



A Comprehensive Overview of the Muslim American Community

The History and Evolution of Muslim Americans

Muslim Americans make up a small yet diverse cultural community in the United States, accounting for approximately 1.1% of the population, or about 3.45 million people. Despite Islam being one of the fastest-growing religions globally, many Americans have limited understanding of the Muslim community. According to Pew Research, U.S. Muslims come from at least 75 different countries, with nearly 60% being immigrants. Muslim Americans are generally optimistic about their place in the country, with a strong belief in the American Dream—9 out of 10 express pride in being American. However, discrimination remains a significant challenge, and media representation continues to be a major concern. A key message many Muslim Americans wish to convey is that they have long been a part of American history, dating back to the American Revolution, and will continue to shape its future.

The history of Islam in America is complex and often debated. Muslims played a crucial role in early European voyages to the Americas, serving as mapmakers and guides. The first documented Muslim in what is now the United States was Estevanico of Azamor, a Moroccan explorer who arrived in Florida in 1527. A more significant Muslim presence emerged during the transatlantic slave trade, at least 10% of the 10 million enslaved Africans forcibly brought to the Americas were Muslim. They faced forced conversion and suppression of their religious practices, however, historical records, including slave diaries, reveal that enslaved Muslims continued to practice aspects of their faith, such as fasting during Ramadan and reciting the Qur'an.



"Estevan De Dorantes" by
graphic artist José Cisneros

One notable early Muslim American was Yarrow Mamout, an enslaved Muslim from West Africa. Brought to America as a teenager, he later negotiated his freedom at age 60 and purchased a home in Georgetown. Known for openly practicing Islam, he was often seen walking the streets reciting passages from the Qur'an. In 1819, renowned American portrait artist Charles Willson Peale painted his portrait, making Mamout one of the earliest known Muslim figures depicted in American art.



Portrait of Yarrow Mamout
(Muhammad Yaro), 1819

By the mid-20th century, Islam in America expanded beyond its early African roots. On July 28, 1957, President Eisenhower inaugurated the Islamic Center of Washington D.C., marking a milestone for Muslim visibility in the U.S. In 1963, the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) was founded to support the religious and social needs of foreign Muslim students attending U.S. colleges. Later, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) emerged, focusing on education and social services. These organizations, along with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), founded in 1994, remain among the most influential Muslim organizations in the U.S. today.

Malcolm X played a vital role in Muslim American history, particularly after founding his own Muslim Mosque, Inc. in 1964 and traveling to Africa and the Middle East to meet political and religious leaders. His pilgrimage to Mecca transformed his perspective on Islam, leading him to embrace a more inclusive and global understanding of the faith. The year 1965 was a pivotal moment for Muslim Americans. Following the assassination of Malcolm X, the Hart-Celler Immigration Act was passed. This legislation abolished the national quota system, opening the doors for a significant influx of Muslim immigrants, particularly professionals such as doctors, engineers, and scientists. The act prioritized family reunification, leading to the rapid growth of Muslim communities across the United States.

The Muslim American community has grown in influence across politics, business, and culture. Figures like Muhammad Ali, Keith Ellison, Ilhan Omar, and Rashida Tlaib have played a role in shaping public perception and representation. The first Muslim-owned Fortune 500 company was established in 1991, and the Women's Mosque of America opened in 2015, highlighting shifts in representation and inclusivity. Muslim Americans continue to contribute significantly across industries.

Demographic Overview of Muslim Americans

The Muslim community in the United States is primarily composed of immigrants and their children, with first-generation immigrants making up the majority. According to Pew Research Center:

- 58% of Muslim Americans are first-generation (born outside the U.S.).
- 18% are second-generation (born in the U.S. to immigrant parents).
- 24% are third-generation or beyond (with deep American roots).

Muslim adults about three times as likely as Americans overall to be immigrants

	U.S. Muslims %	U.S. general public %
First generation (born abroad)	58	18
Second generation (immigrant parents)	18	9
Third generation+ (U.S. born with U.S.-born parents)	24	73
	100	100

Note: Results repercentaged to exclude nonresponse.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. U.S. general public data from U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement.
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Socioeconomic Characteristics of Muslim Americans

The population of Muslim Americans are younger than the overall U.S. population. Of the 3.45 million Muslims in the United States, 2.15 million are adults, and 1.35 million are children. The population is growing rapidly despite starting with a low foundation.

- 35% of Muslim adults are between 18 and 29 years old, compared to 21% of the general U.S. population in that age group.
- 60% of Muslim adults are under 40, whereas only 38% of U.S. adults overall fall within this range.
- The median age of Muslim adults is 35, significantly lower than the national median of 47.

Muslim Americans: A young population

	U.S. Muslims	U.S. general public
	%	%
Ages 18-29	35	21
30-39	25	17
40-54	26	25
55+	14	36
	100	100
Median age	35	47

Note: Results repercentaged to exclude nonresponse. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. U.S. general public data from U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

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Racial and Ethnic Diversity

The Muslim American population is highly diverse, with no single racial or ethnic group forming a majority:

- 41% identify as White (including Middle Eastern and North African).
- 28% are Asian (primarily South Asian).
- 20% are Black/African American.
- 8% are Hispanic.

Among third-generation Muslim Americans, the demographics shift—51% identify as Black, reflecting the deep historical roots of Black Muslim communities in the U.S.

Four-in-ten Muslim American adults are white

	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic	Other/mixed
	%	%	%	%	%
All U.S. Muslims	41	20	28	8	3=100
Foreign born	45	11	41	1	1
U.S. born	35	32	10	17	5
Second generation	52	7	22	17	2
Third generation+	23	51	2	18	7
U.S. general public	64	12	6	16	2

Note: Results repercentaged to exclude nonresponse. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. White, black, Asian and other races include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. U.S. general public data from U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement. "U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream"

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Family Structure and Marriage

- 53% of Muslim American adults are married, a rate equal to the general population.
- 33% have never been married.
- The majority of married Muslims have spouses who also identify as Muslim.
- On average, Muslim Americans have 2.4 children, compared to the national average of 2.1.
- 57% of Muslim Americans live in a household where all members are Muslim.

Education and Income

- Muslim Americans have similar education levels to the general U.S. population—31% hold a college or graduate degree.
- Foreign-born Muslims are more likely to have a college degree than U.S.-born Muslims, reflecting immigration policies that favor highly educated individuals.
- Financially, Muslim Americans are just as likely as the general population to report a household income of \$100,000 or higher.
- However, they are more likely to have incomes under \$30,000—40% compared to 32% of the overall U.S. population.
- Homeownership is significantly lower among Muslims—only 37% own a home, compared to 57% of U.S. adults.

Muslims as likely to have high incomes, but also more likely than general public to earn less than \$30,000 per year

% of U.S. Muslims whose annual household income is ...

	U.S. Muslims			U.S. general public
	Total	Foreign born	U.S. born	
	%	%	%	%
Less than \$30,000	40	37	45	32
\$30,000-\$49,999	17	17	16	20
\$50,000-\$74,999	11	11	11	13
\$75,000-\$99,999	8	6	9	12
\$100,000 or more	24	29	18	23
	100	100	100	100

Notes: Results repercentaged to exclude nonresponse. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017. U.S. general public data from aggregated Pew Research Center surveys conducted January-April 2017.

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Employment and Financial Well-Being

Muslim Americans are more likely to experience underemployment than the general population, meaning they work part-time but prefer full-time work or are unemployed and seeking jobs.

- 56% describe their financial situation as “fair” or “poor,” slightly higher than the national average.
- However, 43% rate their financial situation as “excellent” or “good,” similar to the general public (46%).

Identity and Pride

- 92% say they are proud to be American.
- 97% say they are proud to be Muslim.
- 89% (about nine-in-ten) say they are proud to be both.

While many Muslim Americans feel a sense of belonging, they also acknowledge aspects of their identity that make them distinct.

- 40% report that their appearance, voice, or clothing is something others associate with being Muslim.

Key Values and Life Priorities

Muslim Americans place importance on a balance between religion, personal success, and family life. These values shape the way they live their lives and make decisions.

- 31% of U.S. Muslims value living a very religious life, while 30% prioritize being successful in a high-paying career, and 21% value having free time.
- 78% of U.S. Muslims with children under 18 in their home consider being a good parent is one of the most important aspects of their lives.

Essential Beliefs and Practices

A variety of beliefs and behaviors are shared among Muslim Americans, which help define their community and what it means to be Muslim.

- 85% believe in God.
- 72% express love for Prophet Muhammad.
- 69% are committed to working for justice.
- 62% prioritize protecting the environment.
- 59% follow the Qur'an and Sunnah.
- 48% adhere to halal dietary practices.
- 44% dress modestly.
- 41% emphasize the importance of marriage.

Believing in God, loving Prophet Muhammad, working for justice widely seen as 'essential' to what it means to be Muslim

% who say ____ is "essential" to what being Muslim means to them

	Believing in God	Loving Prophet Muhammad	Working for justice	Protecting environment	Following Quran and Sunnah	Eating halal foods	Dressing modestly	Getting married
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
U.S. Muslims	85	72	69	62	59	48	44	41
Men	83	67	68	59	55	48	36	41
Women	87	77	71	66	64	47	52	42
Ages 18-39	85	72	70	64	61	48	47	39
40+	85	72	68	60	56	48	40	45
Some college or less	84	73	67	64	62	54	47	47
College graduate	87	70	74	59	53	34	37	28
U.S. born	88	70	66	60	58	50	45	38
Black	88	72	72	70	77	72	57	48
Other race	87	68	64	56	50	41	39	33
Foreign born	83	73	72	65	61	47	44	44
Arab/Mid East-N. Africa	81	79	76	66	60	55	53	43
South Asian	88	77	71	65	62	52	39	42
Married	88	76	73	67	65	48	46	48
Not married	82	67	65	58	53	48	41	34
Religion very important	88	83	72	68	77	61	56	50
Religion less important	79	51	65	51	28	24	21	26

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017.

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These core beliefs guide how Muslim Americans live their lives, including their personal, family, and community commitments. A recurring theme in their responses is the value of fairness, with many citing the golden rule as an essential part of their identity.

Religious Practices and Cultural Expressions

Islam is a monotheistic religion, and its followers are called Muslims. While the religious importance of Islam has seen a slight decline among Muslim Americans—dropping from 72% in 2007 to 65% today—core practices remain deeply ingrained in the community.

- 80% of U.S. Muslims fast during Ramadan.
- 60% pray daily.
- 40% of Muslim women always or usually wear the hijab.
- 78% of U.S. Muslims were born into the faith, while 21% converted to Islam.

Key Practices

- **The Five Pillars of Islam:** Shahadah (faith), Salat (prayer), Zakat (charity), Sawm (fasting during Ramadan), and Hajj (pilgrimage).
- **Prayer (Salat):** Many Muslims pray five times a day, whether at home, work, or in mosques. Friday communal prayers (Jumu'ah) are significant for Muslim communities in the U.S.
- **Charity (Zakat):** American Muslims often donate through mosques and Muslim charities, supporting local community programs, refugee aid, and food banks.
- **Fasting (Sawm/Ramadan):** Many Muslims in the U.S. fast from dawn to sunset, with community iftar (meal to break the fast) gatherings at mosques and Islamic centers.
- **Hajj:** While not all Muslims can afford the pilgrimage, those who can often travel from the U.S. to Mecca to complete Hajj.
- **Adaptation to Modern Life:** Muslims navigate work, school, and social settings while maintaining religious commitments (e.g., prayer spaces at workplaces, halal dietary options, and religious accommodations during Ramadan).

Muslim Holidays

1. **Ramadan** – The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, marked by fasting, worship, and charity. Muslims visit mosques frequently, seek forgiveness, and give to those in need.
2. **Laylat al-Qadr** – The holiest night of the year, spent in prayer, Quran recitation, and seeking forgiveness. It falls within the last 10 nights of Ramadan.
3. **Eid al-Fitr** – A three-day festival celebrating the end of Ramadan, known as the “Festival of Breaking Fast,” with feasting and joy.
4. **Eid al-Adha** – A festival of sacrifice, commemorated by the ritual slaughter of animals like sheep, goats, or camels.



Political Affiliation

Muslim Americans show a strong alignment with the Democratic Party, with a significant portion identifying as liberal, though voter turnout among this group remains relatively low compared to the general U.S. population.

- 66% of U.S. Muslims identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party.
- 30% consider themselves liberal.
- 44% of Muslim Americans reported voting in the 2016 election, which indicates major room for increased political participation.

Most Muslim Americans are U.S. citizens, but many are not registered or did not vote in 2016 election

	All U.S. Muslims %	U.S. born %	Foreign born %
Citizen	82	100	69
Absolutely certain registered to vote	57	70	47
Voted in 2016	44	54	37
Did not vote in 2016	13	16	11
Not certain/not registered	25	30	22
Not a citizen	18	0	31
	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals due to rounding. Results repercentaged to exclude respondents who did not answer the question about citizenship.

Source: Survey conducted Jan. 23-May 2, 2017.

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Barriers and Challenges

Muslim Americans encounter several significant challenges, with negative perceptions, discrimination, and ignorance about Islam being among the most pressing. Reports of intolerance and discrimination have risen since 2007, fueled in part by media portrayals—55% of Muslim Americans believe that media coverage of Islam and Muslims is generally unfair. As a result, many feel distrusted by the broader public.

Additionally, Muslim Americans face increased mental health risks, especially Black Muslims—the largest Muslim demographic—who experience discrimination based on both race and religion.

Experiences With Intolerance or Discrimination

	U.S. Muslims	
	2007	2011
<i>Percent who report that in the past year they have been ...</i>	%	%
Treated or viewed with suspicion	26	28
Called offensive names	15	22
Singled out by airport security	18	21
Singled out by police	9	13
Physically threatened or attacked	4	6
Any of the five	40	43
Percent saying someone expressed support for them	32	37

PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2011 Muslim American Survey. Q39.

Discrimination and Mistrust

Even a decade after the 9/11 attacks, 55% of Muslim Americans report that it has become increasingly difficult to be Muslim in the U.S. Many feel disproportionately targeted by government policies and societal discrimination, leading to alienation and mistrust in institutions that should offer support. Data indicates that since 2007, the percentage of Muslims who feel life has become harder post-9/11 has remained nearly unchanged, declining by only 2%.

Barriers to Accessing Halal Food

Key Principles of Halal Food:

- **Slaughter Method:** Animals must be slaughtered humanely, using a sharp knife to cut the throat, while invoking Allah's name.
- **Forbidden Substances:** Pork, its by-products, and alcohol are prohibited.
- **Hygiene & Sanitation:** Strict cleanliness standards must be followed.

Two major challenges hinder Muslim Americans' ability to access halal food:

1. Lack of Halal Options:
 - A significant 83% of Muslim Americans require halal food, with 46% preferring it for religious and cultural reasons. However, mainstream markets and food services often lack suitable halal options, creating a persistent barrier.
2. Food Insecurity:
 - Muslim Americans—especially college students, BIPOC individuals, and older adults—are twice as likely to experience food insecurity as the general population. The scarcity of halal food exacerbates this issue, particularly in campus dining halls, food pantries, and meal delivery services that do not accommodate halal diets.
 - Despite ongoing efforts to address these challenges, Muslim Americans continue to navigate systemic barriers that affect their daily lives, well-being, and sense of belonging in society.

Purchasing Power and Market Influence

The Muslim American consumer market is rapidly expanding. Research indicates that the community's spending power reached \$120 billion in 2020, marking a \$10 billion increase from 2018. This market is projected to soar to over \$250 billion by 2030. With a growth rate exceeding 6% annually, the Muslim American population is outpacing national population growth and is expected to exceed 8 million by 2050. These households tend to be younger, more educated, and wealthier compared to the general U.S. population.

In addition to their substantial purchasing power, Muslim Americans are making significant contributions to entrepreneurship. Some well-known brands founded by American Muslims include Pampers, Staples, and Qantas.

As the purchasing power of Muslim Americans grows, their influence across industries becomes increasingly apparent. Food and beverage corporations are seeking halal certifications to meet Muslim religious guidelines. Fashion and beauty brands are launching clothing lines and cosmetics tailored to Muslim consumers. Retailers are aligning their marketing strategies with key Islamic holidays like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, offering products and promotions designed to cater to these events.

Media Representation and Digital Engagement

Muslim Americans are a growing yet underserved audience in media and entertainment. Despite making up a significant portion of the U.S. population, they are severely underrepresented in mainstream television and film. A study from USC's Annenberg School found that only 1% of speaking characters in major TV series were Muslim, while Muslims make up 25% of the global population. When portrayed, Muslim characters often fall into harmful stereotypes—frequently depicted as foreign, violent, or victims, with little diversity in gender, ethnicity, or identity.

These misrepresentations influence public perceptions and fail to reflect the real experiences and interests of Muslim Americans. As a result, many turn to alternative media sources such as social media influencers, YouTube content, and streaming platforms that provide more authentic and relatable storytelling. Shows like Hulu's *Ramy* and Netflix's *Mo* have gained traction by offering more nuanced, Muslim-led narratives, highlighting the demand for better representation.

For brands and media creators, there is a clear opportunity to engage Muslim American audiences by:

- Collaborating with Muslim creators to ensure authentic storytelling.
- Expanding representation in marketing campaigns, avoiding tokenism and stereotypes.
- Leveraging social media and digital platforms where Muslim Americans actively seek representation.
- Engaging with the community year-round, rather than only during religious holidays like Ramadan.

By addressing these gaps, brands and media companies can build stronger connections with Muslim consumers, who value authenticity, inclusivity, and fair representation in the content they consume.

Consumer Behavior

American Muslim consumers are eager to be recognized—98% feel that brands do not actively acknowledge them. They are also highly loyal, with over 80% preferring to buy from brands that recognize and support Muslims. Despite this, most brands are missing the opportunity to engage with this market.

Given that a large portion of the Muslim American population is under 40 the market is extremely youth-driven. This increases the demand for products and services that cater to the younger generation like educational tools, entertainment, and technology.

Key Considerations for Marketing to Muslim Consumers

The Muslim consumer values honesty, authenticity, and brands that are genuinely committed to improving lives. Despite being a vast and growing market—larger than those in

India or China—Muslim consumers remain underrepresented and often overlooked. To effectively connect with this demographic, brands should consider the following:

- **Respect Sharia Compliance** – Avoid deceptive practices, ensure fair transactions, and honor religious values and practices.
- **Engage Year-Round** – Build relationships with the Muslim community beyond Ramadan, demonstrating consistent commitment.
- **Reflect Diversity** – Represent the diversity within the Muslim American community in marketing campaigns.
- **Emphasize Community** – Focus on initiatives that foster community engagement and meaningful connections.

Conclusion

Muslim Americans are a diverse and growing community with deep historical roots in the United States. Despite facing challenges such as discrimination and underrepresentation, they continue to contribute significantly to American society in fields like politics, science, and business. Beyond their social impact, they are also an important and influential market demographic. With a rapidly increasing purchasing power and a demand for products and services that align with their cultural and religious values, Muslim consumers are shaping industries from fashion and food to entertainment. As their presence and influence expand, Muslim Americans remain an integral part of the nation's evolving social, cultural, and economic fabric.

For a deeper understanding of the diversity and experiences of Muslim Americans, check out this video from the Pew Research Center: [Being Muslim in the U.S.](#) on YouTube.