

Racial Segregation in Muslim Congregations: Evidence from 11 Metropolitan Areas Across the United States

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A large body of literature that suggests African Americans are segregated in nearly every aspect of their lives, including at religious services (Massey and Denton 1987, Emerson and Kim 2003). This article seeks to investigate the extent to which African Americans are segregated among a mostly immigrant religious population, Muslims in the US. Approximately 65% of Muslims in the US are foreign born (Pew 2007), so the context of segregation is different than the traditional white/black divide often emphasized in past research. This study examines mosques in 11 metropolitan areas in the US for evidence of segregation of African Americans. We hypothesize that, similar to patterns of congregational segregation already seen among Black Protestants, African American Muslims will show evidence of segregation across metropolitan areas in the US. The results confirm this idea, indicating that similarly to Protestant congregations, there is a large degree of congregational segregation for African Americans in mosques in the US.

African Americans have been consistently found to be the most residentially segregated minority in the US (Massey and Denton 1987; Logan, Stults and Farely 2004). Residential segregation is closely linked to Protestant congregational segregation, as many churches are found in neighborhoods in the US. Religious institutions also often play a central role in the larger context of social capital and civic engagement (Putnam 2000). Support has been found that residential segregation is often reinforced by social institutions such as religious congregations (Blanchard 2007). It is thought that this racial divide further reinforces the racial divide in other parts of social life (Yancey 1999). In the past, researchers have often noted that

Sunday mornings are one of the most racially segregated features of US life (Yancey and Emerson 2003). Religious institutions are one of the most racially segregated areas of U.S. life, with most Christian congregations made up of a single racial group (Emerson and Kim 2003). Although this finding has been duplicated in several Christian populations, the extent to which segregation exists in Muslim institutions in the US has not been explored.

Segregation in immigrant populations is often common as well. Between 1990 and 2000 segregation among recent immigrants actually increased suggesting more reliance on ethnically dominated enclaves (Iceland and Scopilliti 2008). However, Iceland also found evidence that segregation between African Americans and immigrant groups decreased between the same period, indicating that immigrants had more contact with African Americans (Iceland 2004). This is especially apparent in the US Muslim population, which was estimated to be 65% foreign-born and 20% African American in 2007 (Pew 2007). These findings might suggest less segregation in religious services between these two groups, due to the lower residential segregation however there are several reasons to believe this is not true.

Research in the immigration literature has shown that immigrants are often making gains in the US labor markets at the expense of African Americans (Borjas 1998; Johnson 1998; Hamermesh 1998). Evidence suggests that immigrants seek to be upwardly mobile in their assimilation to the US and select strategies to do so. One such strategy is to avoid associations with lower status groups, such as African Americans when possible. More specific evidence can be found in the ethnographic literature, which finds that African American Muslims often feel more isolated in mosques than do immigrant Muslims (Karim 2009).

The data for this study was taken from the Mosque Study in 2000. The Mosque Study is part of a larger survey on congregations in the US known as Faith Communities Today. This

survey was a random sample of all mosques in the US, which consisted of 416 mosques, or approximately one third of all existing mosques at the time. For the purposes of this analysis, the zip codes where the mosques were located were used to classify the mosques into general metropolitan statistical areas. Eleven MSAs were identified with large enough sample sizes to construct a segregation measure of mosques in the area. Table 1 shows the metropolitan areas in the sample and the number of mosques in each MSA. Metropolitan areas rather than smaller geographic units were chosen as the unit of analysis because of the low density of mosques and Muslims in the US. There were not enough mosques in smaller defined geographic to construct segregation measures.

To examine the composition of mosques, we used the “P-star” measure of segregation. We specifically use the isolation index, which indicates the degree to which the average person interacts with people of their own racial or ethnic group at Mosque; that is, it estimates the share of the average person’s congregation that is in the same racial or ethnic group. We further decomposed this measure in order to separate the effects of composition between the metro and mosque level using the decomposition method described in Van Hook and Balistreri (2002). Descriptive statistics from table 2 show that approximately 90 percent of the sample is comprised of three ethnic groups, South Asians, Arabs and African Americans. Among all of these groups, there is an isolation index above 50, indicating high levels of clustering. This table also shows the average percent of African American Muslims found in each ethnicity’s mosque (i.e., the “interaction index”). Within African American mosques, African Americans make of a majority of the total number of Muslims within the mosque.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of the isolation index by metropolitan area for the three most populous groups of Muslims in our sample. The isolation indices range from .21 for Arabs

to .67 for African Americans. Upon first glance, the isolation indices appear fairly similar across groups, however the decomposition analysis tells a different story. Most isolation of South Asians and Arabs is due to the proportion of these groups which reside in their city. That is, it appears these groups are isolated because they are distributed unequally across metro areas. In contrast, most the isolation seen among African American Muslims is due to their distribution within the metropolitan area. One striking example of this is in Houston. Within Houston, the isolation index for all groups is approximately 0.50; for South Asians and Arabs 0.37 of this total is due to the proportion of these groups that reside within Houston. In contrast, for African Americans only 0.13 of the isolation index is comprised of the proportion of African American Muslims that reside in Houston. Rather, 0.37 of their total is due to the distribution of African American Muslims at mosques within Houston. This is a pattern consistently seen within the data, where African Americans are isolated at mosques within their city even after taking into account the proportion of their ethnicity residing within the city. Our initial analysis of the complementary measure, interaction, shows a similar pattern of segregation among African American Muslims.

In summary, our initial analysis of the data indicates within our sample there is evidence of segregation of African American Muslims in mosques in the US. African American Muslims on average attend mosques that have more African Americans than other Muslim groups in the US and their isolation is due to their distribution in mosques across their metropolitan areas. This evidence suggests similar patterns of segregation seen among Protestant groups in the US.

Table 1. Metropolitan Areas in the Sample

Metropolitan Areas	Number of Mosques	Number of Muslims
New York City	52	17120
Philadelphia	14	2090
Washington D.C.	18	10122
Atlanta	9	3680
Miami	5	500
Cleveland	11	1912
Detroit	20	7157
Chicago	33	14020
Houston	9	2945
Los Angeles	11	4365
San Francisco	19	6132
Total	201	70043

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for All Ethnicities in Mosque Survey, 2000

	Percent in Sample	Total Isolation Index	Percent African American Muslims in Average US Muslim's Mosque
South Asian	40.35	57.45	7.3
Arab	32.75	53.13	7.5
African American	15.09	50.27	53.1
African	4.25	50.12	21.2
Caribbean	1.91	28.96	9.1
European	1.66	25.35	5.8
Iranian	1.38	22.64	10.7
Turkish	1.04	8.35	7.0
White	0.96	7.13	12.7
Southeast Asian	0.43	6.92	11.7
Latino	0.41	3.90	30.9

Table 3. Decomposition of Isolation Index Across 11 US Metropolitan Areas for Selected Muslim Groups, 2000

MSA	Isolation Index			Due to Proportion in MSA			Due to Distribution Within MSA		
	South Asians	Arabs	African Americans	South Asians	Arabs	African Americans	South Asians	Arabs	African Americans
New York City	0.63	0.68	0.50	0.34	0.29	0.17	0.29	0.39	0.33
Philadelphia	0.59	0.46	0.53	0.37	0.26	0.22	0.22	0.19	0.31
Washington D.C.	0.44	0.38	0.51	0.37	0.33	0.15	0.07	0.05	0.35
Atlanta	0.48	0.21	0.67	0.36	0.15	0.38	0.13	0.06	0.29
Miami	0.48	0.35	0.49	0.33	0.22	0.23	0.15	0.13	0.26
Cleveland	0.31	0.41	0.58	0.24	0.35	0.21	0.06	0.06	0.37
Detroit	0.66	0.48	0.57	0.48	0.30	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.39
Chicago	0.61	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.35	0.08	0.12	0.14	0.41
Houston	0.60	0.33	0.31	0.54	0.28	0.08	0.06	0.05	0.23
Los Angeles	0.58	0.57	0.49	0.43	0.44	0.08	0.15	0.13	0.40
San Francisco	0.51	0.47	0.50	0.37	0.37	0.13	0.13	0.10	0.37

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