

REPORT NUMBER 3 FROM THE US MOSQUE STUDY 2011

THE AMERICAN MOSQUE 2011

WOMEN AND THE AMERICAN MOSQUE



MARCH 2013
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Introduction

This is the third report from the US Mosque Survey 2011, a comprehensive study of mosques in America. The first two reports focused on basic demographics and attitudes of mosque leaders, while the second focused on mosque activities and administration. This third report deals with women's participation in the American mosque.

The US Mosque Survey 2011 consisted of (1) a count of all mosques in America and then (2) a telephone interview with a mosque leader (Imam, President or board member) from a large sample of mosques. The mosque count was conducted from February to July 2010 and the mosque leader interviews were conducted from August 2010 to November 2011. A total of 2,106 mosques were counted. From this list, a random sample of 727 mosques was selected. Five hundred twenty-four interviews were then completed, which means that the margin of error for the survey is within the range of +/- 5 percent.

The sponsors of the US Mosque Survey 2011 include a coalition of many organizations: the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (Hartford Seminary), Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), and the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT). The Research Committee for the Survey was:

Ihsan Bagby (Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Kentucky)

David Roozen (Director, Hartford Institute for Religion Research)

Richard Houseal (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies)

Nihad Awad (Executive Director, Council on American-Islamic Relations)

Zahid Bukhari (President, Islamic Circle of North America)

Ingrid Matson (Professor of Islamic Studies, Hartford Seminary)

Iqbal Unus (Director, The Fairfax Institute)

Safaa Zarzour (Secretary General, Islamic Society of North America)

Ihsan Bagby was the Researcher for the Survey.

The US Mosque Survey 2011 is part of a larger study of all American congregations called Faith Communities Today (FACT), which is a project of the Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership, a multi-faith coalition of denominations and faith groups. The FACT series of national surveys includes massive surveys of all religious congregations in 2000 and 2010. The strategy of the FACT surveys is to develop a common questionnaire and then have the member faith groups conduct their own study with their respective congregations. The US Mosque Survey has participated in both studies in 2000 and 2010.

The US Mosque Survey 2011 is actually a duplication—with some modification and improvement—of another mosque survey, the US Mosque Survey 2000 which was conducted with FACT 2000. The US Mosque Survey 2000 can be found at: <http://cdn1-cair.netdna-ssl.com/images/pdf/The-American-mosque-2001.pdf>.

For the purposes of this study, a mosque is defined as a Muslim organization that holds Jum'ah Prayers (Friday Prayers), conducts other Islamic activities, and controls the space in which activities are held. This definition excludes places where only Jum'ah Prayers are held like a hospital, and it excludes organizations that do not control the space that they use, such as a Muslim student organization which

uses a room on their university campus. In the 2000 US Mosque Survey, Muslim Student Associations were included as mosques but in the 2011 Survey these groups were not included if they did not control a building or room off-campus. Some Shi'ite organizations function like a mosque but they do not conduct Jum'ah Prayers because they do not have a Resident Scholar to conduct the services. These Shi'ite organizations were included in the Survey. Organizations that were not included in the Survey include Nation of Islam, Moorish Science Temple, Isma'ili organizations, and the Ahmadiyyah.

A special thanks goes to Riad Ali of the website *Muslim Guide* who was invaluable in the mosque count, Bahauddin Bade of ISNA who handled all the financial matters, Zaheer Uddin, Executive Director of the Center for American Muslim Research and Information, who was an immense help in identifying New York mosque leaders, the numerous CAIR chapters who helped in identifying mosque leaders in their area, the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California who had the vision to provide crucial support for the survey, and the many interviewers who conducted the phone interviews.

Women in Islam, Inc. has been instrumental in producing this report. For copies of this report and more information on Women in Islam, Inc. go to their web site, www.womeninislam.org.

Online copies of Report Number 1 and Report Number 2 are available on the websites of CAIR, ISNA, ICNA and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research: www.cair.com, www.isna.net, www.icna.org and <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/>. Hard copies can be obtained from CAIR and ISNA.

Note: Percentages throughout this report may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Major Findings

- Mosques reported an average of 18% female attendance at Friday prayers. The percentage of female attendance has not changed over the past decade.
- Two thirds (66%) of mosques sampled use dividers to demarcate women's prayer spaces during daily prayers. This percentage has also not changed over the past decade.
- A large majority of the mosques (71%) said they had women's activities or programs; however, a small percent, only 4%, said women's activities or programs were a "top priority."
- About a third of the mosques reported they had women's groups (32%), and 3% said these were a "top priority."
- A large percent of mosques (87%) said that women are "allowed to" serve on the mosque board. This is a significant increase from 2000 when 69% of mosques allowed women to serve on the board.
- Over half of the mosques (59%) had women serving on their board in the past five years. This is an increase from 2000 when half of mosques (50%) had women on the board.
- Most mosques (63%) score "fair" or "poor" on a scale for a women-friendly mosque. Only 14% of mosques score "excellent" for being a women-friendly mosque.
- Shi'ite mosques do much better than Sunni mosques in being women-friendly.
- Mosques that follow a more flexible interpretation of Quran and Sunnah in that they look to the purposes of the Law and to modern circumstances tend to be more women-friendly.
- African American mosques tend to be more women-friendly, in particular the mosques that follow the leadership of Imam W. Deen Mohammed.
- Mosques that are open to involvement in American society through activities such as interfaith and community service tend to be more women-friendly.
- Women's involvement in governance makes a difference in the use of dividers—mosques reporting women's participation at the board level are less likely to use dividers.

Women’s Participation in Prayers, Programs, and Governance at the Mosque

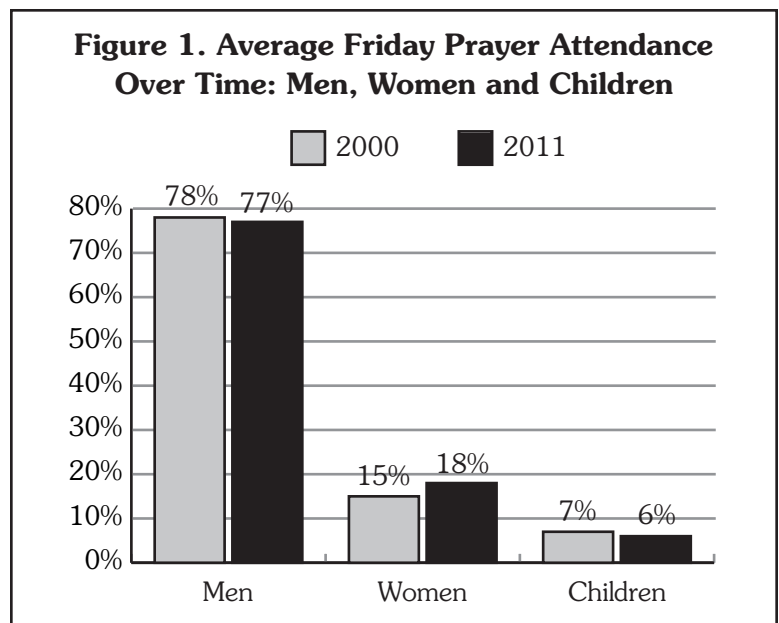
In the United States, many organizational forms have evolved on a parallel track to mosques, including professional, civic, social service, and women’s organizations. All of these spaces, including the mosque afford Muslim women opportunities for public engagement. Therefore, this Report about mosques and women’s involvement is only a portion of the landscape of women’s inclusion in Muslim community institutions. It is important to note also that women’s participation in the mosque is not necessarily inter-related with their involvement in other types of institutions.

This Report focuses on Muslim women’s participation in the mosque using four key indicators of a women-friendly mosque. These indicators were used in the guide “Women Friendly Mosques and Community Centers: Working Together to Reclaim Our Heritage,” published in 2005 by Women In Islam, Inc. and the Islamic Social Services Association. These four indicators are: physical access, as marked by two indicators, mosque attendance at Friday Prayers and the presence of partitions or separate spaces for women; programmatic access, including whether the mosque conducts programs for females; and women’s involvement in governance.

Friday Prayer Attendance

As noted in Report Number 2, “Activities, Administration and Vitality of the American Mosque,” men make up the majority of participants at Friday prayers: 77% of all attendees are men. The number of women who attend Friday Prayer on average is only slightly higher in 2011 (18%) compared to 2000 (15%). Children made up on average 7% of the Friday congregation in 2000 and 6% in 2011.

The low rate of Friday attendance by women raises the question as to why there are so few women joining the weekly congregational prayer. In accounting for this difference by gender, it is critical to acknowledge that attempts to keep Muslim women out of the mosque date back to the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In fact, attempts to exclude women from worship spaces prompted the Prophet to specifically issue a command to his followers that they should not bar women from going to the mosque. However, he did not make it compulsory for women to attend Friday congregational prayer in the same way as he required it of men. In the centuries after the Prophet (peace be upon him), women were effectively excluded from the mosque, and up to today



few women attend mosques in the Muslim world. Thus, the historical and contemporary absence of women from the mosque can be explained both in terms of a tradition of exclusionary practice, combined with women’s decisions to pray at home or elsewhere because of practical limitations on their time, awareness that they are not required to attend on Friday or a feeling of being unwelcome in the mosque.

Yet, contemporary realities marked by the greater visibility of women in the public square across all national and cultural contexts indicate the need for greater inclusion of women in worship spaces. A continued exclusion of women from the mosque when contrasted to their rapid inclusion in other institutional forms not only damages the social and spiritual fabric of Muslim communities but also reinforces a perception that mosque spaces are not keeping pace with cultural and institutional shifts. Yet changing existing structures and interpretations is challenging, particularly when these structures are traditional, because they are more resistant to change. Because of the institutional traditionalism, many women leaders have occasionally preferred to start off with new organizational structures as an avenue to public engagement, rather than integrating themselves into existing organizational forms and seeking change from within.

Female Attendance by Mosque Characteristics

Ethnicity. The highest average of female attendees at Friday Prayers occurs in African American mosques: 23% of attendees at African American mosques on Friday are women. This compares with 16% female attendees in immigrant mosques.

Religious Interpretation. The most common approach of mosque leaders in understanding Islam (56% of the sample) is to follow textual interpretations that are flexible in that they take into account the purposes of the texts and its application to modern circumstances. The next most commonly found approach among 31% of the sample is to refer to the Quran and Sunnah and look to the great scholars of the past, which indicates a greater comfort in looking to the past, and consequently a slightly more conservative approach. About 11% of leaders said they follow one of the traditional schools of jurisprudence, called a madhhab, which indicates that these mosques are more traditional in their approach. Only 1% of mosques follow the salafi approach, which is akin to Wahhabi thought and is associated with the attempt to follow strictly the ways of the first three generations of Islam. For the

purpose of this Report, Shi’ite mosques were extracted from these categories and placed in its own category. Shi’ite mosques constitute 7% of all mosques in America.

In terms of attendance, mosques that follow the flexible interpretation of looking to purposes and those mosques that are Shi’ite have the largest percentage of women that attend Friday Prayer: for both of them 19% of their Friday congregation is female. Mosques that follow the great scholars of the past have about 16% female attendance, and mosques that follow a madhhab have 14% female attendance. Salafi mosques have the lowest percentage at 11% female attendance.

Table 1. Female Attendance and Religious Interpretation

	<i>Percent Female Attendance at Friday Prayer</i>
Look to purposes	19%
Shi’ite	19%
Look to great scholars	17%
Follow madhhab	14%
Salafi approach	11%

Openness to Involvement. Mosques that are involved in outreach such as interfaith and open houses, and mosques that are engaged in community service or social service activities have a higher percentage of female attendance. For example, mosques that participate in community service projects, conduct voter registration, organize open houses and engage in interfaith activities average about 20% female attendance, compared to 16% for mosques that do not have these activities.

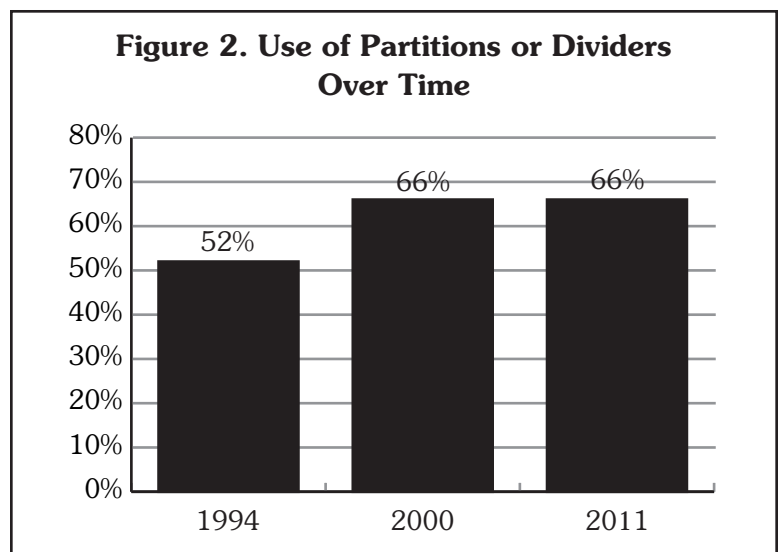
Location, Income, Size, Mosque Structure. Mosques that were built as mosques (purpose-built) have a higher percentage of female attendance than other mosques: 20% of their attendance is female as compared to 18% for purchased structures and 16% for rentals. Mosques in newer suburbs also have a slightly higher percentage of attendance than other areas—most mosques (59%) in newer suburbs are purpose-built mosques. There is no association of a higher percentage of female attendance with the size of the congregation or the income of the mosque.

Inclusiveness of Women. As might be expected mosques that allow women to pray in the main prayer area and mosques that have women on their board have a higher number of women attending Friday Prayer. Mosques with no partition between the men and women’s area average 22% female attendance as compared to 16% for mosques with a partition. Mosques with women on the mosque board average 20% female attendance. Mosques that do not allow women on the board average 13% female attendance, and mosques that allow women on the board but do not have any women serving on the board average 16%.

Mosques with women on the mosque board average 20% female attendance. Mosques that do not allow women on the board average 13% female attendance.

Use of a Curtain or Divider

The 2011 U.S. Mosque Study asked mosque leaders, “For the daily prayer, do women make prayer behind a curtain or partition or in another room?” If a mosque allows women to pray in the same prayer area with men but also has a separate area for women, the mosque was included among mosques that do not use a divider. During the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), women prayed in the same area as men, in rows behind the male assembly. Yet, many mosques in the United States continue to physically separate women from the main prayer area by using architectural or physical barriers such as dividers or a separate room for women. Between 1994 and 2000, the percentage of mosques that used curtains or dividers to distinguish women’s spaces increased from 52% to 66%. In 2011, there was no change in that figure, with about two thirds, or 66% of mosques reporting the use of a divider. It is not clear whether this figure, which is for daily prayer,



actually increases for Friday Prayers, since some mosques accommodate women for daily prayer but exclude women from the main prayer area for Friday Prayer due to the increased male attendance. The lack of space on Fridays also becomes an argument used to deter women from attending the mosque.

The relatively frequent use of dividers, when combined with the relatively low percent of women at Friday Prayers suggests that women are not making use of the mosque, even when there are accommodations—with or without a divider. Women may not feel at home in the mosque space, and are likely to feel more comfortable praying at home.

Use of Partition or Divider by Mosque Characteristics

Ethnicity. The pattern of using curtains or partitions seems to vary by ethnicity, with African American mosques reporting less use (39%) and South Asians reporting the highest use (80%). About 70% of Arab mosques, mixed South Asian and Arab mosques, and other mosques have curtains. Comparing mosques within the African American category, there is a striking difference between those who follow the leadership of the late W. Deen Mohammed who are least likely to use dividers (only 10%) compared to other African American mosques (68%).

Mosques—whose Imam is American-born—are much less likely to use a divider: 38% of mosques with an American-born Imam use a divider as compared to 78% of mosques with an Imam born outside America. Even among non-African American Imams who are American-born, (i.e. second generation immigrant, white or Hispanic American) their mosques are also less likely to use a divider: 57% of their mosques use a divider as compared to 78% of mosques with an Imam born outside America.

Religious Interpretation. Comparing the use of partitions across the religious interpretations, one finds that Shi'ite mosques are the least likely to use a divider (40%) followed by those who follow a more flexible approach (54%). Mosques that follow the other approaches are more likely to use dividers: 82% of those who follow scholars of the past, 89% of those who adhere to one of the traditional schools of jurisprudence (madhhab), and 100% of those who follow a salafi interpretation.

Openness to Involvement. Leaders' attitudes and mosques' openness to involvement in American society is associated with less use of a divider. Mosques that have been involved in interfaith activities or have organized an open house in the past year report significantly lower use of partitions than mosques that have not been involved in these activities (63% versus 76% for interfaith involvement; 60% versus 75% for organizing an open house). In a similar

fashion, those mosques that are involved in community service activities and voter registration are less likely to use a divider.

Location, Income, Size, Mosque Structure. Curtain and partition-use varies by mosque location only for mosques located in newer suburbs: 54% of mosques located in newer suburbs use a divider. All other locations are more likely to use dividers: 63% of central city mosques and residential-area mosques use

Table 2. Religious Interpretation and Use of Dividers

	<i>Percent of Mosques that use a Divider</i>
Look to purposes	54%
Shi'ite	41%
Look to great scholars	83%
Follow madhhab	89%
Salafi approach	100%

barriers, 69% of mosques located in towns, and 72% of mosques in older suburbs.

Mosque income, financial health and mosque structure do not significantly impact the presence of partitions. Wealthier, financially stable, larger, and purpose-built mosques are just as likely as other mosques to use partitions to create an isolated space for women.

Inclusiveness of Women. Mosques that have women on their board are much less likely to use dividers in the main prayer space (52% versus 83% of those mosques that do not have women on their board). There is no difference for use of a divider between mosques that allow women on the board but do not have any women on the board (82% have dividers) and those mosques who do not even allow women on the board (85% have dividers).

Women’s Programs & Women’s Groups

Programmatic access seems relatively high at the mosques sampled. A large percentage of mosques stated they conduct women’s programs (71%), even though a small proportion said these were a top priority. About 29% said they had no women’s programs at all. Types of women’s programs include women study circles and other gatherings such as teas, cooking classes, book clubs, etc.

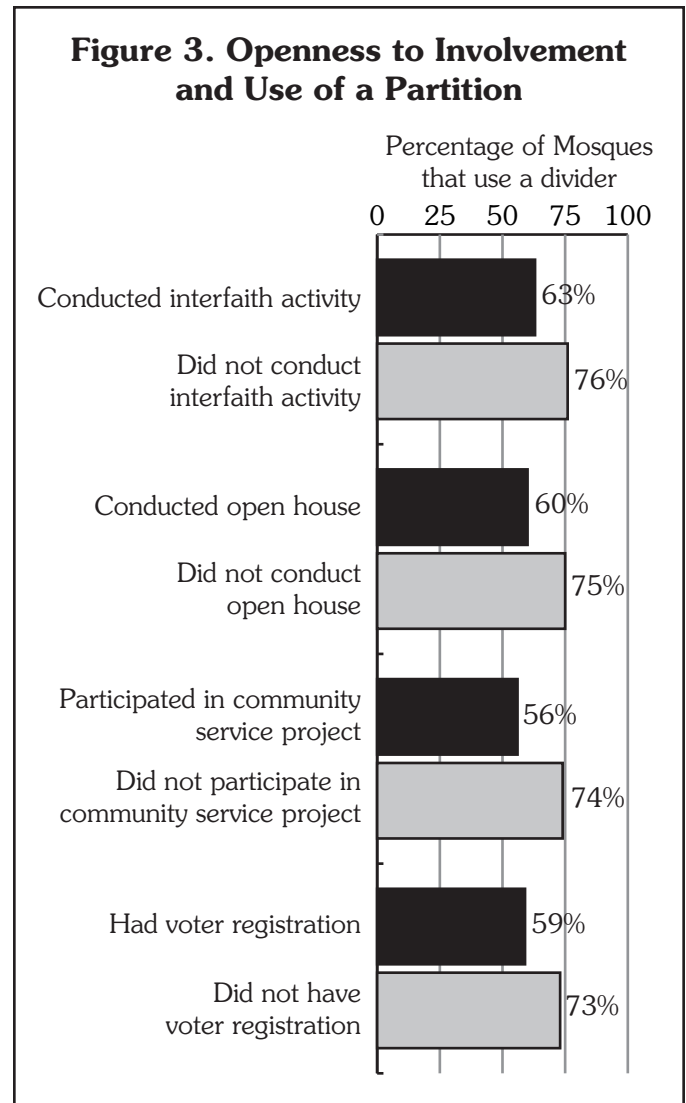
Nearly a third of the sampled mosques had women’s groups (32%), but only 3% said these were a top priority.

It is important to note that mosques currently are not the main congregation area for women. While this particular survey did not address women’s activities outside the mosque, women’s groups can and do meet outside of the mosque, often in each other’s homes or organizational meeting spaces.

Programmatic Access by Mosque Characteristics

Ethnicity. Ethnicity is not associated with increased women’s programs or groups. Part of reason is that women in many African American mosques do not form their own group because of small numbers and because they are well integrated in all mosque activities.

Religious Interpretation. Religious interpretation is also not a statistically significant factor in increased women’s programs and groups. Although the differences are not statistically significant, the responses show a different pattern in that mosques that follow great scholars of the past and mosques that follow a madhhab do slightly better than mosques that look to the purposes and modern circumstances and Shi’ite mosques. Women’s programs and groups are most often reported in



mosques that follow scholars of the past (77% have women's programs and 36% of them have women's groups). Mosques that follow a madhhab are close behind in activities (74% have women's programs) but much further behind in having women's groups (only 23% have a women's group). Masjids that prefer interpretations which look to the purposes of the text have even fewer women's programs than madhhab mosques (71%) but have more women's groups than madhhab mosques (32%). Salafi mosques have the least amount of women's programs and groups (29% have women's programs and none have a women's group). Fewer Shi'ite mosques have women's programs (only 59% have women's programs) but they have a similar percentage of women's groups (32% have women's groups).

Location, Income, Size, Mosque Structure. All of these factors are the most important variables in terms of women's programs and groups. The larger and wealthier mosques are more likely to have more women's programs and groups. For example, 96% of mosques with Friday Prayer attendance above 500 have women's programs and 62% of these mosques have women's groups. A critical mass of women seems to be the most significant factor in having women's programs and groups. Purpose-built mosques also have a significantly higher percentage of women's programs and groups: 83% of purpose-built mosques have women's programs and 49% of them have women's groups. Mosques in newer suburbs also have a higher percentage of women's programs and groups than mosques located in other areas: 91% of them have women's programs and 45% of them have women's groups.

Table 3. Friday Prayer Attendance and Women's Programs and Activities

<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Percentage of Mosques that have Women's Programs</i>	<i>Percentage of Mosques that have Women's Groups</i>
1 - 50	.50%	.11%
51 - 100	.60%	.20%
101 - 200	.76%	.29%
201 - 500	.81%	.43%
501 +	.96%	.62%

Openness to Involvement. Mosques that are more open to involvement in American society are more likely to have women's programs and groups. For example, mosques that have been involved in interfaith activities are more likely to report women's programs (76% compared to only 49% of those who did not do interfaith activities) as well as women's groups (35% compared to 20% of those who did not do interfaith). This correlation may be related to the effort of the Muslim community to challenge the public image of Muslim women as oppressed. After 9/11, there was a greater sense within the community that Muslim institutions should do interfaith outreach. Undoubtedly, it has been helpful to the community to have women involved in such activities in order to correct misperceptions about gender roles. In addition, women are rising as leaders within the community and serving as effective spokeswomen for the community. Thus, the tragedy of 9/11 has opened an opportunity for women to become more involved in the public square

as Muslim women leaders. An entire generation of youth has grown up seeing women in leadership roles over the last ten years, which will have a transformational effect upon the community in the long run.

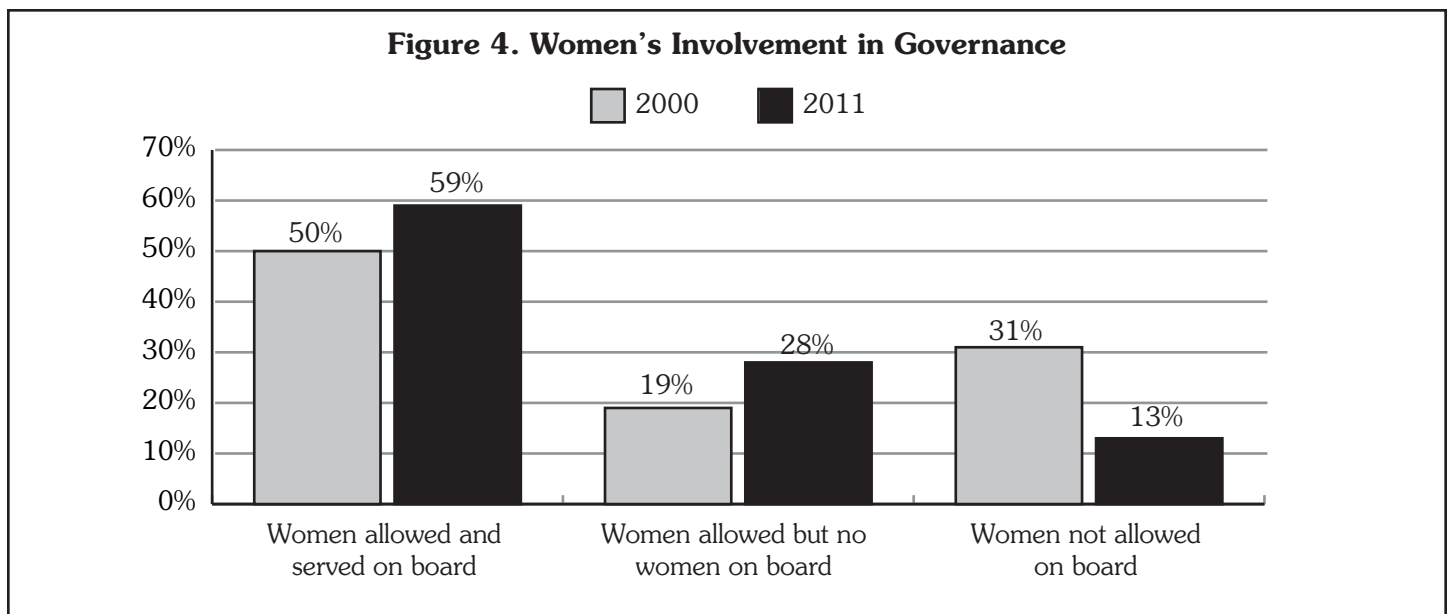
Inclusiveness of Women. Whether a mosque has women on their board or whether the mosque has a barrier separating women is not associated with the presence of women’s programs and groups in a mosque.

It is important to note that mosques are not the only structures through which women can get involved—there are national organizations, national conventions, as well as professional organizations, and within these venues, there are varying degrees of including women. It is not uncommon to hear Muslim women asking the question, “Why aren’t there more women speakers in this national conference?” There are also venues that will acknowledge women’s roles as religious scholars, but will not feature these prominent women scholars as speakers. Women scholars often do not seek these venues because they do not want to become “public figures.”

Women’s Participation in Governance

The majority of mosques (87%) said that women are “allowed” to serve on their boards. Ideological support for women’s inclusion in governance seems to have grown in the last two decades, with 69% of mosques reporting they allowed women to serve in 2000 and 67% in 1994. The percentage of mosques that do not allow women to serve on the board decreased dramatically from 31% in 2000 to 13% in 2011.

We note that there was also an increase between 2000 and 2011 in the proportion of mosques that actually have women serving on the mosque board (50% in 2000 compared to 59% in 2011). However, the number of mosques that allow women but haven’t had women in these roles increased over time (19% in 2000 versus 28% in 2011). Thus, it appears that while mosques have sought to change



their policies, it has been difficult to actualize the participation of women in governance. While the survey did not measure why such a gap exists, it is possible to speculate that women may not actively take these roles because of their other responsibilities, because they do not prioritize their own involvement in the mosque, or because they do not want the challenges of taking on the struggle of being in male-dominated governance structures. Women themselves need additional education about why their involvement in governance is crucial for the community. They also need the support and endorsement of male and female community members and leaders.

Women’s Involvement in Governance by Mosque Characteristics

Ethnicity. Comparisons by ethnicity show that African American mosques are more likely to actually have women serve on their mosque boards during the past 5 years (75%), and Arabs least likely (44%). About half of the mosques with South Asian, mixed South Asian and Arab, or other ethnicities have had women in governance roles in the past 5 years. These differences across ethnicities could arise due to cultural expectations and norms that disfavor women in leadership roles in immigrant cultures compared to African American culture. There are also differences within the African American community, with the W. Deen Mohammed mosques more likely to allow women’s board participation (98%) compared to other African American mosques (78%). W. Deen Mohammed mosques also had higher rates of women’s actual involvement in governance in the past 5 years (91%) compared to other African American mosques (57%).

Religious Interpretation. Comparing subgroups within the sample, mosques relying on interpretations that look to purposes and modern circumstances represented the highest proportion of mosques that “allow” women on the board (92%), and that have women serving in the past five years (67%). A vast majority of mosques that follow the great scholars of the past allow women to serve on the board (81%) but only half (49%) actually have women who serve on their boards. Mosques that follow one of the traditional schools of jurisprudence (excluding Shi’ite mosques) were less likely to “permit” women in governance roles (71%) and only 32% of these mosques had women on the mosque’s board. Five out of six Salafi mosques did not allow women on their boards, and none had women serving in the past five years. All Shiite mosques (100%) said that women were allowed to serve, and 79% of Shi’ite mosques have women serving on their board—the highest percentage of all categories.

Table 4. Women’s Involvement in Governance and Religious Interpretation

	<i>Look to Purposes</i>	<i>Shi’ite</i>	<i>Look to Great Scholars</i>	<i>Follow Madhhab</i>	<i>Salafi Approach</i>
Women allowed and served . . . . .	.67%	.79%	.49%	.32%	.0%
Women allowed but not served . . . . .	.25%	.21%	.32%	.39%	.17%
Women not allowed on board . . . . .	.9%	.0%	.19%	.29%	.83%

Location, Income, Size, Mosque Structure. A mosque’s income, size and structure are not factors in whether the mosque allows women to serve on the mosque’s board or whether women actually serve. In terms of location, mosques in newer suburbs have a significantly higher percentage of mosques that have women serving on their boards (77% of mosques in new suburbs vs. 58% in all other locations).

Openness to Involvement. Mosques that score high in openness to involvement in American society also score high in involving women in governance. For example, mosques that participated in interfaith activities were also more likely to report women being allowed to serve on their boards (90% vs. 71% of those without interfaith activities). In addition, mosques involved in interfaith activities are almost twice as likely to have had women on their boards in the past 5 years (63% vs. 33% of those not involved in interfaith activities).

Inclusiveness of Women. As might be expected, mosques that have a higher percentage of female attendance at Friday Prayer, no barrier dividing a women’s section, and have women’s programs and groups are more likely to allow and have women serving on their mosque’s board. For example, 80% of mosques that do not have a barrier have women on their board.

Conclusions—The Women-Friendly Mosque

To better analyze the situation of women and the American mosque, we created an index or scale of a women-friendly mosque. Using the four indicators of a women-friendly mosque, each mosque was scored based on whether it had female attendance on Friday above the average of 18%, did not have a barrier separating women from the main prayer area, had women’s programs and/or women’s group, and had women serving on the mosque board. A mosque was scored as “excellent” if it had all four indicators, “good” if it had 3, “fair” if it had 1-2, and “poor” if it had no indicator.

Using this measure, only 14% of all mosques scored “excellent” by having all four indicators. Most mosques (53%) were categorized as “fair” (they had only 1 or 2 of the indicators). The American mosque overall faces a great challenge in becoming more women-friendly.

Several factors make a positive difference for women’s inclusion in terms of attendance, dividers, programs, and governance. Shi’ite mosques and those mosques that preferred the flexible interpretation of looking to the purposes of Quran and Sunnah and to modern circumstances had the highest percentage of mosques that scored “excellent” in the index: 27% of Shi’ite mosques scored “excellent” and 18% of mosques that follow a flexible interpretation scored “excellent.” Shi’ite mosques and mosques that follow a flexible interpretation seem more willing to look to portions of the Quran and Sunnah that

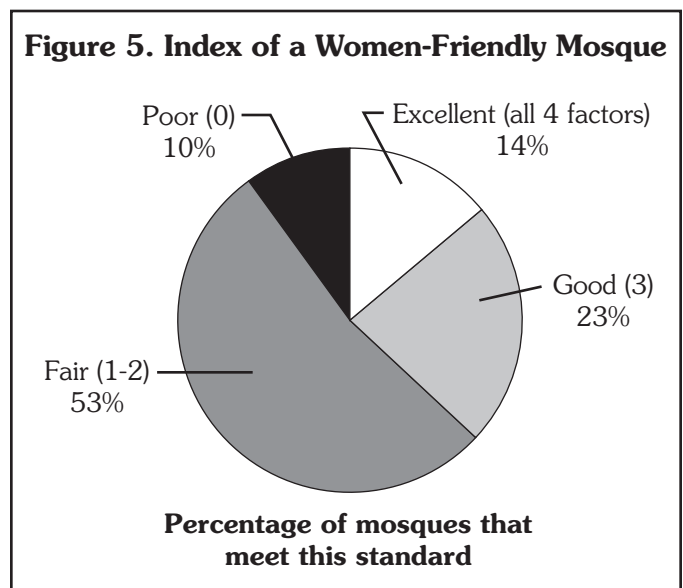


Table 5. Index of a Women-Friendly Mosque and Religious Interpretation

	<i>Look to Purposes</i>	<i>Shi'ite</i>	<i>Look to Great Scholars</i>	<i>Follow Madhhab</i>	<i>Salafi Approach</i>
Excellent (all 4) . . . . .	.18%	.27%	.8%	.6%	.0%
Good (3) . . . . .	.29%	.21%	.20%	.6%	.0%
Fair (1-2) . . . . .	.47%	.41%	.60%	.78%	.43%
Poor (0) . . . . .	.6%	.12%	.12%	.11%	.57%

point to the inclusion of women in Muslim life. Taking a glass half-empty approach, although Shi'ite mosques and mosques that follow a flexible interpretation do better, the reality is that more than half of their mosques (53% for both) score “fair” or “poor.”

There are some interesting differences by ethnicity, with African American communities overall scoring higher in being women-friendly, but the African American communities following W. Deen Mohammed are more inclusive than other African American communities—a remarkable 71% of W. Deen Mohammed mosques score either “excellent” or “good.”

Size and income of a mosque are not associated with being women-friendly. However, purpose-built mosques and mosques that are in newer suburbs tend to do slightly better in being women-friendly than other mosques. Among purpose-built mosques 20% of them score “excellent” as opposed to 11% of other types; 26% of mosques in newer suburbs score “excellent” as opposed to 10% of mosques in other locations.

Openness to involvement in American society is strongly associated with women’s inclusion with respect to all four indicators. About 23% of all mosques that are involved in community service projects or have conducted a voter registration drive score “excellent” in being women-friendly as opposed to 7% of mosques that do not have these programs; about 17% of mosques that have been involved in interfaith activities score “excellent” as opposed to 5% of mosques that are not involved.

It is not clear whether being more women-friendly leads to or is an outcome of openness to involvement in American society. It is possible that the relationship is reciprocal, and that openness to involvement might serve as an entryway to affect and augment the presence and inclusion of women in the function of the mosque overall.

Table 6. African American Mosques, Immigrant Mosques and Women-Friendly Mosque Scale

	<i>W. Deen Mohammed</i>	<i>non-WDM</i>	<i>Immigrant</i>
Excellent (all 4) . . . . .	.42%	.14%	.9%
Good (3) . . . . .	.39%	.19%	.22%
Fair (1-2) . . . . .	.18%	.63%	.57%
Poor (0) . . . . .	.2%	.4%	.12%

Recommendations

As the data of this Report shows, while there have been some positive developments in terms of Muslim women's inclusion in the mosque over the past decade, there is also a great deal of room for improvement. Whether considering women's physical access, program involvement and participation in governance, women continue to be marginalized and the inclusion of women remains a significant challenge that must be overcome by the American Muslim community. The very spiritual health of the Muslim community, including the connectivity of younger generations to the mosque institution is at stake.

Mosques can and must attend to the following recommendations:

- *Increase the attendance of women in Friday Prayers.*

The average of 18% female attendance at Friday Prayers is far too low. With modest accommodation to women's needs and a push among women themselves to attend Friday Prayers, it seems entirely reasonable that female attendance can reach 33% over the next decade.

- *Offer space in the main prayer area for women to pray without a curtain.*

Only one-third of mosques now offer space for women in the mosque without a barrier. This figure is far too low. It is noteworthy that the use of dividers and curtains is not supported by the practice and recommendation of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)—dividers should not be the norm for the American Muslim community. Mosques should emulate the Sunnah and create an inclusive worship space that welcomes women into the main prayer area, in rows behind their male counterparts. A simple solution is to provide space for women who want to pray in the main prayer area and a separate space for women who want to pray behind a barrier.

- *Include women on the mosque's board.*

The vast majority of mosques accept the permissibility of having women on the mosque's board, but too many mosques do not follow through and actually have women on the board. It's an issue of will. Mosques need to take seriously the necessity of having the women's voices heard in their boards.

- *Support women's inclusion in word and deed.*

Leadership should send a strong and public message that it supports the participation of women at all levels of the mosque—prayers, programs and governance. This message should be delivered regularly to the local community via Friday sermons, programs, newsletters, and the website. Women must feel welcome at their mosque in word and deed. Supporting women's inclusion in action as well as words means creating dignified space in the mosque for women to pray during Friday prayers as a first step. In addition, prioritizing women's programs as well as their board participation is critical. The underlying belief that women's presence in the mosque is a potential source of disorderliness should be replaced by a principle that the very dignity of the American mosque depends upon the presence of women.

- *The Fiqh Council of North America and other Muslim scholars need to be more forthright and visible in arguing for the inclusion of women in American mosques.*

Too many Muslims are still in doubt about the Islamic position concerning the inclusion of women in mosques. Others who are in favor of including women do not have the arguments and support to resist those who push the mosque to exclude women. Authoritative fatwas would give supporters of women the ammunition to struggle for the rights of women.

- *Mosque leaders and governance structures should develop strategic action plans that prioritize women's inclusion among other items. Without a deliberate intention and follow-through on the part of mosque leaders, women's inclusion will remain at the status quo and continue to plague the community.*

Recognizing that change is gradual, the responsible strategic plan will also develop short-term and long-term goals in achieving women's inclusion. In addition, incorporating women into the strategic planning should be an obvious method of practicing women's inclusion.

- *Additional research should be conducted to determine how Muslim women themselves approach mosque participation, their experiences and their perceptions. In addition, research should attend to women's programs and leadership in mosques as well as other community institutions.*



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