Study of Intra-Muslim Ethnic Relations

Muslim American Views on Race Relations

MuslimARC launched the first nationwide study of Muslim American views on race relations on December 8, 2014. The survey aimed to reach mosqued and unmosqued Muslims by utilizing the power and membership of social media, national Muslim organizations, student groups, social networks and personal contacts. MuslimARC reached out to many diverse Muslim groups to determine perspectives on race relations, segregation of Muslim populations, and personal experiences with race within Muslim communities and in North American societies at large.

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Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC)
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Abstract

In late 2013, a group of activists and scholars came together with the singular aim of raising awareness about anti-blackness and racism within Muslim communities through social media. By February 2014, the group coalesced to create the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC), an educational organization with three aims:

1) Education and training;
2) Outreach and awareness; and
3) Advocacy.

Nearly one year later, MuslimARC has organized over 15 panels and collected thousands of resources on race, ethnicity, and religious identity.

MuslimARC launched the first nationwide study of Muslim American views on race relations on December 8, 2014. The survey aimed to reach "mosqued" and "unmosqued" Muslims by utilizing the power and membership of social media, national Muslim organizations, student groups, social networks and personal contacts. MuslimARC reached out to many diverse Muslim groups to determine perspectives on race relations, segregation of Muslim populations, and personal experiences with race within Muslim communities and in North American societies at large.

The data was self-reported views and attitudes about the state of race relations within Muslim communities, utilizing the Likert scale to gather quantitative data, as well as open ended questions for qualitative analysis. The open ended questions were analyzed and coded to look for themes, patterns, and tropes.

The findings of this survey were put into context of current scholarship on Critical Muslim Studies, Islamophobia, and African American Islam. The research team offered some suggestions for educators and counselors to take into account given the multiple racial stressors upon Muslim students, including the feelings of alienation that Black American Muslim college students face on campuses across the country. The findings of this study highlight the need for greater research, well-developed materials and customized content for diverse demographics, and advocacy within communities to ensure that anti-racism teachings are sought out and implemented. Without deliberate action taken on these issues, Muslims of all ages will continue to face discrimination, and a result, our communities will continue to fragment.
Introduction

Racism is a chronic and/or an acute stressor that causes trauma (Carter, 2007). Despite its caustic effects on individuals and within social institutions, to date, there are no widespread studies of the impact of intra-Muslim racism outside of MuslimARC’s preliminary study of race relations. Whether growing up as Muslim or converting to the religion as adults, many Muslims have faced some form of discrimination, including but not limited to micro-aggressions, blatant racism, racial slurs, and even loss of employment and eviction at the hands of their co-religionists. Overwhelming anecdotal evidence has pointed to widespread feelings of alienation and emotional pain due to experiences of racial discrimination based on ethnic identity within Muslim communities in North America. Children have reported that they are often witnesses to their parents’ prejudice. For example, one Syrian American girl told her African American teacher that she was the prettiest girl in the class because she was white. In another example, Palestinian American parents told their child that they should be ashamed that an ‘abed’ (slave) excels over them in Qur’an and Arabic.

In late 2013, a group of activists and scholars came together to form a group with the singular aim of raising awareness about anti-blackness and racism within Muslim communities through social media. By February 2014, the group coalesced to form Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC), an educational organization with three aims:

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One year later, MuslimARC has organized over 15 panels and collected thousands of resources on race, ethnicity, and religious identity.

![Figure 1. Trendmap of #BeingBlackAndMuslim](image-url)
On social media, MuslimARC has created and led trending hashtag conversation topics including #BeingBlackAndMuslim, a conversation comprised of over 7000 tweets that highlight positive and negative experiences of identifying as Muslim and Black, African, and/or African-American (see Figure 1). A significant portion of the participants in the conversation pointed to a problem of pervasive experience of anti-Blackness (see Figure 2 and 3).

Other hashtag conversations through the year have encouraged participants to discuss colorism and the exclusion and erasure of Muslims including white American Muslims, East Asian Muslims, South Asian, and Latino Muslims.

In order to determine whether there was a real need for long term programming and gather viewpoints, MuslimARC developed a short needs assessments survey. The primary question was:

**What are the perceptions of inter-ethnic relations in North American Muslim communities?**
Racial/Ethnic Discrimination in a Diverse Faith Community

There is a common myth that Islam is “color-blind” and doesn’t make any distinctions based on classifications or culture. In reality, Islam encourages us to reflect on our diversity. In the Muslim Holy Book, the Qur’an, Allah (God) explains the value of pluralism in the following verse:

> And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.
> (Sahih International 30:22)

In another important verse, Allah (SWT) states:

> O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.
> (Sahih International 49:13)

Despite this message, over the past 1400 years since the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (peace be upon him), in almost every Muslim-majority society, communities have created hierarchies attaching value judgments based on lineage, race, or the lightness or darkness of a person’s skin. These hierarchies pre-dated Islam and shaped how the people who lived during the time of the Prophet ﷺ interacted with each other in 7th century Arabia.

There are many hadith and stories from the Prophet’s ﷺ life that address racism. The Prophet ﷺ confirmed the equality of humanity during his final sermon:

> “All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor a black has any superiority over a white - except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood.”

In another narration, he ﷺ said:

> “Adam is one. There is no favoritism of an Arab over a foreigner, nor a foreigner over an Arab, and neither red skin over black skin, nor black skin over red skin, except through righteousness. Have I not conveyed the message?”
> (Ahmad 22978)
In another hadith, affirming our equality, the Prophet ﷺ said

“People are as equal as the teeth of a comb, they are differentiated only by piety.”
(Ibn Hajar, Fath al Bari).

For over 1400 years, Islam’s egalitarian message was a powerful rallying point for many Muslim communities. Globally, Arabs make up only 18 percent of the Muslim population, with the largest Muslim societies found in Southeast Asia (Indonesia and Malaysia). In addition, the African continent is host to significant Muslim majority societies. Despite this egalitarian message of the religion, however, Muslim societies have been plagued by ethnic conflict.

Modern day examples include the oppression of ethnic minorities, such as slavery in Mauritania (Sutter, 2014) and persecution of Hazara in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Minority Rights Group International, 2008), to military conflict such as the War in Darfur (Sikainga, 2005) and the Iraqi Kurdish conflict (Middle East Watch, 1993), to ethnic cleansing and genocide, such as the 1971 Bangladeshi genocide (Times of India, 2008).

It is important to note the intersections between ethnic identity, sectarian identity, and political factions which play into the conflicts. Muslims in North America are a microcosm of the global Muslim community, which is multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural. Racial
attitudes amongst Muslim Americans develop in complex ways. For many Muslims, the root cause of these problems is tribalism (*asabiyya*). Thus, *asabiyya* for many Muslims plays out in less extreme ways, as Masooma Beatty gives examples in “Islam on Prejudice” (2010):

1. In the context of marriage selection, selecting a spouse for one’s self or one’s child based on ethnic origin or skin color instead of the person’s piety
2. Excluding people from social circles on the basis of ethnicity or culture
3. Judging someone based on their regional or foreign accent (i.e. thinking they are not intelligent, etc.)
4. Feeling unease or anger at seeing a mixed-race/mixed-ethnicity couple
5. Feeling nervous at interacting with others from a different race or culture
6. Believing that people from certain ethnicities or races are inferior and that stereotypes about them are true

Although the tensions between ethnic groups in the United States rarely erupt in violence, they do, however, cause fragmentation when members of a community break off and start a new community. In response, others who lack the numbers to start their own community may simply become alienated from religious and community life.

For example, racism has been cited as common reasons why students become disillusioned with Muslim Students Associations (MSAs) on campus. They explain that the Arab students only hang out with the Arab students, the Desi (people who identify with a South Asian culture such as Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, etc.) students with the Desi students, and the African Americans with the African Americans. Muslims of all ages also point out that their masajid (mosques) and community centers are similarly fragmented along ethnic lines.

Anti-racism work and cultural sensitivity training are relatively new to the Muslim community. Many Muslims committed to anti-racism work draw upon the Qur’anic injunction of enjoining the good and forbidding wrong.

There are many methods that we can take to confront racism and stop our Muslim community centers, Islamic schools, camps, and outreach programs from becoming toxic, ethnically and racially polarized spaces. In order to do this work effectively, MuslimARC wanted to get a better sense of perceptions of race amongst North American Muslims and to add to the growing literature on Critical Muslim Studies.
Muslim Institutions and Community Building in the U.S.

Muslim communities in North America are in a unique position to build bridges and address racial injustice due to the intersections of our multi-ethnic community. And due to its diversity, creating a simplified narrative of the racial formation of North American Muslim communities poses special challenges. According to some estimates, there are about 2.6 million Muslims in the United States, while others say there are about 5 million (The American Mosque 2011). Conservative estimates say that Muslims in America make up 0.5 percent of the total population. Canada's 2011 National Household Survey estimates that there were about 1 million Muslims in Canada, about 3.2 percent of the population.

Muslim American demographics indicate that 30 percent of Muslim Americans report their race as white, 23 percent as Black, 21 percent as Asian, 0.6 percent as Hispanic and 19 percent as other or mixed race (Pew Research Center, 2011). The Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reports that the ethnicities of mosque participants can be broken down to 33 percent South Asian, 30 percent Black American, 25 percent Arab, 3.4 percent sub-Saharan African, 2.1 percent European (i.e. Bosnian), 1.6 percent white American, 1.3 percent South-East Asian, 1.2 percent Caribbean, 1.1 percent Turkish, 0.7 percent Iranian, and 0.6 percent Latino/Hispanic. Other reports indicate the number of Black Americans may be even larger. Regardless of the numbers, there is no clear ethnic majority in American Islam.

Figure 5. CAIR reports that the ethnicities of mosque participants are as follows:

- South Asian, 33%
- Black American, 30%
- Arab, 25%
- Sub-Saharan African, 3.4%
- European (i.e. Bosnian), 2.1%
- White American, 1.6%
- South-East Asian, 1.3%
- Caribbean, 1.2%
- Turkish, 1.1%
- Iranian, .7%
- Latino/Hispanic, 0.6%
The largest ethnic division in North American communities is between predominantly Black/African American Muslims—some who are the descendants of slaves—and immigrants from Arab and South Asian countries who arrived largely after 1965, and their descendants (Daulatzai, 2012). Scholars characterized this division as the “Black/immigrant divide” or the “indigenous/ immigrant” divide (Elliot, 2007; Muhammad, 2011; Marable & Aidi, 2009).

Black American Muslim foundations predate the formation of the United States and are linked to the historic memory of African Muslim ancestors who were enslaved in the Americas. However, due to the brutal nature of slavery, these African Muslims were not able to develop long lasting communities (Daulatzai, 2012). In the early 20th century, proto-Islamic movements developed from Noble Drew Ali and Fard Muhammad (Nation of Islam). They adopted Islamic symbols and rituals to create syncretistic religions that subverted White Supremacy. The Ahmadiyya movement also established dawah programs in the early 1930s to reach African Americans. There are also Sunni communities dating back to the 1960s, such as Dar al-Islam movement, with some communities’ roots dating back to the 1930s.

In the early 20th century, very few Muslims from the Mediterranean region, modern day Turkey, and South Asia had established Muslim community centers. Syrian immigrants built the tiny Ross Mosque in 1929. Through the 1900s, immigration policy reflected business interests, and racist immigrant policies prevented large scale immigration from Muslim majority societies. In the 1920s, there was a “sustained influx” of Middle Eastern immigrants from the Levant (Syria/Lebanon).

Following the hard work of the Civil Rights Movement, the Immigration Act of 1965 allowed for large scale immigration from Muslim-majority societies. By the late 1960s, immigration from the Middle East rose to 14,000-15,000 individuals per year, with immigrants coming from Egypt, Jordan/Palestine, and Iraq, in addition to Lebanon and Syria. In the 1980s, policy reflected increased immigration from Asia and the Western hemisphere. The Refugee Act of 1980 came in response to the huge influx of refugees from Southeast Asia, a move that standardized refugee definitions and created the first right of asylum (Samhan, 1999).

In housing, immigrant Muslim communities reflect the trend and patterns of earlier ethnic communities, including Italian Americans, Irish Americans, and Polish Americans, who at first settled in urban areas and, with social mobility, moved to settle in predominantly white suburbs. Today, most new immigrants settle directly into the suburbs without an urban experience (Wilson & Svajlenka, 2014). Some immigrant communities, including many refugee communities, follow more established ethnic networks, including East African refugees in Minnesota or Bosnian refugees in St. Louis.
While the hub of religious life for immigrant Muslims is primarily in the suburbs, Black American mosques and community centers are generally closer to the inner neighborhoods of major cities, especially cities in the northern states of the US. Working class Black American Muslims often reside in inner cities, and, with upward mobility, the integrity of community life is strained as they disperse in mixed suburbs.

![Map showing population penetration and Muslim adherents in the United States](image)

**Figure 6. Most and Least Muslim states**

For the most part, Muslim Americans reside in large Metropolitan areas, whether in the inner city or suburbs (see *Figure 6*). Black Muslim settlements thus parallel Black American settlement patterns more generally, particularly post-Great Migration. Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York City saw the first major Black Muslim organizations such as the Nation of Islam, the Moorish Science Temple, Mosque Cares Inc., Five Percenter movement, and the Ahmadiyya Community of the USA.

*Today there are a number of Muslim organizations formed to address different needs of the diverse Muslim American community. These national organizations still demonstrate some of the ethnic and class divisions within our communities.*
Today there are a number of Muslim organizations formed to address different needs of the community. These national organizations still demonstrate some of the ethnic and class divisions within our communities. Major organizations include:

- MSA National (founded 1963)
- ICNA (founded 1971)
- Warith Deen Muhammad Ministry (founded 1976)
- ISNA (founded 1982)
- MPAC (founded 1988)
- MAS (founded 1992)
- AMA (founded 1994)
- CAIR (founded 1994)
- MANA (founded 2001)
- The Mosque Cares (founded 2003)
Literature Review

There have been various scholarly and popular responses to the ethnic and racial divisions in Muslim American communities. A particular work that has been largely influential is Sherman Jackson’s *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (2011). Overall, the literature on Islam in America and race can be divided in three major categories:

1. Integration of South Asian and Arab Muslims
2. Black American Muslims, and
3. Race Relations.

I. Arab and South Asians

Much of the literature concerning Arab and South Asian Muslim immigrants to the US deals with their steady racialization following the Persian Gulf War and the events of 9/11. Helen Hatab Samhan gives a historical account of Arab immigration to America and how their race was categorized in *Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab American Experience* (1999). She notes that, for example, there are limited census categories in documentation forms, with the possibilities of American Indian, Alaska native, Asian, Pacific Islander, Black, or white. Though Syrians and Palestinians were classified as “white” on the census, they did not benefit from white privilege and were often disenfranchised from voting. Samhan cites an example from 1920 in Birmingham where a politician distributed flyers while expressing his desire to be elected by white men and not racial minorities—including Syrians. Syrians’ technical classification as “white” contrasted with their everyday experiences and demonstrated the struggle that people of color have with this contradictory reality. Samhan highlights this racial classification, which began to be challenged in the Civil Rights Movement and continues to be challenged today. Additionally, Samhan gives a broad history of the various debates on whether Arab-Americans should benefit from affirmative action, and what alternatives could be included in a more accurate version of racial classification (1999).

Zareena Grewal’s *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority* explores transnational movements of American Muslims, through ethnographies and historical analysis (2013). She notes that (brown) Arab and South Asian immigrants in Detroit provided a “buffer” between the poorer, predominantly Black areas and the more affluent white suburbs. These racial constructions are embedded with different categories of meaning regarding identity and citizenship. She describes the Arab and South Asian population as embodying the privilege of upward mobility and the fluidity of racial identity that allows them to live and work in white suburbs. Arab and South Asian immigrants, however, lack
the social citizenship afforded to the Black community that allows them residency in the social fabric of US society without affording them social justice. She cites Bayoumi’s *How Does It Feel To Be A Problem?* (2009), in which Bayoumi argues that this lack of social citizenship results from the abstractions of Arab/South Asian identity in the U.S. that simultaneously demand citizenship while denying actual inclusion.

In an analysis of intra-Muslim race relations, *Black Star, Crescent Moon: The Muslim International and Black Freedom beyond America*, Sohail Daulatzai notes that Muslim immigrants face the challenge of coming to America to pursue what he dubs “honoraty whiteness” and thus reinforce the anti-Blackness of the dominant culture or utilizing their faith as a means to strive for social justice (2012). Daulatzai highlights a unique social problem in the contemporary era: racialized tropes of “the Black criminal” and “the Muslim terrorist” have been foisted upon Black Muslims and entwined into the “war on drugs” and “war on terror” narratives, resulting in increased surveillance and policing.

Specifically, he uses the term “Black Islam” to describe the way that Islam has been evoked by African-Americans to challenge racism in the United States, and challenges the current domestication of Islam by articulating a vision in which Islam continues to challenge white supremacy.

**II. African American Islam**


Jackson (2005) notes that Islam, as practiced by African-Americans, has been influenced by Black religion’s holy protest against white supremacy, just as the Islam currently practiced among
immigrant Muslims is part of a post-colonial theological tradition of liberation. Additionally, Jackson indicates that as Black Muslims achieved their second resurrection from proto-Islamic to Sunni Islam, and as Muslims of various ethnicities began to mingle, immigrant Muslims familiar with Islam’s classic scholarly traditions began to push Blacks to the margins of influence. Jackson’s work focuses on the intellectual traditions that have shaped Muslim life and includes ethnographic work that highlights lived experiences.

Many of these works have explored intersections of race, gender, and Muslim identity in addition to exploring inter-ethnic community tensions. Jackson (2005) states the influx of immigrant Muslims has resulted in a colorblind focus on “the West” becoming American Islam’s foremost arch-nemesis; supplanting “white supremacy.”

Jamilah Karim’s (2008) ethnographic work explores how Muslim women negotiate race, class, and gender. Frazier (2009) specifically looks at the intersections of race, religion, and gender. Using the term “triple invisibility” to describe the plight of African American Sunni women, whose race, religion and gender are discriminatory factors working against them, Frazier (2009) highlights that the orientalist media portrayal of Muslim women has ignored the experiences of Black Sunni women, who are the second-largest group of Muslim women in America. In addition to religious discrimination, Black Sunni women face racism due to their Blackness and are potentially viewed as less authentically Muslim by the greater immigrant community. They are often seen as being practitioners of a “ghettoized” version of Islam and thus treated with derision. The literature discusses the tensions between African American Muslims and immigrants that tend to erase their experiences. Zain Abdullah offers a corrective by exploring the intersecting identities of African immigrants in Harlem (2013).

Overall, the literature on Islam in Black American life or African-American Islam provides a narrative that is distinct from the literature on South Asian and Arab Muslim communities. The false dichotomy presented between “American” and “Muslim” is broken down by Black American Muslims in sports, government positions, and in media through film and music. Furthermore, social media outlets have provided a space for discourse on race, by utilizing social media for hashtag activism and the rise of both “Black Twitter” and “Muslim Twitter” and their intersections. Discussions on inter-ethnic relations in Muslim community explores competing narratives and challenges in resource distribution in Muslim communities.

### III. InterEthnic Relations in Muslim Communities

Some scholars have pointed to the ways in which colorblind approaches in Muslim anti-racism advocacies have hindered the ability of African American Muslims to effectively challenge white supremacy without facing social ostracism. Jackson (2005) asserts that Kashmir, Israel-
Palestine, and other Middle Eastern conflicts are seen as being more genuine Muslim social causes than social issues that impact the Black community such as affirmative action, police brutality, and substandard education (2005).

In the pre-9/11 era, South Asian Muslims were seen as the “model minority” within the American Muslim community and susceptible to internalizing negative stereotypes about African Americans promoted by the dominant white society (Karim, 2009). In one account, an African American Imam, Abdullah from Chicago, expressed that South Asians and Arabs needed to be more aware of the structural racism that continues to detrimentally impact African Americans in the post-Jim Crow era (Karim, 2009).

There are also significant class barriers that keep Muslims of various racial groups in an unequal power arrangement (Karim, 2009). In the Chicago area, the higher incomes of Arab and South Asian Muslims have enabled them to move to suburban areas, while African American Muslims are situated in inner cities (Karim, 2009). Thus, African American Muslims tend to worship separately from South Asian and Arab Muslims (Karim, 2009). As a result of these socio-economic factors, Islamic events organized by ISNA and ISTA are less accessible to African American Muslims living in inner cities than Muslims in suburban areas (Karim, 2009). Ethnographic accounts further attest that many African Americans experience unwelcoming and hostile attitudes when venturing out into Arab and South Asian mosques. Within inner cities, African American Muslims often problematize Arab Muslim-owned corner stores as being exploitative (Karim, 2009).

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Racism is a socio-political reality that must be confronted within the Muslim community. The approach to challenging racism cannot take a colorblind approach, but strategies should be developed to challenge anti-Blackness directly.

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These accounts indicate that racism is a socio-political reality that must be confronted within the Muslim community. The approach to challenging racism cannot take a colorblind approach, but strategies should be developed to challenge anti-Blackness directly.

In light of increased pressures from Islamophobia, including the murders of Somali youth Abdisamad Sheikh-Hussein, Our Three Winners (Deah Barakat, Yusor Abu-Salha, and Raza Abu-Salha), and the #BlackLivesMatter movement, Muslims of various groups and ethnic
backgrounds are engaged in dialogue and discussion on race, solidarity, Muslim identity, and coalition building.

This MuslimARC study of intra-Muslim ethnic relations aims to make a contribution to literature, as thus far we have relied mostly on ethnographic data rather than quantitative research to come to conclusions regarding American Muslim attitudes on race and ethnicity. Our goal: gather how people from various communities experience and understand inter-ethnic relations.
Methodology

The goal of this study was to gather a cross section of the North American Muslim community with a minimum of 400 respondents. Our aim was to gather Muslim perspectives on race relations within Muslim communities and society overall.

This project was an exploratory study to see what kind of studies MuslimARC should conduct in the future and what research should focus on.

The aims of the study were as follows:

1. Gather feedback about inter-ethnic relations from the general Muslim population, some who would not be reached in mosques
2. Help serve as a needs assessment to ascertain the perceived demand for anti-racism work in the Muslim community
3. Collect empirical data based on congregants’ views on race relations in order to triangulate, i.e. produce understanding using multiple sources.

Our survey was an eight-question online questionnaire intended to gauge perceptions of race and ethnic relations in Canada and the United States. In order to have accurate data, we tracked the initial surveys by email address. We used Google Docs, chosen for its cost (free) and because of its ease of use in embedding on our website and email. MuslimARC ran the study from December 2, 2014 to January 18th, 2014, allowing for eight weeks to collect responses. Volunteers emailed their friends and associates, and we distributed the survey on social media and email listservs. Upon collection, all personal information was deleted, and data was coded to ensure the privacy of the respondents. The responses were only shared with our small team of researchers at MuslimARC, and the information will remain private. We did not anticipate that the survey would involve any risk, although some questions about previous experience of being harassed or discriminated against may cause emotional triggers.

The Needs Assessment survey used a snowball sampling method to cover a broad range of potential Muslim respondents. Survey coordinators advertised the survey through social network applications, email listservs, and word-of-mouth campaigns.

The survey received a sample of 517 respondents by its closing date, well above the target sample size.


For self-identity, these categories included:

- Asian (2% of respondents),
- Black/African/Caribbean (24%),
- Latino/Indigenous (3%)
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- Middle Eastern/North African (18%),
- South Asian (31%),
- White/European (15%), and
- Other/Mixed (6%).

The Asian category includes respondents identifying as Central Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian. The Black/African/Caribbean category includes anyone from the sub-Saharan African diaspora. Latino/Indigenous respondents identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Native American. Middle Eastern/North African respondents include Arabs, Persians, and Afghans. South Asian includes anyone from the diaspora of the Indian subcontinent. White/European includes respondents of both eastern and western European ancestry, both from historically Muslim regions and historically non-Muslim regions. Other/Mixed includes a variety of less frequently claimed ethnic/racial identities, including Turkish and mixed race Americans.

Research team members also consolidated predominant mosque composition categories to include:

- Black/African/Caribbean (15% of respondents),
- Middle Eastern/North African (17%),
- South Asian (25%),
- Mixed-Immigrant and Indigenous (18%),
- Mixed-Immigrant (21%),
- Other (3%), and
- Doesn’t Attend (2%).

Finally, geographic locations were condensed to only include

- Canada (14% of respondents),
- US Midwest (21%),
- US Northeast (30%),
- US Southeast (14%),
- US Southwest (9%), and
- US West (11%).

Roughly 62% of respondents identified as female while the remaining 38% identified as male.

Age groups included

- 18-24 (29% of respondents),
- 25-32 (29%),
- 32-50 (36%), and
- 50+ (6%).

Due to this exploratory study’s snowball sampling method, we see an underrepresentation of older respondents and potential representation mismatches for ethnic/racial self-identity and geographic concentration of Muslim respondents. Further surveys of Muslim perceptions of discrimination should explore more representative or random sampling methods to eliminate bias.

Upon coding the dataset to ensure uniform factors, the research team developed an R script to summarize survey results and analyze correlations between responses.
Researchers summarized perceptions of ethnic and racial relations in the mosque, perceptions of ethnic and racial relations in US and Canadian society, and finally, perceptions of ethnic and racial relations in the Muslim community of the US and Canada.

Each of these questions used a 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) scale to measure perceptions. Researchers treated these responses as numeric quantities to find mean responses and standard deviations. Further questions asked whether respondents believed that the Muslim community would benefit from anti-racism programming and asked whether the respondent had experienced ethnic or racial discrimination from other Muslims, as well as ethnic, racial, or religious discrimination from the society at-large. All three of these questions provided only binary yes-no responses.

Research team members also compared responses to experiences of discrimination with demographic indicators to explore which groups were more likely to report experiences of discrimination.
Results

This section summarizes survey results, including ethnic and racial relations in the mosque, community, and society, as well as perceptions of discrimination and suggestions for improving inter-ethnic/racial relations in the Muslim community.

I. Ethnic and Race Relations in the Mosque, the Community, and Society

Respondents scored ethnic and racial relations in their own mosques at 3.15 on average (sd = 1.04), a fairly neutral score. However, respondents scored ethnic and racial relations in the broader Muslim community (mean = 2.56, sd = .92) very closely to relations in American and Canadian society at-large (mean = 2.56, sd = .86) as slightly poorer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Ethnic and Race Relations Scores in Society, Muslim Community, and Mosque.*

II. Discrimination from Muslims and Broader Society

Of the 517 respondents, 303 respondents (59 percent) reported experiences of ethnic or racial discrimination from other Muslims with the other 214 (41 percent) reporting no major experiences of discrimination.
However, when asked about experiences of racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination from the society at-large, 82 percent answered in the affirmative compared to 18 percent who did not report experiences of discrimination from society at-large.

**III. Discrimination vs. Demographic Factors**

Perceptions of discrimination vary widely when broken down into demographic constituents, especially ethnic/racial self-identity and age. While 59 percent of total respondents reported discrimination from other Muslims, 79 percent of Black/African/Caribbean Muslims (n=126) and 64 percent of White/European Muslims (n=80) reported discrimination from other Muslims, well above the population total. Furthermore, roughly 89 percent of Latino/Indigenous Muslims (n=18) and 79 percent of Other/Mixed Muslims (n=33) also reported discrimination from other Muslims.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, only 35 percent of Middle Eastern/North Africans (n=92) and 48 percent of South Asians (n=158) reported discrimination from other Muslims. In addition, 30 percent of East/Central/Southeast Asian (n=10) reported discrimination from other Muslims.

However, ethnic and racial differences in experiencing discrimination from the society at-large were much more tightly distributed. While Black/African/Caribbean respondents were most likely to report discrimination at 86 percent, the other large ethnic/racial groups were not far behind. Roughly 79 percent of both Middle Eastern/North African and White/European participants reported discrimination, and 78 percent of South Asians also reported
discrimination. All 100 percent of Latino/Indigenous participants reported discrimination from society as well as 91 percent of Other/Mixed and 60 percent of East/Central/Southeast Asian.

![Figure 10. Discrimination by Muslims, by ethnic group.](image)

![Figure 11. Discrimination by society, by ethnic group.](image)

The survey results also show similar patterns for age. While younger Muslims, 18-24 year olds, were least likely to experience discrimination from other Muslims at 46 percent, they reported discrimination from society at levels nearly identical to all other age
groups at 85 percent. Discrimination from Muslims was related to age, as 58 percent of 25-32 year olds reported intra-Muslim discrimination followed by 66 percent of 32-50 year olds and 83 percent of those over 50. All age categories reported discrimination from non-Muslims at 80-85 percent.

Finally, Muslim women were slightly more likely to report experiences of discrimination based on race/ethnicity compared to their male counterparts. 60 percent of female respondents
reported discrimination from other Muslims and 84 percent reported discrimination from society at-large. Likewise, 56 percent of male respondents reported discrimination from other Muslims and 78 percent reported discrimination from non-Muslims.

Respondents overwhelmingly supported anti-racism programming as a benefit to the Muslim community. 93 percent of respondents agreed that such programming would be beneficial while the remaining 7 percent said it would not be beneficial.
Study of Intra-Muslim Ethnic Relations

Preliminary Qualitative Analysis

While the quantitative data provides some important clues that reinforce accounts of marginalization of Muslims who are not from South Asian and Arab backgrounds, the open ended question has pointed to intriguing patterns. In addition to offering suggestions for how to improve intra-Muslim ethnic relations, respondents also detailed their experiences, shared observations, and provided analysis.

The following answer by an Eastern European/Caucasian male indicates the fruitfulness of this approach. The participant is 32-50 years old, attends a predominantly Arab/Middle Eastern mosque, and has never experienced racial discrimination in the Muslim community but has from broader society. He rates his own mosque a 3 and Muslim communities overall a 2. He provides the following three suggestions:

1. Honest conversations on race and ethnicity. One problem I see is that the focus of many conversations rarely moves beyond stating that it is a problem in Muslim communities. It surely is, and yet most conversations, talks, etc. do not go beyond self-critique. I believe we need a more robust perspective on race and ethnicity that includes self-critique and yet goes beyond it. While Islamic talks/programs will help fight some of the root-causes, it will not be able to address these issues sufficiently. Unfortunately, alluding to Islamic teachings alone is not sufficient.

2. Research and hands-on experiential visits. While racial/ethnic discrimination is a major problem in Muslim communities, we do not have proper research to demonstrate the extent of this. This is why I find your initiative very helpful. I understand that our imams/leaders try to draw attention to this sad fact and yet I do not find it helpful when they go all negative and sometimes magnify the extent of the problem beyond where it possibly stands. I believe people will relate to the extent of these problems when they talk across their comfort zones and can relate to the experiences of those who have been on the receiving end of discrimination. One possibility is to talk about "whiteness" and how embedded it can be.

3. Contextualizing race relations in historical/social perspective. Muslims will inevitably inhibit problems that are found in the larger society. Perhaps a curriculum that talks about race and ethnicity in the US context will be helpful to set a full understanding of these issues.
After reviewing the open ended questions, we found that most answers fit within the following five major categories:

1. Education/Awareness/Dialogue/Support
2. Social Mixing/Cultural Exchange/Food
3. Intermarriage
4. Diversification of Mosque Boards/Leadership
5. Increase Religious Knowledge/Deen-Based Solutions

I. Education/Awareness/Support

An Arab North African female, 32-50, who attends a predominantly mixed mosque, and who has experienced discrimination within the Muslim community and from broader society, rates her community a 3, society a 2 and Muslims overall a 1, advising:

*Remind them regularly of the anti-discrimination and anti-racism teachings in the Quran and Sunnah. National campaign, such as the Muslim ARC, with visual aids and online pledges to be posted around the community centers with reminders of the harms racism and discrimination do to our community.*

*Empowering young people through student organizations with language and tools they can use with their parents and elders so that they’re interrupting these behaviors respectfully.*

A white female, 32-50, who attends a predominantly South Asian mosque, who has experienced discrimination within the Muslim community and from broader society, rates relations as 3 across the board, suggests:

*“Provide support for victims of discrimination and educate those who practice discrimination.”*

A South Asian male, 18-24, who attends a predominantly South Asian mosque, who has experienced discrimination within the Muslim community and broader society, who rates relations as a 1 in their community, 2 in society and 1 in Muslim communities, states:
Honest listening of those facing discrimination within the Muslim community. Giving platform to voices that speak on issues of race among Muslims. And to not erase lived experiences under the banner of unity. Less vitriol and more open hearts. We need to work to heal those that have been hurt by us. Ummah is to be forged by mending broken hearts and bonds. Not by erasing. Also, thank you for all that you do as an organization. I have deep respect and admiration for your organization and staff. All my Duas with you.

An African Muslim female, 18-24, who attends a mixed mosque, who has experienced discrimination within the Muslim community and discrimination from broader society, rates her community as a 3, society as 1, and Muslims overall as 1, notes:

We can start by addressing that racism even exists in our community. I don't think we do that enough. Everyone wants to get along and be cordial so we don't bother to address painful and traumatic issues like racism within our Muslim community. Like the elephant in the room, if we ignore it, it doesn't exist and therefore we don't have a conflict at all.

An African American who attends a predominantly South Asian mosque who never experienced discrimination in the Muslim community, but has from broader society, rates his community 4, society 2 and Muslims overall a 3, advises:

Facilitate massive access to sound traditional Islamic scholarship and instruction; support creation, expansion and flourishing of institutions focusing on creating a critical mass of African American ulama; collaborative creation and support of endowments focusing on educational scholarships, after school programming, SME financing, inner city rehabilitation; develop resources for education non-African American on history and nature of white supremacist in American society.

II. Social Mixing/Cultural Exchange/Food

A Middle Eastern male, 32-50, who attends a predominantly South Asian mosque, who has never experienced discrimination in the Muslim community, but has from broader society, rates his community 3, society 2 and Muslims overall a 2, offers:
“We need more mixed mosques. Mosques tend to be very uni-cultural. Islam did away with racism. We should follow the tenets of the faith and institute this more.”

A mixed White and Pakistani male, 18-24, who attends a mixed immigrant mosque, who has experienced discrimination in the Muslim community and from broader society, rates his community a 4, society as 3 and Muslims overall as 4 explained that Muslims should unite against oppression:

“Our fact that we are one single community fighting oppression and injustice.”

III. Intermarriage

A Latino, 32-50, who attends a predominantly Arab/Middle Eastern mosque, who has experienced discrimination within the Muslim community and from broader society, rates their community as 1, society as a 3 and Muslims overall as 2, advises:

Stop being so culturally proud, and practice [Islamic traditions. Stop keeping to your own kind, allow your children to interact and marry outside their race. Acceptance, no one Muslim is better than the other.

IV. Diversification of Mosque Boards/Leadership

A white female, 32-50, who attends a predominantly African American mosque, who has never experienced racial discrimination in the Muslim community, but has from broader society rates her community a 2, society 1 and overall Muslims 2, states:

I think board and mosque leadership should be ethnically, racially, gender/class diverse. Programs, khutbahs, and services should not be segregated or dominated by a specific group of people.

V. Increase Religious Knowledge/Deen-Based Solutions

A Black/white female who attends a predominantly African American mosque, who has experienced discrimination in the Muslim community and from broader society, rates her community 5, society 1 and Muslims overall a 3, suggests:
To refocus our attention on the Qur'an and its principals. And to not forget the time we are living in and where we are living. We must try harder to rid ourselves of the feelings of superiority towards different groups.
Discussion

This study was limited to self-identified Muslims who utilized social media, Facebook, Twitter, or email listservs. Two populations may need to be further sampled to develop a more representative study: Latino/Hispanic/Indigenous Muslims and East and Southeast Asian Muslims.

From the relatively small sample size, it is difficult to ascertain how representative the answers within these groups were. Overall, the study supported scholarship that points to pervasive anti-Blackness. The study also finds a new complexity: that Latinos also reported experiences of discrimination, as well as mixed race/other Muslims. The figures of 79 percent in comparison to 35 percent Arab and 48 percent South Asian experiences of discrimination point to micro-aggressions and exclusions of Muslims from backgrounds considered “non-normative.”

The quantitative analysis of the survey has some limitations. Firstly, because the survey was completed on a volunteer, word-of-mouth basis, without randomized sampling, the survey may present information biased toward the people within a few degrees of separation from the survey developers. Similarly, the survey may not provide a representative sample of the North American Muslim community. To begin with, a large portion of survey respondents identified as white while a relatively small portion of survey respondents identified as Middle Eastern/North African. This runs counter to most surveys of Muslim ethnic identities in North America. Also, the survey tends to skew toward a younger demographic. Finally, survey questions on experiences of discrimination did not define discrimination, leaving open a multitude of interpretations, as evident in the qualitative responses.

However, as an exploratory study to help MuslimARC partners better understand experiences of discrimination within the Muslim community, this survey is the first of its kind and provides a strong platform from which to direct research and programming.

Future research on this topic should clearly define its main terms like “discrimination” and provide a timeline for experiences, e.g. “Have you felt that you were negatively and unfairly targeted due to your race/ethnicity within the past year?” Also, researchers should carefully distribute the survey to create a representative sampling of the North American Muslim community. Perhaps surveys at mosques, rather than hosted online, would provide a more accurate view of Muslim experiences of inter-ethnic relations.

The next step in our research will entail coding the open-ended questions to look for patterns. Which respondents are likely to look for deen-based solutions? Which respondents will look for diversification of mosque boards and community leadership? What age groups are more likely to consider intermarriage as the ideal solution? In addition to looking for
correlations between the quantitative data and qualitative data, our team would like to further analyze the quantitative data.

For example, our team would be interested in looking at the correlation of age and likelihood to score race relations in their mosque as poor. We could consider the ways in which experience of discrimination is likely to increase chances of scoring race relations in mosques as poor. Another question we could ask is whether mixed masjids are more likely to rate higher in terms of race relations.

Beyond this study, MuslimARC is interested in exploring the different types of discrimination that individuals experience. We hope to be positioned to conduct more interviews and focus groups. Another long term study project that could help us understand discrimination in the Muslim community is to examine implicit racial and shadism bias.
Conclusion

The film *Unmosqued* cited ethnic chauvinism as one of the reasons why many Muslims no longer attend mosques. Ethnic chauvinism leads to aversion of Muslims who do not share common cultural background or even worse, common practices of demeaning, belittling, and challenging Muslim who are deemed as inferior. Practices of back handed compliments, micro-aggressions, slurs, jokes, and discrimination can have a lasting effect on children growing up in the Muslim community and people who are just coming into religious life, including converts and those who have just renewed their faith.

Common consequences of racism for marginalized groups in the Muslim community include:

- A sense of being isolated and not belonging to any Muslim community
- Being unsure or confused about whether one is being treated differently because of race or ethnicity
- Pressure to “prove oneself” as a Muslim who can make a valuable contribution to the community
- Feeling fearful, anxious, frustrated, helpless, depressed, resentful or angry
- Considering leaving the community
- Difficulties with concentration and motivation for learning and attending courses
- Not wanting to attend classes
- Avoidance of Muslims who made inappropriate comments
- Not wanting to attend congregational prayers and losing the rewards for praying in congregation.
- Weakening of faith and belief that religious practice improves character
- Diminished motivation to act in solidarity

Many Muslims students who are not of the predominant Muslim ethnic group may also feel exclusion. Counseling Black/Latino/Kurdish/Iranian/White/Bosnian/etc. Muslim students requires a greater sensitivity. For example, a university chaplain or office of religious life may be alerted to the need to counsel students in the case of the Chapel Hill Shootings; however Black/African American Muslim students, and Somali students in particular, may need to express their feelings of erasure as a young Somali boy was killed in an Islamophobic attack. Black/African American Muslims students may feel more anxiety in addressing their needs. Their spiritual needs may not be met by a chaplain who is not trained to be inclusive.

The findings of this study highlight the need for greater research, well-developed materials and customized content for diverse demographics, and advocacy within communities to ensure that
anti-racism teachings are sought out and implemented. Without deliberate action taken on these issues, Muslims of all ages will continue to face discrimination, and a result, our communities will continue to fracture.

As the findings indicate, despite the cultural, ethnic, and racial differences between us, North American Muslims report similar levels of discrimination from society at-large. Without greater unity and genuine relationship-building, our strength as a community falters.

Lastly, Muslims have a religious obligation to stand for justice and to live Islam’s anti-racism ethos. The findings of this study indicate that more must be done for the sake of our dunya (current world/life), as well as for our Hereafter.

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**About MuslimARC**

MuslimARC, the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative, is committed to continual dialogue and examination of ethnic, racial, and Islamic identity, and incorporates wisdom from the Islamic sciences, grassroots activism, human rights law, the arts, and instructional design to do so. We hope to offer work that is fresh, unique, and can be put to use on the ground challenging racism in American/Canadian Muslim communities.

You can visit our website, [www.muslimarc.org](http://www.muslimarc.org), for more information about our programming and campaigns, to donate, and/or to sign up for our newsletter. We are also on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com), [Twitter](https://twitter.com), and [Tumblr](https://tumblr.com), if you would prefer to support our efforts through those mediums instead.

You may contact the lead researcher for this study, Programming Director Margari Hill, at margari@muslimarc.org.
Works Cited


Suggested Reading

Some important literature to understand Islam in North America and the history of race in Muslim societies include the following:


Appendix

Figure 14. Poster with call for participants.

Muslim Interethnic Relations
We need your help
Complete an eight question online survey to gauge perceptions of race and ethnic relations in Canada and the United States.

Take it online
bit.ly/interethnic
by January 9th, 2015

What's your rating?

Must be a self-identified Muslim 18+

Share your thoughts

More info:
muslimarc.org | www.facebook.com/muslimarc | www.twitter.com/muslimarc
Figure 15. Images of survey questions.

Inter-Ethnic Relations in US/Canadian Muslim Communities

Assalamu alaikum,

Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC) is a group of Muslims working together to build and collect the tools needed to creatively address and effectively challenge racism. We need your help to assess inter-ethnic/race relations amongst American Muslims.

For the purposes of this survey, race is defined as a group of persons related by common descent and ancestry and an ethnic group is defined as people of the same race or nationality who share a distinctive culture. Inter-ethnic/race relations are defined as the ways in which two or more people or groups from different ethnic/racial groups talk, behave, or deal with one another. Racial/ethnic discrimination - the practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people - could occur in other communities outside the mosque such as schools, places of employments, and in social gatherings. Please answer the following questions to your best ability.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact the researcher Margari Hill at margari@muslimarc.org.

* Required

Confidentiality *

I understand the intent and requirements of this. I certify that I am over 18 years old. I understand that the information given will be kept strictly confidential. My identity will not be divulged in any discussion, lecture, address, or publication derived from this project. By responding to these the questions, I agree to participate in this study.

Email address *

We value your privacy and this information will be kept confidential.

What is your gender? *

- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

What is your age *

(Check one)

- [ ] 18-24
- [ ] 25-32
- [ ] 32-59
- [ ] 50+
What is your ethnicity *
If you are multi-racial or multi-ethnic, please choose other and fill your information.
- African American/Black/African
- African/West African/East African
- Caribbean/West Indian/Belizean/Guyanese
- White/European
- Arab/North African/Persian/Middle Eastern
- Hispanic/Latino/Chicano/Central/South American
- South Asian/Afghan/Pakistan/Indian/Bengali
- East Asian/Southeast Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American/Indigenous
- Eastern European/Caucasian/Turkish
- Central Asian/Afghan/Kazakh/Uzbek/ etc.
- Other: [ ]

In what geographic region of the US/Canada are you located? *
- United States: West
- United States: Southwest
- United States: Midwest
- United States: Southeast
- United States: Northeast
- United States: Pacific North West
- United States: Canada: Territories
- Canada: British Columbia
- Canada: Prairies
- Canada: Ontario
- Canada: Quebec
- Canada: Atlantic
- Other: [ ]

What is the dominant (largest) ethnic group of the mosque/ Muslim community center/Cultural center/prayer services that you regularly attend? *
- Arab/Middle Eastern/North African
- Black/African American
- African- East/West African
- South Asian/Desi
- Mixed Arab/South Asian
- Mixed Arab/South Asian/African American
- Turkish
- Eastern European
- Caucasian/Eastern European/Central Asian
- Latino/Hispanic/Caribbean
- Other: [ ]
On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate ethnic/race relations in US/Canada? *
1: Very Poor, 2: Poor, 3: Moderate, 4: Good, 5: Excellent

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate ethnic/race relations in your mosque/community center? *
1: Very Poor, 2: Poor, 3: Moderate, 4: Good, 5: Excellent

On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate ethnic/race relations in US/Canada Muslim communities? *
1: Very Poor, 2: Poor, 3: Moderate, 4: Good, 5: Excellent

Have you experienced racial/ethnic or religious discrimination from non-Muslims? *
This could include Islamophobic comments, religious intolerance, racist jokes, slurs, bullying, refusal of service, discriminatory behavior at school, places of employment or business, and social media.
1: No
2: Yes

Have you experienced racial/ethnic discrimination in the Muslim community? *
This could include racist jokes, slurs, bullying, refusal of service, discriminatory behavior inside or outside of Muslim community centers and extending to intra Muslim interactions on social media.
1: No
2: Yes

Do you think Islamic talks or programming addressing racism is beneficial for the Muslim community? *
1: No
2: Yes

What do you think should be done to improve ethnic/race relations amongst Muslim?