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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Political Behavior of Muslims in the US: Transition from Isolation to Political Participation

Ali Namatpour<sup>1</sup> 

**Abstract:** Most of the American politics and public policy researchers focus on the Presidency, Congress, and Judiciary as the leading institutions in the U.S. and consider the relations and interactions among them. However, the relationship between these main institutions is affected by interest groups which can be seen in the process of decision making and their contribution to the public sphere. In an attempt to consider the role of interest groups, this paper's primary concern is to study the influence of interest groups on the public sphere in general, particularly the role of religious interest groups in decision-making for Muslim communities. The paper assumes that the mosque and other religious institutions in the U.S. have multifaceted roles in mobilizing Muslims and pushing them for sociopolitical participation. On the other hand, they can affect legislative and executive branches in their process of decision-making. I will review the literature of interest groups, religious organizations, and policy-making models to explain the process of decision-making and the factors that affect these procedures. Then I consider the effect of these Muslim institutions on the process of decision-making in the U.S. and explain the relationship between these interest groups and policymakers in the U.S

**Keywords:** Muslim, institution, interest group, decision-making, the United State politics.

## Introduction

This anti-Islamic environment in the national and international atmosphere has reinforced the Islamic consciousness and led them to shift to overemphasize religious identity as Muslims and critical views to the “others” (Jalalzai, 2009). As a religious minority confronted with many problems, Muslims do not have an equal chance to participate in the sociopolitical sphere in the U.S. It should be noted here that Muslims in the United States are made up of different groups and races divided into two main groups: the Sunni majority and the Shiite minority. Most studies of Muslims in the United States focus on Sunnis, and little research has been done on Shiites (Walbridge, 1991; Takim, 2019). While there are differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, these differences are eliminated by considering their participation in mosques. In other words, mosques in the United States are an institution that can increase the interaction between Sunni and Shiite Muslims.

In this situation, the institutionalization of Muslim groups can help them increase their role in policymaking in the U.S. Moreover, these institutions help Muslims become more involved in political competition and deal with the party system as rational actors to maximize their benefits.

## Theoretical Framework

### Institutions

Political institutions are organizations that make, impose, and apply laws. They can solve

struggles, make governmental policy, and prepare representation for the People. They influence the process of decision-making and policymaking, which has an important impact on the law, economy, culture, and society. Lijphart in *Patterns of Democracy* and Norris in *Electoral Engineering* provide essential insights into how institutions affect democratic performance. Lijphart claims that many communities are confronted with deep ethnic, linguistic, religious, or ideological cleavages, and these cleavages potentially could avoid minority's chance for participating in policymaking. Moreover, there is much similarity between the minority's and the majority's interests in these societies, and the exclusion of minority might lead to violence. For solving this problem, Lijphart suggests the institutional solution and maximizes the incorporation of the minority to influence policies (Lijphart, 2012).

On the other hand, Norris argues about changes in party and electoral systems and how institutions affect the structure of competition. According to her, it is vital to know the structure of competition in the party system. She argues that the changes in that structure may affect the electoral system, and it has some main consequences for a political party and its institutions. She considers and compares rational choice, institutionalism, and cultural modernization theories to understand the alternative approach for electoral behavior and

political representation. She assumes that formal electoral rules affect the behavior of political actors (Norris, 2004).

Olson and Tsebelis also include institutional characteristics in their theoretical models. Tsebelis in *Nested Games* conducts his research by using the different system designs. He presumes that human activity is goal-oriented and instrumental. In this situation, actors try to maximize their aim and achievement by considering the requirements of rational behavior. He focuses on the institutional and partisan setting by using the game theory to assess the trend of decision-making in democratic countries and the outcomes of the political institutions. Tsebelis considers the role of political institutions and their different impact on political actors and the trend of decisions (Tsebelis, 1990).

While Olson, in *The Logic of Collective Action*, studies about distributions of collective goods to the different groups and explains how this process accelerated or delayed the development of groups. Olson claims that individuals' tendency to act for their desires limited the participation for a collective good through collective action. He argues that public good belongs to all and should be distributed among all members of groups. Olson explains that individuals prefer not to act to achieve the public good based on the free ride problem while benefiting from that collective good. To solve this problem, he suggests incentives (positive or negative) for all members of the

group. However, he pays little attention to the role of motivation and aggregation at the individual level and its effect on the group (Olson, 1965).

All these authors emphasize institutionalism and explain how institutions cooperate in the sociopolitical sphere. The cooperation of these institutions is implemented in a situation established by other institutions, and all these institutions are enforced by a more comprehensive atmosphere.

### Interest groups

There are lots of discussions among scholars to achieve a common definition of interest groups. With all of these debates, they agree with a minimal definition of interest groups as "the collections of people with essentially the same self-interest, about which they feel so strongly that they collectively form an organization to promote and defend it through the political process" (Holyoke, 2014, p 32). According to Holyoke, there is a difference between interest groups and political parties. In political parties, leaders gain political power from voting, which helps them to control law-making institutions. While interest groups focus on a particular interest, they represent only a small number of individuals, and their influence is informal (Holyoke, 2014).

Interest groups have a very complex mechanism to put policies into practice. To increase the influence on public policy, interest groups focus their efforts on those institutions

that have the most power and on which they can exert influence. One important point in this regard is the interaction between these interest groups and parties. This makes the relations between religious interest groups and executive agencies more complicated.

### Religious institutions

Some scholars focus on the role of religious institutions in the political mobilization in the religious communities (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995; Calhoun-Brown, 1996; Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001; Tate, 1993; Wuthnow, 1999). According to them, church participation shows how these institutions mobilize people. Verba claims that religious people who regularly participate in the church tend to involve in political activities. This institution has the ability to increase the level of civic skills, political participation, and sociopolitical knowledge among its members. He claims that the regularity of church participation increases the function of civic skills (Verba et al., 1995). Several types of research explain the role of churches in the political sphere (Greenberg, 2000; Peterson, 1992; Smidt, 1999). They suggest that religious institutions have an essential role in mobilization directly. As Rosenstone and Hansen explain, "involvement in organizations... promotes political participation by making people susceptible to mobilization. Politically, organizations stand between national and local political leaders and ordinary citizens" (Rosenstone and Hansen,

1993, p. 87). In other words, these scholars try to show the direct influence of religious institutions on the political sphere and stand between national leaders and ordinary citizens (Djupe and Grant, 2001).

Moreover, Putnam claims that "religious institutions directly support a wide range of social activities well beyond conventional worship... Churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment" (Putnam, 2000, p. 35). According to him, religious institutions in the U.S. have an important role in training public participation.

### Political behavior of Muslims in the United State

Most scholars claim that religion has a significant role in U.S. politics. They argue that religious factors affected the political behavior of voters in America. A new survey by Pew Research Center affirmed that religion and faith had been influential components in the U.S. presidential elections (Religious landscape Study the Campaign, 2020).

Religion is one of the essential factors which affect individuals' private and public lives. According to scholars, religion has an important influence on the political participation of the individual in two different ways. First, religion can affect political participation through institutional effects. These institutions help people increase their civic skills and political knowledge, which leads to an increase in the political

participation of Muslims. Second, religion can affect political participation through attitudinal effects (Choi, Gasim, & Patterson, 2011). According to scholars, people who attend religious institutions can attach more quickly to the group identity, and this consciousness leads them to the common interest and participation in politics (see, e.g., Calhoun-Brown 1996; Harris 1994). Furthermore, these attitudinal effects can increase the political activities among members involved in political action that encourages group interest.

Islam is growing very fast and has become the second-largest religion in the U.S. (Read, 2008) and because of that, knowing about the sociopolitical behavior of Muslims is crucial. Muslims make up a relatively small but rapidly growing section of the American religious community. The Pew Research Center estimates that 3.45 million Muslims live in the United States. This means that Muslims now make up about 1.1 percent of the U.S. population. The data also show that American Muslims are a very young group. Most Muslim adults (60%) are under the age of 40, which is significant compared to 38% of the U.S. adult population under the age of 40. Surveys show that American Muslims have an average of 2.4 children in their lifetime, while Americans have an average fertility rate of 2.1 children (Pew Research, 2017).

This quantitative and qualitative growth of Muslims in the United States led them to break

out of isolation, participate in the socio-political sphere, and increase their participation. They emphasized reinterpret Islam which related to their circumstances. In this situation, salient issues became more important than their race or different nationalities. I consider this trend of change from closed community to progressive participation in Muslim behavior and explain the direction of this transition and the main elements that affect these changes in the U.S. For explaining this transition, I cover three levels of communication and consider the relation inside the Muslim community, interaction with American society, and the communication with the Islamic World, which is related to the outside of the U.S.

### **Muslim Isolation**

During the 1950s, the U.S. was confronted with a new wave of Muslim immigration that mostly comes from wealthy families with a high level of educations. These new Muslim immigrants came to the U.S. to pursue their education and return after they finished their studies. They resisted any cultural adaptation and tried to isolate themselves from American society (Schumann, 2007). Some scholars argue that adaptation is a complex process for immigrants because most of their sociopolitical characters are shaped at earlier ages, and they resist changes (Merelman, 1986). These new Muslim immigrants were born outside the U.S., and because of that, their ideologies were affected by Muslim World and shaped their identity. As



a result, these new immigrants were reluctant to connect with the new community and preferred to keep in touch with themselves.

### **Interaction with American society**

Muslims are a very diverse population in race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This diversity in Muslim background caused a variety of sociopolitical status and lack of unity in their interest to participate in political activities (Jalalzai, 2009). For solving this problem, they tried to improve their English as an essential tool for communication with other Muslims from different countries and interaction with other Americans. The use of English helped Muslims with different ethnicities create common organizations for improving the communication inside Muslim communities and outside with Americans. The use of common language helps Muslims in the U.S. to become unified and strengthen their organizations and institutions. This condition enabled them to put aside sectarian, racial, and national differences and focused on salient issues. This Muslim generation brought many vital concepts and ideologies to the United State, such as Arab nationalism and Islamic revivalism. Their goal was to preserve the Islamic identity for the Muslims who live in a non-Muslim country (Schumann, 2007).

In that period, the protection of Islamic identity, which was affected by ideologies of the Islamic world, became a salient issue for Muslims, and they mobilized their members in mosques and other organizations to the

preserved Islamic identity of Muslims. They believed that protecting the Islamic identity is crucial because they supposed the American environment could undermine the cultural and moral Islamic identity. For confronting Western culture and resist against it, some of the Muslim scholars articulated the concept of “abode of Islam” and “abode of disbelief” and separation between believers and non-believers to increase the unity within the Muslim community (Nasr, 2009). They created new organizations and magazines like MSA News and Islamic Horizons to bring a unique feeling of activism inside Muslim communities and improve Islamic knowledge among them (Malinovich, 2006). English as a common language in these new organizations and magazines pushed the Muslims to accept and use a new language for their communications that led Muslims to become integrated and overcame to lack of unity that related to their different nationalities. This new strategy helped Muslims to improve their relationships inside the Muslim communities, but at the same time, it caused the boundary between “us” versus “others.” This situation caused the separation of Muslim communities from others and became isolated from the rest of society in the U.S.

### **Communication with Islamic World**

During the 1980s, the sociopolitical discourse of Muslims in the U.S. changed. They need to engage more with American society and improve their institutions like mosques and

Sunday schools (Haddad & Adair 1987). The most crucial factor that affects the political participation of Muslims was the mosque institution and its role in increasing the ability of civic skills among Muslims. These associational memberships to mosques help Muslim individuals to improve their civic skills in the new community. Moreover, voluntary activity such as working in Sunday school is essential because the civic skills gained from associational memberships in mosques can help to compromise divisions in other resources (Jamal, 2005).

To solve the problem of isolation and increase the Muslims' involvement in American society, they compromised their ideologies and started to accept others as part of their living experiences. The religious intellectuals began to justify the new notion that American culture was not bad for their cultural and moral behaviors. They started to criticize the previous framework about the Muslim identity, and at the same time, they criticized the ethical and identity issues in the Islamic World. In new discourse, there is not any place for the distinction between believers and nonbelievers. For instance, some scholars started to defend U.S. liberalism as a humanized approach and supported the notion of liberal values in daily life (Schumann, 2007). These scholars articulated the new framework for Islamic concepts and tried to localization Islam in the U.S., which was consistent with the context (Crane, 1997).

With these compromises, they abled to shift from the concept of identity that the Islamic World suggested to the new Islamic identity, which was prepared for the American context (Poston, 1991).

Furthermore, they borrowed missionary ideas from Christianity and applied them to Muslim activities to increase the trend of organization and engagement within Muslim communities. They start some social activities such as feeding the poor, house the needy, fight oppression, and injustice (Haddad, 1987). Most of the elites in this era emphasized social activities and participation in American society, but they were silent about political participation. In this situation, interaction with non-Muslims and involvement in the community was an essential basis for the spread of knowledge of Islam, and it was a salient issue for Muslims. In this environment, it was important for Muslim leaders to become an equal part of American society and American society accepted them as a part of society with a different identity.

After the 1990s, the Muslims in the U.S. tried to shape a new universal idea that helped them empower the Muslim communities. According to resistance theory, immigrants prefer to keep their identity from their home country (Marranci, 2004). In this situation, for transferring a political interest, Muslim political leaders and intellectuals reached the point that exposure of Muslims to the sociopolitical environment in the US could be

helpful to improve the concept of belonging, partisanship, and participation in politics (Jalalzai, 2009). In this condition, the mosque found a vital position and became the place for Muslims to mobilize, educate, and participate in sociopolitical events.

### **Socio-political paradigm shift: Muslim awakening**

The reaction since the 9/11 crisis has changed the daily lives of Muslims in the U.S. According to the data, after 9/11, Muslims in the U.S. tend to participate in different political activities. This tendency increased after September 11, and Muslims were involved in the political sphere despite all problems that they confronted (Jamal, 2005). At the same time, Middle East events became more salient issues for majorities of Muslims. Muslims in the U.S. face a pessimistic sense about their political situations because of the hostile atmosphere against Muslims since September 11 and military invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan as Muslim countries. Instead of retreating from politics, this condition helps them to intensify their political engagement (Jalalzai, 2009). For instance, the increase in participation in the 2004 presidential election was affected by salient issues among Muslims. Indeed, the effect of the Iraq War on Muslims and its impact on their political participation was huge (Choi, Gasim, & Patterson, 2011).

Muslim scholars started to find the similarities between the American constitutions and Islamic values. In this

situation, a shift happened from the priority of Islamic identity to the preference of values related to the context. This condition led Muslim scholars and ordinary Muslims to accept this paradigm shift and Islamic values became the center of the political discourse (Haddad, 2007). Mosques play an essential role in mobilizing Muslims into social action. Mosques are institutions that should be considered as centers of social and political integration in the United States. They help Muslims integrate into American society and, in fact, play a very influential role in creating differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in the United States. These institutions lead to higher civic engagement and support for the core values of the American political system by Muslims (Learning for Justice). Mosque participation is attended by more outstanding contributions such as working with other Muslims for helping the poor and involvement with the neighborhood or other communities.

Moreover, Muslim leaders have an essential role in encouraging Muslims to be political participate (Jamal, 2005). With new interpretations, Muslims accepted the American values not only because they were in their Islamic traditions, but also, the constitution guaranteed them. Overall, 89% of Muslims in the United States said they were proud to be Muslim and American. At the same time, more than half of Muslims say they face various challenges in American society.



Half of them say being Muslim in the United States has become more complicated in recent years (Pew Research, 2017).

The religious intellectuals tried to find harmonies between Islamic values and the West and claim that the American constitution conformed to Islamic values. With these interpretations, they could solve the problem of Islamic identity in the U.S. by emphasizing that “to be the best Muslim is to be a good American and, to be the best American is to be Islamic” (Crane, 1997, xix). These interpretations led American Muslims to become a part of society and have a better contribution to other Americans.

The progress in the concept of participation among Muslims was a significant shift after September 11 and helped them to take an essential step toward involvement in the political sphere within the U.S. political sphere (Schumann, 2007). The concept of partisanship becomes vital for Muslims because it shaped their attitude constantly and gradually. According to the research, there is a relationship between education and political participation which led to improving the various attitudes and effective political behavior (Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001). As shown in Fig. 1, Two-thirds of U.S. Muslims are Democrats, and much less (13%) are Republicans. From this data, it can be concluded that Muslims preferred the Democratic Party over the Republican Party (Pew Research, 2017).

### Stable share of U.S. Muslims identify with or lean Republican

% of U.S. Muslim adults who say they are ...

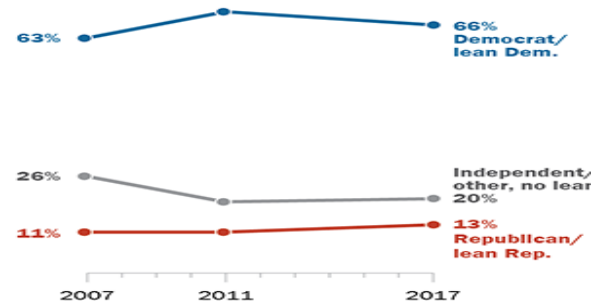


Fig. 1. Pew Research Center, 2017

These approaches led to the political awakening of Muslims in the U.S. and involved them in the political sphere. These conditions accelerated the trend of re-Islamization of Muslim communities and increased using Islamic symbols like hijab (headscarf) in public areas in the U.S. (Haddad, 2007). The leaders of Muslim communities encouraged Muslims to involve in the sociopolitical issues to contribute Islamic values and norms to the notion of American civilization and improve the situation of the Muslim community in the U.S. with sociopolitical works (Schumann, 2007). For this reason, many American Muslim organizations are active in philanthropy, education, interfaith relations, health care, civic engagement, politics, and the media. In short, American Muslims and the organizations they create are part of the structure of American public life. They emphasize that if more Muslims tend to participate in the political sphere and organize in more unified groups, both parties' interest to pay more attention to the Muslim

communities and their requests and interests (Jalalzai, 2009). The main issue was how these Muslim interest groups could participate in the decision-making process in the United States. How can they effectively enter the political arena and increase and maintain the interests of the Muslim community?

### **Models of policy making**

To understand the role of interest groups in the process of decision-making, it is vital to consider the general models of policymaking and how they theorized their assumptions. One of these models is the rational model that provides direction on how to make optimal policy decisions (Caramani, 2008). In this model, the scholars assumed that the decision-makers understand the preferences and priorities of different goals and how they rank them in the process. They are also able to consider all alternative procedures which affect the process of decision-making (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). In this approach, making decisions are related to the amount of information that each actor has, if they have more reliable and comprehensive information, they can make a better decision. In this situation, interest groups who access to money and information can offer professional advice to the policymakers and have an important role in the process of decision-making.

The second model is the bureaucratic politics model which emphasizes the effect of organizational structure on the process of decision making (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010).

According to the scholar, bureaucratic politics is the process by which individuals within government administrative structures deal with each other on how to respond to policy problems (Hastedt, 2004). In other words, actors inside the system confront the problems and analyze them in different ways which related to their positions in the system of government and how they compromise their ideas to reach an agreement and make a decision.

The last model is the group model which emphasizes the role of interest groups and how the strength of each interest group affected the process of decision making. As Caramani explains, policies are the result of the balance achieved in group struggle (Caramani, 2008). In another word, this theory assumes that policymakers are regularly replying to group pressures, so the politicians are interested in “form majority coalitions for which they have the competence to define what groups are to be included” (Caramani, 2008).

### **Muslim interest groups and their role in decision-making in the U.S.**

Building on this literature, Muslim interest groups try to improve their role in the process of decision-making and increase their power of lobbying with policymakers to achieve their goals and maximize their interests. Some scholars claim political participation among Muslims is related to the participation of Muslims in the mosque and other Islamic organizations. Participation with these

institutions helps to increase the level of group consciousness among Muslims and improve the role of these institutions in the public sphere. In this situation, these organizations become powerful, and the interest groups related to those institutions can increase their roles in the sociopolitical sphere.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, American Muslims were confronted with racial and religious pressures. They are a victim of preconception and discrimination in the American public sphere. While they tried to set their characters as Americans post 9/11, they endeavored to save their Islamic identity. American Muslims resist marginalization and isolation and try to increase their participation in the sociopolitical sphere. American Muslims were involved in all aspects of American civic life. They, like other religious communities, have established institutions in the United States. Large groups of Muslims have been established for a long time, such as the Islamic Association of North America (ISNA), a large organization made up of about 300 Indiana-based mosques and Islamic centers. We can also mention newer organizations such as the Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals. Many Islamic centers and institutions offer programs to serve American Muslim communities as well as the general public. The University Muslim Medical Association, for example, is a free health clinic in Los Angeles founded in 1992 by American Muslim students at UCLA and Charles Drew

University to provide services to the urban community (Learning for Justice).

They created professional organizations to participate in a different aspect of American society, which covers varieties of ethnic, racial, cultural, and professional groups such as ISNA, IMAN, Zaytuna Institute, ASMA, MPAC, CAIR, CSID, FMC, and AIFD (Huda, 2006). For instance, the Inner Muslim Action Network (IMAN) is an NGO formed in 1995 by American Muslim students, community members, and leaders to address poverty and scarcity in Chicago. IMAN offers a wide range of services, including a health clinic that provides free medical care and support to the uninsured population in the city (IMAN Central organization). Another example is the Muslim Political Affairs Council (MPAC), established in 1988 by a wide range of Islamic organizations. One of the main goals of this council is to organize Muslims as a mainstream political movement and lobby on issues of concern to Muslims with Congress and the US government (The Pluralism Project, Harvard University). By forming professional institutions and specialized groups in society and politics, Muslims tried to establish relations with the main political groups and pursue their demands and interests in this way. By lobbying and communicating with politicians, they sought to pass laws at the local and national levels to ensure that the interests and demands of Muslims in American society were respected.

After 9/11, these organizations found a position to consult with the government and offer alternative strategies to reconcile the relationship between Muslims and the American sociopolitical sphere. For reaching their goals, Muslims use all the resources such as financial and organizational infrastructure, affiliation informal political parties, and informal social networks, lobbying, and communication media to achieve their goals (Bakalian & Bozorgmehr, 2005).

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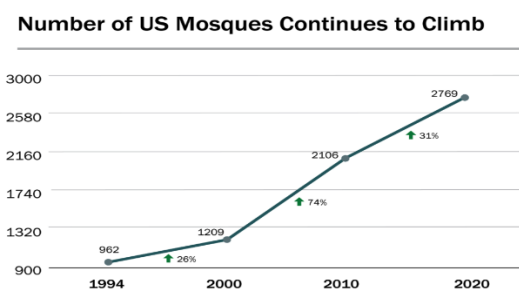


Fig. 2. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020

To achieve this goal, Muslims activated Islamic organizations such as mosques in the sociopolitical spheres (Jamal, 2005). In 2020, polls showed that mosques in the United States

would increase to 2,769. This represented a 31 percent increase over 2010 when the number of mosques in the United States was 2,106 (Fig. 2). This trend of rising mosques in the United States is due to the continued expansion of the Muslim population in the United States due to immigration and the birth rate. Among these mosques, more than 20% have Islamic schools.

Statistics show that the Muslim population in the United States is growing. In its 2017 study, the Pew Research Center found that the American Muslim community continues to expand due to immigration and higher fertility rates. Pew estimated that the Muslim population grew by 26 percent from 2010 to 2017, which is in line with the 31 percent increase in mosques from 2010 to 2020 (Pew Research, 2017).

**Average Jum'ah Size At American Mosques Continues to Climb over Past 20 Years**

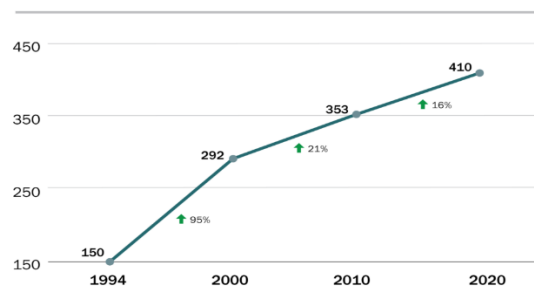


Fig. 3. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020

According to data, attendance at congregational prayers has also been growing in the United States. The average attendance at mosques in 2020 is 410 people, which is 16% more than 353 in 2010 (Fig. 3). This increase in participation can be interpreted as an increase

in Muslims' interest in joining the Muslim community in the United States.

According to statistics, approximately quarters (24%) of mosque attendees are 18-34 years old, indicating the presence of American Muslim youth in mosques and Islamic activities. Also, half of all American mosques have full-time imams, compared to 2010, when 43% of mosques had full-time imams. On the other hand, the average budget of the mosque in 2020 was \$ 276,500, which is a significant increase from the average budget of \$ 167,600 in 2010 (Fig. 4). Mosques collect an average of \$ 40,640 for zakat, when combined with the funding and zakat, collects an average of \$ 317,140 (ISPU research organization, 2020).

Mosque Budgets Over the Decades

Year	Average Budget	Median Budget
2010	\$167,600	\$70,000
2020	\$276,500	\$80,000

Fig. 4. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020

Recently mosques have become important institutions for political activity and mobilization. They push Muslims to register for voting and motivate them to vote. They encourage Muslims to be involved in political campaigns and support the candidates who benefit Muslim communities. Muslims in the US see the American political system as a condition that helps them express their opinions and goals. As mentioned, American Muslims are more satisfied with the state and trends of the country than the American public (Fig. 5). In the Muslim community, white

Muslims (46%) are more likely than black Muslims (28%) and Muslim men (41%) more likely than Muslim women (31%) to express their satisfaction with the country, which is in line with the country's general racial and gender trends.

Muslims More Likely Than General Public to Be Satisfied with Direction of Country

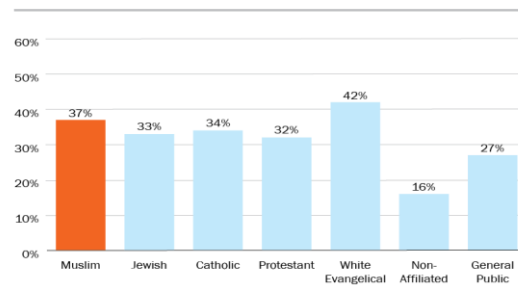
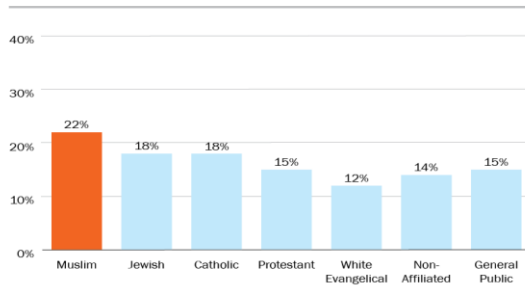


Fig. 5. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020

The poll showed that in 2020, 78% of Muslims registered to vote, and 81% said they decided to vote. Also, a significant proportion of Muslims (22%) reported attending a town hall meeting hall (Fig. 6). This statistic is significantly higher than the average public participation (15%). Muslims are also involved in politics in other ways. 16% of Muslims volunteered to participate in political campaigns in 2020 (Fig. 7), which is a significant number compared to the general population, which is about 7% (ISPU research organization, 2020). These polls illustrate the civic engagement of Muslims in American social life through their mosques.



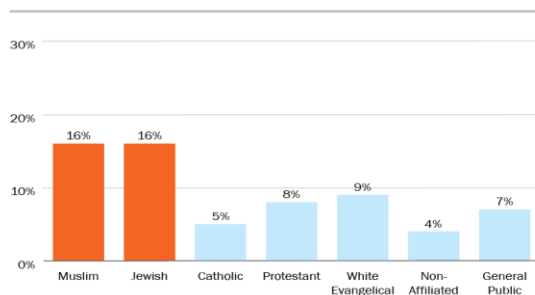
**Muslims among Most Likely to Attend Town Hall Meeting**



**Fig. 6. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020**

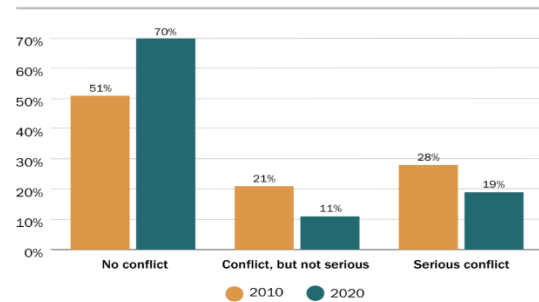
However, these interest groups have a competition together from opposite sides that causes the division between them. Some scholars explain that these divisions and competition exist between interest groups (Holyoke, 2011). Polls show that about 70 percent of mosques have not had severe conflicts in the past five years, and about 19 percent of mosques have reported serious conflicts (Fig. 8). These figures are lower than in 2010 but clearly show the conflict among Muslims in some mosques (ISPU research organization, 2020).

**Muslims, Jews Most Likely to Volunteer for a Political Campaign**



**Fig. 7. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020**

**Fewer Mosques Report Conflict in 2020 Compared with 2010**



**Fig. 8. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, The US Mosque Survey, 2020**

Moreover, the US mosque survey results, as detailed in the above reports, include both Shiite and Sunni mosque groups. However, it may be better to look at Shiite mosques separately to show the similarities and differences with Sunni mosques. In general, Shiite mosques are very similar to Sunni mosques in almost all respects. However, Shiite mosques are smaller and younger than Sunni mosques. 6.5% of the mosques in the United States by 2020 belong to Shiites. In 2010, the percentage of Shiite mosques in the comprehensive mosque survey was 7%, meaning that there were 126 Shiite mosques. In 2020, 6% of mosques belonged to Shiites, equating to 166 mosques. Thus, the number of Shiite mosques increased from 126 to 166, an increase of 32%. The average size of Shiite participation in mosques is significantly lower than in Sunni mosques. While Sunni mosques have an average of about 1,500 participants, Shiite mosques have an average of 500 participants. However, Shiite mosques, like

Sunni mosques, have rising participation rates (ISPU research organization, 2020).

Finally, some scholars argue that lobbying is a two-way street between policymakers and Muslim interest groups. They believe that these groups need policymakers to support their requests and help them in the process of legislation and bureaucracy. On the other side, policymakers need Muslim resources and support during elections, like campaign contributions and votes (Hook & Scott, 2012).

### Conclusion

There are four ways for Muslims in America to express their requests and needs: public opinion, elections, interest group activity, and political protest (Hastedt, 2009). Some scholars claim that interest groups are the better way of supporting public interests because they can access more information and knowledge in different professional fields. Moreover, these Muslim interest groups have a more constant and tangible relationship with the system, and they could transfer the actual request and needs of different groups and communities than other ways such as periodic elections and infrequent public opinion polls. However, some scholars claim that Muslim interest groups do not have a significant influence in

the process of decision-making because there is a division of opinion within interest groups.

All in all, Muslim interest groups are able to have a pervasive and profound effect on the process of decision-making. They have an essential role in the process of decision making especially after 9/11. These groups are influential in the process of decision-making and framing of issues in the system. They provide information and scholarly analysis to support policymaking and control the trend of application and implementation.

In all of these sociopolitical activities, Islamic institutions have an essential role that reinforces civic participation among Muslims. For Muslims, these Islamic institutions are related to more considerable political action, public participation, and group consciousness which serve as a multifunctional place and help them express their requests and needs. This situation caused the main American parties to take the role of Muslims in the American political space seriously and think of an association with them. Today, the candidates pay special attention to persuading and attracting the Muslim community in their campaign and seek to satisfy their desires and needs.

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## رفتار سیاسی مسلمانان در ایالات متحده: گذار از انزوا به مشارکت

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**چکیده:** بیشتر پژوهشگران سیاست و سیاست‌گذاری عمومی در آمریکا بر نهادهای اصلی مانند ریاست جمهوری، کنگره و قوه قضائیه در ایالات متحده متمرکز شده و روابط و تعاملات میان این نهادها را مورد توجه قرار می‌دهند. با این حال، نقش گروه‌های ذینفع در روابط بین این نهادهای اصلی بسیار مؤثر است که این تأثیر را می‌توان در فرآیند تصمیم‌گیری در ساختار قدرت و مشارکت آنها در حوزه عمومی مشاهده کرد. در تلاش برای بررسی نقش گروه‌های ذینفع، دغدغه اصلی این مقاله بررسی تأثیر گروه‌های ذینفع بر سیاست‌گذاری عمومی به‌طور کلی و به‌ویژه نقش گروه‌های ذینفع مذهبی در فرآیند تصمیم‌گیری برای جوامع مسلمان در آمریکا است. فرض مقاله این است که مسجد و سایر نهادهای مذهبی در ایالات متحده نقش‌های چند وجهی برای بسیج مسلمانان و تشویق آنها به مشارکت سیاسی-اجتماعی دارند. همچنین، این نهادهای مذهبی توانایی تأثیرگذاری در روند تصمیم‌گیری در قوه مقننه و مجریه را دارند. در این مقاله، ابتدا به مرور ادبیات درباره گروه‌های ذینفع خواهیم پرداخت و سپس نقش سازمان‌های مذهبی و مدل‌های سیاست‌گذاری را بررسی خواهیم کرد. سپس، با استفاده از تئوری‌های موجود تلاش می‌کنیم تا فرآیند تصمیم‌گیری و عوامل مؤثر بر این رویه‌ها را توضیح دهیم. پس از آن، تأثیر این نهادهای مسلمان را بر روند تصمیم‌گیری در ایالات متحده بررسی خواهد شد و رابطه بین این گروه‌های ذینفع و سیاست‌گذاران در ایالات متحده را توضیح می‌دهیم.

**واژه‌های کلیدی:** مسلمانان، نهاد، گروه ذینفع، روند تصمیم‌گیری، سیاست در ایالات متحده آمریکا.