



2019 Survey of MSA West Student Members: *Perseverance in the Face of Adversity*



Muslim Student Associations are often an integral space for American Muslims' social, spiritual, and political development. To better understand the perspectives of Muslim students in California, ISPU and MSA West partnered to administer a survey during the annual MSA West Conference at the University of California, Irvine. The results of this convenience sample of MSA West students provide a snapshot of their strengths and struggles. We offer data-driven recommendations highlighting opportunities for funders, university administrations, and campus MSAs to address some of the challenges that were identified in the survey.

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For more information about this study, please visit www.ispu.org/MSAW and www.msawest.org/ISPU



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Perseverance in the Face of Adversity



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young American Muslims are one of the fastest growing demographics in the U.S., with 37% of American Muslims under the age of 30.¹ With American Muslims graduating four-year institutions at higher rates (23%) than the national average (17%),² a growing portion of the community are entering academic settings and exploring identities within these contexts. Muslim Student Associations (MSAs) are often an integral space for American Muslims' social, spiritual, and political development, and provide an important window into understanding the challenges and opportunities that young American Muslims face in university settings.

About the Survey

To better understand the perspectives of Muslim students in California, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) and MSA West partnered to

administer a survey during the annual MSA West Conference at the University of California, Irvine from January 11 to 13, 2019.

A total of 516 MSA West Conference participants completed the survey. The sample size consisted of 64% women and 35% men, predominantly of South Asian (39%) and Arab/Middle Eastern (37%) backgrounds, with lower representation of Black American students (5%) than a national sample. Students reported their family's financial situation in four segments; as excellent (15%), good (36%), fair (31%), and poor (15%). A slight majority of participants identified as politically liberal, with participants stating that they are progressive (12%), liberal (17%), somewhat liberal (26%), somewhat conservative (6%), conservative (2%), socially liberal/fiscally conservative (6%), and not interested in politics (14%), and 16% saying they don't know.

The following results of this convenience sample of MSA West students provide a snapshot of their strengths and struggles.

MSA West Engagement

MSA West and Campus MSAs Successfully Serve Many Muslim Students, but Some Women Feel Left Behind

Surveyed students report that MSA West and campus MSAs play important roles in their spiritual and social lives. The frequency with which students wear religious dress has little effect on perceived inclusion. Those who report wearing religious symbols all the time, some of the time, and never did not differ significantly in their likelihood to report that they somewhat or strongly agree that their MSA strives to meet their needs as a community member (60% vs. 65% vs. 58%). Additionally, the frequency of involvement in MSA West is unrelated to confidence in one's faith, suggesting that campus MSAs are equally welcoming to Muslims in different places on their spiritual journey, and who choose different ways to present themselves. Additionally, women and men surveyed report feeling equally confident in MSA West—48% report that they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in MSA West—and equally spiritually nourished by their campus MSAs—62% of men and 55% of women surveyed report that they somewhat or strongly agree that their spiritual needs are served.

Despite these successes, gender-based barriers do exist in this sample, including slightly lower campus MSA leadership among female respondents. Twenty percent of female participants report being on campus MSA boards, as opposed to 28% of male respondents. Additionally, 25% of female respondents report volunteering as compared to 37% of male participants. Finally, female students surveyed express less confidence in their campus MSA valuing their opinions than their male counterparts (23% vs. 33% report they strongly agree their campus MSA values their opinions).

Discrimination and Identity

Women Face Greater Discrimination Inside and Outside of the Community, But Continue to Engage at Higher Levels

Women surveyed report experiencing more gender-based discrimination from both inside and outside their faith community than male participants. Sixty-three percent of female participants report gender-based



discrimination from within their faith community as compared to 28% of male respondents. Fifty-four percent of female participants report gender-based discrimination from outside of their faith community, compared to 26% of male participants.

Female participants are also more likely than male participants to report racial discrimination, experience higher levels of microaggressions,³ and report abuse from on-campus administrators and professors. Although female and male participants report similar amounts of racial discrimination from inside their faith community (37% vs. 39%), 57% of female participants report facing racial discrimination outside their faith community compared to 42% of male participants. Female respondents are also more likely to report experiencing microaggressions than male respondents (58% vs. 43%). Finally, female participants are more likely than male respondents to report experiencing abuse from university professors (17% vs. 8%).

Despite higher reported rates of discrimination and abuse, female participants also report more confidence in their identities as Muslims. They report being more likely to publicly identify their faith by always wearing visible religious symbols (61% vs. 29%). This greater visibility is likely linked to women reporting more frequent religious and racial discrimination. Female respondents who wear a religious symbol all or some of the time (in this case a hijab), as compared to male participants who wear a religious symbol, also report being more motivated to do so for primarily religious reasons (61% vs. 35%) and slightly less likely than their male counterparts to say they do so to make a political statement (1% vs. 4%), as a fashion choice (1% vs. 9%), or so people know that they are Muslim (4% vs. 10%). Female and male participants are equally likely to, and in both cases

rarely, report being primarily compelled to do so by a family member (3% vs. 3%).

Economically Disadvantaged Muslims Face Significant Challenges Inside and Outside the Muslim Community

MSA West Conference participants who identified their family's financial situation as "poor"⁴ (which we will refer to as "poor") face a host of challenges at higher rates than that of their more financially secure surveyed peers. They are slightly more likely than other respondents to report facing sectarian-based discrimination (8% vs. 1-3%), and they are slightly less likely than other participants to attend a Muslim congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space once a week or more (57% vs. 62-72%).

Poor survey respondents are three times as likely as all others surveyed to report experiencing regular gender discrimination by someone within their faith community (22% vs. 6-11%) and more likely than other respondents to report facing gender discrimination from outside of their faith community (16% vs. 2-9%). Economically disadvantaged respondents are more likely than all other respondents to report experiencing regular racial discrimination from inside their faith community (11% vs. 2-5%) and outside their faith community (15% vs. 2-6%).

Poor respondents are also slightly more likely than other participants to strongly agree that people want them to feel ashamed of their faith identity (13% vs. 5-7%). They are more likely than other respondents to somewhat or strongly agree that they hide their faith identity for fear of prejudice (21% vs. 14-15%). As a direct result of the 2016 presidential election, economically disadvantaged respondents are also marginally more likely than all other respondents to report suffering emotionally with stress and anxiety enough to need the services of a mental health professional (24% vs. 15-21%); making plans



to leave the country, if necessary (17% vs. 8-10%); signing up for a self-defense class (17% vs. 10-14%); and fearing for their personal safety or that of their family from white supremacists (59% vs. 46-56%).

Despite these challenges, as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election, poor respondents are slightly more likely than the wealthiest participants to report having joined, donated, or volunteered at a civic organization (36% vs. 30-35%). Economically disadvantaged respondents were also more likely than other participants to report changing their appearance to be both more (32% vs. 14-20%) and less identifiable (12% vs. 4-8%) as a member of their faith community. Meaning, poor respondents were more responsive than other MSA West Conference participants to the socio-political atmosphere, and they report changing their outward public appearance related to their faith as a result—mostly to become *more visible*.

Muslim Students Express Confidence in Their Identity as Muslims

MSA West Conference participants overwhelmingly view their faith identity as an asset (roughly three quarters of men and women agree). Those surveyed place more importance upon their faith identity (81% very important) and less upon their American identity (22% very important). The importance MSA West respondents place on their American identity is also significantly lower than that reported by the general American Muslim population⁵ (58% very important).

Two out of three survey respondents say they attend a congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space at least once per week, and five out of every six say they attend at least once per month. Although most surveyed students (81%) have been approached by someone outside of their faith community to explain a controversial issue regarding their religion at some point, 71% expressed confidence in answering their questions.

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Report the Most Pride in Their Muslim Identity

MSA West Conference participants who always wear visible religious symbols are most likely to cite a religious obligation to God or piety as their motivation (82%), versus the popular trope of being compelled to do so by a family member (1%).

Surveyed respondents who report *always* wearing visible religious symbols are more likely than MSA West Conference students who report *never* wearing a visible religious symbol to: “strongly agree” that their faith identity is an asset (86% vs. 58%); more likely to “strongly agree” about feeling pride in being identified as a member of their faith community (85% vs. 66%); and more likely to “strongly agree” that they have meaning and purpose in their life because of their religious faith (79% vs. 53%).

Respondents Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Exhibit Less Risky Behavior

Survey respondents who wear a religious symbol in public that tells people they are Muslim are also least likely to report engaging in risky social behaviors. Those surveyed who report always wearing a visible religious symbol are less likely than their surveyed student counterparts to say that they have consumed alcohol (4% vs. 13-19%), smoked marijuana (9% vs. 24-25%), or tried other drugs (3% vs. 8-10%). Respondents who report always wearing visible religious symbols are also less likely than other participants to report having had premarital sexual contact with the opposite sex (9% vs. 21-23%).

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Face More Threats, But Are More Civically Engaged Than Others

Surveyed students who report always wearing visible religious symbols (both men and women) are more likely than all others surveyed to report fearing attacks from white supremacists (62% vs. 44-46%). They are more likely than other respondents to report having experienced discrimination in the last year, including microaggressions (60% vs. 46-51%). Finally, surveyed students who report always wearing a religious symbol are more likely than all others surveyed to report signing up for a self-defense class as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election (17% vs. 4-10%).

Despite these challenges, participants who report always wearing a visible religious symbol are more likely than other respondents to have joined, donated, or volunteered at a civic group as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election (40% vs. 22-26%) and more likely than other respondents to report having donated to an organization associated with their faith group (43% vs. 26-39%).



Despite Post-Election Hostilities, Respondents, Especially Women, Are Highly Politically Engaged

Female respondents report feeling less safe than male participants as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election. Twenty-one percent of female respondents vs. 12% of male participants report suffering emotionally and experiencing anxiety enough to need the services of a mental health professional. Sixty-four percent of female respondents vs. 33% of male participants report that they feared for their personal safety or that of their family from white supremacists. Sixteen percent of female participants and 6% of male respondents report signing up for a self-defense class.

Despite feeling less safe as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election, female respondents reported greater civic engagement than male participants. Female participants report joining, donating, or volunteering at a civic organization at nearly twice the rate of male participants (39% vs. 21%). Seventy-seven percent of eligible female voters report voting in the 2018 midterm election cycle, as compared to 63% of eligible male participants and 31%⁶ of eligible Americans 18-29 years old. Both female and male respondents report registering and voting at rates more than twice the national average of similarly-aged eligible Americans.





Risky Behavior, Mental Health, and Institutional Support

MSA West Conference Participants Report Lower Alcohol and Marijuana Consumption Than National Averages

Surveyed students report lower levels of alcohol (10%) and marijuana (16%) usage than national averages of alcohol (62%) and marijuana usage (38%) among American college students aged 18-22.⁷ Economically disadvantaged participants report more risky behavior, including consuming alcohol (21%) and smoking marijuana (31%), than others surveyed (alcohol 5-10%, marijuana 10-17%), but far less than national averages.⁸

Poor Students Report Experiencing More Unwanted and Consensual Sexual Contact Than Their MSA West Conference Peers

Economically disadvantaged students report having experienced sexual contact *without* consent at rates greater than other students surveyed (17% vs. 0-4%). Poor respondents are also more likely than other participants to report consensual sexual contact with the opposite sex (26% vs. 10-17%).

Economically Disadvantaged and Social Justice Activists Report Attempting Suicide at Higher Rates

Poor respondents report greater mental health challenges than all other students surveyed. Although economically disadvantaged students report being twice as likely as other respondents to have attempted suicide (25% vs. 10-13%), thirty-nine percent of poor student respondents report having sought services of a mental health professional, compared with 35% of students with fair financial situations and 26% of students with good or excellent financial situations. Results from respondents reporting involvement with social justice groups on campus demonstrate that they are more likely to report having attempted suicide compared to all others (22% vs. 8-10%), but also more likely than their non-activist counterparts (11% vs. 1-5%) to report going to religious leaders if they experience severe emotional distress.

Women and Poor Muslims Surveyed Less Prepared for Careers

Muslim female participants report less confidence in career choices. Thirty-seven percent of female participants strongly agree about knowing what career path they want to pursue after college, compared to 44% of

male participants. Female participants report being only half as likely as male participants to strongly agree that they will find a satisfying job after graduation (17% vs. 34%) and are less likely than male respondents to say they strongly agree that they have mentorship opportunities from Muslim professionals in their chosen field (8% vs. 28%).

Similarly, economically disadvantaged respondents, as compared to wealthier respondents, are less likely to strongly agree that they will find a satisfying job after graduation (22% vs. 39%). Poor participants are less likely than wealthier respondents to say they strongly agree that they have access to strong mentorship from Muslim professionals in their chosen field (12% vs. 24%).

Families Provide Support for Students, But Women Less Confident in Religious Institutions

Although a majority of survey participants report having “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in religious leaders providing moral guidance (66% total), female respondents were slightly less likely than their male counterparts to hold these views (62% vs. 75%). Female participants also express less confidence in their local mosque than male respondents, with 42% of female

respondents reporting “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in their local mosque, compared to 60% of male participants reporting the same sentiments.

Female students surveyed report placing the most trust in their families to answer questions about faith. Forty-nine percent of female participants report first going to “parents/family” to answer their questions about faith, compared to 26% of male participants. After “parents/family,” male participants report “local imams” (21%) and “internet searches” (20%) as the next most common resources they reach out to for advice related to faith questions. Only 7% of female participants report first reaching out to their local imam.

When under severe stress, more than two in three female participants (68%) and nearly half of male participants (48%) report first seeking help from family and friends. Four percent of female participants and 11% of male participants report first seeking help from religious leaders.

Finally, large majorities of both female and male participants report receiving parental support for their career choices, with 84% of female participants and 80% of male participants agreeing.





ABOUT MSA WEST



MSA West is a grassroots nonprofit organization that aims to serve and support over 30 affiliated Muslim Student Association chapters on college campuses

across the West Coast through a uniquely student-centric approach. MSA West focuses on cultivating a wide variety of student-led initiatives that creatively address the spiritual, advocacy, and institutional needs of their community, helping to grow a sustainable pipeline of student leaders along the way. While research exists around the needs of Muslim youth in general, there are few data sources that are specific to Muslim college students. This study represents an effort to better understand the nuances of the Muslim student community: increasing the ability for the organization and MSA West leadership to better focus their initiatives, giving Muslim students a deeper understanding into their collective challenges and opportunities, and contributing toward painting a clearer portrait for the general Muslim community of its future generation of leaders.

MSA West provides various programs and resources to support the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of Muslim students across the West Coast. For the past 20 years, MSA West has hosted the largest student-run conference on the West Coast, with over 1,000 attendees. Other flagship events include a spiritual retreat and a leadership development summit. In addition to these major programs, MSA West provides resources and services to affiliate campuses such as crisis support, strategic consultation, and networking opportunities with peers and community partners. In January 2019, MSA West launched the Islamic Sacred Activism Cohort, a unique initiative meant to cultivate and train a diverse group of Muslim student activists using an intensive, faith-based community organizing curriculum. MSA West's approach is grounded in holistically addressing the needs of Muslim students so that they thrive and remain connected to their communities as they move forward in their personal and professional lives. This study provides a data-driven framework for MSA West to work with their constituents and partners to develop and strengthen programs and resources that cater to the unique needs of Muslim students.



ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND UNDERSTANDING (ISPU)



The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding is a nonprofit research and education organization. ISPU conducts objective, solution-seeking research that empowers American Muslims to develop their community and fully contribute to democracy and pluralism in the United States. Since 2002, ISPU has been at the forefront of

discovering trends and opportunities that impact the American Muslim community. ISPU's research aims to educate the general public and enable community change agents, the media, and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions. In addition to building in-house capacity, ISPU has assembled leading experts across multiple disciplines, building a solid reputation as a trusted source for information for and about American Muslims.



METHODOLOGY

The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding began this project by conducting five stakeholder interviews with MSA West leaders, including Adnan Perwez, MSA West Board of Directors President; Hafsah Lakhany, MSA West Board of Directors Treasurer; Hammad Alam, MSA West Board of Trustees member; Ahmed Abdelgany, MSA West Board of Trustees member; and Danna Eneil, MSA West Programs Director. The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and provided the overarching framework for the study.

Survey

ISPU developed a survey of 55 questions on a range of topics for MSA West. Topics included professional aspirations, community engagement, the significance of religion, political activism, experiences with discrimination, mental health, experiences with sexual abuse, and general demographics.

The survey was disseminated from January 11, 2019 to January 13, 2019 during the annual MSA West Conference held at the University of California, Irvine. The survey was conducted using the online Survey Monkey platform. Participants were told of the survey during the conference opening and were sent a link to complete the survey. There were also designated computers set up throughout the venue for conference attendees to complete the survey. A total of 650 respondents took

the survey, with nearly 80% completing the survey (516 completes). The average time to complete the survey was 14 and a half minutes.

Analysis

ISPU, in partnership with MSA West leadership, conducted the analysis on a base of 516 respondents who completed the survey. The analysis sample is NOT representative of Muslim college students in the United States or even of Muslim college students in California. Rather, it is a convenience sample of Muslim college students who attended the MSA West Conference. It is likely to be the case that attendees of the conference were more likely to be female, more likely to be born to immigrant parents (Arab or South Asian), more likely to hail from affluent families, more likely to be practicing Muslims, and more likely to be engaged in MSA West work due to the logistics, cost of travel and registration, and location of the gathering.

Our analysis included cross-tabulations and statistical significance testing of each question by five cuts of interest. These include gender, self-reported socioeconomic status, frequency of wearing a visible religious symbol, level of campus MSA engagement, and level of social justice involvement. These cuts were decided upon with MSA West as key areas of focus for this report.

Demographics of Our Sample

The following demographics characterize the 516 MSA West students who completed the survey:

Demographics	% of MSA West Students
Sex	
Female	64%
Male	35%
Other	1%
Age	
<18	10%
18-20	51%
21-25	34%
26-30	4%
31-35	1%
Year in University	
Freshman/Sophomore	34%
Junior/Senior	45%
Recent graduate	8%
Graduate student	6%
Other	7%
Race	
South Asian	39%
Arab/Middle Eastern	37%
White	2%
Black/African American	5%
Mixed	4%
Afghan	3%
East Asian	3%
Hispanic/Latino	1%
Native American	1%
Persian	1%
Other	1%
Birthplace	
United States	79%
Outside of the United States	19%
Don't know	2%

United States Citizenship	
Yes	91%
No	8%
Don't know	1%
Self-rated Socioeconomic Status	
Excellent	15%
Good	36%
Fair	31%
Poor	15%
Don't know	3%
Political Views	
Progressive	12%
Liberal	17%
Somewhat liberal	26%
Somewhat conservative	6%
Conservative	2%
Socially liberal/Fiscally conservative	6%
Not interested in politics	14%
Don't know	16%
Marital Status	
Single & never married	93%
Married	2%
Engaged	2%
Divorced	1%
Widowed	1%
Single & living with a partner	1%
Sexuality	
Straight	94%
Bisexual	3%
Gay/lesbian	1%
Other	2%

FINDINGS

MSA WEST ENGAGEMENT



MSA West and Campus MSAs Successfully Serve Many Muslim Students, But Some Women Feel Left Behind



Assets:

- Campus MSA chapters are inclusive of students regardless of their frequency of wearing Muslim symbols in public.
- Frequency of campus MSA involvement is unrelated to confidence in faith.
- Female and male respondents report feeling equally confident in MSA West and equally spiritually nourished by their campus MSAs.



Challenges:

- Female students surveyed report slightly lower rates of campus MSA participation and leadership; they also express less confidence in their campus MSAs and are less likely than their male counterparts to believe their opinions count.

Wearing Publicly Identifying Religious Symbols Has Little Effect on Inclusivity Within Campus MSAs

Those who report never wearing a publicly identifiable Muslim symbol engage less often with the MSA than those who sometimes or always wear a symbol (15% vs. 18-29% hold an MSA board position). Despite this lower engagement, those who never wear a symbol are no different than other respondents in their feelings of being served by their university MSA (23% vs. 26% strongly agree), believe that their opinions in their campus MSA count (21% vs. 27-29% strongly agree), and that their campus MSA serves their spiritual needs (21% vs. 24%-32% strongly agree). This suggests that respondents perceive represented campus MSAs in California to serve students equally, regardless of outward expressions of piety.

Frequency of Campus MSA Involvement Unrelated to Confidence in Faith

The level of involvement or attendance at campus MSA events is unrelated to respondents' level of confidence in their faith or identity (89% of those who are seldom involved in MSA West agree that they are proud to be identified as a member of their faith community vs. 89-92% of those who attend programs, volunteer, or serve on their campus MSA board). In other words, whether a student practices their faith strictly or only casually, they are equally likely to be involved in campus MSA events. This suggests that events are inclusive of different approaches to Islam rather than appealing only to either the religiously devout or the religiously permissive. Campus MSA events appear to provide a "big tent" approach to serving Muslim students rather than only catering to more religiously oriented students.

Despite Strong Overall Affiliation and Confidence in MSA West, Women Respondents Slightly Less Involved in Campus MSA Leadership and Express Lower Confidence in Campus MSAs

Women participated in the 2019 MSA West Conference (and this convenience sample) in much greater numbers than men (64% vs. 35%) and express similar amounts of confidence in MSA West as male participants (48% of both express quite a lot or a great deal of confidence).

Women attend campus MSA programs at roughly the same frequency as male participants (24% vs. 20% report attending programs regularly), but female respondents report holding slightly fewer board positions (20% vs. 28%) and volunteer less often (25% vs. 37%) than men.

Women as Confident as Men in MSA West

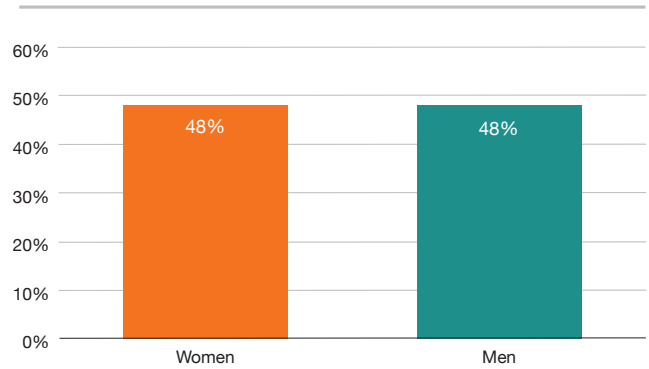


FIGURE 1: How much confidence do you have in MSA West? (% A great deal of confidence and quite a lot of confidence shown) Base: Total respondents

Women Hold Fewer MSA Leadership Positions

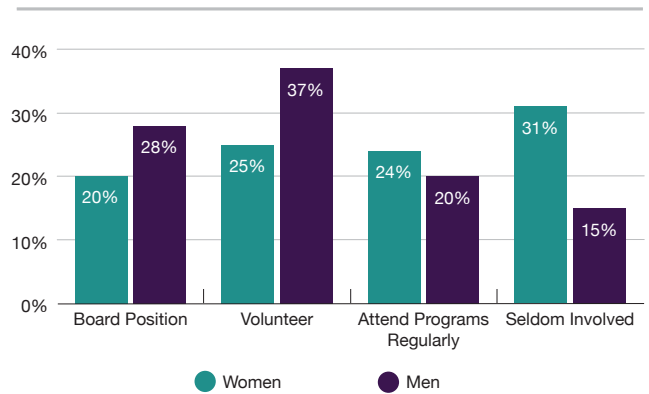


FIGURE 2: How would you describe your level of engagement with MSA? Base: Total respondents

Women Less Confident Than Men in Their Campus MSAs

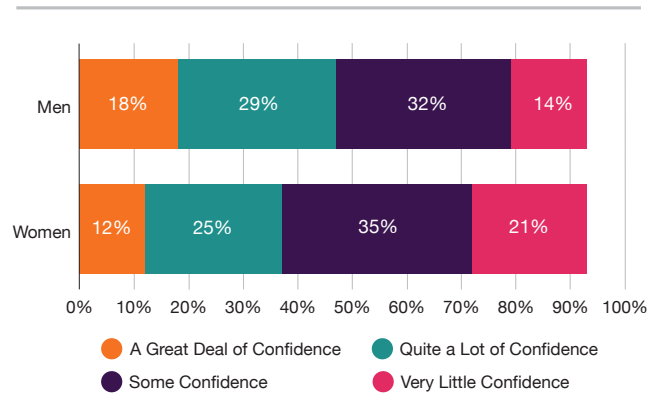


FIGURE 3: Please indicate how much confidence you have in your university MSA. Base: Total respondents

Female respondents also report lower overall confidence in their campus MSA than male respondents (37% vs. 47% express quite a lot or a great deal of confidence).

Despite Feeling Spiritually Nourished, Women Less Likely Than Men to Say Their Opinions Count in Their Campus MSA

Female respondents are less likely than men to feel their opinions count in their campus MSA (50% vs. 66% say they somewhat or strongly agree their opinions count) and also are slightly less likely (55%) than male respondents (62%) to say that their spiritual needs are being met in their campus Muslim Student Association. This finding also suggests that a majority of both men and women are feeling heard. Given the challenge that many traditional Muslim spaces face retaining young Muslim attendance due to younger generations not feeling included, this suggests a relative strength within campus MSA contexts.

Female Respondents Less Likely Than Male Respondents to Feel Opinions Count

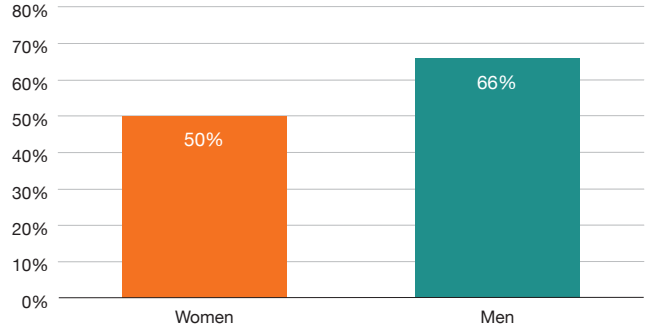


FIGURE 4: In my MSA, I feel my opinions count. (% Net agree shown) Base: Total respondents



DISCRIMINATION AND IDENTITY



Women Face Greater Discrimination Inside and Outside of the Community, But Continue to Engage at Higher Levels



Assets:

- The majority of surveyed students value their Muslim identity as important to how they view themselves.
- Female respondents are more likely than their male counterparts to publicly identify their faith by always wearing visible religious symbols and are more motivated to do so for primarily religious reasons.
- A majority of students surveyed report their faith identity as important to how they view themselves.



Challenges:

- Women in our survey report facing more gender-based and racial discrimination, abuse from on-campus administrators and professors, and microaggressions than men.
- Female survey respondents are more likely than male participants to report being uncomfortable with religious texts.

Women Face Higher Levels of Discrimination Than Men, Both Inside and Outside of Muslim Community

Like women in the general public,⁹ female respondents are twice as likely as male participants to report experiencing gender discrimination. Female respondents in the MSA West survey were roughly just as likely to report experiencing gender discrimination “regularly” from inside as outside their faith communities. Within their faith community, 12% of Muslim women report regularly experiencing gender discrimination, compared with just 5% of men. Similarly, 8% of female students surveyed report regularly experiencing gender discrimination outside of their faith community, compared with just 3% of male participants. Sixty-three percent of female respondents report experiencing at least some gender-based discrimination from within their faith community, compared to 28% of male participants. Similarly, 54% of female survey respondents report experiencing at least some gender-based discrimination from outside of their faith community, compared to 26% of men surveyed. These results nearly mirror ISPU’s *American Muslim Poll 2018: Pride and Prejudice* results, which found that 51% of Muslim women and 45% of women in the general public report having personally experienced gender-based discrimination in the past year.¹⁰

Female participants also experience more racial discrimination from outside the faith community than male respondents. Fifty-seven percent of women surveyed reported some frequency of racial discrimination from outside their faith community, compared with 42% of male respondents.

Women Report Experiencing More Racial Discrimination Than Men from General Public

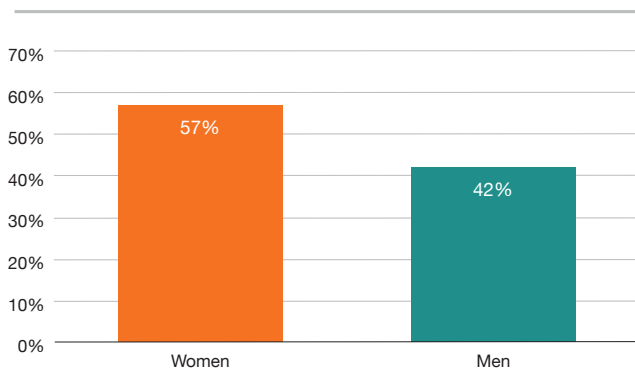


FIGURE 5: How often, if at all, have you personally experienced discrimination by someone OUTSIDE your faith community because of your race in the past year? (% Net discrimination ever shown) Base: Total respondents



Wellness Snapshot: MSA West Conference Women



Female students report more challenges than their male counterparts, including:

- Lower rates of holding MSA leadership positions and volunteering, and less confidence in their campus MSA valuing their opinions
- More gender-based and racial discrimination stemming from both inside and outside their faith communities
- More abuse from on-campus professors and administrators, and more overall reported microaggressions
- Less perceived safety as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election
- Less confidence in career choices and fewer mentorship opportunities



Despite these challenges, in many ways, female students reported greater overall well-being than male participants, including:

- Placing more *importance* on their Muslim identities in relation to how they view themselves
- More *confidence* in their identity as Muslims
- Being more likely to always wear visible religious symbols and more likely to do so for primarily religious reasons
- More trust in their families to answer questions about faith
- Higher voter registration and voting rates during the 2018 midterm elections

Note: all statements are comparisons to MSA West Conference male respondents

Nearly four out of five (79%) women surveyed also report experiencing religious discrimination in the past year, compared with 63% of male participants. When asked about the types of religious discrimination experienced, female respondents were more likely than men to report microaggressions (58% vs. 43%).

Women Report Experiencing More Religious Discrimination

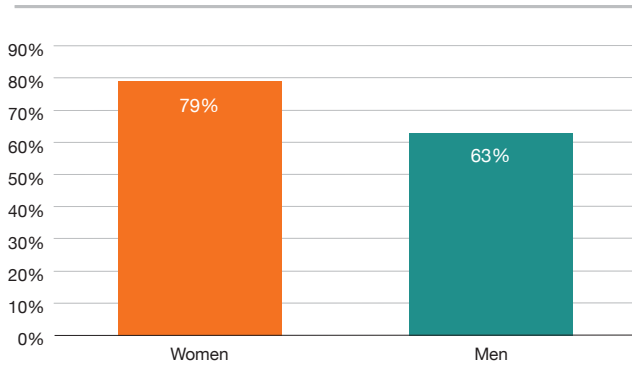


FIGURE 6: How often, if at all, have you personally experienced discrimination in the past year because of your religion? (% Net discrimination ever shown) Base: Total respondents

Female respondents are roughly as likely as their male counterparts to report facing abuse from their campus administration (10% vs. 8%) and twice as likely to report experiencing abuse from on-campus professors (17% vs. 8%).

Women Report More Discrimination from Professors Than Men

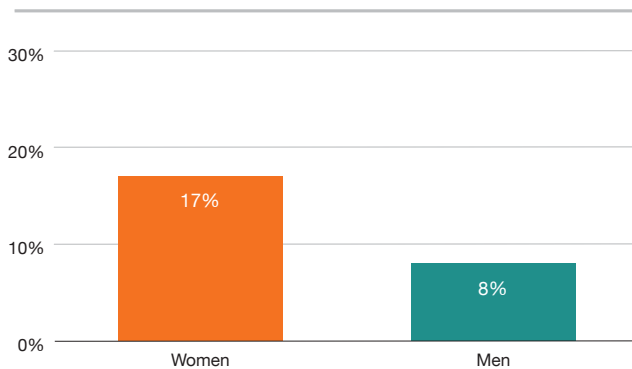


FIGURE 7: I have experienced discrimination from (on campus) professors. (% Yes shown) Base: Total respondents

It should be noted that female respondents reporting higher rates of discrimination and abuse may be driven by the fact that 61% of female participants say they wear a visible religious symbol¹¹ “all the time.” Given the survey population, the most likely visible religious symbol for female respondents is the *hijab*, a more recognizably

Muslim symbol than traditional male visible religious symbols, such as beards, which are less *uniquely* associated with Muslim identity. Consequently, it may be that in addition to experiencing discrimination because of their gender, a common experience for women in the U.S., high levels of Muslim visibility due to religious symbols also help explain increased levels of reported discrimination among female participants.

Women More Likely to See Quranic Passages and Prophetic Sayings as Troubling

Female participants are nearly twice as likely as male respondents to report finding verses in the Quran or Prophetic sayings troubling (29% vs. 16%), though the majority of both groups say they do not.

Women More Likely to Publicly Identify Their Faith Identity Through Appearance

Female respondents are approximately twice as likely as male participants to both report wearing a publicly identifiable religious symbol all the time (61% vs. 29%) and to primarily wear it for religious reasons (61% vs. 35%).

Women More Likely to Value Their Muslim Identity

Despite facing many forms of discrimination in multiple contexts, across a variety of questions, female respondents consistently report slightly greater affinity toward being identified as a member of their faith community than male participants (78% vs. 73%). Additionally, female participants report placing slightly more importance on their Muslim identities in relation to how they view themselves, with 84% saying that it’s very important, compared to 78% of male participants. Additional findings in subsequent sections highlight this distinction between female and male respondents.



Economically Disadvantaged Muslims Face Significant Challenges Inside and Outside the Muslim Community



Assets:

- Poor surveyed students are more likely to report having visited a mental health professional than their wealthier classmates.



Challenges:

- Overall, students surveyed from economically disadvantaged backgrounds report worse outcomes on many questions, in line with national results of poor college students across a variety of social, professional, and economic measures.
- Muslims surveyed who face economic challenges are more likely to report experiencing sectarian-based discrimination than wealthier participants and less likely to report attending a Muslim congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space than other students.
- Poor participants report facing higher rates of racial and gender-based discrimination both from inside and outside of their faith communities as compared to other respondents.
- Economically disadvantaged participants are slightly more likely to report wearing a visible religious symbol because of their family's or spouse's requirement than others surveyed.
- Muslims surveyed who face economic challenges are more likely to believe that people want them to feel ashamed of their faith identity than other participants and are also more likely than other respondents to report hiding their faith for fear of prejudice.
- Muslims surveyed who face economic challenges are more likely than others surveyed to report being negatively impacted by the 2016 presidential election, and they report changing their behaviors more than other participants as a result of the election.

Definition of “Poor”:

Participants were asked, “How would you rate your family’s financial situation today?” Fifteen percent of surveyed students reported excellent, 36% good, 31% fair, and 15% poor. Although the survey also asked about household income, income is only one important factor, and questions related to a family’s overall financial status provide a more holistic snapshot of an individual’s entire financial status. We use “poor” and “economically disadvantaged” interchangeably throughout this report.

Economically Disadvantaged Muslims Face Higher Discrimination Inside and Outside Muslim Community

Poor respondents are slightly more likely than other participants to report being regularly discriminated against by Muslims because of their sect (8% vs. 0-3%). They are more likely to report experiencing regular gender discrimination by someone within their faith community compared to other students surveyed (22% vs. 6-11%), and slightly more likely to report experiencing regular racial discrimination from inside their faith community than other respondents (11% vs. 2-5%). Finally, economically disadvantaged survey respondents are more than twice as likely to report facing regular racial discrimination outside of the community as other participants (15% vs. 2-6%), and to report facing gender discrimination from outside of their faith community as other students surveyed (16% vs. 2-9%).

Poor Muslims Face Heavy Pressure from Others about Their Faith

Survey participants with low economic status are more likely than other participants to report wearing visible religious symbols primarily because their family or spouse requires it (9% vs. 0-2%), though it is still relatively rare in any group. They are also more likely than other surveyed respondents to report strongly believing that people want them to feel ashamed of their faith identity (13% vs. 5-7%). Poor students are slightly more likely than other respondents to somewhat or strongly agree that they “often hide their faith identity for fear of prejudice” (21% vs. 14-15%). Finally, poor respondents are slightly less likely than other students surveyed to report attending a Muslim congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space once a week or more (57% vs. 62-72%).



Poor Muslims Were Impacted by 2016 Election

Surveyed students of low economic status were more likely than other participants to report being directly negatively impacted by the results of the 2016 presidential election. As a direct result of that election, they were slightly more likely than other participants to report suffering emotionally with stress and anxiety enough to need the services of a mental health professional (24% vs. 15-21%); making plans to leave the country, if necessary (17% vs. 8-10%); signing up for a self-defense class (17% vs. 10-14%); and fearing for their personal safety or that of their family from white supremacists (59% vs. 46-56%).

Despite these challenges, poor respondents were also slightly more likely than wealthier students to report that as a result of the 2016 election they joined, donated, or volunteered at a civic organization (36% vs. 30-31%). This may suggest that poor MSA West Conference participants are slightly more likely than others to believe that they hold political efficacy—or the ability to influence societal outcomes through their individual civic participation.

Economically disadvantaged respondents were also more likely than other participants to report changing their appearance to be either more (32% vs. 14-20%) or less identifiable (12% vs. 4-8%) as a member of their faith community. This means poor respondents were more responsive than other MSA West Conference participants to the political atmosphere and reported changing their outward public appearance related to their faith as a result.



Muslim Students Express Confidence in Their Identity as Muslims



Assets:

- A large percentage of MSA West Conference participants state that their faith identity is an asset, with female respondents rating it slightly higher than their male counterparts.
- Two out of three students surveyed attend a Muslim congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space at least once per week. Five out of every six attend at least once per month.
- When approached by someone outside of their faith community to explain a controversial issue regarding their religion, 71% of participants expressed confidence in answering their questions.
- Respondents, particularly surveyed women, report relying upon their families to answer faith questions.
- A majority of respondents report having confidence in religious leaders providing moral guidance.



Challenges:

- Most students surveyed (81%) report being approached by someone outside of their faith community to explain a controversial issue regarding their religion.
- Female participants report having less confidence than their male counterparts in religious leaders providing moral guidance.
- Female participants report having less confidence than male students in their local mosque.

Strong Pride for Muslim Faith

Respondents overwhelmingly view their faith identity as an asset in their life. Female and male participants similarly weigh their faith as an asset, with 76% of female respondents and 75% of male participants reporting that they strongly agree that their faith identity is an asset in their life. It is particularly noteworthy that male respondents highly value their faith identity, given the prevalence of violent, misogynistic, and other negative portrayals of Muslim men projected by mainstream Western media outlets.

Muslim Faith Identity Seen as Strong Asset

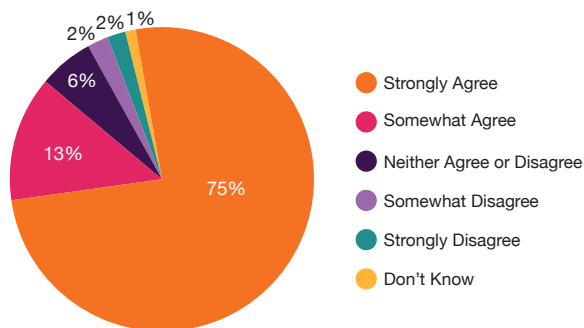


FIGURE 8: I see my faith identity as an asset in my life. Base: Total respondents

American Identity Less Important to Students Than to General American Muslim Population

MSA West Conference respondents are nearly four times as likely as the general American Muslim population to rate their Muslim identity “very important” as their American identity (81% vs. 22%), with slightly more female respondents (84%) than male participants (78%) rating their Muslim identity as “very important.” Notably, surveyed students in comparison to the national Muslim American population report both a greater importance for their Muslim identity (81% vs. 70%) and less importance for their American identity (22% vs. 58%).¹² These generational differences could be explained by a few factors.

First, nearly all of the survey participants attend California-based higher educational institutions and reflect the state’s high percentage of ethnic and racial diversity as compared to the U.S. as a whole. Consequently, in California, one’s primary identity may be viewed through an ethno-religious heritage more than a national lens.

Additionally, increased importance upon American identity among a national Muslim populace may reflect a feeling among Muslims born outside of the U.S. to

American Identity Less Important to Youth Than to Overall American Muslim Population

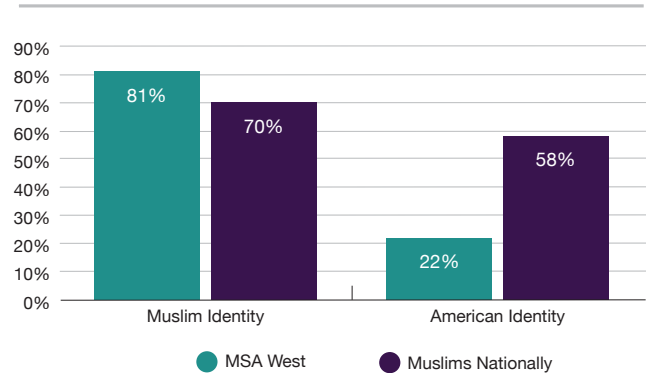


FIGURE 9: How important is being _____ to the way you think of yourself? (% Very important shown) Base: Total MSA West respondents and Muslim respondents from ISPU’s American Muslim Poll 2018

prove their loyalty to this country. Roughly 50% of the 2018 ISPU Poll’s national Muslim sample were born in the U.S.,¹³ whereas 79% of participants in this survey report being born in the U.S. and are likely more secure in their being accepted by their community as authentically “American.”

Finally, recent polling suggests a growing trend among the general American population to value their American identity less. A 2018 Gallup Poll found just 47% of Americans saying they are “extremely proud” to be an American, a 10% decrease from 2013.¹⁴ Additionally, the largest decline came from Democrats, from 56% in 2013 to 32% in 2018. Given that MSA West survey participants skewed heavily to the left politically—55% progressive/liberal, 14% conservative, and 30% not interested/don’t know—stronger left-leaning political affiliation may also explain a significant portion of Muslim students’ lower rates of enthusiasm for their American identity than that of a national American Muslim population (who reported a more conservative political alignment than participants in this survey).

Consistent Attendance for Congregational Prayers in Mosques / Prayer Spaces

Overall, 29% of surveyed students report attending a Muslim congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space more than once a week, 35% report attending once a week, and 20% report attending once or twice a month. Half of male respondents (49%) report attending a congregational prayer at a mosque or other prayer space more than once per week, suggesting a strong positive association with communal worship in religious spaces among male participants.

Majority of MSA West Conference Participants Confident When Approached by Other Americans to Explain Faith

A large majority of surveyed students (81%) have been approached by someone outside of their faith community to explain a controversial issue regarding their religion, and 71% expressed confidence in answering their questions.

Women Rely on Parents / Family to Answer Faith Questions

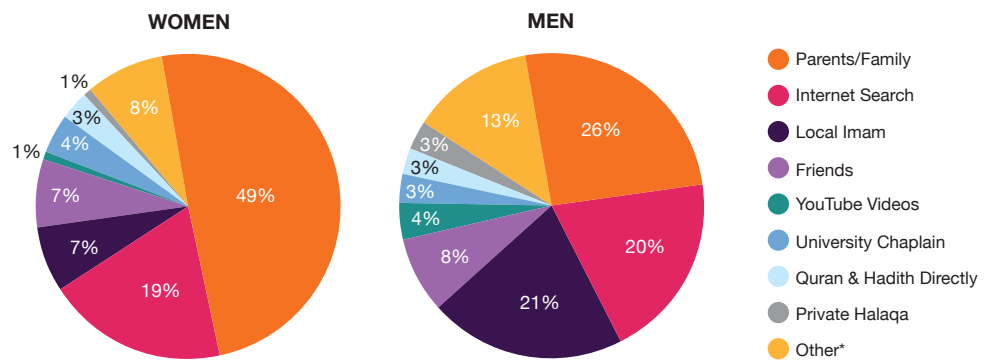


FIGURE 10: If you had a question about your faith, where would you go first to get it answered? Base: Total respondents
*Other = MSA events, Muslim conferences, local mosque classes, social media posts by prominent scholars, third space, and "other"

Muslim Students Rely on Parents and Family Members to Answer Faith Questions

Forty-one percent of those surveyed report being most confident in asking their parents/family about questions related to faith, with female participants reporting that they are nearly twice as likely as male respondents to ask their parents/family members (49% vs. 26%).

Most Muslim Students Confident in Religious Leaders / Institutions for Moral Guidance, But Women Less Assured

Two-thirds of survey respondents report having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in their religious leaders providing moral guidance; however, female participants report being less confident than male respondents in both their religious leaders for moral guidance (62% vs. 75% saying they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence) and their local mosque overall (42% vs. 60% saying they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence). A high percentage of male participants report having confidence in both religious leaders and their local mosque. This suggests that male participants feel relatively secure within community religious contexts and utilize these resources for their spiritual development and religious identity formation.

Women Less Confident in Muslim Religious Scholars

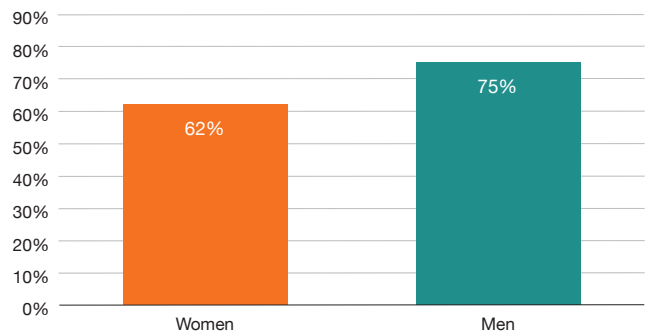


FIGURE 11: How much confidence do you have in Muslim religious scholars as sources of moral guidance? (% A great deal of confidence and quite a lot of confidence shown) Base: Total respondents

Women Less Confident in Local Mosques

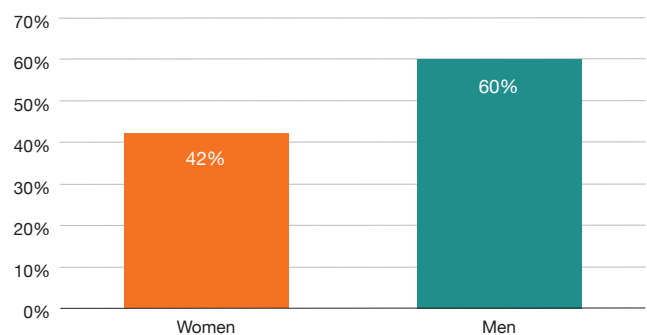


FIGURE 12: How much confidence do you have in your local mosque? (% A great deal of confidence and quite a lot of confidence shown) Base: Total respondents



Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Face More Threats, But Are More Confident and Active in Community



Assets:

- Participants who report always wearing a visible religious symbol are more likely than other participants to believe that their faith is an asset, feel pride in their faith community, and believe they have meaning and purpose in their life because of their faith.
- Survey respondents who report always wearing a visible religious symbol cite a religious obligation to God / piety as their primary motivation for always publicly donning a religious symbol.
- Participants who report always wearing a visible religious symbol are less likely than others surveyed to report engaging in risky behaviors.



Challenges:

- As compared to other participants, surveyed students who report always wearing a visible religious symbol say they are more fearful of attacks from white supremacists; face the greatest amount of discrimination (including microaggressions); and are more likely to have signed up for a self-defense class as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election.

Terminology:

Survey participants were asked, “How often do you wear a visible symbol in public that makes your faith identity known to others? (For example a headscarf, hijab, niqab, skullcap, or beard)”, and 49% of participants responded all of the time, 26% stated some of the time, and 22% said never. This section highlights notable results related to respondents who report wearing a visible religious symbol in public “all the time.”

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Most Proud of Muslim Identity

Surveyed respondents who report *always* wearing visible religious symbols are more likely than MSA West Conference students who report *never* wearing a visible religious symbol to “strongly agree” that their faith identity is an asset (86% vs. 58%); to “strongly agree” about feeling pride in being identified as a member of their faith community (85% vs. 66%); and to “strongly agree” about believing that they have meaning and purpose in their life because of their religious faith (79% vs. 53%). Finally, 76% of surveyed students who report always wearing a visible religious symbol report “strongly disagreeing” when asked whether they feel embarrassed about being associated with their faith community, compared to 58% of those who report never wearing a religious symbol.

Muslims Wearing Religious Symbols All the Time Feel Greater Pride in Faith Community

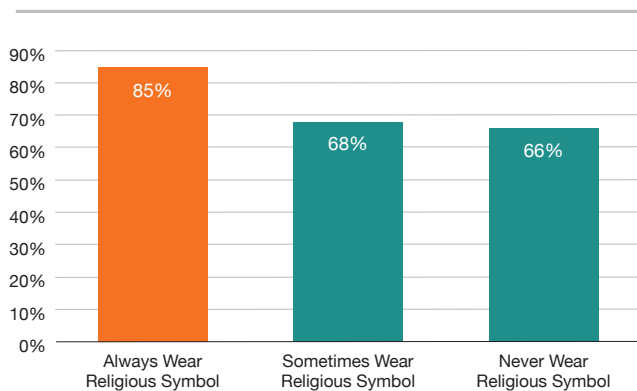


FIGURE 13: I am proud to be identified as a member of my faith community. (% Strongly agree shown) Base: Total respondents

2016 Election Prompted Increase in Muslims Publicly Displaying Religious Symbols

As a direct result of the 2016 presidential election, more respondents reported shifting to *always* displaying religious symbols publicly as opposed to shifting to *sometimes* or *never* donning religious symbols. Only 1% of participants who report always displaying visible religious

symbols say that they do so because their family or spouse requires them to. Additionally, 82% of respondents who report always wearing a religious symbol cite a religious obligation to God / piety as their motivation to wear religious symbols. These reported views and behaviors may be indicative of survey respondents’ overall connection or reconnection with their religious practice and/or identity and resilience in the face of increasing challenges.

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Approached More Often about Faith and More Civically Engaged

Survey participants who report always wearing visible religious symbols are slightly more likely than other respondents to be approached by someone outside their faith community to explain a controversial issue regarding their religion (86% vs. 76-81%). Respondents who report always wearing visible religious symbols also report being more likely than other participants to having joined, donated, or volunteered at a civic group as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election (40% vs. 22-26%) and are more likely than other respondents to report having donated to an organization associated with their faith group (43% vs. 26-39%).

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Cite More Safety Concerns

Respondents who report always wearing visible religious symbols face more threats than other surveyed students. They are more fearful for their or their family’s personal safety from white supremacists than other respondents (62% vs. 44-46%), and they are more likely to report having signed up for a self-defense class as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election (17% vs. 4-10%) than other participants. Finally, participants who report always wearing visible religious symbols are more likely than other respondents to report having experienced discrimination in the last year, including microaggressions (60% vs. 51-46%).

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Hold More Favorable Views Toward Muslim Religious Scholars

Surveyed students who report always wearing visible religious symbols report holding more favorable opinions of Muslim religious scholars than other respondents (75% vs. 58-60%).

Muslims Wearing Religious Symbols All the Time Most Likely to Fear Attacks After 2016 Elections

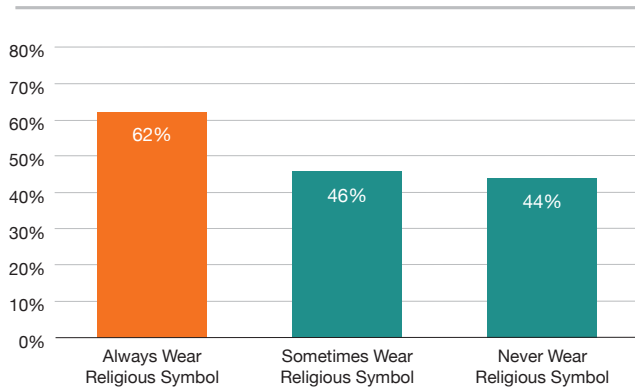


FIGURE 14: As a result of the outcome of the 2016 presidential elections, did you fear for your personal safety or that of your family from white supremacists? (% Yes shown) Base: Total respondents

Muslims Who Always Wear Visible Religious Symbols Exhibit Less Risky Behavior

MSA West Conference participants who report always wearing visible religious symbols are less likely than their surveyed student counterparts to say they have consumed alcohol (4% vs. 13-19%), smoked marijuana (9% vs. 24-25%), or tried other drugs (3% vs. 8-10%). Respondents who report always wearing visible religious symbols are also less likely than other participants to report having had premarital sexual contact with the opposite sex (9% vs. 21-23%).





Despite Post-Election Hostilities, MSA West Members, Especially Women, Are Highly Politically Engaged



Assets:

- Surveyed students report registering and voting at much higher rates than the national average during the 2018 midterm election.
- Female respondents report registering and voting at slightly higher rates than their male counterparts.



Challenges:

- Female participants report feeling less safe than male respondents as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election.

High Voter Registration, With Stronger Female Turnout During 2018 Midterm Elections

Survey respondents are highly politically engaged, with high voter registration and turnout during the 2018 midterm election. Eighty-nine percent of reported eligible voters say they registered to vote. Although eligible female respondents report registering at slightly higher rates than their male counterparts (89% vs. 82%), female participants' voter turnout for the 2018 election was 14% higher (77% vs. 63%). Overall, MSA West Conference participants report voting at more than twice the national average of those in a similar age category. The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement estimated that voter turnout in the 2018 midterm election among eligible Americans 18-29 years old was 31%.¹⁵ Survey respondents in the 2018 midterm election also reported voting at higher rates than American Muslims nationally during the 2016 presidential election (61%).¹⁶ Consequently, since presidential election years always generate significantly higher voter turnout than midterm elections, this signals that MSA West Conference participants' reported voting behaviors in 2018 were particularly high.

2018 Midterm Election Witnessed Stronger Muslim Female Voter Turnout

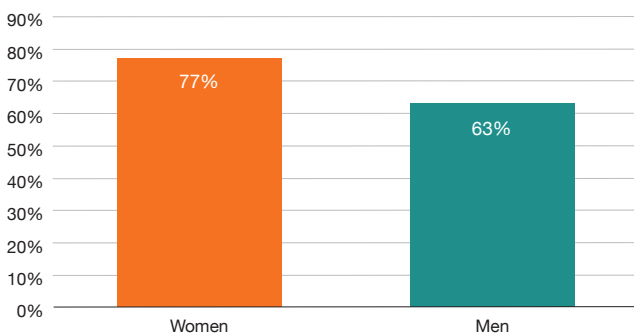


FIGURE 15: Did you vote in the 2018 Midterm Election? (% Yes shown) Base: Total respondents eligible to register to vote in the U.S.



Women Feel Less Safe as a Direct Result of the 2016 Election

As a result of the 2016 election, female survey respondents are more likely than their male survey participants to report having suffered emotionally with stress and anxiety enough to need the services of a mental health professional (21% vs. 12%), made their appearances less identifiably Muslim (9% vs. 5%), feared for their personal safety because of white supremacists (64% vs. 33%), signed up for a self-defense class (16% vs. 6%), and joined, donated, or volunteered at a civic organization (39% vs. 21%). This clearly demonstrates that although female respondents report facing greater stress and threats to their safety, they also report being more involved in civic engagement activities than their male counterparts, suggesting that female MSA West Conference participants may feel a stronger sense of political efficacy than male participants.

RISKY BEHAVIOR, MENTAL HEALTH, AND PROFESSIONAL PROSPECTS



MSA West Members Demonstrate Adaptive Behaviors Despite Considerable Social Stress



Assets:

- Students report much lower alcohol, marijuana, and other drug use, as compared to national averages.
- Although poor respondents and social justice advocates surveyed report higher attempted suicide rates, economically disadvantaged students report higher rates of seeking help from mental health professionals than wealthier respondents, and social justice advocates surveyed report approaching religious leaders when experiencing severe emotional distress more than others surveyed.
- When under severe stress, male and female surveyed students report similar preferences for seeking support from family, friends, and religious leaders.



Challenges:

- Poor surveyed students are more likely than other respondents to report having consumed alcohol and smoked marijuana.
- Economically disadvantaged respondents are more likely than other participants to report having experienced sexual contact without consent and pre-marital sexual contact with consent.

Large Majority of MSA West Conference Participants Report No Alcohol or Other Drug Usage

MSA West Conference participants report having used alcohol (10%), marijuana (16%), or other drugs (6%) in the last year at a much lower rate than national averages.¹⁷ Although MSA West is comprised of both undergraduate and graduate level students, the majority are undergraduates, and a comparison to alcohol and other drug usage among a national undergraduate student population is appropriate. According to a 2017 National Institute of Health Study, 62% of American college students ages 18-22 report having used alcohol in the last month.¹⁸ The same report found that 38% of full-time American college students ages 19-22 used marijuana at least once in the past year.

Despite these overall low figures, respondents of low economic status are more than twice as likely as other survey participants to report having smoked marijuana in the last year (31% vs. 10-17%), and nearly three times as likely as other students surveyed to report having consumed alcohol in the last year (21% vs. 5-10%). These reported figures are still well below the national averages. Economically disadvantaged students are also more likely than other respondents to have had sexual contact with the opposite sex (26% vs. 10-17%), and report being much more likely than others to have had sexual contact with someone without giving consent (17% vs. 0-4%).

Economically Disadvantaged Sexually Assaulted at Higher Rate

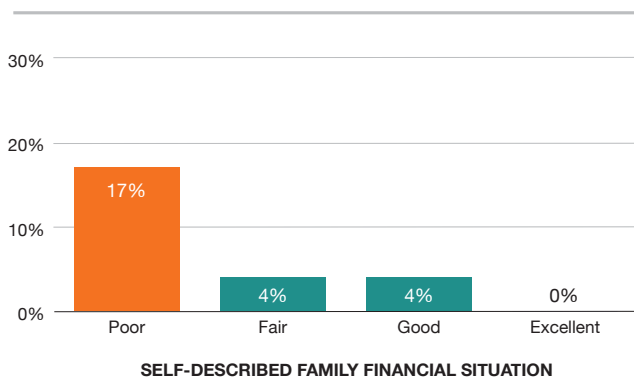


FIGURE 16: In the past year have you had sexual contact with someone without giving your consent? (% Yes shown) Base: Total respondents

Economically Disadvantaged and Social Justice Activists Report Greater Mental Health Challenges

Poor respondents report greater mental health challenges than students surveyed with fair, good, or excellent family financial situations. Specifically, they report being twice as likely as other respondents to have attempted suicide (25% vs. 10-13%). These are certainly concerning results. However, poor respondents seeking help from mental health professionals is a strong asset. Thirty-nine percent of poor student respondents report having sought services of a mental health professional, compared with 35% of students with fair financial situations and 26% of students with good or excellent financial situations.

It should be noted that economically disadvantaged participants report lower access to community spaces as well as lower trust, which are likely contributors to some of these poor outcomes. In the recommendations section of this report we explore potential opportunities for funders, university administrators, and campus MSA leadership to provide resources to address some of these challenges.

Poor Students Most Likely to Attempt Suicide

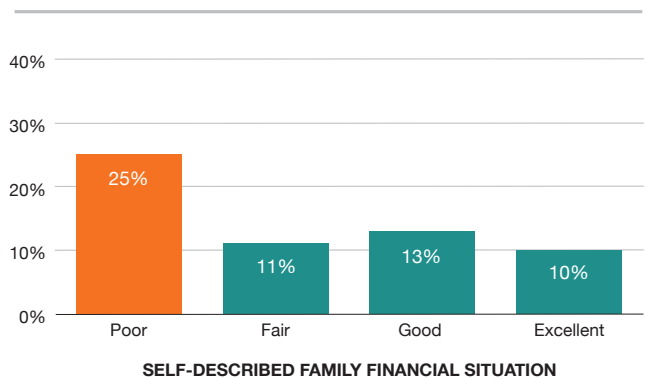


FIGURE 17: Have you ever tried to do anything to kill yourself or make yourself not alive anymore? (% Yes shown) Base: Total respondents

Surveyed students involved in social justice activism are more than twice as likely as other respondents to report having attempted suicide (22% vs. 8-10%), but more likely than their non-activist counterparts to report going to an imam, shaykh, or religious leader first if they experience severe emotional distress (11% vs. 1-5%). This may suggest that those who have personally experienced trauma or other types of injustice are more motivated to participate in social justice work in order to change the status quo or, alternatively, that social justice work puts greater stress on and results in greater mental health risks to students.

Social Justice Advocates Face Greater Risk of Attempting Suicide

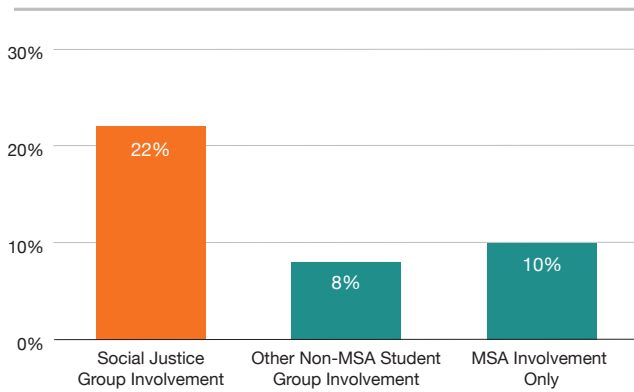


FIGURE 18: Have you ever tried to do anything to kill yourself or make yourself not alive anymore? (% Yes shown) Base: Total respondents

Muslim Identity of Prospective Mental Health Counselors Motivates Students to Seek Services

Survey participants report the Muslim background of prospective mental health professionals (66%) as much more important than other forms of identity—such as a similar ethnic/cultural background (40%)—in motivating them to seek out mental health resources on campus. Forty-eight percent of surveyed students said it was “very important” and 24% said it was “somewhat important” to have a mental health professional that is Muslim. This could suggest that MSA West students are feeling misunderstood or inadequately served by their current mental health resources. Counselors with Muslim backgrounds or mental health professionals with greater knowledge of Muslims’ religious beliefs are more likely to provide support to MSA West students that is in line with their faith tradition.

Family and Friends Are Primary Support Systems During Severe Stress

Although female respondents report having seen a mental health professional more than their male counterparts (35% vs. 21%), if under severe stress, both female and male survey respondents go to family and friends most often (68% of women and 48% of men). Far less often, students surveyed first approach a religious leader for assistance (11% of men and 4% of women). Female and male surveyed students equally report first approaching a non-faith-based general mental health professional (6% vs. 5%), and male participants report being more likely than female respondents to first approach faith-based mental health professionals (7% vs. 3%).





Families Provide Support for Students; Women Less Confident in Career Path



Assets:

- MSA West Conference participants report receiving parental support for their career choices.



Challenges:

- Female participants and poor respondents report greater barriers to professional success and less access to Muslim mentorship than male respondents and wealthier students, respectively.

Women and Poor Muslims Less Prepared for Careers

Female respondents report less confidence than male survey participants in pursuing their career path (37% vs. 44% strongly agree) and report being less understanding of the necessary steps for their career choice (19% vs. 35% strongly agree). Both female and economically disadvantaged participants report less confidence in finding a satisfying job after graduation (female respondents 17% vs. male respondents 34% strongly agree, poor participants 22% vs. respondents reporting excellent economic status 39%). Both groups also report fewer mentorship opportunities from Muslim professionals in their chosen field as compared to male respondents and respondents reporting an excellent economic status, respectively (female respondents 8% vs. male respondents 28% strongly agree, poor participants 12% vs. participants reporting excellent economic status 24% strongly agree).

Both Men and Women Receive Parental Support for Career Choices

An equally large number of female surveyed students (83%) and male surveyed students (82%) say their parents support their career choice.

Poor Students Lack Career Mentorship from Muslim Professionals

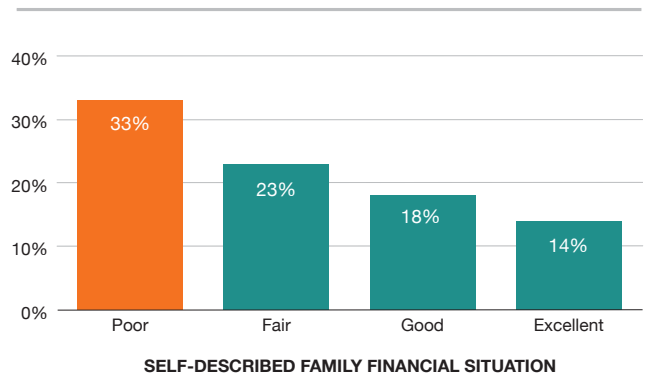


FIGURE 19: I feel I have access to strong mentorship from Muslim professionals in my field. (% Strongly disagree shown) Base: Total respondents





RECOMMENDATIONS

Many campus MSAs are robust institutions with a high capacity to offer programming, services, and resources to their members. Others are newly formed groups with a smaller student population and more focused programming. The following recommendations highlight a few opportunities for funders, university administrations, and campus MSAs to address some of the challenges that were identified in the survey.

Funders

Discrimination and Identity

- Leverage resources for MSA West and for campus MSAs that assist their members and students to address safety and holistic well-being. Given the high levels of reported discrimination that MSA West Conference participants experienced, various types of initiatives, including self-defense classes, mental health services, and advocacy trainings and programs could be explored to address immediate needs and systemic approaches to supporting Muslim students.

- Support efforts to educate the campus community, including students and faculty, on the Muslim community in general and the Muslim student community specifically. Efforts should focus on increasing overall cultural proficiency, with a special emphasis on Muslim female students given that 79% of female respondents reported experiencing some frequency of religious-based discrimination.

Professional Prospects, Mental Health, and Student Well-being

- Leverage resources to support leadership and professional development opportunities for Muslim students. Given that both female and economically disadvantaged respondents report less confidence in finding a satisfying job after graduation and fewer mentorship opportunities from Muslim professionals in their chosen field, there is a clear need for targeted mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities for Muslim students entering the workforce. Additionally, Muslim students surveyed demonstrate a high level of interest in various issue areas and organizational

leadership, but they may need further support and opportunities to develop their leadership skills through training and mentorship programs.

- Invest in mental health resources created by Muslim professionals that target the entire university population. Also, funding additional mental health professionals from Muslim backgrounds may incentivize Muslims and other students of historically underrepresented groups to pursue wellness counseling and other campus services. In the survey, 64% of MSA West Conference participants identified the religious background of prospective mental health professionals as the most important incentive to seeking out mental health resources on campus—much more than other forms of identity such as a similar ethnic/cultural background (39%).
- Consider providing resources to institutions supporting Muslim students through chaplaincy initiatives aimed at providing holistic socio-emotional care for Muslim students, as well as building relationships with campus administrators and community partners to further support and advocate for the Muslim student community.

University Administration

Discrimination and Identity

- University administrators should consider approaching campus MSA leadership to explore how to better address abuse and discriminatory behavior toward Muslim students. Results from the survey indicate that 38% of MSA West Conference participants report experiencing “abuse” from peers on campus, 15% from campus professors, and 11% from campus administrators. Women report facing more abuse from campus professors than men (17% vs. 8%). In addition to overall gender bias, MSA West Conference female participants’ higher rates of wearing visible religious symbols, often the hijab, make them more recognizable as Muslim and, consequently, as targets for bias, discriminatory behavior, and abuse. University administration officials, in conjunction with personnel from university offices of diversity and inclusion and/or campus student life, could implement an internal review process to ensure a more robust and transparent reporting mechanism for harassment and discrimination stemming from university employees. Additionally, university administrators may consider investing in mandatory online implicit bias trainings for all staff, offered by Ohio State University’s Kirwan Institute¹⁹ or similar academic experts in the field.

- Universities should empower and support student organizations such as campus MSAs with funding and resources to create programs and initiatives that enrich the overall campus community. These programs can facilitate learning opportunities for the campus community, as well as strengthen the Muslim student community.
- Universities should ensure that hate crimes, hate incidents, and bias reporting processes are clearly communicated to campus MSAs, and that there is a transparent process for students to be aware of the process and status of their submitted reports. Hate incident and bias policies should ensure that religious discrimination is an included section in the reporting system so that the information can be tracked and made accessible to students.

Student Well-being, Mental Health, and Behavior

- University administrators involved with health and wellness services provided to students should increase the number of Muslim mental health professionals, including therapists and psychiatrists, available on campus. This can be done by either hiring Muslim mental health professionals through on-campus counseling services or contracting Muslim Mental Health institutions such as the Khalil Center to provide on-campus mental health services for Muslim students, such as the Muslim Mental Health Initiative at UC Berkeley.²⁰ In the survey, 66% of MSA West Conference participants identified the religious background of prospective mental health professionals as the most important incentive to seeking out mental health resources on campus—much more than any other factors, including increased accessibility or other forms of identity such as a similar ethnic/cultural background (40%).
- University administrators could increase communication with MSAs on campus to discuss efforts to improve overall physical and emotional safety. Given survey respondents’ reports of high levels of discrimination and fear for personal safety as a direct result of the 2016 presidential election, various types of programs and initiatives can be explored to tackle systems of Islamophobia that impact students on campus. Examples of such programs and initiatives can include, but are not limited to:
 - Providing resources to support the institutionalization of the Muslim student community on campus through physical spaces, additional resources, and representation and insight

on campus advisory councils and leadership programs,

- Publicly supporting student advocacy efforts to support marginalized students,
- Proactive efforts to create campus-wide approaches to student safety and self-defense such as Safe Ride services, that are known and accessible to the most vulnerable groups, and
- Building student-led spaces intended to engage the campus community in multi-racial and inter-faith understandings of systemic oppression in order to build a more robust, understanding, and safe campus climate for all.

Campus MSA Leadership

Campus MSA Resource Development

- Campus MSAs should consider developing stronger alumni engagement programs to explore how they can co-create professional mentorship programs that are more inclusive of Muslim professionals, first-generation white-collar professionals, and other minority groups. Given that female survey respondents report significantly lower access to strong Muslim mentorship (32%) than men (51%) and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds report (27%) less access than all others, resources dedicated to such programs could assist these historically under-resourced groups to excel professionally post-graduation. MSA West can provide resources to campus MSAs to help develop strategic alumni relationships.
- In addition to professional mentorship, students from poor financial backgrounds could likely benefit from comprehensive mentorship opportunities. Given that these students face the greatest social, economic, professional, and psychological barriers, campus MSAs might consider creating a campus MSA buddy program, matching older students with incoming freshman. Additionally, campus MSA leadership might consider building partnerships with college groups, such as the Center for First-Generation Student Success, that have pre-existing infrastructure and resources to provide to economically disadvantaged students.
- Although most students report being served well by their campus MSA, campus MSAs could benefit from more serious and open conversations around gender-based discrimination. Despite strong participation overall, women report fewer leadership roles and volunteering, and view their opinions as being less

valued. Some campus MSAs have instituted quota systems for board roles to ensure structured opportunities for gender-based equity. Other MSAs have facilitated town hall-style dialogues or anonymous surveys to explore underlying systemic challenges that challenge their groups.

- Campus MSAs should build stronger relationships with local male and female Muslim chaplains, scholars, and religious leaders to promote available resources and build accessible, spiritual resources for students to address questions they may have. Campus MSAs should also consider creating mechanisms where students can ask sensitive questions anonymously and have trusted scholars answer them in a forum on campus or online. Due to a greater degree of discomfort among female students with some Islamic scripture and tradition, and less trust in Muslim religious scholars, this system could be especially beneficial for female students.
- Although many campus MSAs already participate in political spaces, they may want to more seriously consider how they can leverage their high civic participation among political causes and groups both on and off campus. High registration and voter turnout among MSA West Conference participants may indicate higher overall civic engagement among campus MSA students than the general university population. This high level of political participation may increase interest from various groups engaged in a variety of political issues, and these relationships could assist campus MSAs to build overall power and increase their influence over a select set of issues they identify as important within each particular campus MSA. Consider implementing committees within your campus MSA such as UC Davis' Political Power Committee or UC Berkeley's Political Action Committee to give students a space to engage in community organizing and advocacy, as well as engaging in MSA West opportunities such as the Islamic Sacred Activism Cohort or on-campus organizing trainings.

Discrimination and Identity

- Campus MSAs should build and maintain relationships with receptive campus administrators to discuss the prevalence of discriminatory behavior toward Muslims stemming from peers, professors, and university administrators. Specifically, campus MSA students could strengthen relationships with allies in university offices of diversity and inclusion or campus student life to discuss what steps

can be taken to ensure a more robust and transparent reporting mechanism for harassment and discrimination stemming from university employees. Furthermore, campus MSA leadership should engage with their members regularly to develop a strong internal sense of their community's needs, in order to communicate tangible recommendations to university administrators.

Professional Prospects, Mental Health, and Behavior

- Students should be more cognizant that their members engaged in social justice organizations face a higher risk of suicide, which is often related to past abuse and/or trauma. Given that MSA West Conference participants involved with social justice groups report similar levels of willingness as others to seek mental health services if under stress, similar
- levels of having previously seen a mental health professional, and similar rates of increased motivation to seek such services if the provider were Muslim, social justice organizations may consider identifying a short list of accessible Muslim counselors for their members in advance of any challenges they may face. See MSA West's Rapid Response Database for local mental health support resources. Additionally, student leadership should be proactive in raising awareness of mental health issues among their membership and building programs and resources to support students in need of services.
- Campus MSA Leadership should partner with other historically disadvantaged groups to form relationships and coalitions to build power, collaborate on various programs and initiatives, and share resources to create a safe and robust campus community.



Endnotes

1. Dalia Mogahed and Youssef Chouhoud, *American Muslim Poll 2017: Muslims at the Crossroads* (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2017), <https://www.ispu.org/public-policy/american-muslim-poll-2017/>.
2. Ibid.
3. It should be noted that female respondents reporting higher rates of discrimination and abuse may be driven by the fact that 61% of women surveyed say they wear a visible religious symbol “all the time.” Given the survey population, the most likely visible religious symbol for female respondents is the *hijab*, a more recognizably Muslim symbol than traditional male visible religious symbols, such as beards which are less *uniquely* associated with Muslim identity. Consequently, it may be that in addition to experiencing discrimination because of their gender, a common experience for women in the U.S., high levels of Muslim visibility due to religious symbols explain increased levels of reported discrimination.
4. Definition of “Poor”: Participants were asked, “How would you rate your family’s financial situation today?” Fifteen percent of surveyed students reported excellent, 36% good, 31% fair, and 15% poor. Although the survey also asked about household income, income is only one important factor, and questions related to a family’s overall financial status provide a more holistic snapshot of an individual’s entire financial status. We use “poor” and “economically disadvantaged” interchangeably throughout this report.
5. Dalia Mogahed and Youssef Chouhoud, *American Muslim Poll 2018: Pride and Prejudice* (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2018), <https://www.ispu.org/public-policy/american-muslim-poll-2018/>.
6. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Young People Dramatically Increase their Turnout to 31%, Shape 2018 Midterm Elections,” November 7, 2018, <https://civicyouth.org/young-people-dramatically-increase-their-turnout-31-percent-shape-2018-midterm-elections/>.
7. Some readers will wonder if the students are underreporting their risky behavior. To respond to this, we offer the following points to consider. Students were told in a short video by the Director of Research at ISPU (Dalia Mogahed) that the survey was 100% confidential. The same video emphasized that only if respondents were completely honest could the right resources be diverted to help and support them. The message was clearly about support and not scrutiny or scolding for bad behavior. Additionally, this same messaging was reiterated by organizers. Finally, the response rate was high, suggesting an enthusiasm for the project and being asked for input. While under reporting is always a risk, researchers did provide respondents with all available assurances as to their privacy and the importance of full transparency to the respondent’s own interest. The lower numbers may reflect the self-selection bias of the group.
8. J. E. Schulenberg, L. D. Johnston, P. M. O’Malley, J. G. Bachman, R. A. Meich, and M. E. Patrick, *Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2016: Volume 2, College Students and Adults Ages 19-55* (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan, 2017), http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/mtf-vol2_2017.pdf.
9. Mogahed and Chouhoud, *American Muslim Poll 2018*.
10. Ibid.
11. The survey question asked participants, “How often do you wear a visible symbol in public that makes your faith identity known to others? (For example a headscarf, hijab, niqab, skullcap, or beard).”
12. Mogahed and Chouhoud, *American Muslim Poll 2018*.
13. Ibid.
14. Jeffrey Jones, “In U.S., Record-Low 47% Extremely Proud to Be Americans,” Gallup, July 2, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/236420/record-low-extremely-proud-americans.aspx>.
15. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, “Young People Dramatically Increase their Turnout to 31%, Shape 2018 Midterm Elections.”
16. Mogahed and Chouhoud, *American Muslim Poll 2017*.
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18. Schulenberg et al., *Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2016: Volume 2*.
19. <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>
20. <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/muslimstudents>



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About ISPU

ISPU conducts objective, solution-seeking research that empowers American Muslims to develop their community and fully contribute to democracy and pluralism in the United States. Since 2002, ISPU has been at the forefront of discovering trends and opportunities that impact the American Muslim community. Our research aims to educate the general public and enable community change agents, the media, and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions. In addition to building in-house capacity, ISPU has assembled leading experts across multiple disciplines, building a solid reputation as a trusted source for information for and about American Muslims.

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