

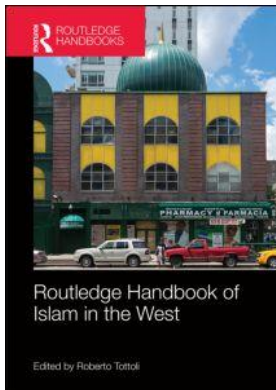
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### **American Muslim associational life from 1950 to the present**

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# American Muslim associational life from 1950 to the present

*Kathleen Moore*

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## Introduction

There has been a great deal of scholarship in recent years on the role of religious organizations in American public life (e.g. Layman 2001; Wald et al. 2005; Cleary and Hertzke 2006; Sager 2010). Much of this scholarly interest arises from a concern for the relationship between religion and government. Religion has always played a central role in American public life, yet in recent times this role has demonstrated the potential to expand precipitously as faith-based groups, coalitions, and leaders from a range of perspectives have elicited debate about the proper understanding of religion's place in contemporary society. A previous consensus around a secularizing, if somewhat Judeo-Christian, view of American public life, in which individuals and society may be cognizant of religion but the polity may not be, has broken down in recent decades to be replaced by a debate about the significance for the relationship between religion and government of the ever-increasing diversification of religious faith in America. New religions are on the rise; older religious movements once reviled, such as Mormonism, have gained legitimacy; and, since the latter half of the twentieth century, through new immigration patterns, a greater variety of faith traditions have arrived on America's shores. Further, the "nones" – those who identify with no particular religious affiliation – are on the rise, constituting one-fifth of the American public and fully one-third of those under the age of thirty.<sup>1</sup> Can Americans rethink their identity as a nation in a way that reflects this new stage of diversification? Will this change the way Americans think about the balance between "church" and "state"?

Religion is an organizing framework not to be overlooked when it comes to citizen participation in public life. Today there is a growing awareness of the power of religion and how it influences politics, for better or worse. Those who theorize about political theology (e.g. Kahn 2012; Critchley 2012) hold that in order to make sense of the political we must make recourse to such religious concepts as faith, the sacred, and ritual. Even basic questions about the boundary between the political and the religious, and whether politics is conceivable today without religion, can turn on strongly partisan terms and strain public debates. The crux of the matter is: can politics become effective at shaping, motivating, and mobilizing people without some dimension that is religious, without "some sort of appeal to transcendence" (Critchley

2012: 24) or an immanent frame which can be a powerful tool for persuasion? Some argue that a motivational deficit typifies modern political life, and religious institutions are poised to fill it (Habermas et al. 2010). Churches mobilize and educate for civic engagement; they have the potential to increase congregants' levels of civic skills, political efficacy, and political knowledge depending "on the frequency of church attendance and the denomination one attends" (Verba et al. 1995: 89, also cited in Jamal 2005: 522). Several studies show how religious institutions mobilize people to take political action, becoming directly involved in political processes. Recently, Catholic activists tried to influence lawmakers in Washington, DC, on such hot-button issues as immigration and health care, in the name of religion. By the same token, politicians sometimes use religion to shore up their own election bids. Political endorsements from the pulpit are on the rise, as candidates for public office – particularly those on the conservative right – receive an increasing number of endorsements from religious leaders in spite of tax regulations prohibiting endorsements of candidates but not ballot issues (see Johnson 2012). This trend has led to a more explicitly political consciousness on the part of many religious believers, as well as to a more established place for religious organizations among Washington lobbyists.

In this context, relatively little attention has been given to the organizational efforts of American Muslims, although they have become increasingly politically important. Few have studied American Muslim organizations as such (see, however, Jamal 2005; Bagby 2012a, 2012b; Leonard 2013), so this has been an area based on (sometimes polemical) speculation rather than reliable data. Although they make up a remarkably small percentage of the overall population, the way Muslims are viewed by the general public is vitally important, and the level of attention paid to American Muslims belies their modest number. Muslims and Islam increasingly have become the target of suspicion and fear since the 1979 Iranian Revolution and American hostage crisis, but emphatically so since 9/11. The mainstream political environment by the second decade of the twenty-first century is greatly influenced by anti-Islamic populism. The stigma afforded Islam is borne out in public opinion polls that indicate that Americans are fairly evenly divided about whether Islam is consistent with American values and way of life (Abu Dhabi Gallup Center 2011; Public Religion Research Institute 2011). Looking further into the surveys' findings, we can see that most Republicans, Americans who identify with the Tea Party movement, senior citizens, and those who most trust Fox News agree that Islam is at odds with American values and way of life, and most Democrats, Independents, Americans under the age of thirty, and those who most trust CNN or public television do not share that assessment (Harbin 2013). Such partisan differences over American values now divide the nation very sharply and have pushed Americans to opposite corners even on issues (e.g. Muslim presence in the United States) that were less charged little more than a decade ago. Further, in discursive arenas ranging from talk radio and cable news networks to congressional hearings, public figures continue to discredit American Muslim organizations as "hard core" and not "authentically" American, while they also openly question: Can Muslims be loyal citizens of the United States?

Particular stress points might further exacerbate this even divide. For instance, in the 2010 controversy regarding a Muslim community center in midtown Manhattan (dubbed the Park51 controversy) and a series of attacks on mosques and mosque building projects throughout the country, the American public was also evenly divided and demonstrated a definite ambivalence toward the continued presence of Muslim institutions in American society. The cover of *Time Magazine* asked the trenchant question in August 2010: "Is America Islamophobic?" The 2010 midterm elections produced a handful of ballot initiatives across the country to "ban the *shari'a*," which called into question the loyalty of American Muslims. In

March 2011, New York congressman Peter King, the powerful chair of the US Congress's Committee on Homeland Security, led a congressional inquiry into the radicalization of American Muslims, asking the rhetorical question whether there are "too many mosques" in America. Other political leaders, such as the 2012 GOP (Grand Old Party) presidential candidate Mitt Romney, suggested wire-tapping American mosques as a measure to prevent future terrorist attacks (Jamal and Albana 2013: 107), and it was recently disclosed that the New York City Police Department has secretly designated entire mosques within its jurisdiction as terrorist organizations, thus allowing the police to use informants to record sermons, spy on imams, and open investigations on anyone who attends prayer services even without any specific evidence of criminal wrongdoing.<sup>2</sup>

These instances grow out of a deeply embedded and prevalent worry that there is an abiding association between Islam and extremism. A concern often heard is that mosques and Islamic centers serve as recruiting grounds for homegrown terrorists. This bromide is common even though instances of American Muslim terrorism are relatively rare, and in most cases the perpetrators had come to the attention of law enforcement because of American Muslims' self-policing against radicalization within their own community organizations (Kurzman et al. 2011: 471–2; Schanzer et al. 2010). Some argue that American Muslim community building has been a significant factor in the prevention of radicalization, and "almost all observers agree that Muslim-Americans have stepped up community-building in all forms over the past two decades" in order to strengthen American Islam and to serve community goals, including not only the protection of civil liberties but also deepening Muslims' faith and spreading Islam's message to non-Muslims (Kurzman et al. 2011: 478).

While the political environment of the twenty-first century has been largely negative, there are also positive engagements with Islam. Perhaps the most powerful statement of support for Islam and Muslims in the United States came in the form of President Barack Obama's 2009 speech delivered in Cairo. The president began this speech by offering:

I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based upon mutual interest and mutual respect; and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles – principles of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.

*(Barack Obama, quoted in Hammer and Safi 2013: 7)*

He also remarked, "faith should bring us together, [a]nd that is why we are forging service projects in America to bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews," promising to turn dialogue into good works.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I begin with a brief demographic profile of Muslims in the United States. Then I provide an overview of the recent history of American Muslim associational life in the larger context of civic voluntarism and American organizations from the latter half of the twentieth century to the present. While it is clearly impossible to do justice to the details of this history in such a brief essay, it is important to lay the foundations for exploring the possibility that patterns can be discerned, and that these patterns may indicate something about an ongoing set of dynamics that constrain voluntary groups in the American setting. While 9/11 has made it more difficult to be Muslim in the United States in various ways, it has also catalyzed Muslim associational life. According to a poll released by the Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR) in 2003, in the wake of 9/11 almost half of all American Muslims reported that they had increased their social, political, interfaith, and public relations activities (cited in Jamal and

Albana 2013: 106). American Muslims have mobilized *qua Muslims* to favor greater visibility in public life in the post-9/11 era, but the roots of this mobilization reach well back into the twentieth century. To what extent are the processes of institutional growth and representation of collective interests giving way to a critical engagement with public norms of fairness and democracy? The core argument of this chapter is that the hardening of public attitudes toward Islam and Muslims is propelling major American Muslim organizations into major transformational change.

## Demographic profile

The Muslim population of the United States remains relatively small. The community's size, estimated between two and ten million, remains a matter of some dispute. Leaders of American Muslim advocacy groups generally have given estimates at the upper end of this range, citing higher levels of Muslim immigration since the 1960s and increased conversion and birth rates as contributing factors (Senzai 2012: 12). At the low end of this range are estimates provided by national surveys such as the Pew Research Center (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2011; estimate of 2.75 million) and the National Opinion Research Center (Smith 2001). Even with its relatively small size – less than 1 percent of the overall population – one should keep in mind that the Muslim community continues to grow at a faster pace than other religious communities in the United States.

The majority of American Muslims today are post-1965 immigrants or their children. The Pew Research Center indicates that nearly two-thirds of Muslims in the United States (63 percent) are first- or second-generation immigrants, many of whom come from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. About one-third trace their heritage to the Arab world or Iran. Currently about one in six Muslims (16 percent) in the United States have arrived from South Asia. Similarly, African Americans, some of whom are converts and some of whom are descendants of African Americans who converted during the early twentieth-century growth of American Islam, comprise another 20–30 percent of the Muslim population. Aside from these three largest groups – Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African American – there are many smaller groups of European and sub-Saharan African immigrant Muslims, and a growing number of converts who are Latino, white, or other ethnicities. Moreover, while remaining an exceedingly small proportion of the overall population, Muslims in the United States have grown dramatically in visibility and in number in recent decades. According to Pew, an astonishing 40 percent of American Muslims have arrived since 2000, while only 12 percent came to the USA before 1979 (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2011).

The same study also shows that Muslims generally are far more integrated into American society than are their counterparts in Western Europe; whether they are foreign born or not, approximately 70 percent of American Muslims are US citizens. American Muslims' income and education levels are similar to those of the general public. While American Muslims are mostly middle class and are as likely as anyone else in the United States to hold a college degree (between 26 and 28 percent), in Britain, France, Spain, and Germany the average annual incomes of the Muslim populations fall far below the average incomes of non-Muslims.

While much of the current population of Muslims in the United States came to America as voluntary immigrants or are second-generation American Muslims, a considerable portion are the result of what are called indigenous forms of Islam, which developed from the early twentieth century within the African American community. A renaissance of pan-African movements at the turn of the century, World War I and the age of prosperity immediately following the war, and the Great Migration by thousands of African Americans from the rural South to

the industrialized North between 1915 and 1930, cultivated an atmosphere in which people rejected the “negro” label in favor of reconstructing the self through a new ethnic or religious identity. Out of this period there arose numerous Black Jewish groups, and the two most notable African American Islamic movements of the first half of the twentieth century, the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) and the Nation of Islam (NOI), with a black nationalist agenda (Knight 2013: 88–9). As “American Islam’s most influential conversion movement” (Knight 2013: 92), the NOI produced America’s most widely recognized conversion narrative found in any faith tradition, Malcolm X’s autobiography (as told to Alex Haley), and constructed an organizational network and belief system that have withstood the trials of time over the many decades since its creation, albeit in a much changed form. Reoriented after the death of its founder in 1975, the NOI under the direction of Warith Deen (W.D.) Muhammad underwent several changes which resulted in the founding of a non-profit organization and ministry called the Mosque Cares. Islamic schools were pioneered by the NOI from the 1930s as Sister Clara Muhammad Schools (formerly University of Islam schools) as alternatives to the inferior and racially segregated public schools available in America’s inner cities in the mid-twentieth century. Under W.D. Muhammad’s leadership, these schools maintained their high academic standards and emphasis on black pride, but replaced the NOI theology classes with Sunni thought and theology. This triggered a reaction from the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, the rival leader who remained faithful to the original teachings of the NOI, and he re-established the University of Islam K-12 schools in inner cities across the country in 1989 to compete with the Sister Clara Muhammad schools, offering religious instruction in the original theology of the NOI (Grewal and Coolidge 2013: 250).

After 1965, when Muslim immigrants began to arrive in larger numbers, many times to fill professional and technical jobs, many bypassed the inner cities, where African American converts and other minorities lived, in favor of suburban life. Thus mosques were built to serve local communities and were residentially segregated, with inner city mosques serving largely an African American constituency and suburban mosques by and large serving immigrant populations. At the same time, racial differences have also been reflected in sectarian differences and other kinds of orientation toward religious practices. Since the late nineteenth century Sufism has attracted white Americans, and Marcia Hermansen has argued that since the 1960s Sufism has appealed to “young, middle class, Americans [who] located the cause of racism, the Vietnam War, and the evils of technocracy in a spiritual sickness that the establishment religions in America had not only failed to solve but had fostered” (quoted in Abdullah 2013: 73). Similarly, by the close of the twentieth century African American Muslims had gravitated toward Sunni Islam – and there are Black Sunni movements with distinctive beliefs in black pride, such as Darul Islam and the Islamic Party of North America – though a small number of African Americans have followed Shi’i Islam, especially since the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

### **Associational life**

There are two main approaches to the public significance of religion. A large branch of political science literature is devoted to how people organize for political action, and within this branch we find an offshoot which highlights the role of religious institutions – churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship – in fostering civic and political engagement. Though religious institutions were neither designed for nor intended to organize for political activity, several studies have highlighted the myriad ways in which they have equipped their constituents for action (Wald et al. 2005: 121; Chappell 2004; Putnam 2001: 35; Greenberg 2000; Verba et al. 1995). These institutions develop skills important for civic participation and political

advocacy in both clergy and laypersons. Participation beyond simply attending services inevitably leads to the development of both leadership and civic skills. Verba et al. discover that religion can be a powerful resource that promotes and encourages political participation, at times enabling some racial and ethnic minorities to overcome deficits in education and wealth. Asserting the importance of the church in the polity rests on claims that locally based institutions play an essential role in linking people to the political process, by building social capital – the networks, norms, and trust that enable individuals to act together to pursue common objectives – and by functioning as a part of broader networks, which mobilize people into civic engagement by providing participatory information and resources (Greenberg 2000: 377–8). In short, this line of reasoning posits that houses of worship channel civic engagement and result in a stronger polity.

Another type of study, though, suggests that the linkage between religious institutions and political strength is highly contingent and should not be presumed. With respect to Muslims in the United States, Amaney Jamal (2005) shows us that mosque participation is not necessarily linked to broader forms of political activity across all Muslim subgroups.<sup>4</sup> She finds that frequent attendance at mosque is highly associated with membership in civic groups for both Arab and South Asian Muslims in the United States. However, only in the case of Arab Muslims is frequent mosque attendance associated with greater political activity. Moreover, for African American Muslims, mosque participation relates neither to greater civic involvement nor to political activity. In short, Jamal finds that high levels of religious activity link to higher levels of involvement in civic life – being a member of an organization that helps the poor, the sick, the elderly, or the homeless, or a neighborhood or community group – for American Muslims of Arab and South Asian descent, but has no effect on African American Muslim civic involvement or political activity. Thus the mosque may serve as a site for the acquisition of civic skills for some, but there is little evidence to suggest that the mosque mobilizes political engagement across the board. Three important factors – culture/identity, resource mobilization, and political opportunity structure – have been under-studied, particularly with respect to mosque communities in the USA.

Studies such as Jamal's raise important questions about religiously based political action. It is clear that while traditional houses of worship such as mosques were not created for political mobilization, they can perform important, though limited, functions in channeling political action. While these institutions were created primarily to offer religious services, formalize and maintain religious doctrines and rituals, transmit the religion from one generation to the next, provide religious leadership for their congregants, and train clergy and develop their leadership skills, it is also equally unmistakable that the resources needed for political mobilization overlap considerably with the resources necessary to perform these religious tasks. Many of the questions concerning religious expression in public life could be better addressed if we kept in mind the fact that for many Americans the pathways to political action are mediated through structures (often religious institutions) that help to cultivate communal identities in culturally and contextually specific ways. To put it another way, to appreciate this contingent development of associational life we need to understand motive, means, and opportunity: "the motives that draw religious groups into political action, the means that enable the religious to participate effectively, and the opportunities that facilitate their entry into the political system" (Wald et al. 2005: 124).

When we think about Muslim American associational life, by the second half of the twentieth century three kinds of institutions became evident: mosques and Islamic centers; a range of non-profit associations providing public service, charity, and educational products; and advocacy groups. Each of these will be taken in turn as we consider motive, means, and opportunity for civic engagement and political activity of Muslims in the United States.

### *Motives that draw different Muslim groups into political action*

Appreciating the importance of Muslim organizations in civic engagement and political activity in the latter half of the twentieth century requires a look at the bigger picture. At mid-century, Americans in general launched more nationally visible voluntary associations than ever before. Roughly half of all voluntary associations in 1950 were business associations, yet these lost their proportional share over the years, as they shrank to 40 percent in 1960 and less than 18 percent by 1990 (Skocpol 2004: 4). The field of associational life diversified, and Americans of both genders and all educational levels were likely to join and hold office in voluntary associations, often claiming one or more memberships in church-related associations, civic-political groups, and fraternal lodges, becoming by the 1960s eager participants in fellowship associations that emphasized and expressed solidarity among citizens (Skocpol 2004). While business associations shrank as a portion of the total field of voluntary groups, expanding categories consisted of public benefit organizations and non-profits that aim to further specific value-laden understandings of the public good, such as environmental groups, family values groups, anti-poverty groups, veterans' groups, and associations dealing with the interests of women, racial minorities, and so on. As sociologist Theda Skocpol puts it, "the balance of organized voice in US public affairs shifted markedly in the late twentieth century, as many new kinds of associations came to be heard, speaking for more causes and constituencies than ever before" (Skocpol 2004: 5).

At the same time the trend was toward more professionally managed associations, away from the popularly rooted and restrictive membership model of organizations. This key social change accompanied the civic shift in favor of civil rights and the new attitudes and practices about race and gender. At roughly the same time, a bubble of legislation appeared – which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s – which constituted an "age of improvement," in which the federal government attempted to influence new realms of American social and economic life, ranging from women's and minority rights to environmental and social security policies. The appearance of nationally oriented civic associations closely tracked the expansion of federal legislative activism, especially in areas of federal rights and social regulation. So, for instance, new rights advocacy organizations sprang into being *after*, rather than before, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the establishment over the next few years of federal agencies to enforce and monitor compliance with civil rights legislation (Skocpol 2004).

It is within this atmosphere and this evolution of federated networks of civic associations that Muslim organizations grew in the second half of the twentieth century. What motivated Muslims to organize and join in the professionally managed groups? Throughout much of the twentieth century, associational life revolved around the mosque or Islamic center, the house of worship for Muslim Americans. Many who had immigrated to the United States or had converted to Islam during the early decades of the century showed little overt interest in participating in civic life beyond ad hoc volunteering at the local level. Aside from a small but significant number of foreign missionaries and Black Muslim movements, few Muslims thought about establishing Islam at the national level prior to World War II. Instead, Islamic practices either were private and individualistic or were limited to one's immediate community (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 178).

The unique historical context that helps explain the course that American Muslim life took – why Muslims began to form national-level organizations – accounts for adaptations of religious resources and ideals to prevailing institutional arrangements. At the inauguration of the Islamic Center in Washington, DC, in 1957, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower spoke of a global context in which religion formed the foundation for a geopolitical bond among allies, his speech was remarkably prescient of President Obama's "new beginnings" speech in Cairo. Even



though the debates about political changes and dangers at mid-twentieth century concentrated on the threat posed by global communism rather than global terrorism, Eisenhower's assertions of what matters bear a strong resemblance to Obama's narrative of shared principles and institutional arrangements co-constituted by commitments to values like freedom and respect. Eisenhower spoke of the relationship between the United States and the Islamic world:

This fruitful relationship between peoples, going back into history, becomes more important each year. Today, thousands of Americans, both private individuals and government officials, live and work – and grow in understanding – among the peoples of Islam. At the same time, in our country, many from the Muslim lands – students, businessmen, and representatives of states – are enjoying the benefits of experience among the people of the United States. From these many personal contacts, here and abroad, I firmly believe there will come a broader understanding and a deeper respect for the worth of all men; and a stronger resolution to work together for the good of mankind ... Under the American Constitution, this Center, this place of worship, is as welcome as could be any similar edifice of any religion. Americans would fight with all their strength for your right to have your own church and worship according to your own conscience. Without this, we would be something else than what we are.<sup>5</sup>

Yet while Eisenhower's comments might have indicated there was room for Islam to grow in the United States, it was still viewed as something foreign and new, and recognition of the presence of Muslims in the United States proceeded at a slow pace. From 1948 to 1965, the number of students from Muslim countries in the United States increased fivefold (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 264). Those who belonged to Islamist movements who fled in fear of persecution from secular, nationalist regimes that came to power after independence and viewed Islamist organizations as a political threat had a significant impact on the development of national Muslim organizations in the United States in the early 1960s. The Muslim Student Association of the United States and Canada (MSA) was founded in 1963 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and in the next two decades became the most successful Muslim organization founded by immigrants (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 265). The early MSA functioned for the most part as a membership organization, financed by its membership dues (\$2 per year in the 1960s), personal donations, the sales of books, and modest funds from Muslim countries such as Kuwait and Pakistan (GhaneaBassiri 2010). Its membership was primarily male foreign students, with a women's committee formed in 1966. Its first center of operations was established in 1973 in al-Amin Mosque in Gary, Indiana. Later it built its present headquarters in Plainfield, Indiana. According to MSA documents, in its early years the organization sought to establish local chapters so the Muslim students might maintain their religious commitments while living in a non-Muslim society. Through its commitment to viewing Islam as a complete way of life, the MSA has seen the US organizational context as a "melting pot" experiment in which Muslims from around the world can transcend their racial, ethnic, and cultural differences to become what one scholar has called the "normative *homo islamicus* subject[s]" (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 268). While this normative vision has not been realized, and local chapters maintain a high degree of autonomy from the national leadership, other related organizations have sprouted up around the MSA. In the 1970s, Arab students created the Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA), and Malaysians the Malaysian Islamic Study Group (MISG). Also in the 1970s, some Iranian, Shi'i students began the Muslim Student Association – Persian Speaking Group, and some South Asian students started the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 269).

In 1981, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) was formed to provide an umbrella over a greater range of activities than the MSA could provide given its specific focus on student life. ISNA oversees the interests of campus organizations (MSA), professional associations, service and youth groups, committees on legal matters, charities, interfaith relations, outreach, public relations, and so on. The maturing of the organizational model for Muslim activism was demonstrated in the letter to all members of the MSA announcing the creation of the new umbrella organization of ISNA:

There is no longer any doubt, if there ever was, that Islam has come to North America to stay for good, insha'Allah [God willing]. Islamic presence here must, therefore pervade all spheres of a Muslim's life in this societal environment and must exert a positive influence on the non-Muslim segments of this society. To do so, Islamic work must continually grow and come to grips with new challenges and opportunities. This requires evolution and adaptation of the organizational structure of Islamic organizations so that they may provide the right type of leadership to an increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive socioeconomic order among Muslims in North America ... Muslims in North America are truly at the cross-roads. The most sincere and persistent effort of every Muslim is needed to forestall fragmentation and forge a united and enlightened front of Muslims to serve the Cause of Allah.

*(MSA letter, quoted in GhaneaBassiri 2010: 312)*

The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a significant growth in the number of mosques and Islamic centers built in the United States, some constructed with funding from foreign countries, but the majority the result of local fundraising efforts by Muslims. Most were built to serve a single ethnic or national origin congregation. National organizations such as the Federation of Islamic Associations, established in 1953, “understood well the local nature of American Muslim community building” (GhaneaBassiri 2010: 274) and did not impose themselves on mosque building projects. However, national organizations maintain an interest in fostering a unified strength, and so continue to offer instructional materials and financial assistance to local groups wishing to organize around a specific project.

In a related move, ethnically defined civil rights organizations were founded in the early 1980s that sought to monitor the enforcement of civil rights laws. For instance, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) was created in 1980 to defend the civil rights of Arab Americans. Defining itself largely as a secular ethnicity, the organization expanded to include specifically the defense against anti-Muslim bigotry in the early 1990s. Similar organizations, such as South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), founded in 2000, focus on community education and advocacy, and include but are not limited to bias incidents against Muslims. These organizations are not specifically defined as Muslim but include Muslims among their membership.

A primary though not the only motivation for associational life in the United States was the promotion of a particular understanding of Islam that was greatly influenced by the Islamist movements of mid-twentieth-century liberation movements in much of the Muslim world. The emergence of the Muslim Student Association set the tone for itself and several subsequent organizations that took a “top-down” approach to create a national leadership structure while stimulating the growth of local chapters.

Muslims in the United States responded to the international role the United States grew into after World War II to become a much more significant world power abroad and to change immigration laws in such a manner as to open the doors to more diverse immigration at home.

Muslims formed associations led, albeit loosely, by a national leadership whose members often were politicized by the nationalist and Islamist movements in their home countries as well as the growing significance of the United States' involvement in the affairs of Muslim countries. Sometimes these organizations were funded at least in part by Muslim countries, but they also diversified as they matured.

### *The means that enable the organization of group interests into political form*

Religious individuals and groups, like non-religious individuals and groups, have a right to participate in the debate on all issues that are important to political and civic life. As the Supreme Court of the United States said in 1970: "Adherents of particular faiths and individual churches frequently take strong positions on public issues ... Of course, churches as much as secular bodies and private citizens have that right."<sup>6</sup> For example, religious leaders and organizations often take positions on legislative bills and they sometimes boycott certain corporations or launch media campaigns about public issues. So when faith-based advocacy organizations began to appear in the public sphere to set the agenda for government, coalitions formed to advance the cause of defining social values and of challenging them.

In the field of interest group politics, religious activism and advocacy are constantly evolving. Early groups included the United Methodist Church, which established its Washington, DC, office in 1916 to promote the prohibition of alcohol, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference, established in 1919. The Peace Churches (e.g. the Brethren, the Quakers) became registered lobbyists by the 1940s to protect conscientious objector status, and by the middle of the twentieth century Jewish and Baptist organizations joined the scene to litigate church-state issues. Since the 1950s the number of religious lobbyists has expanded substantially, and in 2011 the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released a study that identified more than 200 national religious organizations engaging in public policy advocacy.

This increased the opportunity for Muslim activism in the field of interest group politics. In 1986, the Islamic Center of Southern California started the Muslim Political Action Committee, which within two years changed its name to the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC) and became one of the leading Muslim American advocacy organizations in the United States. Also in the late 1980s, political science professor Agha Saeed established a political coalition in northern California, initially called the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), aimed at mobilizing the Muslim vote, and continued to organize two more similar organizations, the American Muslim Political Coordinating Committee (AMPCC) and the American Muslim Task Force (AMT), which combined to become the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections. The twin objectives of participating in a meaningful way in democratic elections and successfully fighting prejudice against Muslims became a motivating factor in the creation of organizations from the 1980s onward, with goals ranging from the improvement of curriculum in public education to make sure it is accurate and unbiased, to monitoring public media to correct distortions and misinformation. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), founded in 1995, regularly monitors hate crimes and other forms of discrimination against American Muslims.

New media technologies and models of association building have also propelled the new, professionalized advocacy organization. At one time, organizations needed to rely on campaigns to gain mass membership at the local level in order to build networks that could sustain them and wield national influence. Organizations used to pressure lawmakers by mobilizing members and newspapers across legislative districts. However, today advocacy groups can start an association using membership support but then rely on computer-based systems and the internet to

develop a constituency and donor relations so that they can rely less on membership dues for their budgets. This new approach means that today's associations need to keep their profiles constantly in the public eye, especially in major metropolitan centers, where politicians and advocacy spokespersons appear endlessly on talk shows, social media feeds, and blogs. This not only enhances the association's reputation but also keeps contributions flowing in from constituents. No longer do association leaders think in terms of creating a federated network of volunteer staff members. Instead, when a new issue arises, they open a national office and build an association (as well as national projects) from the center (Skocpol 2004: 10). This allows associations to concentrate on efficient management while keeping close to federal government and national media. Several American Muslim organizations embrace the tools of new media to reach their members. Social networking is common. Web destinations such as YouTube are filled with content from American Muslim advocacy organizations. The internet and other new technologies have made it easier for these organizations to reach a younger generation of Muslims and are now a permanent feature.

This also results in a cadre of national advocacy organizations that are detached from the other kind of collective institution, the local mosque or Islamic center. In fact, a significant challenge to political mobilization is that a majority of American Muslims do not feel that a national Muslim association represents their views. According to the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, when asked which of a list of national Muslim American organizations represented their interests, 55 percent of Muslim men and 42 percent of Muslim women said that none do (Abu Dhabi Gallup Center 2011: 25) (Table 8.1).

### *The opportunities that facilitate their entry into the political system*

Opportunities to enter into the public sphere have expanded in the era of civil rights in obvious ways. Advocacy organizations have multiplied, in particular when it comes to the outlawing of discrimination and the rise of identity politics. Also, increasing American Muslim participation in electoral politics has led to the creation of organizations that are above the local mosque level to promote and defend American Muslim political interests. As Table 8.2 shows, according to the 2011 study by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life most Muslim advocacy organizations in Washington, DC, arrived there after the 1990s.

However, less visible yet more common routes to civic engagement have led American Muslims to join humanitarian or charitable organizations providing service, charity, and

**Table 8.1** No national American Muslim organization represents a large portion of the community

<i>Organization cited</i>	<i>% Muslim men</i>	<i>% Muslim women</i>
Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR)	12	11
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)	4	7
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)	6	1
Muslim American Society (MAS)	0	2
Imam Warith Deen Muhammad group	3	1
Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)	2	0
Other	6	20
None	55	42

Surveys conducted via Gallup Nightly Poll from January 1, 2008 to April 9, 2011.  
Source: Abu Dhabi Gallup Center (2011: 25)

*Table 8.2* Advocacy organizations listed by Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (updated May 15, 2012)

<i>Name (arranged alphabetically)</i>	<i>DC arrival date</i>
Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, USA	1948
American Islamic Congress	2006
Center for Islamic Pluralism	2005
Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy	1999
Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR)	1994
Free Muslims Coalition	2004
International Quranic Center	2007
International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation	2005
ISNA, Office for Interfaith and Community Alliance	2006
Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights	1993
Kashmiri American Council	1990
Minaret of Freedom Institute	1993
Muslim American Society	1993
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)	1997
National Committee of Women for a Democratic Iran	1990
Uyghur American Association	2004
World Organization for Resource Development & Education	2000

Source: Compiled from data from online directory at Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2011).

educational products, beginning in the 1990s but accelerating in the twenty-first century. Many Muslim organizations at local and state levels provide social services, including financial assistance for education, referrals for domestic violence solutions, and shelter services for the homeless. Several organizations are hybrids, performing some advocacy work while also providing a range of services. Still others are national service or civic organizations, such as the Muslim Boy Scouts and the Muslim Girl Scouts, or those formed for a specific segment of the American Muslim population, such as the Latino American Dawah Organization, founded in New York City in 1997 for Spanish-speaking converts, or the Muslim Alliance in North America (MANA), with its focus on African American Sunni Muslims and other American-born Muslims.

After 9/11 the pronounced appearance of Muslim women in the American public sphere was a noticeable change in American Muslim associational life. Impelled by increased surveillance and indictment of some American Muslim charities and organizations, as well as the special registration program, men began to keep a lower profile, thus creating the opportunity for women to move into the vanguard and assume more responsibility for administering important Islamic institutions. Women began to write op-ed pieces and became media professionals, pursued careers in human and civil rights, and established advocacy groups to fight for civil rights. For the first time in its history, in 2001 the ISNA elected a woman, Ingrid Mattson, to serve as vice president, and later president (2006–10) of the organization, bringing a woman into the top ranks of the national leadership. However, in the world of American Muslim advocacy and activist organizations generally, the organizational structure is gendered. While American Muslim women are among the most highly educated women (second only to Jewish women) and are as likely as American Muslim men to hold a professional job (Gallup International 2009: 56), surprisingly few women have served as top executives of national American Muslim organizations. Exceptions to this rule include Dr. Ingrid Mattson and Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, founding

Table 8.3 Non-profit organizations by and for American Muslim women

<i>Name</i>	<i>Date founded</i>
The Sisters' Wing of the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)	1978
International League of Muslim Women	1984
Muslim Women United (Richmond, VA)	1989
Muslim Women's League	1992
Women in Islam	1992
Rahima Foundation	1993
Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights	1993
Peaceful Families Project	2000
Muslim Women Resource Center (Illinois)	2001
Muslim Advocates	2005
Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE)	2006

executive director of Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, and Ferhana Khara, the founding executive director of Muslim Advocates, two American Muslim civil rights organizations staffed almost entirely by women. Muslim women in the United States, though, are actively engaged in political activism and civic affairs, and have gained entry in particular in post-9/11 engagements. For instance, the Muslim Women's Resource Center, started in 2001 by Suma Quraishi, and the American Muslim Women's Association (Arizona) provide services. The Muslim Women's League and the Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality (WISE) provide an arena to discuss the interpretation of scripture and tradition, to confront prejudice, and to raise awareness. There are too many organizations to list here, but Table 8.3 lists a selection of non-profit organizations that have been founded by and for American Muslim women.

Many activists and community leaders paved the way for these new kinds of interventions by Muslims in the American public sphere in the twenty-first century. The formulation and negotiation of the space for Muslim associational life, as it exists in the second decade of this century, began to take shape as early as the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with the growth of federal policy and civic monitoring of equal rights guarantees and philosophies in the United States. These movements followed the religious advocacy movements of the early twentieth century in which certain Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations were formed at the national level, detached from the congregational levels, to pursue policy goals and protect religious institutional interests (e.g. religious liberty, prohibition, etc.). In the world of interest group politics, religious lobbying gained momentum in the 1950s and 1960s just as new legislation guaranteed civil rights to African Americans and allowed greater Asian immigration to the United States. The impact of these combined trends changed the game plan in terms of the public significance of religion, in a nation that once considered itself to be a Protestant nation.

Recent agenda-setting works have emphasized the need to create a comprehensive history and a stronger infusion of social sciences theory into the rapidly developing subfield of Islam in America (e.g. Curtis 2009; Hammer and Safi 2013). This essay hopes to pose questions for research about the salience of religion in the development of Muslim associational life in the United States. What are the motives for belonging to associations defined by faith? Do these associations foster connections or alliances with other non-Muslim associations? Do these groups facilitate political action, and by what means? What conditions provide opportunities for associational growth and political strength?

At the end of the twentieth century, American Muslim associational life had advanced to the point where institutions, networks, and civic and professional organizations with social, economic, and political as well as religious power were well established. American Muslims may have every reason to feel marginalized in the post-9/11 environment, but their inclusion in public life has become undeniable. What follows is a short list of some of the major organizations of American Muslims.

### *Major American Muslim Organizations (alphabetically listed)*

- *American Muslim Alliance (AMA)* ([www.amaweb.org](http://www.amaweb.org)) provides information about elections and voting. The goal of this organization is to organize and mobilize American Muslims as a voting block in local, state, and national elections, and to get qualified American Muslims to run for public office at every level. Established in 1994.
- *Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals (CAMP)* ([www.camp-online.org](http://www.camp-online.org)) is a face-to-face networking organization for mid- to senior-level Muslim professionals in the United States with chapters in five major cities. The objective is to broaden community and philanthropic efforts. Founded in 1994.
- *Council on American–Islamic Relations (CAIR)* ([www.cair.com](http://www.cair.com)) is considered by many to be the leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding, and aims to educate the American public about Islam, to challenge defamatory representations about Islam and Muslims, to protect the civil liberties of American Muslims, and to lobby on behalf of American Muslim interests. CAIR emerged when certain pundits were bringing to public attention the problem of militant Islam. Founded in 1994.
- *Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)* ([www.icna.org](http://www.icna.org)) was initially predominantly a South Asian Muslim organization that concentrated on the personal spiritual development of its membership, and was an offshoot of the Pakistani Jamaat-i Islami Party. Since the 1980s it has diversified its membership, adding outreach and social justice, charity, and Islamic savings and investment to its mission. Established in 1971.
- *Islamic Relief USA* ([www.irusa.org/](http://www.irusa.org/)) is a relief organization with five regional offices in the United States that educates the public about its disaster assistance operations around the world. It holds seminars, banquets, concerts, and other events to raise awareness and raise funds for domestic and international relief efforts. Established in 1993.
- *Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)* ([www.isna.net](http://www.isna.net)), founded in 1983 as an outgrowth of the Muslim Student Association (established 1963), functions as a broad-based organization that holds annual conventions. It is an umbrella organization representing over 2,000 mosques and Islamic centers in the United States and Canada. The ISNA has long been a service organization that has periodically taken a position on policy. More recently, in the past decade it has established a lobbying arm in Washington, DC, which it calls ISNA, Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances. The Fiqh Council of North America, an affiliate of ISNA, is a prominent network of religious scholars from the United States and Canada which offers Islamic legal advice on the application of religious principles. The Muslim Youth of North America (MYNA) is also sponsored by ISNA and plays an important role in staging conferences and events with an Islamic focus. Divided into four regions covering Canada and the eastern, central, and western United States, MYNA provides occasions for young people to talk about issues of common concern and to develop leadership skills.
- *Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)* ([www.mpac.org](http://www.mpac.org)) is considered the leading civil rights advocacy organization that aims to inform and shape public opinion regarding issues of importance to the nation. It offers internships for young leaders to encourage careers in

public service and media, and works with law enforcement agencies to insure the protection of Muslim Americans' civil liberties. This organization has an affiliate, the Muslim Women's League, which promotes women's rights. Established in 1988.

- *Muslim Urban Professionals (Muppies)* ([www.muppies.org/](http://www.muppies.org/)) supports the advancement of Muslim leaders in private, public, and non-profit sectors, and is built on the foundation of both professional success and community engagement. It provides social networking and mentorship opportunities as well as civic engagement with broader society. Established in 2007.
- *National Association of Muslim Lawyers (NAML)*, with its sister organization *Muslim Advocates*, is a national legal advocacy and educational organization that promotes the protection of freedom, justice, and equality regardless of faith. It uses the tools of legal advocacy, policy engagement, and education to meet its aims. In its mission statement this organization states that it endorses the founding principles of American constitutionalism, and believes that these principles can be fulfilled without compromising the nation's security. Muslim Advocates ([www.muslimadvocates.org](http://www.muslimadvocates.org)) has established itself as a networking agent among the nation's leading lawyers, community and mosque leaders, government officials, the media, and allies in the human rights and national security fields. In addition to its advocacy efforts, Muslim Advocates has provided technical assistance to Muslim charities to help them be in legal compliance. NAML was established in 2000 and Muslim Advocates founded in 2005.

## Notes

- 1 According to an October 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, many of the country's unaffiliated are religious or spiritual in some way. Two-thirds say they believe in God, and think that religious institutions benefit society by strengthening community bonds and helping the poor. See Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012).
- 2 [nation.time.com/2013/08/28/nypd-designates-mosques-as-terrorism-organizations/](http://nation.time.com/2013/08/28/nypd-designates-mosques-as-terrorism-organizations/)
- 3 See text at "Remarks by the President on a New Beginning," White House Office of the Press Secretary, June 4, 2009, accessed on March 30, 2013, at [www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09).
- 4 Political activity in Jamal's study excludes voting because 70 percent of her data set were foreign born and thus not eligible to vote in elections. She defines political activity by asking four questions: Have you ever called or written the media or a politician on a given issue, or have you signed a petition? Have you ever attended a rally in support of a cause? Have you ever given a contribution or volunteered your time or services in support of a political candidate? Would you consider yourself an active member of a political party? (Jamal 2005: 528).
- 5 "Eisenhower's 1957 Speech at Islamic Center of Washington," last accessed Sept 10, 2013, at [iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2007/06/20070626154822lnkais0.6946985.html#axzz2f5e01e00](http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2007/06/20070626154822lnkais0.6946985.html#axzz2f5e01e00).
- 6 *Walz v Tax Commission*, 397 U.S. 664, 670 (1970).

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