



# MPAC Special Report: “MUSLIM, AMERICAN, OR BOTH?”

## *Religion & Identity of Muslim American Youth Post-London Attacks*

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **BACKGROUND**

- **Reason for the Study** – To identify the central factors that contribute to young Muslims’ self-image
- **Goal of Study** – This non-scientific survey is a first step in ascertaining the needs, interests and perspectives of Muslim American youth from across our nation.
- **Setting & Method** – Distributed questionnaires to 200 people between the ages of 14 and 26, during the largest annual gathering of Muslim Americans from across the country (ISNA – 35,000 people). Questions revolved around three key issues: (1) Islamic education, (2) identity, and (3) civic participation. While participants were identified at random, they represent young American Muslims who have a strong enough connection to their faith to attend such an event.

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

- **Islamic Education** –
  - 69% reported that their primary source of Islamic education is the mosque or their home
  - 68% said they believed that jurisprudence developed in the United States by Muslim scholars is as legitimate as the jurisprudence developed in the Muslim world.
- **Identity** –
  - 56% feel no conflict between their American identity and their Muslim identity.
  - 70% said they noticed “significant hostility” toward Muslims in the general American public.
  - 38% believe the general American public recognizes this hostility, but 60% believe that they are accepted as part of the nation’s pluralism.
- **Civic Participation** –
  - 99% believe national Muslim organizations should “engage in dialogue with government and the general American public to get our rights.” 43% said their opinion changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks or the London attacks.
  - 94% said Muslims should be involved in the American political process “even though they may disagree with the government’s foreign policy.” 11% said “such disagreement makes you less American than others.”

## IMPLICATIONS

- **Islamic Education** – Strong mosque with good programming and curriculum could contribute positively to resolving the conflict some young American Muslims feel in relation to their identity.
- **Identity** – Muslim American youth do not limit their friends and acquaintances to others who share their racial or ethnic background. The American Muslim community is the most diverse population on earth. For these youth, the lowest common denominator between their Muslim friends and acquaintances is their American-ness. Many reported experiencing hostility from the general American public as a result of their faith. A perceived lack of acceptance from other Americans may account in part for the conflict many feel as a result of their unique identity.
- **Civic Participation** – Three-fourths of the young American Muslim polled felt that American Muslim engagement with government and the American public are necessary in order to realize their goal of full-citizenship, and the acceptance that comes with it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Islamic identity** – American Muslims should work to actively support and participate in making their mosques and institutions relevant to their experience and mainstream Islam.
- **Identity** – Anti-Muslim rhetoric and discrimination are an impediment to the full integration for all Muslim Americans. Since media portrayals of Islam and Muslims and government policies have a great impact on public opinion, these institutions should contribute to cultivating an accurate and enriching understanding of Islam and Muslims by the general American public.
- **Civic participation** – While young American Muslims view political and civic engagement as important, they are underrepresented in occupations that make public policy and influence public opinion. Internship opportunities should be provided to encourage young American Muslims to pursue careers in these fields. Furthermore, government and media institutions should seek the perspectives and experiences of young American Muslims, who should be afforded the opportunity to represent their views on themselves and their nation to the general American public.