



AMERICAN MUSLIM VOTERS

A Demographic Profile and Survey of Attitudes

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Council on American-Islamic Relations

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Executive Summary

American Muslim voter sample characteristics:

- **Young:** About 47% are in the 35-54 age group; another 20% are in the 25-34 age group.
- **Highly educated:** 62% have obtained a bachelor degree or higher. This is double the comparable national figure for registered voters.
- **Professional:** About 50% are professionals.
- **Middle class:** 43% have a household income of \$50,000 or higher.
- **Family oriented:** 78% are married. Of those, 83% have one or more children.
- **Religiously diverse:** Only 31% attend a mosque on a weekly basis; 16% attend once or twice a month; 27% said they seldom or never attend. The largest segment of the respondents said they consider themselves “just Muslims,” avoiding distinctions like Sunni or Shia. Another 36% said they are Sunni and 12% said they are Shia. Less than half of 1% said they are *Sa/afi*, while 2% said they are Sufi.
- **Integrated in American society:** 89% said they vote regularly; 86% said they celebrate the Fourth of July; 64% said they fly the U.S. flag; 42% said they volunteer for institutions serving the public (compared to 29% nationwide in 2005).
- **Democratic or independent:** There is no clear majority in party membership: 42% said they consider themselves members of the Democratic Party; 17% said they are Republican; 28% said they do not belong to any party.

Views on issues:

- 84% said Muslims should strongly emphasize shared values with Christians and Jews.
- 82% said terrorist attacks harm American Muslims.
- 77% said Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews do.
- 69% believe a just resolution to the Palestinian cause would improve America's standing in the Muslim world.
- 66% support working toward normalization of relations with Iran.
- 55% are afraid that the War on Terror has become a war on Islam.
- Only 12% believe the war in Iraq was a worthwhile effort, and 10% support the use of the military to spread democracy in other countries.

Introduction and Note on Methodology

The CAIR Research Center presents here the results of its first scientific survey of American Muslim voters. The poll provides a detailed picture of American Muslim voter demographics and attitudes. To reach a deeper understanding of this sample in its larger American and Muslim contexts, this report compares findings of this poll to other surveys, including U.S. Census Data and public opinion trends.

The survey questionnaire inquired about the following five sets of information:

1. Basic demographic indicators, including age, gender, education, occupation, and income.
2. Social and religious life, including marital status, structure of family, background of spouse, religious affiliation, and religiosity.
3. Integration in American society.
4. Political behavior.
5. Views on public issues.

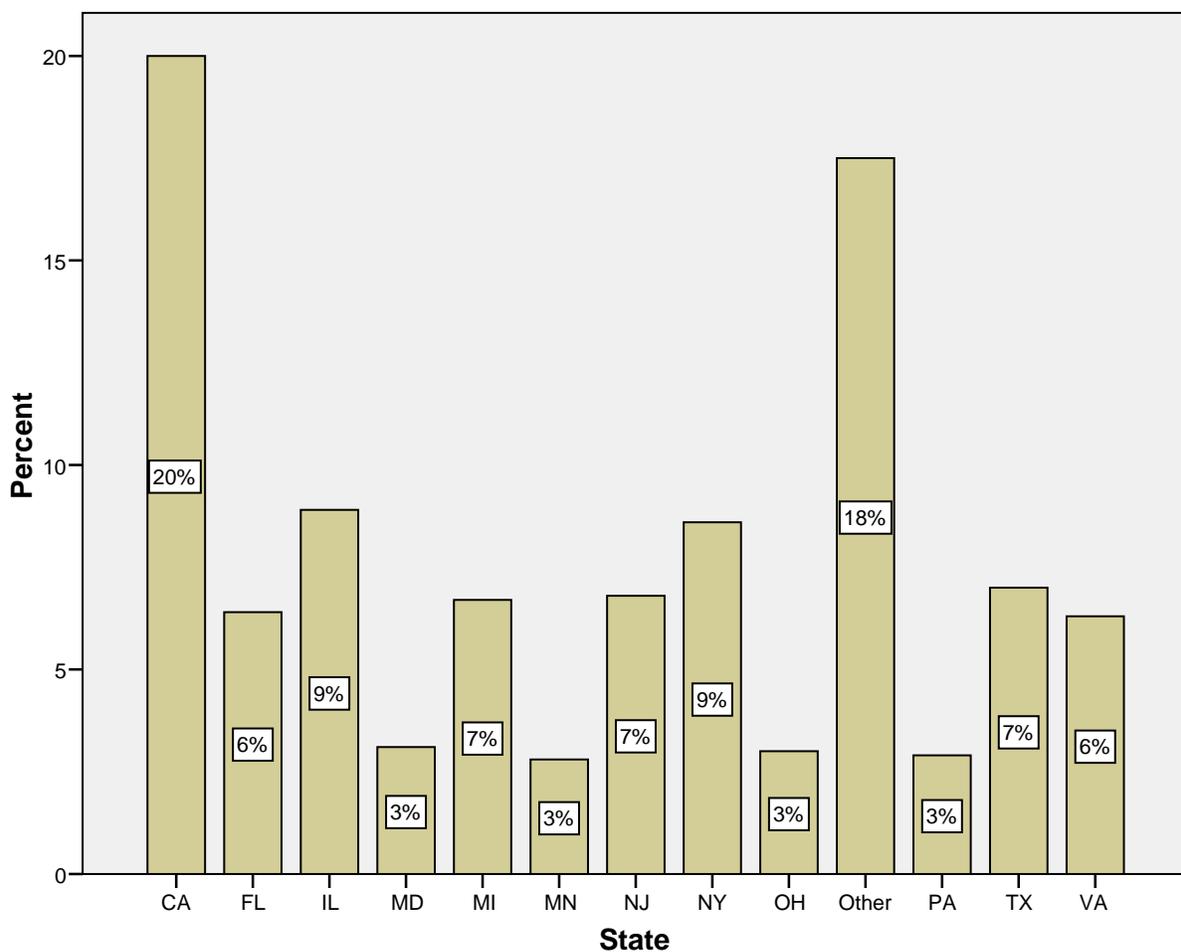
A sample of 1,000 respondents was drawn through a randomization procedure from a database of nearly 400,000 American Muslim voters. The American Muslim database was developed by matching state records of registered voters with an extensive list of about 45,000 Muslim-sounding first and last names. In compiling this list, common names prevalent among Muslims across the world's Muslim-majority ethnic groups were identified and verified by well-informed members of these ethnic groups. Though the largest ever, this pool of Muslim community voters does not include Muslims with non-common Muslim names or those with no Muslim-sounding names—especially converts who do not change their legal names. Also excluded are Muslims whose names are common in both the Muslim community and the general American public, such as Sarah and Adam.

CAIR commissioned an independent polling company, Genesis Research Associates of Descanso, California, which conducted the poll via telephone interviews. The calls were all made between August 3- 31, 2006. Respondents consisted of 687 men and 313 women in 42 states. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3%.

Geographical Distribution of American Muslim Voters

This survey indicates that American Muslim voters are concentrated in 12 states. As the chart below shows, these are: California, 20%; Illinois, 8.9%; New York, 8.6%; Texas, 7%; New Jersey, 6.8%; Michigan, 6.7%; Florida, 6.4%; Virginia, 6.3%; Maryland, 3.1%; Ohio, 3%; Pennsylvania, 2.9%; and Minnesota, 2.8%. All other states and the District of Columbia are home to 17.5% of this segment of American voters.

Percentage of Respondents by State



Demographic Characteristics

Age:

As a subset of American voters, American Muslims are somewhat younger than the general population of registered voters. Nearly 80% of Muslim voters are younger than 55, compared to 65% for the general voting public.

Percentage of Registered Voters by Age

| Age group | U.S.* | Muslim |
|-------------|-------|--------|
| 18-24 | 10% | 9% |
| 25-34 | 15% | 21% |
| 35-54 | 40% | 49% |
| 55-69 | 21% | 17% |
| 70 or older | 13% | 4% |

*Based on U.S. Census Bureau, November 2004 record of 142 million registered voters. See: www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html.

Education:

American Muslim voters enjoy a substantial educational advantage over other members of the American electorate. Of all American voters, 30% have obtained either a four-year or more advanced degree. Among the sample of Muslim voters used in this study, the percentage (62%) is more than double the national figure.

Percentage of American Registered Voters by Education Level

| | All U.S.* | Muslim Sample |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Less than 12 th grade | 10% | 1% |
| Graduated high school | 30% | 5% |
| Some college or two-year degree** | 31% | 31% |
| Four-year degree | 20% | 35% |
| Masters or doctorate | 10% | 27% |

*U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004. See: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/cps2004/tab05-1.xls>.

** Category appears as "Some college or associate degree" in U.S. Census Bureau statistics.

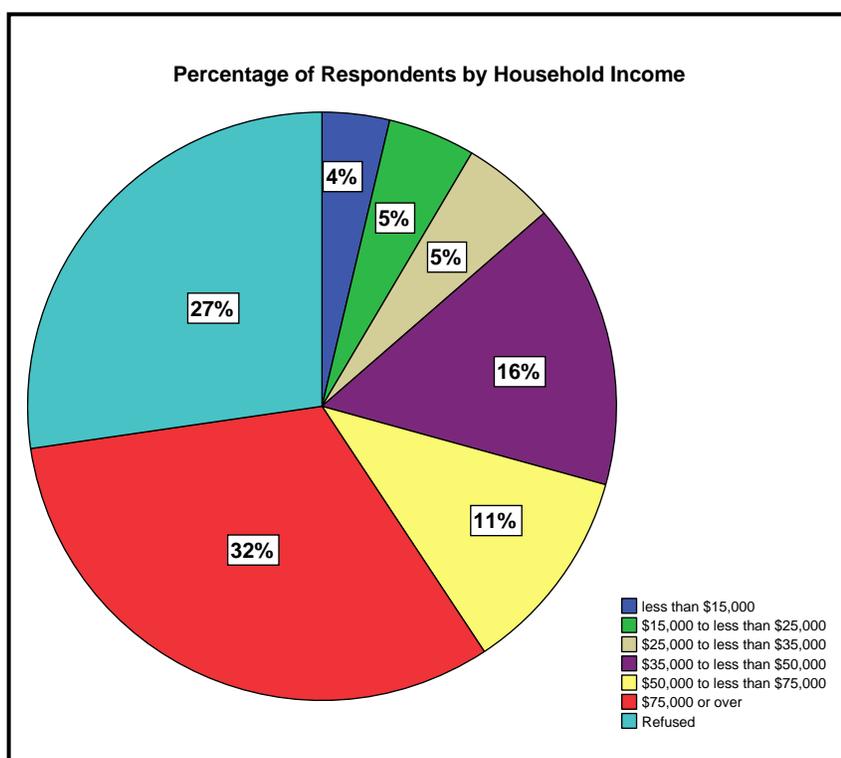
American Muslim female voters also fare very well when compared to all registered voters, with 48% of female Muslim voters holding a bachelor's degree or higher. This represents a 40% advantage over the American electorate. Muslim female voters have a lower level of education than their male counterparts.

Income:

The educational lead enjoyed by American Muslims has not translated into a corresponding income gain. Survey respondents enjoy almost the same income level as the general voting public. A little less than 4% of the respondents' households make less than \$15,000, compared to 6% for the households of all U.S. registered voters.¹ Also, while 31% of all American voters make more than \$75,000², 32% of the Muslim subset has this income level. Data is not available, however, to determine what percentage of Muslim voters enjoy an income level higher than \$100,000. About 18% of the families of U.S. registered voters belong in this category.³

Occupation:

About 50% of the sample respondents are in white collar occupations: engineers comprise 9%; professors or teachers, 6%; and physicians or dentists, 4%. About 16% own businesses, while 4% are workers in construction or manufacturing jobs.



¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004. See: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/cps2004/tab09-1.xls>.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Number and Percentage of Respondents by Occupation

| Occupation | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Physician or dentist | 36 | 3.6% |
| Lawyer | 11 | 1.1% |
| Engineer | 86 | 8.6% |
| Teacher or professor | 59 | 5.9% |
| Salesperson | 85 | 8.5% |
| Construction or manufacturing worker | 34 | 3.4% |
| Business owner | 123 | 12.3% |
| Professional or technical | 118 | 11.8% |
| Managerial | 70 | 7.0% |
| Secretarial or administrative | 43 | 4.3% |
| Other | 85 | 8.5% |
| Refused | 22 | 2.2% |
| Total | 772* | 77.2% |

* The rest of the respondents are not in the workforce. They are students, homemakers or retired.

Ethnicity:

About 70% of the sample respondents were born overseas; 28% are U.S.-born. Among the foreign-born, two-thirds have lived in the U.S. for twenty years or longer. Only 4% are recent immigrants who have lived here less than ten years.

Number and Percentage of Respondents by Years lived in the U.S.

| Respondents | Frequency | Percent | |
|--------------|--------------------|---------|-------|
| Foreign Born | Less than 10 years | 30 | 3.0% |
| | 10-19 years | 211 | 21.1% |
| | 20 years or longer | 457 | 45.7% |
| | Refused | 6 | 0.6% |
| | Total | 704 | 70.4% |
| U.S.-born | 279 | 27.9% | |
| Refused | 17 | 1.7% | |
| Total | 1,000 | 100% | |

Asked about their ancestral background, 40% said they come from the Arab world, 33% from Southeast Asia (Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi), 6% from Africa, 5% from Iran, and 3% from Europe. The rest either refused to answer or said their ancestors came from somewhere else.

Earlier surveys suggested that Muslims of Southeast Asian descent in the U.S. outnumber their Arab counterparts.⁴ The reversal of numbers in this poll could reflect the fact that Arab immigrants arrived in the U.S. sooner and thus are likely to appear on registered voter records in larger numbers. Within our sample’s Arab-descent voters, more than 70% have lived in the U.S. twenty years or longer, and 26% have lived in the U.S. between 10 to 19 years. Among Southeast Asian-descent voters, the percentages are 65 and 31, respectively.

Number and Percentage of Respondents by Ancestry

| Region | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| Southeast Asia | 328 | 32.8% |
| Arab World | 401 | 40.1% |
| Turkey | 19 | 1.9% |
| Iran | 50 | 5.0% |
| Africa | 57 | 5.7% |
| The Caribbean | 3 | 0.3% |
| Europe | 31 | 3.1% |
| Somewhere else | 28 | 2.8% |
| Refused | 83 | 8.3% |
| Total | 1,000 | 100% |

Marriage patterns:

As shown in the table below, marriage is a dominant social trend in the U.S.; 54% of all Americans older than 15 report being married. This life trend is found among 78% of the survey respondents (who are older than 18), which is roughly 50% higher than the national figure. In households of married respondents, 83% have children, and 54% reported having two to three children. This yields a rough average of 4.5 persons per family for this sample of registered voters. In contrast, the number of family members in American households averaged 3.14 in 2005.⁵

⁴ A Poll conducted by Zogby International in October 2004 for ProjectMaps found 34% of a national Muslim sample to have ancestry in Southeast Asia, and 26% in the Arab world. In the Zogby sample, however, 17% of the respondents were not registered to vote. Also, the Zogby sample included African-Americans who comprised 20% of all respondents.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. See: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2005/tabAVG1.csv>.

Marital Status of Respondents Compared to U.S. Population

| Marital Status | U.S. Population* (%) | Muslim Voters (%) |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Single | 27% | 16% |
| Married | 54% | 78% |
| Divorced, widowed or separated | 19% | 5% |

*U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000. Note the discrepancy in the comparison: The Muslim voter column reflects people older than 18 while the U.S. figures represent people older than 15.

Most Muslim voters tend to marry other Muslims. Still, 8% are married to members of other faith groups.

Religion of Spouse

| Religion | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Muslim | 687 | 88.2% |
| Catholic | 20 | 2.6% |
| Protestant | 14 | 1.8% |
| Agnostic or atheist | 3 | 0.4% |
| Other | 27 | 3.5% |
| Refused | 28 | 3.6% |
| Total | 779* | 100% |

* The remainder of the respondents are single.

Also, the overwhelming majority of respondents (87%) reported marrying within their ethnic group, while 11% are married to spouses from other ethnicities.

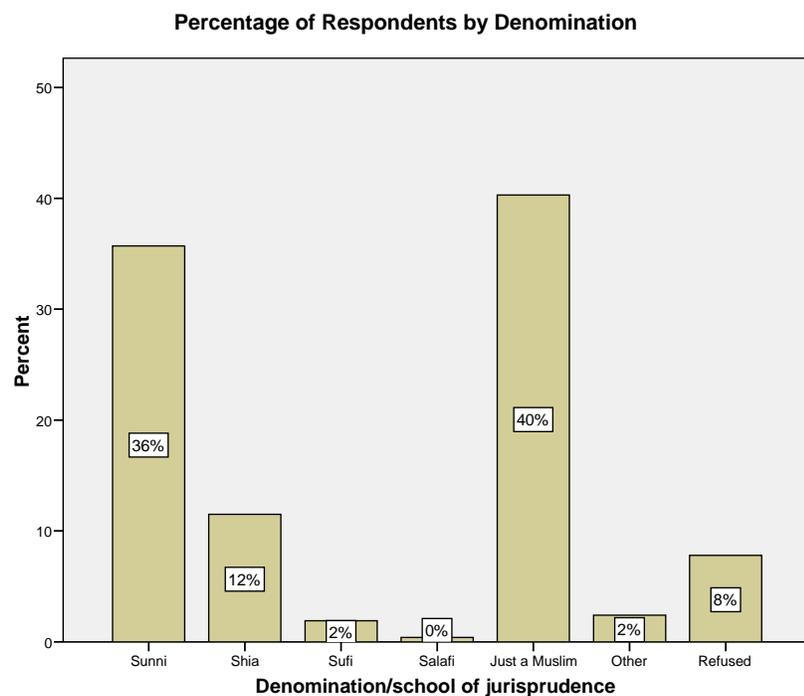
Ethnicity of Spouse

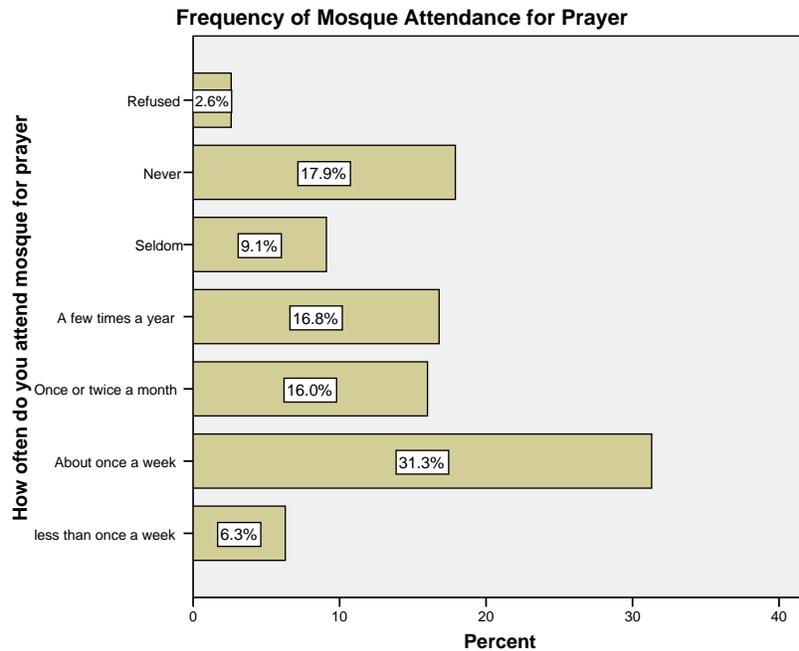
| Ethnicity | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Same | 674 | 67.4% |
| Different | 88 | 8.8% |
| Refused | 17 | 1.7% |
| Total | 779 | 77.9% |

Religious Profile

The largest segment of respondents said they consider themselves “just a Muslim” when asked to state their denomination/school of Islamic thought. Another 36% said they are Sunni, and 12% said they are Shia. There is reason to suppose that those who opted for the “Just a Muslim” category are mostly Sunnis. Historically, Sunni Muslims have regarded their community representative of mainstream Islam. Some respondents in the “Just a Muslim” category could be Muslims who are tired of sectarian divisions in the community and prefer to regard themselves as denominationally neutral. Indeed, this position is prevalent among African American Muslims. About 2% of respondents said they are *Sufi* (a mystical tradition), and less than half of 1% said they are *Salafi* (an orientation holding belief in Islam as practiced by the early generations of Muslims).

Asked how frequently they attend mosque, 31% said they do so weekly. Another 22% said they go fewer than once a week or once or twice a month. Nearly 17% said they attend a few times a year, and 27% said they seldom or never attend. About 43% said they are very involved or somewhat involved in mosque activities aside from prayer. A substantially larger proportion (54%) said they are not very involved or not at all involved.





Percentage of Respondents by Involvement in other Mosque Activities

| Level of Involvement | Percent |
|----------------------|---------|
| Very involved | 7.3% |
| Somewhat involved | 35.8% |
| Not very involved | 25.3% |
| Not at all involved | 28.4% |
| Refused | 3.2% |
| Total | 100% |

A correlation test found no disparity in mosque attendance between respondents born in the U.S. and those who are foreign-born. However, a great disparity in attendance exists along gender lines: 36% of males vs. 22% of females said they attend once a week; while 35% of females vs. 23% of males said they seldom or never attend mosque. Religiously, females are not mandated to attend congregational prayers. This gender disparity is less pronounced in the general involvement in non-prayer mosque activities. Asked, “Not including *sa’laat*⁶, how involved are you in activities at the mosque?” 46% of males vs. 37% of females said they are very involved or somewhat involved, while 59% of females vs. 52% of males said they are not very involved or not involved at all.

⁶ Sa’laat means prayer.

Integration in American Society

The findings of this poll demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of American Muslims favor engagement and a search for common ground with others:

- 89% said they vote regularly, which is almost identical to the 2004 comparable national figure of 88.5%.⁷
- 86% said they celebrate the Fourth of July.
- 64% said they fly the U.S. flag on occasion.
- 42% said they volunteer for institutions serving the public. In contrast, federal government data shows that only 29% of all American adults volunteered in 2005.⁸
- 82% said terrorist attacks harm American Muslims. (Most of the rest chose “not sure” option.)⁹
- 77% said Muslims should emphasize more strongly the values they share with Christians and Jews. CAIR’s 2005 survey found 59% of Americans indicating such actions would favorably change their views toward Muslims.¹⁰

Despite this integrationist tendency among Muslims, a perception gap separates Muslim voters from other Americans. This assertion is based on a comparison of the results of this survey and the public opinion poll on Islam and Muslims commissioned by CAIR in 2005.¹¹ Only one-third of Americans then agreed with the statement “Muslims worship the same God as Christians and Jews do.” Nearly 77% of the Muslim sample replied affirmatively when queried with this statement. This particular disparity is perhaps due to the fact that Christianity and Judaism are part of the Muslim religious narrative, but not vice versa.

Theological questions aside, substantial differences exist on matters of human relations. For example, in the 2005 poll, most Americans (68%) said they would have a more favorable view of Muslims if they worked to improve the status of Muslim women. A majority of 54% of this

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004. See <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/cps2004/tab02-1.xls>.

⁸ U.S. Freedom Corps, *Volunteering in America: State Trends and Rankings*, released June 12, 2006. See at: http://www.usafreedomcorps.gov/about_usafc/newsroom/announcements_dynamic.asp?ID=1350

⁹ It is not unusual in public opinion polls to see a high percentage of “not sure” responses to critical questions. In a Harris poll on public perceptions of liberals and conservatives, the “Not sure” answers accounted for as high as 30%. See: http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=542.

¹⁰ CAIR, *American Public Opinion About Islam and Muslims*, released May 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

survey's Muslim voters said Muslim leaders are working to achieve this objective. Nearly 70% of Americans wished Muslims would take measures to condemn terrorism more strongly. Exactly the same percentage of this Muslim voter sample said Muslim leaders have strongly condemned terrorism. And close to two-thirds of Americans (63%) would like to see American Muslims work harder to improve America's image in the Middle East. In contrast, 67% of this sample's respondents said American Muslims are doing just that.¹²

This survey also shows that a large segment of Muslim voters feel a certain level of alienation. Of the sample respondents, 43% answered affirmatively to the question, "Have you ever felt discriminated against or profiled?" Still, nearly 40% said they have experienced noteworthy kind treatment since 9/11. Therefore, the overall sentiment swings between the hope for inclusion and the fear of prejudice.

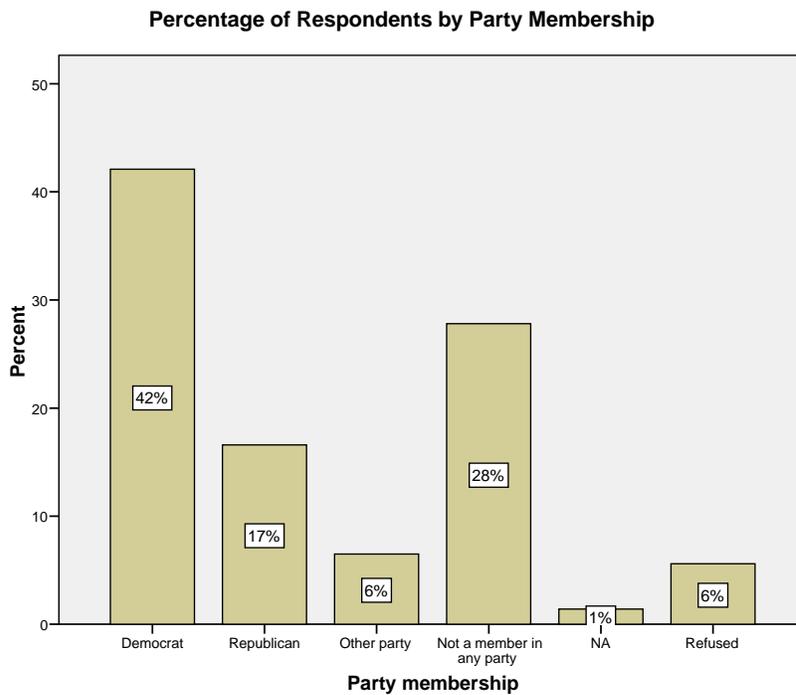
Political Orientation

There is no clear majority in party affiliation among respondents, but a plurality of the sampled voters reported a Democrat leaning:

- 42% said they consider themselves members of the Democratic Party;
- 17% reported being Republican;
- 28% said they do not belong to any party.

This finding is evidence of a substantial shift among American voters. In 2000, American Muslims endorsed and voted for Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush, because of his pledge to do away with secret evidence. Muslims generally feel he did not honor that commitment.

¹² *Ibid.*



Survey results indicate that Muslim voters are more committed to issues than to party. When asked “Which party is most responsive to the needs of American Muslims?” party votes dropped substantially: 5 percentage points for the republicans and 4 percentage points for the Democrats. Uncommitted vote remained at 28%.

Number and Percentage of Respondents by Most Responsive Party

| Party Most Responsive | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Republican Party | 120 | 12.0% |
| Democratic Party | 381 | 38.1% |
| Libertarian Party | 13 | 1.3% |
| Green Party | 53 | 5.3% |
| None | 281 | 28.1% |
| Don't know | 108 | 10.8% |
| Refused | 44 | 4.4% |
| Total | 1,000 | 100% |

This independent tendency is evident in the responses to the statement “Muslim voters should vote as a bloc in presidential elections.” About 46% agreed or agreed strongly, while 31% disagreed or disagreed strongly. The drive to form a bloc of Muslim voters entered American Muslim public discourse only in 2000, when the American Muslim Political Coordination Council was formed and set out to build consensus among American Muslims to support national endorsement of political candidates. At that time, this coalition endorsed the Republican presidential ticket. In 2004 the coalition, which changed its name to the American Muslim Taskforce for Civil Rights and Elections, doubled its group membership and endorsed the democratic ticket to protest what had been widely seen as anti-Muslim policies by the Bush administration.

Number and Percentage of Respondents by “Voting as a Bloc”

| Responses | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Agree strongly | 217 | 21.7% |
| Agree | 246 | 24.6% |
| Disagree | 217 | 21.7% |
| Disagree strongly | 91 | 9.1% |
| Not sure | 229 | 22.9% |
| Total | 1,000 | 100% |

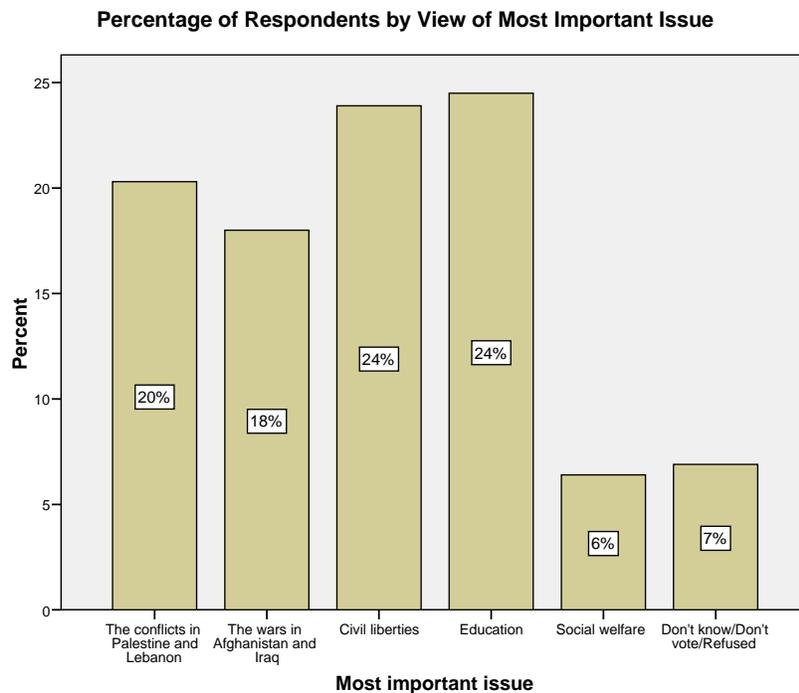
Most Important Issues

Like other voters, American Muslim voters identify more strongly with issues closer to their lives. Respondents were presented with five foreign and domestic policy issues and were asked which was the most important to them.

Education came first, with 25% of the respondents ranking it as most important. This was followed closely by civil liberties, which garnered the preference of 24% of the respondents. This ranking is unsurprising for two reasons: first, the sample is composed largely of highly educated parents with school age children

(53% of married respondents have children 6 to 17 years of age). Second, civil rights issues have dominated American Muslim discourse since 9/11.

But America’s involvement in conflicts overseas is not far behind in the ranking. The “conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon” and the “wars in Afghanistan and Iraq” received 20% and 18% of the vote, respectively. These foreign policy issues ranked higher than the domestic



concern of social welfare, which came last with 6%. A correlation test found no substantial differences in the ranking of concerns across age group, mosque attendance, income, education, ethnicity, or place of birth. Suffice it to say that foreign policy, especially the Middle East, has become a top public issue.

In a CNN poll released on September 4, 2006, 25% of Americans rated Iraq as the most important issue, second only to the economy, which received 28% of the vote.¹³ And a poll by Zogby International found the Iraq War as the top issue among Democrats.¹⁴ The conflicts in Palestine and Lebanon got a boost in this survey perhaps because the poll was conducted during the recent Israeli bombing of Gaza and Southern Lebanon.

Still, disparity in the ranking of issues appears to be significant along lines of gender and denominational affiliation. Shia respondents gave the highest ranking (35%) to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In contrast, the largest proportion of Sunnis (28%) ranked the wars in Palestine and Lebanon as the most important issue, while a plurality of 29% among those who consider themselves “just a Muslim” ranked civil liberties as the most important issue. Also, females appear to have tipped the total balance in favor of education as the most important concern. A plurality of 29% among them said education was their most important concern—compared to 22% among males.

The War on Terror, Iraq, Iran, and Palestine

Since 9/11, relations with the Muslim world have dominated the U.S. foreign policy agenda. Survey data shows that most respondents (55%) are afraid that the war on terror has become a war on Islam. Therefore, a decisive majority prefers de-escalation between America and Muslim-majority countries. Eighty-eight percent believe the Iraq war was not worthwhile for America. Ninety percent are also decidedly against spreading democracy by force. A substantial majority (69%) believe that America would improve its standing in the Muslim world by supporting a just resolution to the Palestinian cause. A similar portion (66%) support “working toward normalization of relations with Iran.”

¹³ <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/09/04/poll.election/index.html>.

¹⁴ Zogby International, *Battle for Congress Tightens*, September 15, 2006.

Statement by Percentage of Agreeing Respondents

| Statement | Agreement level (%) |
|--|----------------------------|
| "A just resolution to the Palestinian cause would improve America's standing in the Muslim world." | 69% |
| "Working toward normalization of relations with Iran." | 66% |
| "The war on terror has become a war on Islam." | 55% |
| "The war in Iraq has been worthwhile for America." | 12% |
| "Using military means to spread democracy in other countries." | 10% |

Denominational differences appear to cause some variation in attitudes on the U.S. intervention in Iraq. In the strongest of such correlations, although clear majorities of both Shia and Sunni respondents oppose the war in Iraq, opposition is somewhat stronger among Sunnis. When presented with the statement "The war in Iraq has been worthwhile for America," 69% of Sunnis and 64% of Shias disagreed or disagreed strongly. The distribution of opinion for this question is illustrated in the following table.

Views on the Iraq War by Main Schools of Islamic Thought

| "The war in Iraq has been worthwhile for America." | Sunni | Shia |
|---|--------------|-------------|
| Agree strongly | 3.9% | 4.3% |
| Agree | 7.6% | 10.4% |
| Disagree | 26.1% | 39.1% |
| Disagree strongly | 46.8% | 25.2% |
| Not sure | 15.7% | 20.9% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100% |

In addition, some disparities in opinion exist when place of birth is a factor. Voters born overseas are more likely to agree that the War on Terror has become a war on Islam. Close to 60% of this group agreed or agreed strongly with that statement, while 47% of those born in the U.S. held this view (only 35% of the latter segment disagreed or disagreed strongly).

“The war on terror has become a war on Islam” by Place of Birth

| “The war on terror has become a war on Islam.” | Were you born overseas | | | Total |
|--|------------------------|-------|---------|-------|
| | Yes | No | Refused | |
| Not sure | 18.5% | 18.3% | 41.2% | 18.8% |
| Disagree strongly | 5.1% | 11.1% | 5.9% | 6.8% |
| Disagree | 17.5% | 23.7% | 29.4% | 19.4% |
| Agree | 32.4% | 25.4% | 17.6% | 30.2% |
| Agree strongly | 26.6% | 21.5% | 5.9% | 24.8% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Conclusion

Findings of this survey illustrate that American Muslim voters have done well in America. Their young profile, level of education, economic prosperity, and large family size bode well for the future of their political influence. Like America itself, American Muslims are diverse with respect to gender, social class, denomination, religiosity, and ethnicity. This diversity appears to be associated with the strength of their views on issues. However, clear majorities exist regarding integration in American society as well as important public policy issues.

The overwhelming majority of American Muslim voters are in favor of participation in American civic and political life. They are keen on expressing their American identity through voting, volunteering and celebrating national holidays and symbols.

Despite their hope to continue to advance and live freely, most are afraid that the current leadership of their country is heading in the wrong direction in regard to relations with the broader Muslim world to which they belong. The survey shows that most Muslims have chosen to respond to this reality through active engagement rather than passive isolation. Although a substantial portion of American Muslim voters maintain a non-partisan political posture, a plurality is willing to align with the Democratic Party in the hope of substantive political change. And many other Muslim voters, who are largely independent, may go along—favoring to express the American Muslim political will as a bloc.