliminary survey by Ihsan Bagby cited in *Time* magazine's August 30, 2010 issue, there are about 1,900 sites operating as mosques in the United States, ranging from small storefronts and houses to large buildings with community centers. Since 2009, at least 35 proposed mosques and Islamic centers in the U.S., have encountered community resistance. Additionally, of the hundreds of thousands of non-profits in the United States, hundreds of these are operated by Muslims; they include local and national charitable or relief, social service, advocacy, arts, cultural, educational, outreach and political or advocacy organizations. There are also thousands of Muslim American groceries and butchers, restaurants and other retail stores.^{vi}

ENSLAVED MUSLIM AFRICANS

Beginning in the 1500's and continuing into the 1800's, Muslims made up a significant percentage of the West African slaves who were brought to North, South, and Central America during the centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. Many of these African Muslim slaves maintained their Muslim practices despite pressure to abandon them. While Muslim slaves were a minority, with estimates ranging from 10 – 30% of the total slave population, they were a distinctive minority. They often possessed some education and a high sense of self-esteem, making them an important leadership element in the American slave population.

HISTORY OF MUSLIM IMMIGRATION TO THE U.S.

The earliest Muslim immigrants (as distinguished from African slaves who practiced Islam) came between the late 1800's and early 1900's from the area then known as Greater Syria (modern-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan and parts of Turkey and Iraq). Most came for economic reasons and worked as laborers or merchants.

With the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire, and the period of Western colonial rule in the Middle East, a new wave of immigrants arrived. Many of these new Muslim immigrants came as a result of political as well as economic reasons, with many joining relatives who had arrived earlier in the United States.

Following World War II, additional Muslims came to the United States, many from countries outside of the Middle East, including the former Yugoslavia, Albania and the former Soviet Union; they often came to escape religious or political repression. Immigration also accelerated from India and Pakistan after the 1947 partition of the Subcontinent, with many members of former elite families coming to attain more education and technical training than was available in their countries of origin.

The change in immigration laws in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson dramatically increased the number of Muslims immigrating to the U.S., primarily for higher education. Some of the best and the brightest students in the Middle East and Asia came to the United States to pursue higher education, mainly in the fields of engineering, science and medicine. After graduation, many of these students became professionals and, subsequently, became leaders in their fields.^{vi}

PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS

According to a 2010 Gallup World Religion Survey, United States citizens are more than twice as likely to express prejudice against Muslims as they are against Christians, Jews and Buddhists. Nearly two-thirds of those polled said they have little or no knowledge of Islam, yet a majority have an unfavorable opinion of the religion. According to the poll, just over half of the respondents said they felt no prejudice against Muslims, while 43% acknowledged having at least "a little" prejudice against them. According to Gallup:

- 53% of Americans have an unfavorable view of Islam
- 47% disagree with the statement that most Muslims around the world are accepting of others from different races
- 81% disagree with the statement that most Muslims believe that women and men should have equal rights^{viii}

An August 2010 *Time* magazine article reported:

- 55% of Americans believe that U.S. Muslims are patriotic Americans
- 46% of respondents believed that Islam is more likely than other faiths to encourage violence against nonbelievers
- 35% of respondents oppose a mosque in their neighborhood
- 24% of respondents believe that President Obama is a Muslim, while President Obama identifies himself as Christian^{vi}

The Southern Poverty Law Center reported that in 2001, after September 11, the FBI recorded a 17-fold growth in anti-Muslim hate crimes.^{ix}

ⁱ "Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream," Pew Research Center, May 22, 2007 <<http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/muslim-americans.pdf>>.

ⁱⁱ Taken directly from: Dr. Louis Cristillo, *The Muslim Population of New York City*, Columbia University Teacher's College, August 24, 2009. (The population estimate of 700,000 Muslims in New York City is based on extrapolations of ancestry and country of origin data from immigration and U.S. Census records from 1990 to 2000, and combined with recent demographic studies on Mosque affiliation suggesting that at least 1 in 10 Muslims in the U.S. resides in New York City.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Taken directly from: Dr. Louis Cristillo, *The Muslim Population of New York City*, Columbia University Teacher's College, August 24, 2009.

^{iv} Taken directly from: Dr. Louis Cristillo, *Resolution 1281: Muslim holidays of Eid Ul-Fitr and Eid Ul-Adha as Observed School Holidays in the City of New York*, Columbia University Teacher's College, September 26, 2008. (This estimate was calculated by taking 17%--the percentage of school-aged children in New York City according to the U.S. census bureau, of the estimated population number of the City, 700,000. See: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36000.html>.)

^v Taken directly from: *Muslim Americans: A National Portrait An In-depth Analysis of America's Most Diverse Religious Community*, Gallup's Center for Muslim Studies, 2009.

^{vi} Bobby Ghosh, "Does America Have a Muslim Problem?" *TIME* August 19, 2010 <<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2011798-1,00.html>>.

^{vii} Jane I. Smith, “Patterns of Muslim Immigration,” U.S. Department of State—Office of International Information Programs <<http://infousa.state.gov/education/overview/muslimlife/immigrat.htm>>.

^{viii} “In U.S., Religious Prejudice Stronger Against Muslims,” Gallup, January 21, 2010 <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/125312/religious-prejudice-stronger-against-muslims.aspx>>.

^{ix} “SPLC Testifies About Increase in Anti-Muslim Bias,” Southern Poverty Law Center, March 29, 2011 <<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/news/splc-testifies-about-increase-in-anti-muslim-bias>>.

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