

Gallup survey finds Muslims are younger, more racially diverse: A national portrait

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Muslims in America attend worship services as frequently as Protestant Americans. Among the nation's faith groups, they are the most racially diverse. And they're younger—more than a third of Muslim adults are between the ages 18 and 29, double the percentage of young U.S. adults overall.

So says a sweeping new study by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, which indicates that U.S. Muslims reflect both the successes and challenges of American life: although 30 percent of Muslim Americans work in professional occupations, another 27 percent said there were times in the previous year when they lacked enough money to buy the food they needed.

"I think one of the biggest myths that was shattered is that Muslim Americans are incredibly different from the rest of America, whereas we find that the community really reflects the rich . . . American mosaic," said Dalia Mogahed, senior analyst and executive director of the center.

She discussed the new findings in "Muslim Americans: A National Portrait" on March 2 at the Newseum in Washington, D.C. The data reflect 946 responses from self-identified Muslims, from among more than 300,000 Americans surveyed via cell or landline phones in 2008.

Among U.S. Muslims, no racial/ethnic group makes up a majority: 35 percent describe themselves as African American, 28 percent as white, 18 percent as Asian, 18 percent as "other" and 1 percent as Hispanic.

They are also diverse politically, with 38 percent saying they are moderate, 23 percent liberal, 21 percent conservative. Another 6 percent said they are "very liberal" and 4 percent called themselves "very conservative."

Asked about party affiliation, 49 percent of Muslim respondents said they are Democrats, 37 percent independents and 8 percent Republicans. They are less likely than other Americans to register to vote. With 64 percent registered, Muslims rank as the lowest percentage among religious groups studied by Gallup.

Ahmed Younis, senior analyst for the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, said lower levels of political involvement are a familiar pattern for immigrant groups.

“There is no group of Americans that has ever politically integrated before they become of substance . . . economically,” said Younis, former national director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council. “Political integration is what comes last. It has always been what comes last in the integration experience of any new American community. That includes Catholic Americans. That includes Italian Americans.”

Researchers found that economic disparities among Muslims reflect racial income differences in the country. For example, while 44 percent of Muslim Asian Americans have a monthly household income of \$5,000 or more, just 17 percent of Muslim African Americans report such a high income.

The research showed that the same percentage of Muslims as Protestants—41 percent—report attending worship services each week. And those services are attended equally by men and women, which contrasts sharply with the case in many countries with Muslim majorities, where men attend more often than women.

Researchers paid particular attention to young adult Muslims since they make up a far larger percentage (36 percent) of their religious group than their counterparts (18 percent) in the general population. Muslim Americans in that age group particularly reported discontent with their jobs and communities.

Younis said some Muslim Americans have a sense of “otherness,” in part because of outsiders’ stereotypes about their religious beliefs and lack of community involvement.

Researchers found that despite high levels of education and employment, Muslims—including young Muslims—were less likely to be classified as “thriving,” a Gallup measure of how they felt about their current and future circumstances. At 41 percent, the percentage of Muslims considered thriving is the lowest among religious groups studied by Gallup. *-Religion News Service*